

**Liquid Gold: An Ethnographic Exploration of the Water-Gender-Power Nexus in
Tigray - Highland Ethiopia**

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Petula Christine Peters

September 2005

**Department of Anthropology
Goldsmiths College
University of London**

Abstract

Water is a crucial global resource and in this thesis I seek to find out how at the local level it is used and abused. This thesis examines the cultural politics of water within the development process by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a one-year period in rural Tigray, Highland Ethiopia. I explore people's ideas about water and analyse what is being done by local communities, NGOs and government policies to improve matters. These are important issues not only because of their impact on beneficiaries themselves but also on project outcomes, NGOs and policy makers. The literature regarding the anthropology of development describes the failure of most development projects to meet the needs of the stated beneficiaries, such as women and the poor and needy.

My study highlights the multiple realities underpinning the operation of and relations between agencies, institutions and local people involved in the implementation of water supply and sanitation (WSS) projects. My key question focuses on relations of power. The discourse of development masks the multifarious power relations that underscore the modernisation project. In this thesis I ask: how is power articulated (manifested) at the local level? Does this local situation mirror global power relations? By building on work carried out on gender and development I explore the discourse and rhetoric of development, particularly key terms such as 'empowerment' and 'participation'. I link this to what actually happens on the ground and ask: why do projects fail? I discuss this question with village people and explore the workings of the various institutions such as NGOs and local government bodies involved in the water development process in Tigray, Highland Ethiopia.

The gap between rhetoric and reality is explicable [on] at many different levels. Power struggles of many kinds occur during the various stages of project planning, implementation and evaluation. There are also many constraints on resources, particularly time and labour. I set these issues within the wider social contexts in which they are embedded, making the connections between global and local power relations and aid. I focused on an indigenous NGO, The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) to explore the contestations of power between the stakeholders in water resource use and development. To this end I suggest that there are at several levels a dynamic I term 'power blindness'.

A major concern of the thesis is gender and it explores a series of questions concerning the dynamic I term the water - gender - power nexus. NGOs and other actors in the development process espouse an ideology of gender equality and empowerment which differs from local views of gender relations. Is women's reluctance to participate in water projects a rejection of changing gender identities as the new 'modern' nation state is reconstructed as part of the globalisation project? I explore this tension from a feminist perspective and link this to the literature on gender and development, drawing on the work of Kandiyoti (1997) Cleaver (2000), Mosse (2005) and Abu-Lughod (1998) as well as critiquing other scholars such as Hammond (1999).

Acknowledgements

The theme for this study came from an exceptional woman who has inspired me from the moment I entered the academy. Sincere thanks to Professor Pat Caplan, a visionary and erudite scholar, whose generosity in sharing knowledge, ideas and her passion for learning and teaching shaped my concept of education as truly liberational. I hope one day to be of the ilk of Pat, my role model, mentor and friend. Extra special thanks to my Supervisor Dr Nici Nelson, whose tireless support, through the duration of my doctoral journey consisted not only of critical commentary but more importantly Nici sustained me through her love of life, music and food. Dr Victoria Goddard has also been a very important influence on my work and studentship, a lecturer who makes Anthropology exciting and alive. A very special mention also for Professor Brian Morris, a polymath and good friend, I thank Brian for his incredible mind, memory and mentorship. Also for all those lovely walks on the Sussex Downs. Other important Colleagues from Goldsmiths College I thank are Dr Jean Besson and Dr Mark Leopold for their encouragement and insightful comments. Dr Sophie Day and Dr Sari Wastall for their brilliance, enriching my experience as a student at Goldsmiths College. The Administrative staff in the Anthropology department Flo and Margaret, who always put up with my unending questions and queries, thank you. Also thanks to Malcolm (Media Equipment) for help with photographic slides. I wish to acknowledge the Economic Social Research Council for their financial support, especially Dawn Hill who helped me throughout my scholarship. I also wish to thank the Royal Anthropological Institute for the Sutasoma Award which helped greatly. Huge thanks to a very important group of people my informants from Tshalo village in Tigray, unfortunately far too many to mention. Special thanks to REST staff, Tekleweini, Berhane Gebru, Maria and Fiona for their time and support. I also thank Dr Karen and Wray Witten for their insights into the region. A very special thanks to Gedion Kiros my research assistant and interpreter. Thanks to Kudus and Tamrat from the Tigray Women's Association for their time and help, and sharing with me their life stories. I thank Dr Jenny Hammond for preparing me for my journey to Tigray. Thanks to all the members of Plumstead SDA Church especially Aldreana and Teach Somerville who supported me throughout with good food and prayers. Big love and thanks to Donna Gardier whose soulful voice and ministry in gospel music lifted me through those moments of doubt. Extra special gratitude to Bob Harrison without his guidance, kindness, perseverance and patience I would never have got this far. Then my family, whose love and support has always sustained me, Annabelle always providing for my needs, generously caring for me. Sylvia thanks for always being there, for never giving up on me, for your loving kindness wonderful sense of humour and theatrical gifts. Finally my nephew Clark whose football skills amaze me, his great personality and intelligence, his kindness and love and sense of humour make him very special. This thesis is dedicated to my parents Molly and Samuel Peters, who are in Heaven. I thank God for them, their loving kindness seemed to have no bounds, they were the greatest gift in my life, they were kind and loving to all people and taught me to love and share whatever I can. Lastly but most importantly I thank God for his never ending grace and favour. I am eternally grateful for the power of answered prayer.

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Glossary

Baito	Elected local Council in Tigray
Birr	Unit of Ethiopian currency
Dergue	Ex Military Government of Ethiopia
Etro	Clay water pot
Fana	Unpaid health worker at the village level
Finjal	Small coffee cup
Fornello	Small tin cooking stove
Gojo	House with circular roof
Gugela	Group of households used to spread government plans
Hidmo	Type of stone house / building with stone and turf roof
Injera	Fermented grain pancake, staple food of Ethiopia
Kebelle	Dergue urban association, smallest unit of administration
Keshi	Priest
Kollo	Lowlands
Kushett	Hamlet or village, smallest unit of rural administration
Mihab Kefti	Dowry
Siwa	Local beer made from sorghum or millet and herbs
Tabia	Village comprised of three or four Kushetts
Tigrinya	Language spoken in Tigray and highlands of Ethiopia
Tsimdie	Unit of land measurement. 4 tsimdies equal 1 hectare
Wereda	Administrative district comprising up 7 -14 tabia

Acronyms

ADCCS	Adigrat Catholic Secretariat (NGO)
BOH	Bureau of Health (in Tigray)
CAA	Community Aid Abroad
CAFOD	Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
CHA	Community Health Agent
CLA	Community Level Agreement
DA	Development Agent
DAWN	Development Alternatives for Women of a New era
DEDEBIT	Rural Credit Scheme for Tigray Region
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
EPLF	Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERAD	Environmental Rehabilitation and Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GAD	Gender and Development
HA	Home Agent
HDW	Hand dug well

IADP	Integrated Agricultural Development Project
IDS	Institute for Development Studies (Sussex)
IDWSSD	International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade
IFSP	Integrated Food Security Programme
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
R&R	Relief and Rehabilitation
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
RUWAS	Rural Water Supply Unit
SWC	Soil and Water Conservation
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
VLOM	Village level operation and maintenance
WA	Women's Association
WAD	Women and Development
WB	World Bank
WC	Water Committee
WED	Women, Environment and Development
WELL	Water and Environmental Health at London / Loughborough
WHO	World Health Organisation
WID	Women In Development
WME	Water, Mines and Energy
WRI	World Resources Institute
WSS	Water Supply and Sanitation

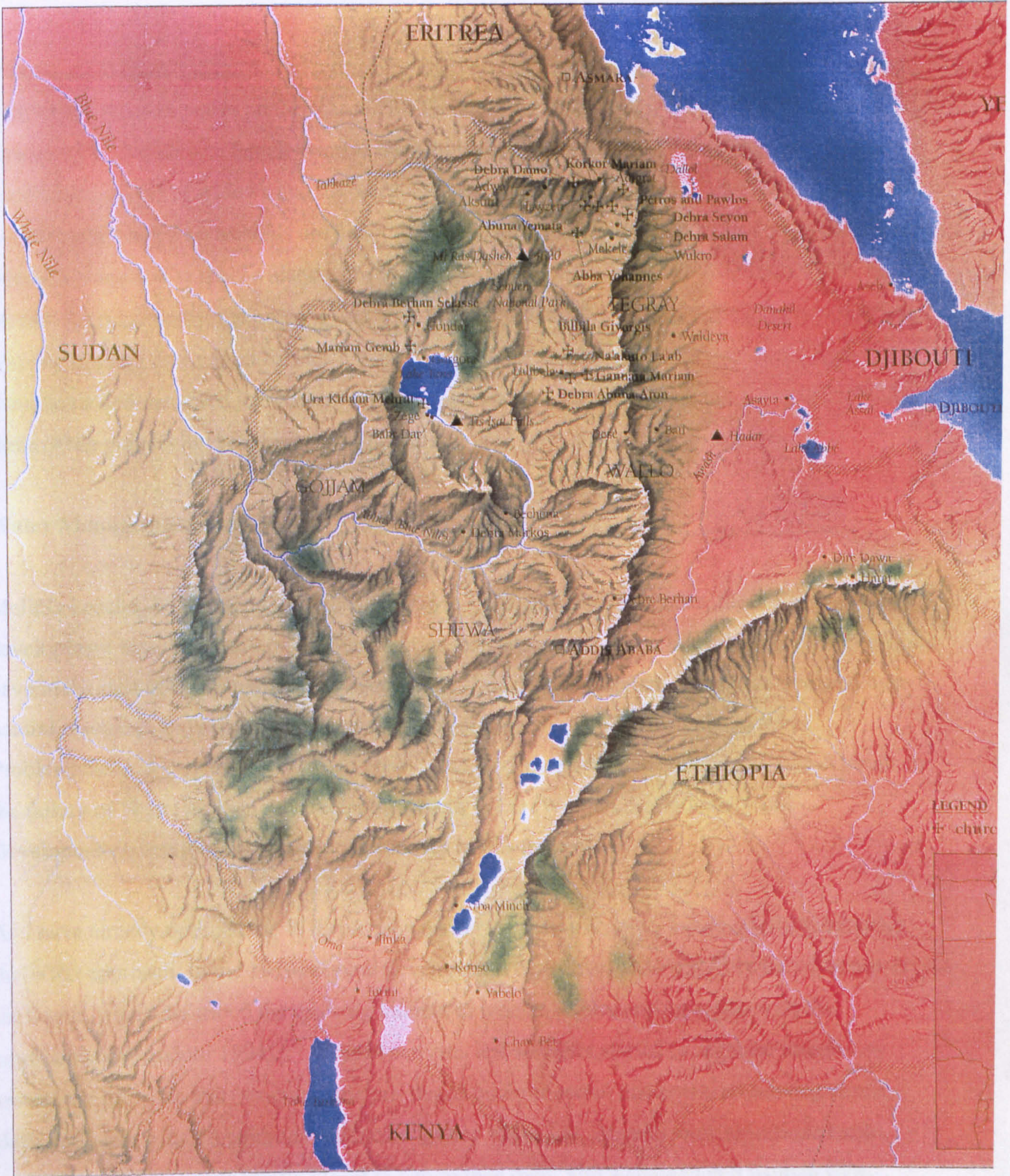


Fig 1.1 MAP of Ethiopia. Nomachi (2000)

CHAPTER 1: LIQUID GOLD: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

The *Kebrä Nagast* describes how Solomon, king of Israel, tricked Makeda, the unsuspecting Ethiopian Queen of Sheba, into a sexual tryst. Following a lavish meal the queen was about to retire for the night. Knowing of the king's lascivious intentions, Makeda made Solomon take a vow not to dishonour her through the use of force. Solomon agreed, but only on condition that the queen should reciprocate with an oath not to take anything from his palace without his consent:

During the night the queen awoke from her slumber feeling thirsty. She took hold of the jar of water the king placed at his bedside. Solomon, who had only pretended to sleep, caught her arm and reminded her that she had broken her word. She claimed an oath did not apply to water. The king argued there was nothing on earth more precious. Makeda agreed to free him from his oath on condition she first be allowed to quench her thirst. Thus, King Solomon worked his will upon her (Belai 1991: 10).

Three millennia later, water is just as precious. In the near future it may even merit the designation 'liquid gold'. This is why I have chosen to focus my research on such a critical finite resource. Water is a new concern in the anthropology of development. As a feminist interested in development, I set out to study an arid region. I chose Ethiopia because of its history of drought and famine and because I believe, following the work of Gardner and Lewis, that:

There are moral absolutes in the world....People have a right to basic material needs...Yet many millions of people ... are denied these rights...We therefore make no apologies for arguing that professionally as well as personally anthropologists should be actively engaged in attempting to change the conditions which produce poverty, inequality and oppression (1996: 157-8).

Water is the most important resource in social and economic development in a drought-prone region (WELL 1998). This research examines the cultural politics of water within the development process by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a one-year period in rural Tigray.

The question central to this study focuses on relations of power at both the global and local level with regard to water development policies and projects and asks: Should international policies be translated into local priorities? I shall use sustainability as the indicator of success

or failure. By drawing on the work of Abrahamsen (2000), Abu-Lughod (1998), Crewe and Harrison (1998), Gaventa (1980), Gaventa and Cornwall (2001), Lukes (1974), Mitchell (1995) and Mosse (2005), I shall deconstruct the discourses of development in the Tigrayan context to unmask the multifarious power relations that underscore the modernisation project. What are the links between aid, democracy and development in Ethiopia? Can global policies shape local realities or do local people resist impositions of the western modernisation ideology by refusing to play the same game? In a study of acquiescence and resistance my thesis highlights the multiple realities underpinning the triangulation of agencies, institutions and local people involved in the development encounter. It examines how the rhetoric of empowerment and participation, so prevalent in development discourse, obscures the significance of these differences. To this end I suggest the notion of ‘power blindness’ as a mask that obscures relations of power from the grassroots upwards, and the concept of a ‘power play’ as the relational dynamic underpinning the development encounter.

A feminist analysis of development necessarily takes into consideration gender issues. Gender is a social and cultural concept that deals with the relations of power that structure certain types of social inequality and affect development accordingly (O’Laughlin 1996). For example, women can be excluded from the potential benefits of any development accompanying economic growth due to gender relations which can prevent or minimise the extent to which growth ‘trickles down’ to benefit particular social groups (Jackson and Pearson 1998). The feminist economist Lucia Hanmer asserts that it is generally accepted that gender relations shape the development process (1998). An analysis of gender relations is important to a study such as this, since water is a basic need particularly associated with the female contribution to the division of labour. I have therefore advanced the idea of a water–gender–power nexus. By this I refer to the inevitable link between the three most important factors in this study: water, gender and power. This nexus will be described in more detail throughout the course of this work. In the Ethiopian context a strict gender division of labour is the norm at the village level. This has implications for development projects in terms of policy implementation. To this end I describe the dynamics of gender and power in terms of the interface between development personnel in a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), the Adigrat Catholic Secretariat

(ADCCS),¹ and its beneficiaries. Through this analysis I hope to elucidate the important themes of consultation, participation, empowerment and decision making in project design, site selection, implementation, operation and maintenance.

At the village level I examine the ways in which water is used symbolically, ritually and metaphorically in cultural practices and belief systems. I describe how this impacts on the health of the people. This multi-vocal ethnography analyses the multifarious meanings and social values attached to water as a life giving common good in order to understand more fully the ways and means by which it mediates social and political relations.

I compare the water development process as performed by ADCCS with the work of one of the region's largest and most powerful local NGOs, The Relief Society of Tigray² (REST), to analyse whether the stated participatory and gender policies by donor organisations are effectively translated into praxis, and if not why not. As Moser (1993) argues, 'Current development policy because of incorrect assumptions, often, if inadvertently, discriminates against or "misses" women, while even correctly formulated policy too often fails to get translated into practice.'³

My thesis therefore explores a series of themes concerning the water–gender–power nexus in Tigray. By reflecting the many voices present in the development process, I explore the following questions:

1) Do the discourses underpinning international water development policies have any currency at the local level? If they do, then the translation of policy into praxis should theoretically be manifested in the sustainability of water projects in the villages of Tigray. I will draw on the works of scholars such as Abrahamsen (2000) and Mitchell (1995) to examine the impact of global power on the development arena, the links to aid and poverty in Ethiopia, and the acquiescence of government, NGOs and local people in the process of social change / 'modernisation'. I also use the work of Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) to critique the modernisation

¹ ADCCS is a small NGO funded by the Roman Catholic Church.

² REST is one of the largest NGOs in Tigray. It has links to the current ruling party, the TPLF. It is also the NGO I was affiliated to during the course of my fieldwork.

³ This citation prefixes the introduction in 'Gender Planning and Development.' No page number is given.

project, linking her analyses of the construction of the modern nation and the formation of new gender identities to the scientific discourses of the development encounter.

2) Have the policies of participation and empowerment transformed the lives of men and women in the rural milieu in equal measure? If not, what are the barriers to women's equal participation in the cultural politics of water development in Tigray? Do women have power at the household level and is this power reflected in the public arena? Are the gender policies that are espoused by the NGOs and government officials having any practical impact in either the domestic or public spheres, or is the empowerment of women through development a myth? In this study I posit a new notion of power relations, which I call the 'power play'.

3) How are the contestations of power and privilege articulated between agencies and individuals in water resource use and development in this arid region? What are the formal and informal mechanisms through which women assert power at the village level and within agencies? I argue that there is a hidden nexus that emerges through my work. I term this the *baito*-TPLF-REST nexus and suggest that this powerful constellation is significant as an explanatory tool for understanding power relations played out through the water development process in Tigray.

4) How do religious beliefs impact on health at the village level? I analyse this in relation to the state's biomedical model to gain insights into local water handling and health practices.

5) Is there an inherent paradox in western notions of equitable and desirable social change, which claim to listen to indigenous voices yet simultaneously uphold the rights of women, particularly in relation to changing gender roles and relations? Do the representations made by NGOs regarding these questions hold good at the village level?

6) Have participatory gender policies and planning made any significant difference to water resources development at the village level? Is it possible to assert that water can be a strategic tool in the transformation of inequitable power relations in the rural milieu, or are such discourses merely rhetorical? Again I argue that it is important to view such claims in the context of the global political arena.

In this thesis I explore many of these issues by unpacking the notions of participatory development and empowerment. I draw on the work of Cleaver (2000), Gardner and Lewis (1996), James (1999), Kandiyoti (1997), Leach (1998) and Rowlands (1998), amongst others, to elucidate the complexities of the discourses of development. I also critique the process of development in terms of the representations and reality espoused and experienced in the context of Tigray. I study the impact of 'indigenous beliefs' on the 'world ordering knowledge' of the Western biomedical development model (Hobart 1993), and I draw on medical anthropology to examine the importance of cultural norms in understanding health practices (Kleinman 1980).

Research into this particular region should contribute much to anthropological knowledge as only scant research has been carried out in Tigray due to its historical isolation followed by recent decades of political unrest, war, and revolution. What I hope to present is a close grained and grounded ethnographic account of a development project. Through a case study in water provision I hope to elicit insights into the gender and development process in Tigray which, I argue, could contribute positively to policy change impacting on the quality of life and well-being for the people of this region. These insights may be translatable into similar development contexts where people's voices have not been adequately heard. I hope especially that this work will benefit the people of Ethiopia whose hospitality enabled me to undertake this research.

Water Development: From the Global to the Local Level

Water is 'essential to sustain life, development and environment' (WMO 1992: 2). Yet there are great disparities in access to water globally, both in terms of quality and quantity. As Sen (2001) notes, we live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression. This is nowhere more visible than in Ethiopia, where a rural family in Tigray may use just 20 litres of water per day to meet its entire needs. In comparison, a US household in Arizona may consume up to 3,000 litres of water on a typical day (Postel 1996: 17).

World Water Vision (2000), an international NGO, claims that 'Owing largely to poverty, at least 1.2 billion people globally do not have access to safe drinking water and 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation'. At any given time, an estimated one half of the people in developing

countries suffer from water and food-related diseases caused either directly by infection or indirectly by disease-carrying organisms that breed in water and food. Every 15 seconds a child dies from a water-related disease, and the global toll per year is at least seven million children (*Guardian* 23 August 2003). Poor sanitation is blamed for causing more than three-quarters of all disease.⁴ (It is important to note that these statistics are produced by organisations involved in the global development or ‘modernisation’ project.)

Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) became salient in the development agenda more than 25 years ago. The 1977 UN Water Conference in Argentina recommended that the 1980s should be proclaimed the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD). Launched at the UN General Assembly in November 1980, all participating countries adopted the declared target to reach 100% coverage in water supply and sanitation by 1990. The UN claimed that escalating poverty and rising populations thwarted these objectives, and the resultant numbers of people without access to safe drinking water continued to grow (Ward 1997).

In Ireland, in January 1992, the International Conference on Water and the Environment was convened. An important policy document entitled ‘The Dublin Statement’ proposed four guiding principles which remain today as the common basis for policy dialogues among donors and partner governments, not only in the WSS sector but in the wider field of water resources development, management and conservation. At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit) held in Rio in June 1992, ‘Agenda 21’, a blueprint for sustainable development, was endorsed. Chapter 18, ‘The Protection of the Quality and Supply of Freshwater Resources’, drew heavily on the Dublin principles. Four key points form the basis of the water development context within which this thesis is embedded: (1) the protection of natural ecological systems; (2) a participatory approach at the local level; (3) a focus on women’s empowerment; and (4) the valuing of water as an economic good (i.e. the need to pay for it). I shall focus primarily on points (2), (3) and (4).

How are these principles viewed in Ethiopia generally and Tigray more specifically? By drawing on the work of Rita Abrahamsen (2000), Theresa Hayter (1981) and Tim Mitchell

⁴ Statistics given at the Earth Summit on Sustainable Development (2002)

(1995), I shall examine how international policies are adopted in the Ethiopian context and if these policies are translated into praxis in the context of my study.

Fresh water is indeed a valuable resource, but does it hold premium value in the eyes of users in Ethiopia? Do the villagers believe in the same aims as the policy-makers, and do they choose to abide by the rules set by the NGOs and local bureaucrats responsible for the effective implementation of water projects? Is integrated management, founded upon the principles of participation and gender equality, a model that Tigrean villagers agree to adopt? Why should they or would they? I explore these questions throughout.

The final point concerns water development interventions set within a western development model of free market capitalism. Beneficiaries are required to pay for access to water resources. Can such practices be imposed on cultures which have no conception of water as a commodity? This raises further questions: Why pay? Who pays? Who profits?⁵ This system opens the way for exploitation and a differential access to resources that may disadvantage the poor. Yet the policy-makers stress that the reasons for placing an economic value on water resources arise from current global evidence of scarcity and wastage.

Aid and Development

The relations of power inherent in the trade, aid and debt nexus have long been explored by scholars such as Hayter (1981), who challenges the assumption that through aid agencies 'the West' helps the rest of the world to develop. In fact far from rescuing Africa, Asia and Latin America from their supposed 'backwardness', Hayter suggests that the rich countries have accumulated vast wealth at their expense. She argues that an economic system has been established that has enabled the growth of transnational corporations, draining the wealth from poor countries to the developed nations. Governments in developing nations have taken on the burden of massive and escalating debts to western banks and institutions.

⁵ French multinational corporations such as Ondeo and Veolia are buying up the contracts to own water rights globally. These monopolies have 225 million customers worldwide. This has significant implications for citizens' rights over their own nation's water resources (pers. comm.; Jarman, 1998). See also *Guardian* 23 August 2003.

Aid is directed at development strictly in accordance with the interests of the industrialised world, and capitalism in particular. Eugene Black, former president of the World Bank, when drumming up support for aid in the 1950s stated: 'Our foreign aid programmes constitute a distinct benefit to American business' (in Hayter 1981: 83). Richard Nixon was also of the same mind – in 1968 he stated: 'The main purpose of American aid is not to help other nations but to help ourselves' (p. 83).

In the 1980s the World Bank went beyond merely lending for projects like roads and dams to more broad-based support, in the form of structural adjustment loans, but only with IMF approval which imposed strict conditions on the receiving country.⁶ The IMF was supposed to focus on crisis but developing countries were always in need of help, so the IMF became a permanent part of life in most of the developing world, driven by the collective will of the G7.⁷

Rita Abrahamsen (2000: 6) discusses the links between global power, aid, democracy and development. 'The rebirth of political pluralism on the African continent in the early 1990s was heralded as a new beginning, which would usher in freedom, welfare and prosperity for Africa's long suffering peoples'. Examining development discourse and its relationship to processes of democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa, Abrahamsen argues that development discourse is historically contingent and culturally specific. She looks at the significance of this discourse to the changing balance of power in the Cold War era, and makes the case for thinking about the current emphasis on 'good governance' as legitimising not only certain forms of democratic politics but also economic liberalism (p. 6). The 'Washington Consensus', which has been accepted by the vast majority of multilateral and bilateral donors, promotes the desirability of liberal democracy, by which is often also meant free-market economics.

Linking these discourses to aid dependency in Africa, Abrahamsen (2000) demonstrates that for many countries such as Ethiopia, state survival depends on continued outside financial assistance. In 1990 official development assistance accounted for 10.7% of GNP in sub-

⁶ Policies such as cutting deficits, raising taxes or raising interest rates can lead to a contraction in the economy. This has had disastrous social and economic consequences in some countries, as jobs have been systematically destroyed. Liberalisation has caused a heightened sense of insecurity, riots, and misery (Afshar and Dennis 1992).

Saharan Africa, with several countries depending on aid for between 15–20% of their GNP (World Bank 2000).

Abrahamsen argues that development aid is conditional on political liberalisation. Global aid policies purport that aid-deserving countries are ‘democratic and committed to economic liberalisation’ (2000: 103). Both she and Tim Mitchell (1995) show how the international is always present in domestic politics, and how many interventions are sanctioned by development discourse’s representation of the southern hemisphere. The formal trappings of democracy have been maintained, partly as a consequence of aid dependency.

To this end Ethiopia has followed the guidance of the powers in the global arena and made an ideological shift (in the post Cold War era) and emphasised democracy and human rights instead of Marxism and Leninism. The country’s first multiparty elections were held in 1995 (Hammond 1999). Official press releases describing the past decade record that, ‘the eight years following the overthrow of the Socialist *derg*ue regime witnessed a stable period in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia’. A government programme of peace, *development* and *democracy* was actively pursued by the new ruling party, the EPRDF (emphasis mine). Government policies have therefore favoured market liberalisation (in everything except land), a dismantling of parastatal organisations and disengagement of the public sector from economic management.

In 1993 a decentralised federal system of government was adopted. Subsequently, and in line with international development policies, a series of new domestic policies was promulgated to aid an integrated approach to development: Health Policy 1993, Environmental Policy 1997, Water Resources Policy 1998. These all incorporate the new principles of democratisation and decentralisation, which are meant to devolve power from the centre, or state, to the regions and the people. In 1996 the government announced five-year development programmes for three key sectors: roads, health and education. These policies were actively pursued in conjunction with advice and aid from the World Bank and USAID who published information in official reports to justify and legitimise the funding of aid applications in the region. These

⁷ The United States, Japan, Germany, Canada, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. This group is typically called the G8 when it meets with Russia.

representations of Ethiopia – as a country unable to rectify its economic situation by itself and hopelessly impoverished and overpopulated – are presented below.

‘With an estimated population of 67 million, 52% of which is below the age of 18, Ethiopia is the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa’ (The World Bank 1999: 3). In 1998 the per capita GNP was estimated at \$110 per year with an annual economic growth rate at 2%. National statistics indicate an under-5 mortality rate of 175/1,000 live births (UNICEF 1999). The adult literacy rate is 39% and primary school enrolment stands at 30% (USAID 2000: 1). One of the major donors of development aid in the region, USAID, claims:

Poverty, high levels of malnutrition, food insecurity, crippling debts (accumulated at both national and household levels), severe environmental degradation and rates of population growth exceeding real economic growth, war, and a lack of infrastructure have resulted in some of the worst economic and health conditions experienced in the modern world (2000: 27).

Ethiopia remains one of Africa’s poorest countries with high rates of malnutrition, infant mortality and infectious disease. Burdened with a high population growth, low employment, inefficient agricultural and industrial sectors and poor social and physical infrastructure, *Ethiopia cannot feed itself* and requires a massive transformation of all major sectors if it is to reverse the declining trends of the past twenty-five years (p. 5, my emphasis).

This is considered an important funding document cited by both the regional government in Tigray and REST, one of the region’s leading NGOs.

Over a decade ago, USAID used exactly the same phrase to describe Egypt, another country that it was assisting (Mitchell 1995). In an important text analysing food security, aid and development in Egypt, Tim Mitchell demonstrates how development interventions are justified by western powers, using discourses which effectively disempowers the countries experiencing economic crisis and seeking international aid. For example, USAID reports about Egypt began by outlining the problems of economic development in the country as caused by geography and demography, suggesting that scarcity of land and water, combined with population growth, meant that: ‘The population has been growing faster than the country’s ability to feed itself’ (USAID in Crush 1995: 131). Mirroring the report on Ethiopia mentioned above, the USAID report stated that *Egypt cannot feed itself*. However, Mitchell deconstructed these discourses by

providing evidence that the situation in Egypt was indeed far more complex than indicated in the report. Mitchell claimed that, contrary to the representations painted in the USAID reports, the converse was true. Directed by US policy regarding Egypt, both the US and Egyptian governments had encouraged a change amongst the rural population from diets based on legumes and maize (corn) to a less healthy reliance on wheat and meat. Basically the demand for meat by foreign tourists and the middle class and urban upper class meant that Egypt was growing more food for animals to consume than humans. Egypt did in fact grow enough food to feed its people, but due to international pressure from the IMF, World Bank and US government to pursue policies detrimental to the majority of its citizens, the poor did not have enough to feed themselves. Egypt has had to borrow money and ask for aid, getting into debt to buy grain for animals, and the poor have to contribute to repaying the country's debt through taxes. Thus Mitchell unmasked the global politics behind the aid encounter. Similarly, Susan George suggests that when multi-lateral and bilateral aid agencies begin to construct images of over-population and land shortages, 'You should reach, if not for your revolver, at least for your calculator' (1990: 18).

Similarly, Hayter argues that 'Aid is of course not always used as a means of promoting particular economic policies. Often it is used merely as a political weapon. At times it is used with brutal cynicism' (1981: 10) and this can be especially so in the important case of food aid, as I have outlined. Quite a large number of underdeveloped countries have allowed themselves to become heavily dependent on this form of aid, especially through agencies such as USAID. Ethiopia is one such country. This relationship of dependency locks countries into the terms and conditions imposed by the donor countries. Crewe and Harrison demonstrate how the conditionality attached to aid agreements maintains unequal power relations between the givers and receivers of aid funding. They argue that the multilateral and bilateral aid agencies' point of view is: 'We have the money, you want it, so you better behave as we think correct' (1998: 69). These scholars clearly demonstrate that even if governments and NGOs do not agree with policies imposed on them by aid agencies, they have no option but to acquiesce and adopt a position of compliance with the agenda set by a top-down process. In Ethiopia, the switch from Marxism/Leninism to a democracy modelled on a western free market economy demonstrates this fact clearly.

Does this mean that all developing nations have no voice or power? Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) and Scott (1985) demonstrate that resistance to such development may take many forms at the national and local level. Yet do countries such as Ethiopia have an option? Ethiopia has embarked on policies of decentralisation and five-year plans that reflect the global neo-liberal development paradigm and that have to be in place for aid packages to be agreed. Scholars place this ideology in the context of a postmodern world where grand narratives such as Marxism are considered no longer relevant and an ideology encompassing global capitalism is seen as prevalent (Donham 2002).

Water Aid

Documents published by the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan NGOs mirror the global policy proscriptions, linking a lack of clean water to ill health and poverty. For example, the Ethiopian Ministry of Water Resources in conjunction with USAID has stated that only 15% of the population has access to potable water in Ethiopia.⁸ There are wide rural–urban disparities. Results from the National Nutritional Survey of 1992 showed a worsening nutritional status compared to a similar survey carried out in 1983. Stunting (low height for age) was observed in 64% of children between the ages of 6 and 59 months.⁹ These statistics form the basis for the justification of water aid interventions in Ethiopia in general and in Tigray in particular.

In response to this picture, President Meles Zenawi and his government have pledged to improve the existing access to potable water. A Ministry of Water has been established in order to promote, implement and monitor water development projects on both a local and regional level. The government claims that a new mood of transparency and accountability has opened the way for western donor agencies and NGOs to invest in the implementation of water projects in the country. In Tigray, local initiatives include earth dams, wells, bore holes, spring capping, and programmes to prevent deforestation and soil degradation, using techniques such as terracing and other water conservation technologies.

⁸ Ministry of Water Resources, 1998 Federal Water Resources Policy, Addis Ababa .

⁹ UNICEF (1999) 'State of the Worlds Children', New York.

Gender in Water Resources Management

The responsibilities, power and interests of the actors involved in the water development process are not all the same.¹⁰ Men and women may have different interests in and control over the use of water, for different purposes. Wijk (1998) claims that access to water as a critical resource is an arena of contestation. It is important therefore to study the differences in knowledge, choices, and decision-making capabilities of different user groups, based on the variables of gender, class, race and religion, to ascertain the optimum conditions for socio-economic development. In the past, some water development programmes either excluded women as actors and managers or excluded men and failed in their aims of sustainability (Wijk 1998). 'The gender based approach to development is distinct in that it focuses on women and men rather than considering women in isolation' (IDS 1995: 1) and activists claim gender awareness in the implementing agency's policies and programmes can resolve past failures.

The issue of gender relations in water management and water rights has increasingly captured the attention of policy-makers internationally (Benda-Backman 1998). Mollinga and Straaten (1996) argue that water management policies must be location-specific and based on understanding local processes and power relations. They stress that any change in water management means a concomitant change in institutional arrangements and that these are based on influence and power. They argue that the current emphasis is mainly on financial incentives while social power and empowerment are neglected. It is at this point that gender issues in water resources management become important and the focus of my study.

The acknowledgement that women tend to be a disadvantaged group in most countries with regard to 'traditional' roles and responsibilities necessitates a gender approach that pays attention to the differences between men's and women's interests, even within the same household (Kabeer 1994, Moser 1989, Wolf 1997). A gender and development (GAD) approach considers how these differences and contestations are played out by analysing the hierarchies and conventions which determine men's and women's positions in the family, community, and society at large (Leach 1992), suggesting that women are usually dominated

¹⁰ These include agriculture, domestic water supply and waste disposal, industrial use, as well as interests in energy [hydro-electric power] and ecosystems.

by and subordinate to their male counterparts. GAD scholars and activists also study the differences among men and women based on age, wealth, and status, and explore the ways in which gender roles and relations shift and change as a result of socio-economic factors such as migration for employment (IDS 1995: 1).

The first expression of concern for women and their involvement in development emerged in the 1960s. Women were recognised as a disadvantaged group, for whom special women's components had to be developed. In water supply projects women were seen only as passive beneficiaries of these projects. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, women came to be recognised as actors and managers of water in their own right. It became apparent that involving women in planning, construction and management brought benefits for development in general and for the household specifically (Hannan-Andersson 1984). During the 1980s new programmes that targeted women and sought to broaden their involvement in planning and implementation of WSS services were launched by the United Nations and bilateral agencies. Women were trained as handpump caretakers and latrine builders. Their participation was mandated in water committees. Wijk (1998) argues that 'busy women became even busier'.

In the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s it became clear that the effective involvement of women required them to unite and develop inner strength and self-reliance (Wijk 1998). These changes would shift the positionality of women from the mundane tasks of physical work, i.e. transporting water, cleaning, digging wells, to the role of decision-makers and controllers of resources (Kwaule and Groote 1990). Caroline Moser (1993) has referred to this spectrum of development interventions as the welfare approach, followed by the equity or anti-poverty approach, the efficiency approach and finally the current genre of development employing the empowerment approach. In Ethiopia the empowerment approach has been adopted by the national government. Following policy directives, Haile claims that the National Women's Association has empowered and assisted women to become involved in more than just digging: 'Women have been trained in management and technical skills' (1991: 95). Haile perceives a commitment to gender awareness as the way forward, putting resources and energy into pragmatic measures such as skills and confidence building. Is this transformation taking place at the village level and in the regions, and does this model fit the cultural and political context in Tigray shaped by Ethiopia's historical past?

History of the Region

The size of Ethiopia is slightly less than twice the size of Texas (see Figure 1.1). It is a country comprised of 80 different ethnic groups competing for power and representing a wide diversity of languages, cultures and faiths. The Mursi in the south of Ethiopia practise a form of pantheistic religion. While Ethiopia has been for 20 centuries a Christian state, one-third of the population is Muslim (Marcus 1994).¹¹

The country has a long and rich history beyond the scope of my thesis.¹² The periods relevant for my purposes extend from the late 19th and early 20th century onwards, which witnessed the transformation from a ‘feudal’¹³ kingdom, through the socialist revolution (1974), to the current Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Era of the Princes (1769-1853)

The period of Ethiopian history known as *Zamana Masafent* or the Era of the Princes forms the prelude to the modern history of Ethiopia. The social order was sustained by the rural subsistence farmers, the only productive class in society, while the ruling nobles fought among themselves. Through a combination of plough agriculture and animal husbandry, the farmers supported the whole social system (Zewde 2001). There was a lineage system of land ownership known as *rist*, and access to land was based on membership in an extended kinship group. A system of surplus appropriation known as *gult* gave the nobility rights to collect tribute from the peasants (Hendrie 1999). At the end of the 18th century, in the southern part of the country, slaves constituted the main item of export trade. Slaves were captives of war or children sold into slavery by destitute parents. Other significant exports were ivory, coffee and honey.

¹¹ The dominant religion is Orthodox Christianity (Pankhurst 1992).

¹² A skeleton of a 3.5 million-year-old upright female hominid, named ‘Lucy’ (*Australopithecus Afarensis*), was found in Ethiopia in 1974. This is the oldest human fossil on record (Marcus 1994). See Pankhurst (1990) for a broad sweep of Ethiopian history.

¹³ Ethiopian historians and political commentators refer to this system as ‘feudal’ (Zewde 2001). Although I am aware that there are debates about the definition of feudalism, and critiques of its use in an alien context, the scope of this thesis does not permit detailed examination of these debates. Thus I shall follow Ethiopian academics in their definition and shall use the term ‘feudal’ only as and when necessary.

Ethiopia Becomes of Strategic Importance in Global Politics (1848 onwards)

The first British Consul to Ethiopia arrived in 1848. Emperor Tewodros II was the reigning monarch, known for his valour and military might (Pankhurst 1990). In 1869 the Suez Canal was opened, and the whole Red Sea region was invested with great strategic and commercial importance in global politics. European colonial powers rushed for possession of territory along the coast. The British intervened and occupied Egypt in 1882. This event had ominous significance for Africa as it unleashed the scramble to partition the continent. The Anglo-Italian collusion over Ethiopia began as the struggle over control of the White and Blue Nile brought together the two countries – the British, who controlled the former, wanted the Italians to control the latter (Zewde 2001).

Menelik II became the next important figure in Ethiopian history. Emperor from 1882 to 1910, Menelik's military genius thwarted Italian colonial attempts and at the Battle of Adwa on 1 March 1896 Ethiopia maintained its independence (Zewde 2001). In 1917 Ras Tafari became Prince Regent of Ethiopia and was later crowned Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930 (Joireman 2000). In 1935, as an expression of Mussolini's ambition, Italy gained revenge for their defeat at the Battle of Adwa. Just when the other European colonisers were contemplating releasing their colonial holdings, the Italians occupied the northernmost part of Ethiopia. The Italians developed an infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, and building construction began in earnest, even though the two sides were literally at war (Pankhurst 1990). In 1941 a British-led allied force defeated and expelled the Italian troops. During the occupation Haile Selassie sought refuge in England, and in 1942 he returned from exile to reclaim his throne and to create an independent Ethiopian empire

During his reign, the emperor maintained the 'feudal' state structure already in existence. Traditional elite groups were comprised primarily of those who were born into Ethiopian royal families and were mostly Amhara or Tigrayan nobility and clergy. Old noble families in the provinces formed local dynasties and held positions in local government administration, forming an extremely powerful rural aristocracy. Many of these individuals had been given land by various emperors of Ethiopia and administered the land as *melkenya*, a term referring to their rights to tax, administer and at times even control the distribution of land within the areas of their oversight (Pankhurst 1990).

The collective, lineage-based *rist* land tenure system was well established by the time the first assessments of the area were recorded. It was essential to both the nobility and the farmer in imperial Ethiopia as it separated the powerful ruling nationality, the Amhara, from the non-Amhara, and the patron from the client. For the elite groups, especially the rural nobility, land equated with status. For the rural people access to land gave the means of subsistence. Land acquisition was a route to wealth accumulation. Throughout the imperial era poor subsistence farmers had almost no political power, only affecting national decision-making through mass revolt and the deaths of thousands from famine (Hendrie 1999).

Besserat argues that for centuries before and during the reign of Haile Selassie, 'Ethiopia was steeped in feudalism and it was this system of political economy and not ecological conditions that led to the tragic famines which impacted on the north of the country during the 20th century' (1989:12).¹⁴ In 1973 another major famine occurred in the region,¹⁵ and Haile Selassie was accused of ignoring this tragic situation in which a quarter of a million people died (Mockler 1984).

The Socialist Revolution

The famine in Tigray and Wallo, plus rapid inflation spearheaded by a rise in petrol prices, unrest among the urban population, guerrilla activity in Eritrea and Bale, and peasant disturbances in the south set the scene for a coup. In September 1974, after a series of strikes in Addis Ababa and a mutiny in the armed forces, Haile Selassie was deposed. On 20 December 1974 the country was declared a socialist state under a provisional military government called the *derg*.

The first serious policy decision of the revolutionary government was to implement land reform that divested large landholders of their property and gave to the tenants the plots that they were farming. This was achieved through the 1975 Rural Lands Proclamation upon which all rural land was nationalised and holdings restricted to less than 10 hectares. Ownership of land was

¹⁴ This view is, however, opposed by Penrose et al. (1987), who argue that ecological factors such as land degradation and drought were responsible for the scale of the tragedy.

¹⁵ The first great famine was at the end of the 19th century. Menelik obtained Tigray through war and forced starvation. During the seven years of that period of Menelik's domination drought was not a factor, yet two hundred thousand Tigrayans died, many of starvation. In the Italian attempt to colonise Ethiopia in 1943 another quarter of a million people perished; again there was no drought (Besserat 1989).

vested in the government. Pankhurst (1992) states that *Meret larashu*, or 'Land to the Tiller', the slogan of student activists prior to the revolution, became the main legitimising measure undertaken by the *dergue*. The hire of labour was simultaneously abolished. 'Development through co-operation' took the land from the 'lords' and gave it to the tillers.

In a radical transformation some women now had visible and direct access to land, yet others still had none. This was only a partial reform as a woman's agricultural yield and the amount of control she had were influenced by whether the ploughing was done by a present or former husband, relative, friend or hired help. There was thus considerable variation in women's entitlements to land. Some women had complete land use rights, other women had inherited half shares to land rights, some women had a latent right, whilst others had a minor's share, or no active or latent land rights at all (Pankhurst 1992).

The farmers associations were a mass organisation and the primary channel of state administration. In effect they were a tool of the state and gave people little if any autonomy or agency. The local leaders of the associations, who played a crucial role as intermediaries between state and society, represented the state and implemented its policies while becoming powerful in the process. 'Corruption and nepotism were increasingly visible' (Pankhurst 1992: 13).

Zewde (2001) claims that the farmers' lack of power continued long after the 1974 revolution. Regardless of this radical restructuring of the land system, the state structures remained undemocratic. Power and control now rested in the hands of the military rather than the elites. Farmers were in theory given representation at the local level as *kebelle's* were set up, local and elective in form and with their own militia, but these had nominal power.

Between 1977 and 1978, in a period of violent inter-factional fighting, the *dergue* armies became known as the 'Red Terror', imprisoning and killing thousands. In 1984 famine and drought ravaged the north, affecting some nine million people. Actions taken by the government included relief and rehabilitation in the affected areas and the controversial resettling of 600,000 northern Ethiopians to other regions as an attempt at a partial long-term solution. In the northern highlands a coalition of rebel forces, including the Tigrean People's

Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), rebelled against the *derg* regime. The *derg* used the famine against the rebels, allegedly burning food aid in Western Tigray to starve them out (Hammond 1999).

However, on 14 June 1987 elections were held and Ethiopia was proclaimed a People's Democratic Republic, a unitary socialist state under Mengistu Haile Mariam who controlled the party and the state. While the constitution proclaimed the equality of all nationalities and the equality of men and women, 'the rights of citizenship and theories of equality were seen as little more than empty words' (Pankhurst 1992: 8) and unrest and resistance in the regions grew.

Recent History

As dissent in the region developed into civil war in the early 1980s, urban communities found themselves caught between the repressive *derg* in the towns and the revolutionary process in the countryside. The students who started the TPLF had been active in the rural areas since the late 1970s and central to their revolutionary strategy was the political work of converting the scattered and poverty-stricken farmers in rural Tigray into a politically conscious mass able to defend its interests. The students were ill equipped to survive in the countryside and local farmers helped them to find water and food. The fighters' reliance on 'the people' formed the basis of the strong ideological link of the TPLF to the grassroots. It was a genuine partnership, for without the peasants the fighters could not survive. Listening to the people became critical. The TPLF identified the rural population as its major resource, yet the *derg*'s approach to rural problems remained authoritarian despite its socialist claims (Hammond 1999).

The TPLF had seen the *derg*'s revolution as a betrayal of the intense popular movement for political change. They described it as a 'palace' revolution, resulting in little change in power relations. One largely Amhara elite had replaced another, but the two big issues, rural poverty and the problems of a multiethnic state, remained unresolved. By contrast the TPLF began a process of education and training, both formal and informal, to convince formerly powerless sectors of society of their vision of an alternative and to mobilize them to action (Hammond 1999). The TPLF fought a guerrilla campaign largely with peasant support, which was brutally

resisted by the *derg*. Throughout the civil war the *derg* had airpower (supplied by Soviet aid) and bombarded the towns and villages in Tigray.

The government also applied brutal measures to suppress civilian opposition. Teachers were shot and their students were killed in front of them. There was a marked escalation of rape, enforced prostitution and violence against women. Imprisonment, torture and death were routine hazards. In order to survive some farmers collaborated fully with the authorities; women slept with soldiers to protect their families, others married the *derg* security officials for protection. There was so much fear it was difficult to trust anyone, even members of a person's own family (Hammond 1999).

Meanwhile, in parallel with the military struggle, the TPLF had been making political preparations for the expansion of the war south of Tigray. In 1989 they formed a united front with an Amhara liberation movement. The resulting party, The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), took control of the capital and Ethiopia in 1991. The end of the *derg* found Ethiopia a country with a shortage of jobs, resources, and essential goods. National reconstruction began with the formation of the *baito* or locally elected administrative councils. They laid the foundation for development by making new laws (*serit*) on land tenure, inheritance and marriage, including equal rights and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of gender and religion. Hammond (1999) claims the *gemgem* process, which evaluated administrative tasks and progress, formed the triad on which rural participatory democracy was founded. She argues that the TPLF insistence on bottom-up politics as the basis of all economic and social development continued in the post-1991 era.

The War with Eritrea (1998–2000)

Meles Zenawi and Isaias Aferwerki, the heads of Ethiopia and Eritrea respectively, were both hailed by US policy-makers as examples of 'Africa's new leaders who would usher in a new progressive era' (Ottaway 1990: 4). This did not, however, prevent the two nations from going to war. A two-year period of conflict began on 6 May 1998 when neighbouring Eritrea engaged in military combat against Ethiopia, contesting the demarcation of national boundaries. Ethiopian Embassy officials claim that in May 1998 Eritrean forces crossed the international border between Ethiopia and Eritrea and occupied Ethiopian towns and villages which until

that time had incontestably been under Ethiopian civil administration. In response to this a war broke out between the two countries over the disputed territories and ended with the signing of the 'The Algiers Agreement' in December 2000. An aide memoire published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 2003 still contests decisions made by the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission, which has resulted in a current impasse in the Ethiopia–Eritrea peace process. Both countries are unhappy about the demarcation of national boundaries as set by the Commission.

Allegations of violations of international law by both forces during the conflict, consisting of accusations of intentional killings, rape, beatings, abduction, illegal arrests, looting and property destruction, have been investigated and found true. The Commission found Eritrea responsible for allowing military aircraft to attack the Ayder school with cluster bombs twice, causing the death and wounding of civilians, including many children. The Commission also found both parties liable for failure to prevent rape in certain occupied towns and villages.

The Ethiopian towns of Badime, Zalambassa and Alitana and other areas, including small villages along the border, were under Eritrean occupation, culminating in the displacement of over 300,000 Ethiopian citizens. REST estimated the figure was over 584,000 refugees. REST and other NGOs in the region assisted the displaced citizens with the co-operation of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau, giving food aid and non-food items such as clothing and providing shelter and blankets. Western agencies including USAID, Medicins Sans Frontiers (Holland), Save the Children UK and OXFAM GB were involved in the efforts.

A resolution came in the signing of a peace treaty on 12 December 2000, bringing the war to an end. It is estimated that 30,000 Ethiopians and 70,000 Eritreans lost their lives, and military spending during the war was over \$800 million. The external debt in 2000 was \$5.3 billion. Ethiopia received \$308 million in economic aid in 2000/01 (World Fact Book 2002).

The war had a devastating impact on an already fragile economy and a deleterious effect on the families I lived amongst in Tigray. The local government administration system or *baito* was responsible for catering to the needs of the people during war time and post-conflict. It was also responsible for implementing regional government policies, such as those concerning

development. Through the course of this thesis the reader will see the power of this system of local governance. The *baito* members are drawn from the ruling political party, the TPLF, who are also inextricably linked to the largest development NGO in the region, REST. This nexus, *baito*–TPLF–REST, is significant in terms of the modernisation of the rural milieu, and as I shall show with particular reference to the water development process.

Water Supply Provision in Tigray

The aim of the Planning Department (part of the regional government's Social and Economic Development Committee) is that all people in the region shall have access to basic water supply and sanitation by 2020. A multidisciplinary group of stakeholders has been convened to facilitate this process. These project partners include the regional government, donor agencies such as USAID, local and international NGOs (including REST), and the government's Bureau of Water Resources. This core group of actors is responsible for negotiating the interface between policy and action planning. Zemechial, the government minister responsible for social and economic development in Tigray, leads this cross-sectoral body. The integrated approach adopted was influenced by work done in the early 1980s in Nigeria (Black 1990). Multi-disciplinary work in the water sector is seen as the blueprint for multi-sectoral and integrated action. This model of programme planning focuses on water and sanitation in conjunction with other government departments such as health, education, agriculture and economic development. These are meant to work together to create sustainable projects that are self-funding, the consensus that is now reflected in water policies globally, as the Tigrean model attests.

However, in this thesis I question the fulfilment of such rhetoric at grassroots level. Highly skilled development agencies and NGOs can become very adept at espousing policies without translating these into practice or, as Hashemi (1989) states, 'talking the talk but not walking the walk'. Gardner and Lewis state that, 'there is a growing radical critique of NGOs which argues that, rather than promoting deep-rooted change, they actually preserve the status quo by setting up a system of patronage based on the flow of development assistance, which undermines and depoliticises local grassroots organisations' (1996: 109). They also demonstrate that sometimes 'where the state has sought assistance with service delivery or project implementation,

frequently with donor agency support, NGOs have often merged seamlessly with mainstream government structures (1996: 108).

The Relief Society of Tigray (REST), an indigenous NGO, could be construed to be an arm of the state as some of the organisation's key personnel are leaders within the TPLF. There is almost an apocryphal quality to the narratives of local people regarding the NGO. REST is legendary, mythologised by the urbanites and rural peasants alike. It is perceived as an organisation borne out of armed struggle that is representative of the grassroots. Many key staff are members of the ruling party, the TPLF, while the director, Tekleweini, is a member of the powerful inner circle of its Central Committee. Reflecting the party's Marxist/Leninist ideology, REST has a history steeped in guerrilla communism and the Tigrean people's fight for self-determination. In 1978, during the armed struggle, REST was officially founded by members of the TPLF¹⁶ volunteering to form a humanitarian NGO through which aid agencies could channel relief aid and essential medical supplies from the West to the villages of Tigray (Hammond 1999). As is the case in many wars, access to food and water was used as a political weapon (Marcus 1994). The *dergue* army tried to cut off aid supplies to the north of the country (the Tigrayan and Eritrean rebel held territories) in order to starve the opposition into submission. REST worked tirelessly to counter this situation and gained their reputation as being 'for the people' (Hammond 1999).

It is not only the local people who venerate REST. Maria, an Australian expatriate of Greek descent now working for the organisation, told me, 'REST is more powerful than the government.' In 22 years the organisation's growth has been phenomenal, and it boasts a workforce of several hundred staff. The head of Projects and Planning, a well-educated man in his early 30s, Berehu, backs up Maria's claim. 'REST is the key organisation for development in the Tigray region. We are the largest indigenous NGO. REST is stronger than the government because we have dedicated staff. REST tries to know the heartbeat of the society, we know the problems of the people.'

¹⁶ The TPLF was formed on 18 February 1975 by a group of dissident Tigrayans. They were mostly students who had left Addis Ababa to avoid arrest and imprisonment for their outspoken political views against the *dergue*. The TPLF were the backbone of REST (Hammond 1999).

The strongly expressed gender policy within the organisation reflects a key theme of the western development paradigm. This policy is particularly relevant to my study. In Ethiopia it is women who have traditionally been the gatekeepers of water, whilst male administrators are usually the arbiters of decision-making power in the development context. I argue therefore that it is imperative that the water–gender–power nexus in development interventions be subject to rigorous analysis in order to elicit valuable new insights into the dynamics of gender and development in this area, and to analyse their effectiveness. To do so I shall draw on the works of three anthropologists of Ethiopia – Barbara Hendrie (1999),¹⁷ Helen Pankhurst (1992) and Jenny Hammond (1989, 1999) – in order to set the stage for my subsequent analysis.

Gender Power Relations in Ethiopia

Hammond (1989) asserts that under the hierarchical system, women in Ethiopia were systematically oppressed and marginalised in every area of their lives. They had no rights to land, which was the basis of the economy. Marriage therefore was the only means of securing economic stability. Most women were illiterate with no access to health care or education. A dowry system compounded the subject position of women as they were seen as expensive commodities, their natal families' wealth being taken out of the house upon their marriage. The birth of a son was welcomed more than that of a daughter. Among the Amhara, Pankhurst (1992) attests that the most open and expressive form of resistance to women's social and sexual inequality was expressed through the medium of work songs. These narratives expressed the hardship of their lives, spent in time-consuming and back-breaking tasks such as grinding, weeding, hoeing, tilling, preparing and cooking food and gathering fuel and water. Although these labour intensive practices still exist today in rural Tigray, Hammond (1999) claims that the position of women in contemporary society has been transformed since the revolution, which aimed to change the social and economic lives of the people. Hammond states,

The armed struggle was waged to counter food deprivation, ill health, powerlessness and exploitation. The role of women was paramount to the successful overthrow of the previous repressive regime. ... The TPLF challenged male supremacy at every level and subsequently women now have equal rights to land and are represented in the

¹⁷ Helen Pankhurst studied gender and development among the Amhara in a region outside Tigray. Jenny Hammond focused on politics and the revolution, paying particular attention to gender issues. Barbara Hendrie's PhD research was on land tenure and agrarian reform (1993–5).

baito or people's council, reclaiming a voice which had previously been silenced (1999: 27).

Hammond suggests that, after the revolution, members of the women's associations learnt new skills and gained access to training, empowering women in all areas. The previous sexual division of labour which prevented women from undertaking certain jobs, i.e. ploughing, a traditionally male domain, was challenged, enabling single women to farm their own plots of land.

'It is predominantly women who influence the environment through the daily task of fetching water and their management of this family resource' (Hartman 1985: 98). Women negotiate the uses of water for social production and reproduction on a daily basis, in drawing water, transport and in storage in the home. The burden of water collection today still falls mainly on women and girls. In Tigray, they can walk up to 10 miles a day to fetch water, and in the dry season even twice that distance is not that uncommon. Water containers hold about 20 litres and weigh approximately 20 kilograms. Constant carrying of such heavy weights, commonly on the head, back or hip, has severe health implications. Backache and joint pains are common and, in extreme cases, curved spines and pelvic deformities as well as broken backs can occur. Collecting water is not only physically stressful but is extremely time consuming, often resulting in girls and young women being unable to attend schools and colleges (Water Aid 1997).

The government in Tigray acknowledges that women provide for the physical subsistence of the community and are thus targets for development interventions.¹⁸ The ideal of a revolutionary new Ethiopia in which women are empowered and equal citizens needs now to be evaluated in the light of eight years of peace and 'democracy'. I contest these claims through my research because I feel they reflect Hammond's particular viewpoint gleaned from her sample of TPLF women revolutionaries. Although women did have powerful roles as fighters in the armed struggle, the transference of these non-traditional roles to non-fighter women was not evident in the rural milieu of my study, where women were not represented on the *baito*, nor did they engage in non-traditional activities. Women's participation in politics was minimal. However, women were engaged in income-generating programmes such as soil and

water conservation. They used techniques such as terracing to encourage the maintenance of fertile lands, with the aim of increasing harvests and providing a self-sufficient form of subsistence economy to cater for their families. Women were also active in reforestation activities to prevent soil degradation.

My research focuses on rural women and men to explore the structural and material conditions which they experience on a daily basis. I view this through the lens of the water development process and discuss the way the water development process does (or does not) impact on their lived experiences and identities. I describe the village of Tshalo, a small rural community in the highlands of the Eastern zone, paying particular attention to the crosscutting and intersecting issues of water, gender and power in the context of Tigray. In order to do this I used the following anthropological methods

Methodology

Olivia Harris claims that ‘anthropology is the art of the possible’. Its power, she states, resides in the many different ways that anthropologists approach questions. Its beauty lies in the discipline’s ability to have a different ‘take’ on the world. Harris argues that comparative analysis elucidates different perspectives. Moreover, ‘the humanistic bias of anthropology is holistic, in trying to understand culture, rituals and institutions in the broader context’ (Harris 2003, pers. comm.). It is with this rich framework in mind that I undertook my research, drawing primarily on the discipline’s baseline methodology of writing ethnography.

I am cognisant of the work of Clifford and Marcus regarding the historical predicament of ethnography, ‘that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures’ (Clifford 1988: 2). I am also mindful of the fact that

Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilisations, cultures, classes, races and genders. ... Ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial – committed and incomplete (1988: 2).

Sandra Harding (1987) argues that researchers can no longer hide behind the language of ‘objectivity’. They must situate themselves in their research and must not appear as an

¹⁸ Haile, personal communication (2000).

anonymous invisible voice of authority but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests. Clifford and Marcus (1988) remain optimistic that although ethnographic work remains enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, it has a relationship within this dynamic which is complex, ambivalent and counter-hegemonic. It is in this encounter that I believe social change is possible.

My account is reflexive and I situate myself as a British Armenian feminist teaching and learning within the English academy yet having my own particular subjective slant on the world. I am a practising Christian.

With these insights in mind this study incorporated a multi-sited and processual examination of the actors involved in the development context (Nelson 1995). To achieve this I spent a one-year period engaged in intensive fieldwork in Tsahlo, a rural village in Tigray. I also spent time in Mekelle, the capital city of the region, attached to an indigenous non-governmental organisation, REST. I followed their Rural Water Supply Team into several of the project's fieldsites in the lowlands of the Central Zone to familiarise myself with the technological aspects of the water development process in Tigray. I also did this in order to compare the various manifestations of the water development process in a water scarce zone with the semi-arid region of Tsahlo village. I chose this field site in consultation with the director of the Rural Water Supply Department of REST and his team.

I first made contact with REST by working with their international office in London, in a voluntary capacity, from 1998 to 1999, which enabled me to gain open access to project personnel and data in Mekelle, as well as providing me with key informants to interview at the regional government level. REST also provided for me on a more practical level. Access to the leaders of the local government institution (*baito*) was negotiated on my behalf to secure accommodation and transport in the village of study and access to other research sites. I negotiated access in other key sites by visiting the women's associations of Tigray, who arranged strategic contacts at the local level. This process 'snowballed', enabling me to meet key informants at the village level.

I compared a water project implemented by REST in the lowlands with a new water development intervention initiated by the Adigrat Catholic Secretariat (ADCCS) in the village where I lived. These fieldwork locations were chosen on a reconnaissance trip to the area, which I undertook during my first week in the region in January 2000. I was accompanied by a REST hydrologist who talked me through the paleo-hydrology of the areas I visited in order that I could make an informed choice as to the village of my study.

While this form of collaborative research is, I believe, crucial both methodologically and ethically, there is a caveat. I must acknowledge that being linked to one of the region's largest local NGOs with very close links to the TPLF may have had an impact on the data I collected, although it is impossible for an anthropologist to know what people may or may not have said had my situation been different. Conversely, if I had not been linked to REST then I also may or may not have had access to particular narratives, and my data may have been influenced by my choice.

I looked at usage, maintenance and management of an already established water point in my village. I therefore chose to stay in Tsahlo as the REST team informed me that the administration there was weak and I believed that, rather than viewing a 'model' site, my research would be most beneficial if I could uncover problems in the development process and offer constructive solutions. I compared and contrasted the water development process in Tsahlo to the site in the lowlands because I thought it would be an ideal method to examine the questions regarding gender and development raised in this thesis.

At this point I need to acknowledge the debt that I owe to my male interpreter and research assistant Gedion Kiros, without whose insights my understandings of life in Tigray would have been incomplete. Aware of the politics of gender and interpretation/translation of cultures and the questions of access and power, I did ponder over my choice of a man. However, Gedion and I grew to know and understand each other over the year that we worked together. I am aware that my account may have been richer in certain areas had I worked with a woman research assistant but, given the context of war, I felt safer knowing that potentially dangerous

situations I might encounter would be mitigated by a male presence.¹⁹ I also am grateful to Gedion for securing access to many strategic people through his connections as an ex-politician. Simultaneously, I need also to reflect on the impact that my choice of Gedion, a politically active TPLF member, had on my research. His presence may have had an impact on the information I was given by some informants who may have slanted their conversations either towards a particular party line, i.e. pro TPLF, or alternatively may have constrained other informants from presenting information to me that they felt would jeopardise them in any way, i.e. anti-TPLF sentiments. However, even though I was linked to the TPLF throughout my stay in the village (and research in the town and city), I tried to maintain a neutral, apolitical, objective researcher stance to mitigate any hint of allegiance to anyone. Moreover I was obviously an outsider and therefore could have been seen by villagers, NGOs and government ministers alike as linked to the west or the aid givers. This fact also may have impacted on the information that informants did or did not share with me.

Techniques of Data Gathering

Participant Observation

Since Malinowski's time, the 'method' of participant-observation has enacted a delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity. The ethnographer's personal experiences, especially those of participation and empathy, are recognised as central to the research process. ... States of serious confusion, violent feelings or acts, censorship, important failures, changes of course, and excessive pleasures are excluded from the published account (Clifford 1988: 12).

Clifford muses that in the 1960s ethnographers began to write about their field experience in ways that disturbed the prevailing subjective/objective balance. This led to a sub-genre of ethnographic writing, the self-reflexive fieldwork account. Problematising the method of participant-observation, Clifford locates cultural interpretations within encounters of power relations. One way of deconstructing the monophonic authoritative voice of the ethnographer is to use many voices in our texts. To engage in narratives that are dialogic, polyphonic, to represent the words and voices of our informants, to make steps towards inclusion, would engender the holism of which Harris so eloquently speaks. Representing the views and voices of as many of the villagers as was possible was partially my aim.

¹⁹ Stories of the rape of village women by soldiers encamped in the area of my homestead were common..

Before I entered the field I took lessons in Tigrinya and had a basic grasp of the language before I arrived in the village. I immersed myself in Tigrean culture by using the method of participant-observation to undertake my ethnographic study. I lived amongst the people in the village of Tsahlo, gaining their confidence and trust. This process enabled me to gather the data I needed to describe, analyse and consequently interpret the articulation of power relations in the water–gender–power nexus in Tigray. I returned from the field with 13 notebooks full of valuable information, gleaned through dialogue between myself and my informants.

As I had gone on a reconnaissance mission before I chose the village that I was to live in, the villagers had provided housing on my return to the village of my choice. An empty room made of mud and stone walls in the local style was cleared of rubble and prepared for my interpreter and myself to share. In some ways I did miss out on not actually living with a family and experiencing village life 24 hours a day, but I felt it best not to offend the people who had so kindly prepared my house.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Focus Groups

Chambers (1994) states that PRA is a set of techniques and methods intended to enable local people to conduct their own analysis, and to plan and take action with regard to development technologies. Moreover, ‘it is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act’ (1994: 953). These research tools originated in the study of applied anthropology in the 1980s and have gained popularity as a method of information collection. The objective, however, is less to gather data than to start a process. The outsider is less extractor of information and more convenor and catalyst. The approach has gained considerable popularity in natural resource project planning and has been adopted by a variety of agencies, i.e. the World Bank and NGOs both at project and programme level. The PRA method emphasises intensive interrogation and the use of role reversals and visual techniques in public settings. Each of these emphases can, however, be problematic, firstly as the information is elicited in a social context where the influence of power, authority and gender inequalities may be great. This may lead to ‘muting’ or ‘officiating strategies’ (Mosse 1994) wherein women in particular are silenced and ‘poor low status people’ resist voicing their needs in order to protect their economic or social security. (Pottier (1993) echoes this point by referring to public knowledge and private knowledge.)

Another critique of the methods of PRA has been made by Woost: ‘whatever the P.R.A pundits say about relaxed settings, participatory workshops are structured encounters marked by hidden agendas and strategic manoeuvres’ (1997: 221).

By being aware of such critiques yet still participating in the various agencies’ use of such methods, I entered the field hoping to get the villagers to engage in PRA activities. I hoped that this method would enable me to glean more insights into the perceptions of all the actors and agents involved in the water–gender–power nexus. I intended to discover if this method, designed to empower people, also paradoxically managed to disempower those whom it was intended to benefit. I decided to talk to the people in the village in which I lived about PRA and entered into a discussion with them about its principles, potentials and pitfalls. The villagers decided not to engage in some of the classic methods of PRA. They concluded that they seemed childish and patronising. If they had something to say they assured me they would just say it and did not need games and techniques to facilitate discussion. The villagers in Tsahlo were cognisant of their needs and clearly articulated them in focus group sessions, one participatory method, which did work well, eliciting good discussions and rich data. I held 14 focus group interviews: the Tsahlo *kushett* administration, *Kokakay* elders, young women’s group, young men’s group, farmers, women, the women’s association at *wereda* and *kushett* level, children’s group, the youth association, Tsahlo water committee, Tsadenale water committee, priests from Holy Xavier church and Tsahlo elders.

Interviews – National, Regional, Wereda

I used formal interview techniques as well as utilising semi-structured and free flowing speech methods. I interviewed people at all levels of [Ethiopian] Tigrean society. I conducted over a hundred interviews in total, speaking to commentators from the national, regional and local government offices and the *baitos*. At the local government level I interviewed all the heads of the local councils at both *wereda* and *kushett* level. I transcribed the tapes myself.

In Addis Ababa I gained access to a short interview with Shiferaw, the Minister for Water Affairs in the federal government. I also interviewed the head of the National Water Resources department and the chief engineer in the Ministry of Water Resources, Dr Hagos.

In the Tigray regional government I interviewed Zemechial (Head of Social and Economic Development), Haile (Head of Planning) and Dr Solomon (Head of Social Affairs). I attempted to interview the person responsible for women's affairs at the government level but the post holder was on maternity leave and I did not gain access to this key informant for the duration of my research.²⁰ In hindsight, I wonder if this situation was contrived. As Price (1983) points out, informants can engage in strategies of ellipsis, concealment and partial disclosure. I would also add non co-operation in the form of complete avoidance and absenteeism.

I completed over 30 interviews of personnel in the NGOs I studied both at ADCCS and within REST. I learnt a really fascinating lesson through trying to gain access to a key informant in REST. It took me over a month to try and get an interview with this person (who I shall not name). I was given the run around on several occasions and finally, in frustration and feeling slightly angry that my time had been wasted, I decided to confront the worker and ask her why she was avoiding me. I sat in amazement as my informant stated, 'The water project is my baby, you are doing the research that I always wanted to do. I wanted to write the book that you are now working on.' After talking this through, my informant became really helpful and I managed to secure several interviews with her over the period of my research. The initial tension dealt with, we were able to become friends and move on.

I also took still photographs and tape-recorded conversations to elicit additional visual and auditory data to substantiate my research (Okely 1996).

Secondary Data

I procured several official reports from REST, USAID, the regional government and the national government. I refer to these documents throughout this work and they are included in my bibliography.

Ethics

In line with the current development emphasis on putting people first, Pottier (1993b) suggests that the role of anthropology has been recast in terms of the researcher's greater responsibility towards the research community. If research is to be ethical it no longer suffices to merely

²⁰ See Appendix 3 for list of interviews undertaken

protect the informants and the host community in terms of concealing their true identities.²¹

The researcher now has a duty to reciprocate, and responsibilities continue until well after the fieldwork itself. One way in which reciprocal relations can be met is through enabling local groups to gain control over and responsibility for their own resources (Bennet 1988). This is especially relevant in the context of access and rights to water. The new research ethics distinguishes between the ‘products’ of research (data analysis) and the ‘process’ of research with the former ‘objects of research’ now receiving more credit for their unrecognised contributions as researchers. ‘Field research is an ethical minefield requiring a good deal of reflexivity’ (Pottier 1993: 207).

Pottier suggests a multi-vocal approach to ethnography, enabling those many voices present in anthropological texts to be given their rightful status as analysts. In my thesis I aim to share the many different voices and views that I encountered during my time in the field. However, as a caveat, Pottier notes that a major challenge for field workers involves opening up communication lines with the powers that be: ‘policy-makers, bureaucrats, politicians and other academics’ (1993: 208). Through the many narratives in my work I hope to cover all these different positions of power and interrogate their claims to authority.

Caplan (2003) urges anthropologists to think through the implications of their research. A reflexive approach is central to this endeavour as issues of consent, confidentiality, respect, responsibility, consultation, privacy, trust, honesty, integrity, compromise, exploitation, harm and intrusion may all be considered in achieving the practice of an ethical anthropology. As Barnes (1979) states, ‘Social research entails the possibility of destroying the privacy and autonomy of the individual, of producing more ammunition to those already in power (1979: 22).

This relates directly to the vexed issue of how to treat certain practices that I uncovered in the field. Raising an ethical dilemma with regard to the NGOs I studied and the impact that publishing such information may have on the organisations. For example, compromising

²¹ The villagers in both field sites did not want to remain anonymous; they volunteered for their photographs to be used in this thesis and were excited at the thought of having a formal record of their participation in an academic research project. The implications were fully explained to them by the author. Permission was also

further application for aid monies. Similarly at the village level my research unearthed claims of corruption that resulted in a member of the *baito* losing their administrative position. This is regrettable because of the impact this has on the individual concerned and his family.

One of the NGOs that I observed 'set up situations' by going out into the field before the donors arrived to mobilise the people and make it look as though participation levels were high. This was at a time when the crops were ready for harvesting and all the men interviewed claimed they would usually be out in their fields rather than at the development sites. The men returned to their fields as soon as the donors' jeeps had left the site. This is important as the maintenance of 'systems of representations' (Mosse 2005: 159) are central to the development process and obscure the complexities of the encounter, particularly the forms of acquiescence and resistance and what I call the power play at all levels.

It is important to note at this point that I did share my research findings with REST and ADCCS by presenting papers to both organisations. I also will ensure that a copy of this work will be given to REST and ADCCS. I will also send a copy to the library at the University in Addis Ababa and a copy to the Ministry of Water Resources in Addis Ababa.

I am in accord with Caplan (2003), drawing on the work of Scheper-Hughes (1995: 419) who argues for an active and politically committed anthropology. Caplan states,

Scheper-Hughes suggests that given 'the perilous times' in which we live, the best we can do is to compromise and practice a 'good enough' ethnography which includes seeing, listening, touching, recording and above all recognising our subjects. For her, anthropology should insist on an explicit ethical orientation to 'the other', it demands a 'witnessing' which is a kind of 'barefoot anthropology' (2003: 18).

granted by REST to publish photographs of the project and staff of the RUWAS team. The anthropologist cannot assume that all people wish to adopt a position of anonymity.

Summary of Thesis

I shall now briefly sketch an outline of my thesis, having already introduced earlier in this chapter my reasons for choosing this particular aspect of the gendered nature of the water development process.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature central to this work, covering three separate but related discourses: anthropology, gender and development. In Chapter 3, I set out the context of the village of my study, describing the social, cultural, religious and environmental landscape. I also describe the water sources and introduce several key informants. Chapter 4 focuses on health and belief systems of the villagers, as well as describing water-handling practices in the rural milieu. In Chapter 5 I take a closer look at the decentralised system of the management of existing water projects in Tsahlo village. Chapter 6 examines two case studies of new water interventions. I analyse the discourses of empowerment, participation and ownership at the local level, reflecting the rhetorics espoused in the development literature. I compare a large NGO, REST, to a smaller and less powerful organisation, ADCCS. Finally, Chapter 7 explores the translatability of global water policies, specifically focusing on the discourses of gender and water development within the most important NGO in the region, REST (which controls most of the region's water projects), and on their beneficiaries. I also place this in the framework of the discourses of the regional government and the region's women's associations who are both key 'partners' and stakeholders in the water development process. I conclude in Chapter 8 by summarising the key findings of the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 2: ANTHROPOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT AND FEMINISM

In this chapter I will briefly review the relevant literature from the anthropology of development by outlining a discussion of the issues of power in the modernisation encounter. Then I shall look at participatory development and the role of NGOs in development. I shall then focus on gender, feminism and development before finally looking at water management and gender issues.

Issues of Power: A Short History of the Concept of Development

Development is as much a set of currently existing institutions and practices with an international remit and compass as it is sets of concepts containing powerful ideological visions with normative tools of reform on behalf of economic growth and poverty alleviation. Development is therefore at the same time rhetoric, official practice and political theory, while also serving as a framework for descriptions, on a global scale, of human misery and hope (Rew 1994: 81).

Kaufmann contends that the concept of development¹ suggests a movement from ‘a less to a more evolved state, a process of completion’ (1997: 107). Gardner and Lewis define the term as:

Processes of social and economic change which have been precipitated by economic growth, and/or specific policies and plans whether at the level of the state, donor agencies or indigenous social movements. These can have either positive or negative effects on the people who experience them. Development is a series of events and actions, as well as a particular discourse and ideological construct (1996: 25).

This contemporary definition reflects a recent interrogation of development by social activists and academics. The original term, however, was first popularised just after World War Two to describe the process through which underdeveloped countries outside Europe and North America were to be transformed into modern² developed nations. Many of these societies had formerly been colonised and were deemed to be ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’ (Sachs 1992). Modernisation was thus viewed as a linear process and its aim was to transform the ‘uncivilised nations’ into industrialised, mass consumption, democratic societies similar to these of the western world (Reddock 2000). Obstacles to economic growth were highlighted as ‘traditional’ ideas, beliefs and cultural practices (Connelly et al. 2000). However, the concept of planned development is not just

¹ Charlton maintains that the notion of development, ‘assumes the human ability to influence and control the natural and social environment by utilising tools, laws, religion or even magic’ (1997: 7).

² Modernisation theory emerged in the 1930s and gained momentum in the postcolonial period. In economics it has been closely associated with mainstream neo-classical economics; this growth-led model still dominates economic policy in the West. It emphasises the benefits of the free market. Johnston states that

a post war phenomenon, an account written in 1844 describes a law of ‘development’ (Cowen and Shenton 1995: 29).

An anthropological analysis views development as both problematic and contentious. It is perceived as ‘a cultural, economic and political process involving directed change predominantly in countries that used to be designated the Third World’³ (Grillo and Stirrat 1997: vii). Escobar takes a strong position and calls for an end to such development. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, he claims that the ‘South’ has been produced by the discourses and practices of development. This discourse maintains a form of domination by which the ‘North’ [read Europe and America] produces knowledge about, and exercises power over, the ‘South’⁴. Escobar states that

Development was – and continues to be for the most part – a top down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated peoples and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress. ... Under the ‘development gaze’, ‘peasants’ are socially constructed prior to the agent’s interaction with them (1995: 9, 155).

Grillo and Stirrat suggest that academics and activists should engage in a critical analysis of development and deconstruct the discourses which ‘serve to construct the objects of development’ (1997: 12). As Esteva contends, ‘Development occupies the centre of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation’ (1992: 8).

Resonating with Esteva’s thesis, Hobart (1993) argues that in the development process there are several coexistent discourses which are incommensurable in terms of the developers, those developed and governments. Drawing attention to the fact that development has in the main failed to improve the conditions of the millions of poverty-stricken peoples of the world, Hobart claims that a largely neglected aspect of the development encounter is the part played by western

since the end of the Cold War, the shift from colonialism and the emergence of the international agencies, it has become ‘one of the cognitive binding forces that holds the global system together’ (1991: 164).

³ The term ‘Third World’ is contested within feminist literature as being derogatory and homogenizing a diverse range of people and their individual experiences. Because I cannot alter direct quotes I have included the term where the scholars concerned employed it, but have used the alternative expression ‘South’ or ‘women from the southern hemisphere’ in relation to my work. The term ‘Third World’ is the English translation of *le tiers monde*, developed in France in the 1950s; it emerged with the heightened anti-colonial consciousness that arose with the new nation-states in Africa and Asia. This was also a time when the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union was dividing the world along ideological and geopolitical lines (Reddock 2000).

scientific knowledge. The privileging of this discourse negates and ignores indigenous⁵ forms of knowledge, and he argues that it functions as a mechanism akin to the concept of Orientalism for ruling the world (see also Said 1978). Thereby, 'The nature of the problem of underdevelopment and its solution are defined by reference to this world ordering knowledge' (Hobart 1993: 1). This point is important since, as Hobart demonstrates, decisions about what constitute knowledge – what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know – involve acts of power (Foucault 1972). Part of my thesis will address this issue⁶.

Michel Foucault has had a significant influence on scholars engaged in critiquing development discourse and analysing the relationships of power involved in this global encounter (Escobar 1995, Grillo and Stirrat 1997). Drawing on Nietzsche, Foucault states that 'discourse is a will to truth, pushing away everything it cannot assimilate' (1972: 68). Nietzsche argued that knowledge is the result of conflicting desires, characterised by the will to dominate or appropriate. Foucault (1972) analyses history as 'the will to power'.

As the nature of the complex relations of power in the institutions and practices of water development in Tigray is the central question in my research, I shall touch on the relationship between power and knowledge that Foucault highlighted and apply this to my thesis by using the illuminating work of John Gaventa. His study of power and powerlessness in an Appalachian valley (1980) throws much light on the topic. Gaventa's ethnographic account outlines three models of power used by social scientists, which he terms the 'three dimensional approaches to power', and sketches out the 'traditional' or 'pluralist approach' that was developed by Dahl (1969) from the work of Polsby (1963). Dahl posits that power is exercised in a given situation, as in a meeting of a group of work colleagues, for example. Power is thus analysed and understood in this context by who participates, who gains and who prevails in decision-making, the latter a key issue for Polsby. The model is demonstrated by the example of person A who has power over

⁴ Esteva maintains that when the term development was first coined in the 1940s, vast areas of the postcolonial world were suddenly labeled 'underdeveloped' (1992).

⁵ It is important that anthropologists problematise the term 'indigenous' and deconstruct it to reveal the diversity that it encompasses. The idea that communities are homogeneous may be conferred by this usage, which is misleading as there are multiple differences in all communities, for example in socio-economic status, age, gender, wealth and power (Gujit and Shah 1998). I shall, however, for the purposes of this discussion, use the term as it is used by the scholars whose work I cite.

⁶ In Chapter 4, I shall question the usefulness of the distinction between 'scientific or world ordering knowledge' and 'traditional belief' (Hobart 1993).

person B. In this power dynamic, 'A can get B to do something he would otherwise not do' (1963: 19).

The second approach Gaventa refers to as the 'mobilisation of bias approach'. In this model power may work to limit the actions of the relatively powerless through a mobilisation of bias which prevents certain actors from gaining access to decision-making processes at all. Developed by Bachrach and Baratz (1962), 'power's second face' refers to this process of exclusion.

Steven Lukes' critique of Bachrach and Baratz has argued instead that 'the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict arising in the first place' (1974: 110). This in turn has led to the third approach, the 'radical view' put forward by Lukes in which 'power not only may limit actions upon inequalities, but also serves to shape conceptions of powerlessness' (p. 38). Lukes argues that this model 'offers the prospect of a serious sociological approach of how political systems prevent demands from becoming political issues or even from being made' (p. 38).

Gaventa (1980) uses Lukes' third dimension to illuminate further the theoretical interrelationship of power and powerlessness, and what Gaventa calls 'quiescence and rebellion in situations of inequality'. Excavating the hidden faces of power in his research field, Gaventa takes a historical approach by documenting the impact the past had on shaping present roles and routines of power in his field site. Gaventa shows that the maintenance of quiescence can be examined by identifying specific mechanisms of power from below, from the perspective of the powerless. 'Patterns of power and powerlessness preclude issues from arising and actors from acting' (1980: 74). Gaventa highlights Lukes' analyses of the means by which power may serve to protect the power holder, even to the extent of shaping the perceptions of the powerless about a given conflict. Gaventa argues that such elements need to be overcome for protest to occur. In Chapter 3 of my thesis I contest this view and describe another take on power relations, that of the 'power play'. I describe women as active agents exercising their gender power through decision making in a positive way rather than interpreting women's behaviour as a negative reaction, born of false consciousness.

I have also drawn on the more recent nuanced theoretical position of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001), which builds on Gaventa's 1980 thesis. Gaventa and Cornwall have added a fourth

dimension, the relational view of power, emerging from the work of Foucault (1977). Through this approach they explore questions of power, knowledge and participation, in particular the ways through which structural relationships of power are maintained by monopolies of knowledge. Following Foucault, Gaventa and Cornwall argue that ‘power works through discourses, institutions and practices that are productive of power effects, framing the boundaries of possibility that govern action’ (2001: 72). Knowledge is power: ‘power and knowledge directly imply one another ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’ (Foucault 1977: 27).

This is particularly pertinent to my study in relation to the discourses of the water development process. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) maintain that earlier scholarly understandings of power looked at issues of power and knowledge within organisations, and power relations between individuals, in terms of dichotomies – “‘They’ (structures, organisations, experts) had power, ‘We’ (the oppressed, grassroots, marginalised) did not’ (p. 70). This denies the agency of the latter.

Rather than upholding the pluralist model, conceptualising power as a resource that individuals gain, hold and wield, viewed primarily as a negative force, the Foucauldian reading interprets power as productive and relational. Power therefore becomes ‘a multiplicity of force relations (Foucault 1979: 92) that constitute social relationships; it exists only through action and is immanent in all spheres, rather than being exerted by one individual or group over another’ (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001: 72). This insight will inform my analysis of the water development process throughout.

This position has been taken up by feminist academics such as Rowlands (1998), who defines power in a similar way, suggesting that it can be ‘power over’ – as controlling power that can be bestowed upon or withdrawn, and responded to with compliance or resistance. In this model the notion of women having power or being empowered can be inherently threatening to men who fear losing power and control. Also drawing on Foucault (1982), Rowlands suggests that ‘power is not a finite entity that can be located, power is not a substance, it is relational and is something which exists only in its exercise’ (1998: 46). Rowlands draws on this notion of power as relational to build on the feminist model which she asserts includes an understanding of how ‘internalised

oppression' places internal barriers to women's exercise of power, thereby contributing to the maintenance of inequality between men and women. I shall elaborate on the feminist viewpoint later in this chapter as it relates to the diversity of actors and power positions expressed in the development context and is therefore central in the interplay of the water–gender–power nexus.

This diversity of actors has been incorporated into the socio-scientific analysis of development as a political process, which has led development anthropologists to adopt an 'actor oriented approach', recognising the 'multiple realities' and diverse social practices of indigenous peoples (Long 1992: 5). These scholars call for ethnographic texts which are 'multi-vocal', thereby reflecting the multiplicity of voices present in the development process (Long 1992, Unnithan and Srivastava 1997). Emphasising the importance of indigenous knowledge and technologies, such anthropologists explore locally-held concepts and identify ways in which their subjects define and understand the processes of change surrounding them, (Grillo 1997, Hobart 1993, Long 1992). Grillo suggests that researchers should ground their analysis in a thorough incorporation of local perspectives. Similarly, Marcus calls for 'strategically situated ethnographies, illustrating the need for context-specific analysis of development programmes and projects' (1986: 7). In their analysis of the management of ecosystems in Africa, Croll and Parkin assert that such a perspective is 'particularly valuable when researching the needs of indigenous people who are dependent on environmental resources for their survival' (1992: 4).⁷

Parkin maintains that by the early 1990s many anthropologists had come to accept that 'to some degree, development is a fact of everyday life for most peoples of the world' (1992a: 8). The need therefore to engage with this process in a constructive way is reflected by Grillo and Stirrat et al. (1997). They explode the 'myth of development' perceived only as a monolithic enterprise and assert that development is not always oppressive but is a multi-faceted, multi-vocal process.

As Gardner and Lewis state, 'There is a pressing moral and political responsibility to work towards improving the quality of life for the bulk of the world's population' (1996: x). Moreover, 'The application of anthropology in attempting to construct a better world is as vital as ever in the post modern, post development era' (p. 25).

⁷ 83% of the population in Tigray relies on subsistence agriculture (Pausenewang 1996)

Participatory Development and Empowerment

Ferguson (1990) notes that early post-war models of development were based on the view that capital penetration, commoditisation and industrialisation would transform a traditionally isolated subsistence peasantry into participants in a modern economy and in the politics of a nation-state. This use of the term 'participation' suggests that people were not economically and politically active before development came along (Nelson and Wright 1995: 2). In fact 'historically non-participation was seen to be due to backwardness, ignorance, and laziness' (Lane 1995: 185).

Jackson and Pearson (1998) trace the changes in development policy from the 1970s, when states were seen as the key actors, through to the 1980s, when 'participation' became the new orthodoxy. Woost (1997: 231) suggests that the 'vocabulary of people's participation' had by the 1990s been adopted at nearly all levels of the global development hierarchy as an alternative to mainstream discourse, 'placing the citizen or "the people" centre stage in the development drama'. Cooke and Kothari (2001: 5) contend that 'the *raison-d'être* of participatory approaches to development is to make "people" central to the processes over which they had limited control or influence before, by encouraging beneficiary involvement in interventions that affect them directly'. The broad aim of participation is to 'increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised peoples in decision making over their own lives' (Gujit 1998: 1). This approach, now adopted by the World Bank, views participation as a process through which 'stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect their lives. It includes an awareness of the importance of indigenous knowledge, local people's contributions in terms of their skills and perspectives, and also is hailed as presenting an alternative to donor driven 'outsider' led development models (World Bank 1995).

Nelson and Wright (1995) contend that, in the contemporary context, agencies and individuals use the term participatory development in a variety of ways.⁸ A common distinction is that of participation as a means to accomplish efficient and cost effective projects, as opposed to an end, where the community or group is believed to be in control of the process.⁹ Anthropology has always acknowledged that there are differences between what people say and what they do or, within organisations, a gap between institutional rhetoric and practice. Nelson contends that there

⁸ Contributions are expected from individuals in the form of labour, cash or kind (Nelson and Wright 1995).

⁹ The implications of this dichotomy reflect the contestations of power between members of a community, agencies and the state.

are specific concepts within the development paradigm that plug these gaps. One of these is the unexamined notion of community, which Nelson argues suggests a homogeneous, idyllic population.

Gujit and Shah (1998) question the use of the term community in reference to PRA techniques utilised in development programmes. The notion of community, they argue, conceals power relations within them and further masks biases in interests and needs, based on class, age, ethnicity and gender. Cornwall et al. (1993: 58) likewise recognise that ‘the local community consists of many different people with different power positions, different priorities and perceptions’, and raise the pertinent question of which of these viewpoints become privileged. Crewe and Harrison (1998) demonstrate how local people negotiate power in different ways. They show how local people prioritise according to their needs which are culturally specific and socially embedded. (This approach is crucial in terms of my analysis, as I will demonstrate in Chapters 3 to 7.)

James (1999) highlights the risks of development working in reverse, as local elites are further empowered and the poor and marginalised become powerless and unable to benefit from the development process, enhancing their poverty and vulnerability. Mosse (2001) draws important parallels while highlighting gender issues, commenting on the links between discourses of participation and indigenous knowledge. Mosse clearly demonstrates that ‘local knowledge reflects local power’, adding that project actors are not just passive facilitators of local knowledge production and planning. Rather, they ‘shape and direct the processes in which knowledge is shaped by local constructions of power, authority and gender in which women’s voices are constrained’ (2001: 19). Consonant with this position, Fairhead and Leach (1995) speak of development agencies that implicitly ignore women by focusing on the undifferentiated community.

PRA techniques are widely used in an effort to elicit a range of voices. However, the failure of such approaches to challenge existing gender and class-based hierarchies has been described by Mosse, who argues:

Far from providing a neutral voice for local knowledge, PRA actually creates a context in which the selective presentation of opinion is likely to be exaggerated and where minority or deviant views are likely to be suppressed (1994: 11).

Mosse (2001: 32) asserts that in the development process there is never one single voice¹⁰ or harmonious consensus around projects but, rather, power in projects is often multi-centred. Cooke (2001) argues that group dynamics hailed as equitable in PRA can lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful. Participation can result in political co-option, requiring contributions from participants in the form of labour, cash or kind, and can therefore transfer some of the project costs on to beneficiaries. Other commentators argue that the rhetoric of participation masks continued centralisation in the name of decentralisation (Biggs and Smith 1998). Many other scholars in the field are critical of participatory approaches to development, citing similar examples of lacunae in theory and praxis (Fairhead and Leach 1995, Stirrat 1997, Unnithan and Srivisteva 1997).

This raises an interesting possibility that participation can be seen as ‘tyranny’ (Cooke and Kothari 2001). I was told a revealing story by a water development expert in Tigray. Wray Witten (pers. comm.) described an incident that had occurred at a nearby village. A group of women had been called to attend a meeting on a new development project. The women who had gathered were not forthcoming in their contributions to the discussion. One of the male leaders had asked the women to speak, but the women sat quietly and did not engage in the debate. It was growing dark and the women were anxious about getting home. The men convening the meeting were becoming increasingly frustrated and threatened the women that they would not be permitted to leave until they spoke out. This tactic to me seemed to contradict the whole ethic of empowering women in the development process. Being forced to speak is as oppressive as being forbidden to speak and does nothing to develop the confidence and esteem of stakeholders. Having a voice must be about choice and not coercion.

Nelson and Wright (1995) argue that those trying to shift the development apparatus to enable women and other marginalised categories to determine their choices in life and to influence the direction of change need to critically analyse ethnographic contexts to see how the discourse and procedures of participation work in practice.¹¹ This is exactly what I propose to do in this thesis. Carroll (1992) maintains that for many radical development theorists¹² and practitioners the aim of

¹⁰ See also Cooke and Kothari 2001, Cornwall 2000, 1998, Gujit and Shah 1998.

¹¹ For example Moser (1993) highlights the plight of women from the South having to volunteer their labour in projects which increase their burden.

¹² See Friedmann (1992) *The Politics of Alternative Development*.

promoting participation should be to achieve empowerment for participants. Kaufman (1997) suggests that words such as ‘empowering, enabling and sustainability’ reflect the dominant 1990s development paradigm, and Gardner (1997: 143) adds that ‘the terms participation and “the grassroots” have become buzzwords’. The shift in development thought during the 1980s was away from the assumptions of top-down change towards alternative development models. The idea was that the fulfilment of empowerment was to be brought about by local efforts and techniques of problem-solving. Black (1990: 21) states that empowerment can be nurturing, liberating, even energising to the ‘unaffluent and the unpowerful’.

Empowerment’s modern use originated in the civil rights movement, which sought political empowerment for its followers. This concept of empowerment has been influenced by the work of Paulo Friere (1972). The term was particularly associated with the women’s movement (Page and Czuba 1999). Even the World Bank and most aid agencies today claim to desire the empowerment of women (Young 1997). Empowerment, however, is a construct shared by many disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics. Cheater (1999) states that by the mid-1990s empowerment became linked not only with women but also with gender, health, education and development, especially in Africa. Wright (1994: 63) reflects on the use of the term in the 1970s and suggests that with reference to developing countries empowerment was understood as ‘the development of economic activities under the control of the weakest ... so that they had their own resources for development’.

James (1999: 6) interrogates the concept of empowerment, arguing that ‘the very discourse itself may obscure the real or hegemonic relations of power linking states, developers and empowerers to poor people lacking resources and thereby render the already vulnerable even less capable of defending their self-identified interests’. She argues that ‘the IMF and World Bank (as well as liberal intellectuals) speak as if power was for them to give and not for the powerless to take as they have done in history, through moral force, withdrawal of labour or armed struggle’ (1999: 31).¹³ Young (1997) maintains that empowerment was originally a demand made by activist feminist groups who sought to ‘enable’ women to take control of their own lives. It involves the

¹³ Wendy James brings a new understanding of the term empowerment in a revolutionary context. In the Sudan, refugees who had in the past served in guerrilla organisations or the Sudanese army expressed that they felt powerless without guns (1999: 24). Sudanese cultural understandings of empowerment included expressions of anger and fighting, expressed as feelings of empowerment. James tells of men stoning

radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women's subordinate position. Women therefore become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. One of the reasons that empowerment was deemed desirable was to counter the situation that Leach (1998: 262) described from her research into several development interventions, namely the fact that 'men dominate decision making bodies and control high status activities and women's interests have often been ignored as a result'.

The aim of gender and development (GAD) programmes was to empower women through communication of information and education and to enable them to recognise and improve their social and economic status (Jain et al. 1986). This is operationalised in the empowerment paradigm as it is distinctive in its focus on the processual aspects of power (Kabeer 1994). Not all scholars view this process as unproblematic. Cleaver (2001) argues that as empowerment has become a buzzword in development, its radical, challenging and transformatory edge has been lost; empowerment has been depoliticised. Rowlands' study (1998) of a women-only educational programme in Honduras questioned the real life and practical implications of the discourse of empowerment. She asks if the concept makes any significant and positive changes for women. Rowlands concludes, 'Talk of empowerment can be rather empty rhetoric, however, the changes achieved by some women have been tangible, with the potential for transforming the lives of women and their communities' (1998: 22).

Mosse (2005) demonstrates how the actions of the actors involved in development projects and programmes are shaped by the need to maintain relationships. Moreover, workers have to make coherent representations of their actions as fulfilment of policy rhetoric, a requirement of the donors. For example with regard to my study, terms such as 'empowerment' and 'women's participation' could be described as 'mobilising metaphors' (Mosse 2005). Considered an important part of the requirements of the Dublin Principles (1992), (more recently referred to by Cleaver (2003) as the International Water Policy Consensus) these terms are enshrined in the gender policy documents of NGOs involved in water development projects in Tigray. I shall use the work of Crewe and Harrison (1998) who describe the power of these terms to give development actors such as donors an air of legitimacy and authenticity in the global arena. I shall explore the dissonance between gender policy and practice in particular in chapter seven of this

members of another group to death, without international agencies being aware but with the encouragement of recognised leaders.

thesis and use the work of Crewe and Harrison (1998) to demonstrate how donor agencies can appear to obey the rules of aid exchange without doing so in reality.

Emily Crewe (1997) suggests that the themes of androcentrism and evolutionism still dominate the development process. Crewe contends that ‘the current rhetoric and fashion for gender issues often amounts to no more than proposing women’s presence in technology development projects, yet have little regard to women’s relative control over innovation, production and distribution in resource management’ (p. 75). The terms participation and empowerment are inextricably linked:

It is not enough to revere participatory development, to say listen to the people, consult the poor and let them tell us their needs, as if they all agreed. People disagree and compete partly because their interests are differentially defined, by class, race, ethnicity and gender; not recognising conflict between interest groups leaves control in the hands of the most powerful by default (Crewe 1997: 77).

These insights are reinforced by the analysis of my own data, which is woven throughout this study and considered in particular in chapter three. In chapters five, six and seven I aim to enhance the critiques outlined by the scholars mentioned above (Cleaver 2002, Crewe 1997, James 1999)

The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Development

Since the end of the Cold War, development policy and aid transfers have come to be dominated by a new policy agenda driven by the twin poles of neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory (Robinson 1995). Hulme and Edwards (1997: 28) suggest that in this constellation, markets and private initiatives are seen as the most efficient mechanisms for achieving economic growth and providing the most services to the most people. Governments ‘enable private provision but should minimise their direct role in the economy because of their supposed cost effectiveness in reaching the poorest’. Under the new policy agenda NGOs are seen as vehicles for ‘democratisation’ and essential components of a thriving civil society. NGOs are supposed to act as a counterweight to state power by opening up channels of communication and participation, providing training grounds for activists promoting pluralism, and by protecting human rights. Clark (1990) posits that the paradigmatic shift in development thinking, encompassing the active participation of local people in the development process, is characterised by the policies and practices embedded within the NGO sector.

There has thus been a significant increase in the role of privately organised non-governmental organisations involved in relief and development. So much so that the 1980s was referred to as the decade of NGOs (Lane 1995). The proliferation has been justified by the belief that NGOs are in some way better at relief and development work than official bilateral or multilateral aid agencies. Some of the positive traits of NGOs are their flexibility, innovativeness, and the fact that they are perceived to be 'not weighed down by bureaucracy' (Bratton 1989). Furthermore, they are considered to be independent and autonomous, free from political pressure and not constrained by conventional policies. They are alleged to be free from the influence of local elites, operating at the grassroots level, closest to the poor and 'putting people first' (Chambers 1983).

In the early 1960s, very few NGOs were involved in aid. However, the aid landscape has changed dramatically over the last 20 years, and with it has come an unprecedented growth of development NGOs. Hulme and Edwards (1997) argue that the numbers of NGOs involved in social and economic development grew exponentially in the late 20th century: from 176 international NGOs existing in 1909, the field witnessed a massive increase to 28,900 by 1993.¹⁴ NGOs vary greatly from country to country. The authors state that the rise of NGOs is not an accident, nor solely a response to local initiative and voluntary action, but they attribute this growth to the associational revolution.

Wood (1997) argues that within the institutional triangle of state, community and market it is clear that NGOs have made a contribution to the rolling back of the state. NGOs maintain that this has strengthened the role of communities and citizens influencing state actions, but critics suggest that it has contributed to the identification of the private sector as the main provider of essential goods and services for the entire population (including the poor and disadvantaged). Over the past two decades government support services in the southern hemisphere have been on the decline, as a direct result of the impact of structural adjustment policies that have reduced social expenditure on health, welfare and education (Elson 1995).

Lane (1995) divides the NGO community into four groups: relief and welfare, modernisation, community development and institution building. The last three are collectively termed 'development NGOs'. The most important goal for the relief and welfare organisations is the

¹⁴ Not only have numbers increased. For example, the income of the British NGO Water Aid was £25,000 in 1981. By 1990 it had grown to £2.7 million, and by 2003 it had increased to £23 million.

‘immediate alleviation of suffering’ (Smith 1984: 118) They aim to meet the immediate needs of the socially and politically disenfranchised by providing goods and services, such as food aid and health care, in times of famine or drought. In this type of organisation, resources and information flow down from the agency to the recipients/beneficiaries. Lane argues that this form of intervention can be characterised as top down, militaristic and paternalistic, because the agency retains complete control and the constraints to development are primarily viewed as logistical. The second group, ‘development NGOs’, aim to initiate long-term change and, in doing so, increase the capacity of people to meet their own needs. The community development group concentrates on self-reliant local action (Korten 1999: 118). Lane suggests that for this group, participation becomes a means to an end, often predetermined by an external agency, usually a western NGO. It is important to note here that there is a form of stratification between northern and southern NGOs. Edwards and Hulme (1997) question the relationships between NGOs, developing-country states and donors, and in particular the control or influence that each of these parties may have over others. They argue that NGOs are now socialised into the establishment development industry (1997: 3). This insight is particularly pertinent to my study of REST, which demonstrates a synergism of the characteristics of both relief and community development. It began as a relief organisation and still retains elements of ‘paternalistic’ values. Their vision promotes long-term change by focusing on capacity building/training of the local people as a form of empowerment to enable people to meet their own needs. I suggest they would consider themselves as fitting into the category that Tendler (1982) refers to as an ‘enlightened top down’ NGO.

Tvedt (1998: 1) poses an interesting question: are NGO staff ‘Angels of Mercy’ or development diplomats? Drawing on the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1993), Tvedt suggests that NGOs form or are part of an international social system. DiMaggio and Powell put forward a theory of ‘institutional isomorphism’ (1993: 148) which gives a general explanation of the development of institutional similarities. They assert that NGOs are influenced by funding bodies in such a forceful manner that they become alike: ‘The greater the dependence of an organisation on its donors the more similar it will become in structure, climate and behaviour’ (p. 95). (This is especially the case for southern NGOs forming dependency links with northern donor NGOs.) Importantly also, in their use of language, I will demonstrate this in relation to REST and the discourses of development about water projects. Hulme and Edwards suggest that this integration process between states and NGOs the world over seeks to develop a global community of interests and to further pluralist values such as democracy, extending western economic and political power

and consolidating discursive hegemony. This links to the work of Abrahamsen (2000) and Mitchell (1995) that I discussed earlier and will return to throughout this thesis.

In a romantic claim Korten (1999) states that NGOs have evolved from having a responsibility for service provision to being members of civil society, nurturing and strengthening the growth of democracy in developing countries. Ines Smyth suggests that this approach dovetails with the ethical claims of human rights discourse espoused by donors as a legitimate aim of development aid (1998). Jorgenson has a more nuanced approach; he suggests that NGOs should be under no illusion about the political nature of their work. 'They are trying to engineer certain social changes in certain areas for certain target groups. This is a political act' (1996: 39). Participatory methods are often characteristic of NGO practice and are frequently cited as the way forward. As Cleaver cogently states:

A move away from narrow project approaches may be seen in the current concern with the role of social capital in development. Ideas about overcoming the problems of social exclusion have linked concepts of community, democracy, the key role of NGOs, individual responsibility and citizenship (2000: 38).

Clark (1990) maintains that it is now being recognised in development circles that economic growth and social betterment are best achieved when the mass of the population is informed about and involved in development aims and plans. One of the ways of achieving this is structuring the decision-making process in such a way as to ensure widespread consultation at all levels of society about development goals, the processes by which those goals are to be reached and the resources needed to achieve them. Government works best when it is responsive and accountable to the bulk of the population.

There is no doubt that NGOs can play an important role as promoters of the interests of the citizenry (Young 1997). But in many cases NGOs provide a power base for people from the same social stratum as government officials, politicians, planners or civil servants (Clark 1990). Mosse cites examples of NGOs utilising participation as a means of reputation building and consolidating pre-existing patron-client relationships. He describes how 'power in development is multi-centred and practices indeterminate and adaptive' (2001: 32).

There are competing and contradictory discourses regarding the positive and negative aspects of development NGOs. 'Groups that are truly representative of the grassroots are rare' (Young 1997:

373). Some scholars argue that NGOs are unsure how to translate the rhetoric of participation into practice (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

Garber and Jenden (1993) argue that the NGO sector has a greater variety of views of development and demonstrates a greater sensitivity and responsiveness to local needs and opinions. This in turn, they claim, can 'democratise development'. Young (1997) warns us about assumptions of greater effectiveness and recipient participation with NGOs than with official development agencies, as this is not always the case. Nelson and Wright (1995) argue that project managers often orchestrate the balance of resources and time.

NGOs promote participatory approaches and gender approaches. However, Rogers (1980) argues that international organisations such as NGOs are not exempt from male bias because the higher echelons of staff in them have been dominated since World War Two by men with a western educational background. She maintains that this has limited the diversity of perspectives in development planning. More importantly, she stresses that women from the southern hemisphere have had very little control at any level of the development process. This bias is also reflected on several levels. Charlton (1997) states that women are dependent upon men in formal politics at the local, national and international levels. These insights are important to my work, as through my study I aim to construct a picture of how development processes are embedded within the political relations of various groups of developers as well as their beneficiaries (Crewe 1997). In chapter seven, I will demonstrate how REST, the NGO that I was attached to, reproduced male bias within their organisation and also how REST provided a power base for people from the same social strata (Clarke 1990) – primarily male political elites belonging to the ruling party in government the TPLF. I term this powerful dynamic the *baito*- TPLF-REST nexus.

Gender, Feminism and Development

Gender refers to the socially ascribed position of men and women in society. It is used to differentiate between the roles which men and women have due to their biology and those they have due to particular, historically specific, socially constructed relationships. Gender is thus one important determinant of how people relate to one another at work, at home, in economic activities and in social ones (Hanmer 1998). Gender relations permeate socio-economic institutions such as the family, the household and the family farm. They influence political, cultural and religious institutions and organisations at both local and national levels. They shape the construction of

national and civil identities. Gender relations are one form of social relation that structure the opportunities and entitlements that social groups have in a given society (Kabeer 1994). Feminist academics have argued that epistemologies based on androcentric assumptions have resulted in skewed perceptions of reality.

The aim of feminist theorising is therefore to deconstruct and redefine concepts previously defined from a male perspective in order to effect equitable social change. By drawing on women's experiences and knowledge a new and radical view of the world can emerge through 'a feminist gaze' (Rose 1994) which focuses on problems and issues that affect women. Central to feminist theory is the recognition that the social roles and ways that women negotiate the world are diverse in different social, political and cultural contexts. The category 'woman' should not be perceived as homogeneous but as pluralistic (Connelly et al. 2000, Moore 1994). It encompasses a variety of lived experiences which should take into account differences in class, race, age, sexuality and ethnicity. Drawing on this pluralistic approach, postmodernist feminist theorising assumes that there will be multiple realities in every community and that knowledge is socially constructed and can be fluid, contingent and historically and culturally specific. In chapter four I will draw on the work of Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) and Afsaneh Najmabadi (1998) to elucidate the impact of modernisation on gender identities, as this is central to my notion of the power play.

Feminist analysis of development issues is now at least 25 years old (Jackson and Pearson 1998). Prior to the 1970s, the discourses and practices of development reflected an androcentric or male bias (Elson 1991, Rogers 1980). This was made evident by Boserup's (1970) seminal thesis demonstrating that development interventions benefited men disproportionately. International agencies were producing policies and designing programmes that not only bypassed but also adversely affected the lives of women (Bailey et al. 2000, Rao and Overholt 1991).

The UN decade for women (1975–85) played a crucial part in highlighting the important yet invisible role of women in the social and economic development of countries of the southern hemisphere. To counteract 'male bias', it was maintained that women should be integrated into development projects and the term 'Women in Development' (WID) was coined.¹⁵ It was soon adopted by USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, and came to

¹⁵ In the early 1970s The Women's Committee of Washington DC, influenced by Esther Boserup (1970), invented the term (Visvanathan 1997).

represent an approach which encompassed the rationale that women were an untapped resource which could provide an economic contribution to development (Rao et al. 1991 : 3). As key actors in the economic system, their neglect in development plans had been perceived as one of the reasons for the failure of many development interventions (Tinker 1990).

A critique of WID came from Pearson who stressed the tendency to 'isolate women as a separate and homogeneous category, suffering universal subordination' (Pearson et al. 1984: x). Moreover, the critique centred on the sex role stereotyping of men in the equation. As Pearson and colleagues stated, 'Our point of departure was that the relations between men and women are social and therefore not immutable and fixed' (p 5). Visvanathan et al. also critiqued the WID paradigm for subscribing to the assumptions of modernisation theory. They argue that WID programmes 'generally stressed western values and targeted individuals as catalysts for social change' (1997: 4).

The 1970s saw the influence of radical feminism on the development arena, and some academics and activists began to call for women's projects that were completely separate from those of men. They argued for a development approach that recognised the dangers of integrating women into a patriarchal world, and they sought instead to create women-only projects. This has been referred to as women and development (WAD) (Connelly et al. 2000). WAD also emerged from a critique of modernisation theory and drew on dependency theorists for its philosophical orientation. The focus was on women and the development process. They rejected the notion of integrating women into development as a myth because, they argued, women already were involved in development.

The WAD approach was, however, criticised by more progressive scholars for not recognising and analysing the power relations involved in gender roles, for seeing women as a class and downplaying differences among women. As Eva Rathgeber stated, 'WAD failed to undertake a full scale analysis of the relationship between patriarchy, differing modes of production and women's subordination and oppression' (1990: 493). This position is resonant with more radical critiques from black women/feminists whose progressive deconstructions of modernisation theory find both WID and WAD implicitly gendered, and its characterisations of women from the southern hemisphere as a homogeneous category derogatory and disparaging. Mohanty (1997: 81) argues that:

Western feminist hegemonic discourses construct third world women as passive victims, leading an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized).

In a trenchant critique of the 'feminist' notion of the universal subordination of women, Mohanty deconstructs the notion of a global sisterhood and refutes the feminist claim of sameness based on shared gender oppression which views the category of 'women' as universally powerless, exploited and sexually harassed.

In the 1980s the stage was set for a more progressive form of development and the shift from WID to WAD to GAD ensued. The GAD or gender and development approach had its roots in a feminist anthropology.¹⁶ It was centrally concerned with cross-cultural and intra-cultural differences (influenced by Rubin 1975). Rathgeber (1990) chronicled the shift from WID to GAD, stressing the need for a gender analysis of social relations that will lead to the empowerment of women. GAD rejected the public/private dichotomy and gave special attention to the oppression of women in the family. It emphasised a holistic perspective, looking at all aspects of women's lives. It stressed the need for women to organise themselves for a more effective political voice and called for a strengthening of women's position in terms of legal rights (Rathgeber 1990).

Moser highlights the importance of meeting the strategic needs of women. This, she argues, must happen in order to change the subordinate status of women in society. Following the GAD perspective, Moser established a new paradigm for mainstreaming¹⁷ gender into development agencies' policies and planning, the goal of which is 'the emancipation of women from their subordination, and their achievement of equality, equity and empowerment through the meeting of strategic gender needs' (1993: 1, 9).

Moser had drawn on Molyneux's thesis (1985), which posited the need to distinguish between two sets of interests: those arising from the fact that women are allocated certain roles by the sexual

¹⁶ Jackson and Pearson stated that 'In the 70s the concern with gender was to theorise a social identity not given by sex, free from biological determinism and the arbitrary naturalisation of the gender order. Feminists needed to deny that biology was destiny and anthropologists provided the necessary scholarship on the enormous range of different gender identities that formed around biological females and males in other cultures' (1998: 5). 'That the sex:gender distinction might lead logically to the argument of social constructionism biting back at the foundational feminist concept of woman, denying its existence, was hardly anticipated' (Sayers 1982, cited in Jackson and Pearson 1998).

¹⁷ A mainstreaming strategy is oriented towards democratising decision-making processes so that the dominant development model can be changed. See Edgren 1997.

division of labour, and those arising from the fact that women as a social category have unequal access to resources and power. The former included responsibility for the care and education of children, the elderly and sick, household maintenance and servicing kin and neighbourhood. Women's unequal access to resources resulted from their exclusion from the arenas of political and economic power, their inequality within the family and the society, and their lack of control over their lives. In both cases women's location in the social structure was important. Molyneux referred to this distinction as practical gender interests and strategic gender interests. I shall question the usefulness of this arbitrary distinction in the Tigrean context. Moreover, I aim to challenge the assumption that women in the southern hemisphere need outside help from western feminists to remedy inequitable gender relations.

I shall also critique another assumption that lies behind the classic statements on gender and development by interrogating the assumption that women in the southern hemisphere need to be empowered as per the claims of the modernisation paradigm. Is it possible for women to be empowered from outside or can it only happen from within? I shall draw on the work of Abu-Lughod (1998), Najmabadi (1998) and Kabeer (1994) to explore this question. This is central to my work and my conception of the water–gender–power nexus, as notions of power and empowerment will flow throughout the course of this thesis.

The empowerment discourses that GAD adopted were heavily influenced by the political orientation of the southern feminist movement in development known as DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). The group was formed in the early 1980s in response to the failures of development as experienced by the 'supposed beneficiaries' of the process (Sen and Grown 1988). It was founded in an attempt to search for new and flexible approaches, culminating in multiple development styles which were context specific (Braidotti et al. 1994). These southern and northern feminist scholars/activists argued that

It has become increasingly clear ... that development, which has been conceived of as a western project to modernise the post colonial societies, did not bring the promised improvement in the living conditions of people in the south. Instead, the development process contributed to the growth of poverty, to an increase in economic and gender inequalities and to the degradation of the environment (Sen and Grown, 1988: 12).

DAWN recognised the power of global economic and political processes that set the context for the diverse national and regional experiences in development. DAWN's vision had at its very core

a process of economic and social development geared to human needs, through wider control over and access to economic and political power. They rejected the belief that it is possible to obtain sustainable improvements in women's economic and social position under conditions of growing relative inequality and absolute poverty. 'Equality for women is impossible within the existing economic, political and cultural processes that reserve resources, power and control for small groups of people' (1988: 20).

By privileging the perspectives of poor and oppressed women, their standpoint provides a unique perspective in examining the effects of development projects, programmes and strategies. Women constitute the majority of the poor, under-employed and economically and socially disadvantaged and excluded. The 'feminisation of poverty' is clearly described in the development literature, as women suffer from the additional burdens imposed upon them by gender-based hierarchies and subordination (Elson 1991).

DAWN argued that women's work is under-valued and under-remunerated, yet is vital to the survival of human beings in all societies; for example in food production and processing, in responsibility for water and fuel collecting, in child rearing – the entire range of so-called basic needs. Moreover, their research methodology is 'bottom up'. They advocate a people-centred empowerment approach to development and question the present western development model which, they argue, is based solely on economic growth. I will draw out these points particularly in Chapters 5 and 6 of this work.

Debates on the Household

An analysis of family life is important in the study of development. In particular the domain of the household is key, as it is the major arena where women's power and possibilities are enacted through the dynamic of gender relations. Kandiyoti argues that experiences of gender power are not merely fractured by class, race and ethnicity¹⁸ but also 'by the complicated emotional (and material) calculus implied by differing organisations of the domestic realm through women's and men's unfolding life cycles' (1997: 143).

¹⁸ I would add the socio-cultural and religious context.

This is reflected in DAWN's stance, resonating with the position espoused by Mohanty, who argues that researchers need to open up the household and analyse the interactions between social actors within it. This, she claims, will erode the image of women from the southern hemisphere as passive victims. The result will 'contribute to a portrayal of Third World women as active participants in social change in their own right' (Mohanty 1997: 132). This standpoint is also reflected in the work of Unnithan and Srivastava (1997), who state that one of the more pervasive images of women in developing countries has been informed by the idea that, given the patriarchal contexts of their lives, women have universally been devoid of power and agency. Citing Raheja and Gold (1994), they stress that researchers should not assume that women in patriarchal systems necessarily internalise patriarchal values. They stress that, alongside patriarchal structures, other mechanisms and institutions that empower women may also coexist.

Agarwal (1994) argues that, in the context of household negotiations, women adopt compliance rather than resistance as a long-term strategy to ensure their own security within both the household and the wider community. Even if women adhere to their customary gender roles and seek to maximise collective interests, they may do so for reasons other than altruism, possibly because individual and family interests are more linked for women than men. This idea complements Kandiyoti's (1997) thesis, which explores how power is articulated within the household or family. It views intra-household relationships dynamically, in terms of a continuous process of negotiations, contracts, renegotiations and exchange within a broader politico-economic unit.¹⁹ In a critique of what she feels is a simplistic analysis put forward by radical feminists, and especially their frequent use of the term patriarchy, Kandiyoti states:

The term patriarchy evokes an over monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between genders (1997: 86).

Kandiyoti's work is important to my thesis as it underscores the differences in gender relations cross-culturally and brings a more nuanced analysis to feminist understandings of household dynamics. This debate is enshrined within a scholarly response to a critique of what has come to be termed the New Household Economics. Until recently, the dominant neo-classical model of the

¹⁹ Wolf (1997) asserts that feminists have cut through romantic assumptions about family and household unity, arguing instead that there are multiple voices, gendered interests and unequal and contested distribution of resources within families and households (Evans 1989).

household prevailed, which presupposed household activity as working towards the maximisation of the joint welfare of its members (Dwyer and Bruce 1988, Evans 1989, Folbre 1986). The household head, assumed in this model to be male, was also considered to be an altruist, a benevolent yet dictatorial provider in whose hands decision-making power rested (Becker 1981, Kabeer 1998). However, many studies by feminist scholars rejected this model and proved that women rather than men spend more of their money on household needs (Nash 1997). As Elson states:

There is a great deal of evidence from all over the world to suggest that there is incomplete pooling of income within households. Women attach a higher priority to expenditure on family nutrition, health and education related goods than do men. Men are more likely than women to spend part of their income on purely personal consumption of commodities such as alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, and female companionship (1998: 164).

There are commonly reported patterns of women's altruistic behaviour in relation to food consumption within the household. Kynch (1994) claims that these behaviours are socially constructed. For example in Asian households women are socialised into an ideal of self-sacrifice, which begins with food denial, eating last after the men and children.

This is important in the light of Mary Douglas's insightful comment that 'needs and wants are culturally defined and express gender ideologies' (1992: 63). Relating this statement to the critiques of western feminism by women from the southern hemisphere, it highlights the need to look at cultural specificity in terms of gender relations. Snyder and Tadesse (1997) demonstrate the complementarity expressed in the Ethiopian context, where men work alongside women in the rural milieu and farm side by side. They draw attention to the fact that African women across the continent have gained a measure of respect from their men-folk for their political participation in liberation struggles, and also for their contribution to the household and community writ large. Reflecting Boserup's influential thesis, Snyder and Tadesse highlight the importance of women's contribution to subsistence agriculture and the rural economy. As Koopman (1997) attests, food production is in fact the major enterprise of nearly all rural African women. In 'traditional' African societies, whilst it cannot be claimed that women had complete equality with men, a balance of economic responsibility did prevail between them. The work of both men and women was valued in a largely non-competitive division of labour. In drought prone societies such as

Tigray, women's crucial role in economic survival gives them important status in intra-household relations (Hendrie 1999, Snyder and Tadesse 1997).

Moser suggests that the literature regarding gender relations in the southern hemisphere is 'complex and contradictory' (1993: 28). There are ideological and cultural as well as economic reasons underlying the symmetries and asymmetries in intra-household resource allocation. As Kandiyoti posits:

A new consensus has emerged in feminist theorising which Moore (1994) characterises as a 'rapprochement between feminist analysis of the household and mainstream models in anthropology and economics'. This views the household as a locus of competing interests, rights, obligations and resources, where household members are often involved in bargaining, negotiation and possibly even conflict (Moore 1994: 87 as cited in Kandiyoti 1997).

In Tigray gender relations are, as Moore suggests, complex and negotiated. Some may argue they fit the notion of the 'patriarchal bargain' that Kandiyoti first described nearly two decades ago and revisited more recently:

The term patriarchal bargain is intended to indicate the existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, refined and renegotiated (1997: 97).

Kandiyoti demonstrates the power and autonomy that women in sub-Saharan Africa possess, becoming expert in maximising their own life chances by adopting specific inter-personal strategies that ensure their security and stability. This refutes previous feminist readings of women from the southern hemisphere as passive victims (Mohanty 1997). Kandiyoti (1997) argues that conceptualisations of gender entail struggles not only over resources and labour but also over socially constructed meanings, which are often multiple, contradictory, fluid and contested. A focus on gender should therefore entail a reconceptualisation of the micro-politics of the household in relational terms.

Kandiyoti also calls for a more nuanced analysis of the household through her concept of the 'patriarchal bargain'. Furthermore, her insights extend to a critique of the very ways in which western feminists deconstruct gender relations. She argues that the concepts we employ to designate the workings of power and domination never seem fully to capture the specificity of their manifestations through historically and culturally contextualised forms of gender relations. I

shall elaborate on and address this tension in my work by my idea of a power play in the context of Tigrean gender relations. This takes further Kandiyoti's argument that false consciousness is not an adequate explanation for women's quiescence or acquiescence in the domestic sphere. Influenced by the work of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) Kandiyoti (1997) and Moore (1994), I have extrapolated this idea of the relational aspect of power into a concept I call the power play. This contests feminist ideas of false consciousness or collusion in the 'patriarchal bargain' and is an idea that gives women a stake in a 'power play'. I shall extend this idea to the development process in the following chapters.

Women, men, boys and girls are likely to be involved in three main areas of work: productive, reproductive and community. In many societies, however, women do almost all of the reproductive and much of the productive work (Connelly et al. 2000).

Caroline Moser (1993) describes women's roles in the workplace, the home and in the neighbourhood, which have been referred to as the triple burden. As I have stated, women are often the primary care givers, with responsibility for children, household management, and care of the sick, elderly and disabled members of the household. (The burden of these tasks on women is increasing as structural adjustment policies reduce the provisions of state welfare across the globe [Afshar and Dennis 1992].) Duggan (1997) adds that in rural settings this work also involves carrying water and firewood. These added burdens often result in women and girl children from rural areas working longer hours than their male counterparts.

Koopman (1997) states that as a result of this skewed gender division of labour, women subsistence farmers in sub-Saharan Africa are overworked and exhausted. This is compounded by chronic malnutrition, which is becoming a serious problem for large segments of African rural populations (Bukh 1979).

Another factor that affects households (urban and rural) in many African countries is that the number of female-headed households is growing (Brydon and Chant 1989). The resultant feminisation of poverty means that women are disproportionately represented among the poor. Gender and development policies and programmes try to counteract this situation, and GAD

projects are frequently justified in terms of the poverty of female-headed households.²⁰ However, analytically much depends on the reasons for female-headedness (IDS 2004). The literature demonstrates that de jure female-headed households are often amongst the most poor. These are families composed of widows and divorced and separated women and their children. However de facto female-headed households are better off, as they often receive remittances from absent males who have migrated to other villages, towns or cities to find work (Brydon and Chant 1989). In chapter three I demonstrate how the war with Eritrea impacted on Tsahlo village, as men had left their farms to go to the front line to fight as soldiers. The number of de facto women headed households had increased significantly. I also describe how de jure female headed households are some of the poorest households in the village, and give an example of one such family.

Water Management and Gender

Melissa Leach (1998) asserts that since the 1980s linkages between gender, the environment and development have become a major focus of research attention.²¹ Water development interventions have in the past not been particularly successful. They did not improve women's command over natural resources and also failed to assist project effectiveness in environmental terms. Problematising the encounter between gender, the environment and development, Leach points to the failure of WID (Women in Development) and WED (Women, Environment and Development), two distinct feminist approaches in this process.

As I have already outlined the WID position earlier on in this chapter, I shall briefly summarise the WED approach. In the 1970s several development discourses emerged from the countries of the South, which described the growing interest in women's relationship to and with the environment (Braidotti 1994).²² Women activists and scholars started to organise themselves around the principle that 'women were privileged environmental managers, possessing specific skills and knowledge in environmental care' (Mies 1986: 13). Women were represented and conceived of as being inherently closer to nature than men. Shiva claimed that women were

²⁰ There is, however, a caveat: one cannot assume that all women-headed households are poor, as this is not always the case (see Win 2004).

²¹ Policies were connected to the sustainable development debates, which brought social and economic concerns to bear on biological conservation projects (See Leach 1994, WRI : IUCN 1992).

²² The oil crisis in 1973 and the large-scale effects of drought in the Sahel drew global attention to the fact that the world's natural resources were not infinitely exploitable (Braidotti et al. 1994).

‘embedded in a reciprocal relationship of symbiosis, harmony and mutuality, which provided women with their subsistence needs’ (1988: 21). This essentialist stance was central to WED principles and has been critiqued by Bina Agarwal (1989).²³ Agarwal argues that ‘the woman/nature symmetry has been socially and culturally constructed, and not biologically determined’ (1989: 60).

Leach (1998) notes that in the development literature women were generally described as the main ‘users’ and ‘managers’ of natural resources at the local level (see also Dankelman and Davidson 1988 and Rodda 1991). The starting point for both WID and WED discourses was therefore the gender division of labour. WED discourse stressed women’s roles as ‘haulers of water and hewers of fuelwood’ (Green et al. 1998: 271). WED scholars argued that women’s interests naturally lay in sustainable rural development. However, as an alternative to both WID and WED approaches, Leach takes the GAD approach. This paradigm challenges the assumptions in both WED and ecofeminism that women, a priori, have a special relationship with nature. Instead, men’s and women’s relations with the environment are seen to emerge from the social context of dynamic gender relations. GAD shifts the focus from gender roles to gender relations. The emphasis is on control over resources, products and decision making.

Leach contends that power relations and bargaining processes within social institutions such as marriage affect resource use and decisions. In the case of water resource management at the community level, it cannot be assumed that gender-equitable arrangements will be promoted by local institutions, as such structures and organisations are both part of, and emerge from, social and gender relations which may reproduce these very biases (Sarin 1995). Cleaver’s research in Zimbabwe illustrates how local institutions for the management of water are deeply embedded in social relations, in which there is a continuous process of negotiation between all users (2000: 42). Cleaver highlights the danger of assuming that indigenous structures in resource management are egalitarian: ‘socially embedded institutions are not necessarily “better” than organisational ones, as they may uphold and reproduce locally specific configurations of inequity and exclusion’ (2000: 44).

²³ Agarwal (1989) refers to another approach, ‘ecofeminism’, as ‘feminist environmentalism’. The salient points of ecofeminism according to Agarwal are as follows: There are important connections between the domination and oppression of women and the domination and exploitation of nature. In patriarchal thought, women are identified as being closer to nature and men as being closer to culture. Nature is seen as inferior to

Local institutions have tended to become 'dominated by local elites who have taken on new community roles in water projects as a means of promoting their own interests' (Leach 1998: 270). David Mosse also found similar patterns of patronage in his work on water resources management in Tamil Nadu. In an insightful critique, Mosse states that, 'At a general level, all development is about power as well as resources. Development action is public action, and the public is the domain of power and authority' (1997: 276).

In Mosse's study in Tamil Nadu, new village structures and societies helped institutionalise existing relations of power. As Li comments, 'community management policy involves competing representations of locality and community, each being a simplification ridden with power' (1996: 502). This raises the problem of the development conundrum. Development practitioners claim to listen to indigenous voices, who may in turn decide to ignore particular groups within the community such as women. This can lead to muting of women's voices and dispossessing them of access to resources and decision-making power. Women may sit on committees in name only, and attend meetings only when allowed by husbands or summoned by male elders (Leach 1998).

Gender hierarchies can thus often limit the quality of women's participation on water committees, muting their expressions of interest and limiting their ability to take on responsible official duties (Purves and Bamba 1994). When women are kept out of key decision-making responsibilities they lack interest in following water use rules over which they have no influence.

As Cleaver (2000) demonstrates, the participation of women cannot be taken for granted. Age, gender, class and individual agency may all shape people's willingness and ability to participate. For example, poor young women with small children commonly find it difficult to participate publicly in development projects due to their burden of productive and reproductive activities.

There is a growing body of literature demonstrating that, contrary to the ubiquitous optimistic assertions about the benefits of public participation, non-compliance and non-participation may be either 'rational' strategies or unconscious practices embedded in routine, social norms and the acceptance of the status quo (Cleaver 2000, Crewe and Harrison 1998). I will demonstrate this through my discussion of the power play, particularly in chapters five and six of this thesis.

culture, hence women are seen as inferior to men (Ortner 1974). Also, the feminist and the environmental movements both stand for egalitarian, non-hierarchical systems and have a lot in common (Agarwal, 1997b).

Village women are often targeted as the focus of change and key agents in development (Unnithan and Srivastava 1997: 166). Women's multiple roles as providers and managers of domestic water at community level and as guardians of family health give donors a clear rationale for integrating women into water sector initiatives (Rodda 1991). The water and sanitation sector (WSS) is viewed as having multiple benefits for women. According to the World Bank, improvements in water supply and sanitation provision are 'win-win' policies (1992). This, however, begs the question: if this is the case, why do so many projects that target women fail, as Leach (1998) demonstrates?

One reason may be the argument of resistance to development interventions, of which there is a comprehensive literature (Agarwal 1990, Bernstein 1979, Ferguson 1990, Gujit and Shah 1998). Feminists have also documented many examples of women's resistance (Cleaver 1998, Elson 1996, Kabeer 1994, Kandiyoti 1997). An important forerunner of this literature was the work of Scott, who drew our attention to 'everyday forms of resistance, foot-dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, or a refusal to understand' (1985: xvi).

In the development field, strategies of resistance can include sabotage and general non-compliance, poor participation in 'participatory schemes' imposed from above, and refusal of technical advice and input judged as inappropriate to poor people's needs. Finally, there is the preservation of spiritual practices that 'put the hegemonic logic of western scientific rationalism into question' (Connelly et al. 2000: 82). All of the above relate specifically to my thesis, as will be shown in Chapter 4. Much of the so-called 'failure' of water projects can be analysed as strategies of resistance.

It has become increasingly clear that women's participation does not always benefit them. Projects may just draw on women's labour, thus adding to their energy and time burdens without increasing their technical or managerial skill. Women tend to be allocated tasks perceived as an extension of their traditional responsibilities, even if donors propose alternative approaches. Green et al. (1998) warn of the dangers of the low levels of women's participation in water supply and sanitation projects as compromising both health and water supply objectives. Low-quality participation in water projects can lead to gender-specific preferences relating to water quality, quantity, reliability or willingness to pay for water.

The New Delhi Declaration states that it is critical to ensure the sustainability of water and sanitation systems by improving the recovery of the recurrent costs of operation and maintenance (Cleaver and Lomas 1996). But does this discourse make any sense to people at the local level in the villages of Tigray? For example, the idea of water as a basic human need has been replaced by the notion of water as an economic good. Increasingly the provision of WSS systems is being subjected to cost benefit analysis. Willingness to pay is being used as a tool in this analysis (Klumper 1995). There has been a supply-led approach to water provision with accompanying problems of appropriate technology and cost recovery. Cleaver (1996) notes that research into WSS projects in developing countries neglects people's subjective perceptions and valuations of health benefits, the difference between willingness and ability to pay and the complexities of prioritising livelihood strategies within households. I aim to explore the notion of water as an economic good by examining the discourses of both men and women at the local level in Tigray. As women are the gatekeepers of water, does this notion of payment for water cause problems for women? Cleaver and Elson (1995) suggest that even where women are willing to pay, this willingness may not be matched by an ability to pay, because of lack of control over household income.

The culture and structure of formalised water committees may be a barrier to women's involvement in water development projects (Cleaver 1998). This formalisation of structures may also overlook informal systems for managing resources in which women may previously have played major roles. Whilst the empowering effect of successful collective action on women is asserted in the GAD literature (Mayoux 1995), Cleaver argues that there is little evidence that participation on committees is either empowering to women or necessarily efficient in terms of water resource management. Moreover, appointing women to committees may just be reinforcing their role as housekeepers of the water sources, rather than enhancing their decision-making capacities (1998: 354). Ostrom (1990) argues that the idea that hierarchical structures are efficient in reducing transaction costs justifies the formalised structure of water committees. Integral to this approach is the idea that exclusive group ownership of certain waterpoints leads to a greater sense of responsibility by users (Ostrom et al. 1994). Ostrom explores how best to govern natural resources used by many individuals in common. Her analysis of water as a common-pool resource suggests that 'neither the state nor the market is uniformly successful in enabling individuals to sustain long-term, productive use of natural resource systems. Further, communities of

individuals have relied on institutions resembling neither the state nor the market to govern some resource systems with reasonable degrees of success over long periods of time' (1990: 1).

Upholding the modernisation paradigm and the WID position, Wijk (1998) argues that the participation of all stakeholders in all aspects of the development process is important to the success of water interventions. She states that equitable participation in integrated water resources development and management is influenced by culturally determined differences. For example, in many contexts men and women have different access to information, differ in the degree to which they can take part in decisions, and also in the weight given to their views (Hannan- Andersson 1995). Koppen (1997) argues that the greater participation of women may be beneficial for the project, for development, and for the strategic interests of women.

Tanzania (1983) and du Toit (1980) assert that for water projects to be successful, women must not just be considered as passive beneficiaries and recipients but as active designers and managers in the development process. To achieve this Wijk argues that meetings need to be convened at suitable times and in accessible places. Women's voices need to be heard to ensure equitable development (1998).

Hannan-Andersson's research (1984) in Tanzania demonstrated that when rural women were invited to public meetings they felt restrained by their lack of education and did not contribute effectively to the discussions. Mujeni (1975) asserts that women need to be informed and encouraged to attend meetings, using communication channels such as formal and informal groups and political structures such as the women's associations (Zwarteveen and Neupane 1996).

However in two villages in Andhra Pradesh (India), members of women's organisations did not know that water projects were being implemented in their communities (Wijk and Dhawan 1980). This failure to inform women adequately will be particularly pertinent to Chapter 6 of my thesis.

The constraints women face are often reflected in terms of their representation on decision-making bodies. Meetings of local councils and development committees are often restricted mainly to men. A more balanced gender representation on decision-making bodies needs support from both men and women in the community.

Wijk poses the question of how gender is operationalised in the management of drinking water. What are the effects on men and women? Stanbury (1984) argues that the most effective and efficient committees are those chosen by the community, and the alternative of agency intervention is less effective. In Tigray the political structure is really well suited to the co-option of women on to water committees.

Kwaule and Groote (1990) argue that female members co-opted in an act of tokenism often do not attend meetings and have no influence on the process. Libatique (1994) contends that in Mexico and Indonesia water scheme performance improved when women ran it. The reason for this success is because the water project was culturally appropriate and chosen by women themselves. Narayan (1989) claims that in Indonesia women grew in knowledge, self-control and leadership as a direct result of being empowered through water development projects. In the global context, women take part at the lowest levels of management, at the higher levels it is men who dominate and maintain power and control (Kelles 1983, Olsson et al, 1990). Through my study I shall explore if these findings are reflected in water development projects in Tigray.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a short history of development and offered a contemporary definition that reflects the recent interrogation of development by both social activists and academics. This critique of the 'modernisation' project drew on the scholarship of Escobar (1995), Grillo and Stirrat (1997), and Hobart (1993) among others. I linked these discourses from the anthropology of development to the work of Gaventa (1980), Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) and Michel Foucault (1972) to examine the theories of power and knowledge in development and also to highlight the ideas of quiescence and resistance. I have also presented the work of feminist scholars such as Abu-Lughod (1998), Cleaver (1998), Kabeer (1994), Kandiyoti (1997, 1988), Rowlands (1998), and Moser (1993) to explore the dynamics of gender and power. The major theoretical debates on participatory and gender approaches that I have outlined in this chapter will inform my analysis throughout this thesis. In particular in chapter four I shall draw on the work of Abu-Lughod (1998), Najmabadi and Newton (1994) to explore how women and men at the local level resist the imposition of changing gender identities.

I aim to use these theories and link them to feminist scholarship to elaborate on a concept I term power play. The power play builds on Scott's (1985) theory of resistance. It challenges Gaventa's (1980) study of a community in Kentucky, in which he puts forward a theory describing passive reactions to power which are informed by Luke's ideas of false consciousness. Both Gaventa (1980) and Lukes (1974) seem to interpret reactions to power as a negative process rather than a positive action. I argue that women and men in the village I studied and beyond utilise their own gender power to make informed strategic choices. They exercise power in decision making according to their own agenda of prioritisation. This draws on the work of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) who argue for a more relational interpretation of power in the development encounter. I explore this idea in relation to water development interventions in the water–gender–power nexus in Tigray. By this phrase I refer to the inexorable link or connection between the three salient elements in this study. In order to study the water development process in Ethiopia, gender relations are paramount, and the concept of power is crucial in terms of the dynamics of gender, the process of development, and all the agencies and individuals involved in the encounter. From the grassroots users or beneficiaries of interventions in the villages to the policy makers and donors in the global arena, the interplay of the three elements elucidates the complexities of a study of the cultural politics of water and relations of power in an arid region. In chapter six I describe how men at the village level also act out the power play and can thwart the plans of NGO's and their donors.

In chapters six, seven and eight of this thesis I take further my idea of the water–gender–power nexus and describe another more powerful dynamic that I discovered operating in the water development context - that of the *baito*-TPLF-REST, a powerful constellation of actors who dominate development at the local level. I describe how power is exercised through the relationships of political officials representing local systems of governance, the state represented through a political party the TPLF and one of the regions largest NGO's - REST. I show that men also engage in the power play and this can be observed at the highest level of the development process, in relation to the dynamic between the donors, the aid givers, and the recipients of aid, the NGO's and regional government departments. In chapter seven I also describe a dynamic inextricably linked to this nexus which I term 'power blindness'.

I shall now turn to the locale of my study and present the ethnographic context.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chapter Three

Dr Solomon, Minister in the Tigray Regional Government

Tsahlo Villagers

Walalla, gatekeeper of Mai Eif hand pump member of women's association, TPLF Co-ordinator

Haile Selassie, wealthy farmer, brother in law of Walalla

Tadbeb, Haile Selassie's wife

Tsergir, poor divorced single woman, head of her household.

Gebriski, farmer TPLF member married to Medhin who is related to Haile Selassie

Zekiros, farmer had his aid package cut for speaking out against the local administration

Abreha Beyene, richest farmer in the village

Khassa, very poor landless old woman lives on food begged from neighbours

Kiros, teacher at Gosemite School in Tsahlo

Tsadkan, wife of Kiros, a student at Gosemite School

Mahret, member of Tsahlo Women's Association

Asqual, member of Tsahlo Women's Association and health *fana*

Amete, member of Tsahlo Women's Association

Takah, village woman

Gebre, farmer

Regional Women's Association

Kudusan, Director of the women's association of Tigray (WAT)

Tamrat, Deputy Director of the women's association Tigray (WAT)

These are the principle characters mentioned by name in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

In this chapter I will describe the historical, political, cultural and social context in which my study is set. I will describe the village that I lived in to paint a picture of the land and local economy. I will explore gender power at the household level and then link these relational dynamics to explore the social use value of water at the village level.

The Region

My study was set in Tigray, situated in the highlands of Ethiopia. The topography is varied, consisting of a high plateau cut through with breathtaking ravines, deep gorges and flat mesas. The region has been dominated for the last several decades by the ravages of famine and war. As I have given an in-depth account of the historical and political context of the nation and region in Chapter 2, here I shall briefly note only the important political events impacting upon and shaping Tigray's political and economic context over the past 30 years.

I described above how in 1978, following the military coup, the TPLF formed a revolutionary front to combat the cruel dictatorship of the *derg*. From 1983 to 1985 the loss of life escalated as one of the worst famines recorded in the region's history impacted upon an already war-torn population. A massive level of displacement occurred as Tigreans migrated to the Sudan to flee the drought and strife.

The rebels continued the fight, gained victory over the military and took control of their homeland. Distribution of land became one of the first post-war priorities. The TPLF took the land from the ruling elites and redistributed it to the poor farmers, and women were given rights to land for the first time. The TPLF maintained control of the region and administered the area through the local bureaucratic structure known as the *baito*, a system of local government controlled by the regional government.

In 1989 the TPLF formed a united front with Amharic and Eritrean rebel groups, and the coalition overthrew the *derg* regime in 1991. Four years later Ethiopia held its first multiparty elections and switched from its socialist (Marxist Leninist) ideology to adopt the western model of democracy and free market economics. Ethiopia became a Federal Democratic Republic, with the

TPLF leaders in prominent positions of power. This power was devolved to the regions and Tigray established its own regional government.

In the year 2000, the period of my study, the population of Tigray was estimated at three and a half million, 80% of whom live in rural areas and depend on rain-fed agriculture for their subsistence. The annual rainfall is approximately 570 mm. The average income is 833 *birr* per annum, equal to \$100 US. Government sources maintain that 60% of the people 'live below the poverty line'. The economic profile is acknowledged internationally as one of chronic structural poverty.¹

The government claims that erratic rainfall patterns have exacerbated the situation. From 1996 to 2000 the short *belg* rains failed, resulting in drought, famine and a decline in the food-producing capacity of the region. Farmers had to sell their valuable livestock to buy grain to survive. When this reserve is depleted they turn to the government. According to the region's largest NGO, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), in the previous year 904,452 people required a total of 101,751 metric tonnes of food aid to meet their daily food needs (REST 2000).

In 2000 the region was once again gripped in yet another military conflict, war with neighbouring Eritrea, which had begun in 1998 and had compounded the economic and structural problems of the region. Three hundred thousand internally displaced peoples were both homeless and landless. Having lost their livelihood they were totally dependent on relief assistance for their survival. Families faced untold dangers, hardship, abuse and exploitation, and were vulnerable to disease and hunger.

The negative impacts of the war were also felt throughout the region. The rural farmers comprised a poor and vulnerable group. The lives of the people were once more disrupted through forced migration and the loss of labour power as men and women left farms and homes to join the war effort. Food production was again adversely affected. During the time of my study almost one-third of the populace was dependent on external assistance in the form of relief food aid.

The regional government asserts that inadequate water supplies and depleted pastureland have devastated southern and eastern Tigray. They claim the region is food-insecure (see Figure 3.1)

and, I would suggest, according to their criteria, water-insecure. Recently published figures suggest that up to 2.7 million people in Tigray have no access to clean, safe water. Dr Solomon, a member of the regional government, maintains that the previous regime's policies of neglect had resulted in the underdevelopment of the region. Since the TPLF came to power in Tigray seven years ago, he claims that their 'rural centred approach to development' has improved access to essential services such as education, health care and clean drinking water. Dr Solomon told me: 'Potable water coverage is now between 22 and 27%; the trend is positive. Before people lived their lives in fear. We have enjoyed five years of peace, development and democracy.'

A local non-governmental organisation, REST,² is responsible for providing 90% of relief aid given in this region. Their priority items are the provision of essential services such as food and water. The relief and rehabilitation packages are delivered in the form of food for work programmes and water development interventions such as hand-dug wells and spring capping. REST get the majority of their funds from donors such as USAID.

Local Economy, Land and Livelihood

Tigray is divided into five administrative zones – the Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, and Central (see Figure 3.2). These zones in turn are broken down into smaller units of local governance called *weredas*. My study is situated in the Eastern zone, in *Wukro wereda*. The population is 101,991 and comprises both urban and rural dwellers. There are 15 *tabias* and 65 *kushetts* in *Wukro*. A *kushett* is a small village, and a cluster of villages is known as a *tabia*. My research was located in *tabia Gemad*, a small rural area comprised of four *kushetts* -- Tsadenale, Megadin, Deriba and Tsahlo. The population of Gemad is 9,092 people who farm 1,600 hectares of arable land for their subsistence.

Political elites maintained control over local resources and the structures of governance operating from the grassroots level up: *kushett*, *tabia*, and *wereda*. At all three of these levels the administrative structure consists of a committee that has the following posts: chair, vice-chair, secretary, economic development, propaganda and security. The chair was the overseer and held

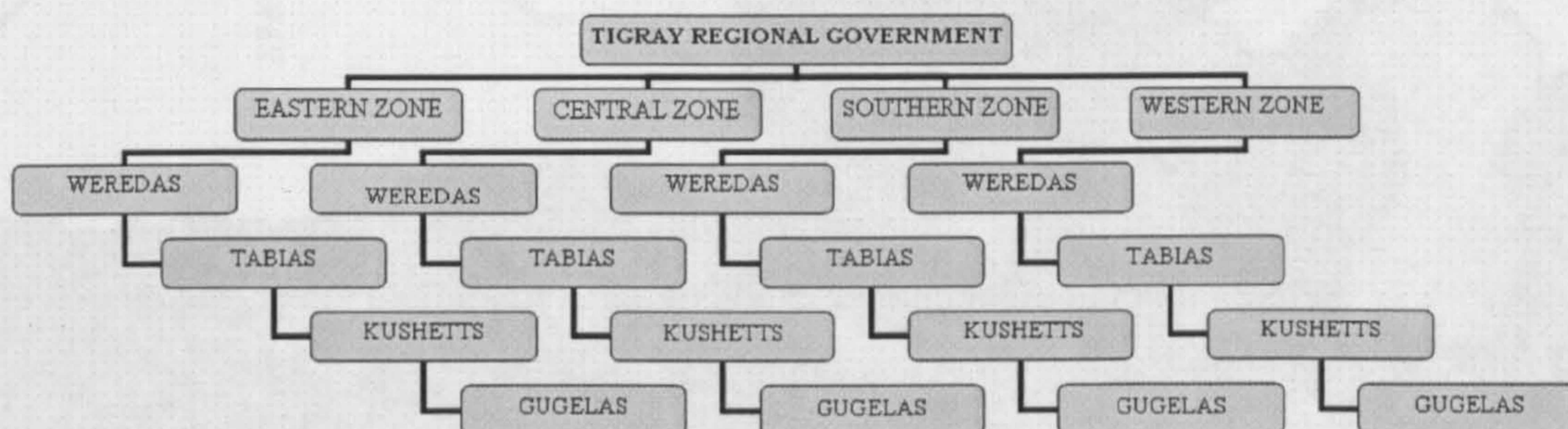
¹ Ethiopia is ranked 169 out of 175 countries on the UN Human Development Poverty Index.

² REST is an organisation born out of the armed struggle and politically affiliated with the TPLF. It is the NGO that I was attached to during my fieldwork.

overall responsibility for all activities such as agriculture, health and education. The vice-chair and secretary seemed also to be involved in these areas but held less power than the chair, who had ultimate decision-making power. The economic development cadre was responsible for all development activities and made proposals to the committee regarding local problems and solutions. The propaganda cadre's role was to encourage the people to participate in all activities from development efforts to the war. The security cadre was responsible for security issues in the *wereda*, making sure that the village was safe from incursion, especially during wartime. This role included recruiting a militia (a volunteer army) from local farm communities, maintaining law and order at the local level and having a seat on the local social court.

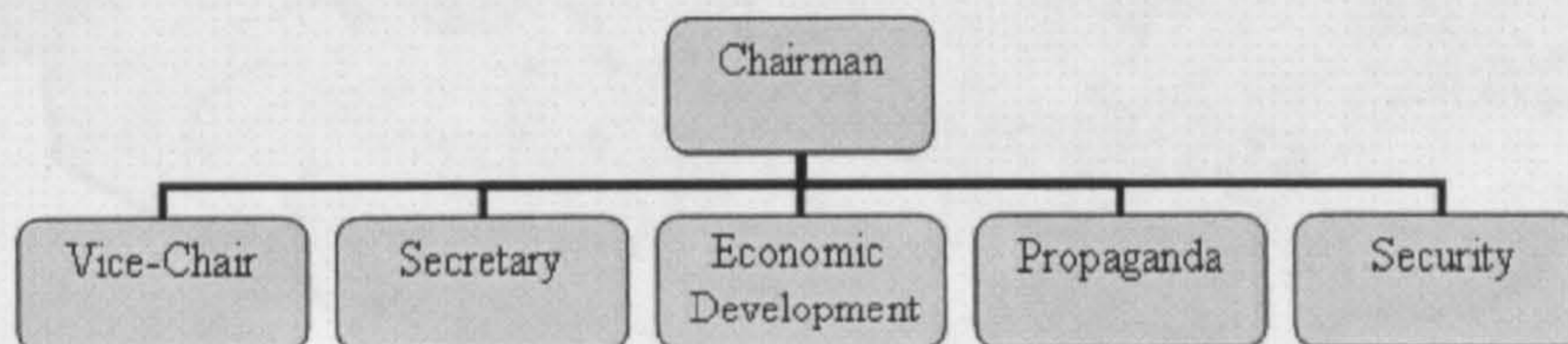
The local government structures acted on orders in a chain of command from the regional government down through the *wereda*, to the *tabia* and finally resting with the *kushett* leadership, who then called the people together to tell them what the plans for their village were to be.

Figure 3.3 System of political administration



A *gujela* is a group of 10-20 households used to convey government directives

Posts held are reproduced at each level of the administrative structure except for the *Gugelas*



The village of my study was Tsaḥlo.³ At an altitude of 2,140 meters above sea level, the climate was sunny and hot during the day, but cold at night.⁴ The village comprised 591 households, 368 of which were male-headed; the remaining 223 were female-headed. The village was made up of dispersed homesteads (see Figure 3.4). Small stone and earth houses known as *hidmos* or *gojos*⁵ are enclosed by fields that provide annual crops of barley, wheat, maize, millet, taff and various beans. This micro-economic structure comprises ‘the family farm’ (Shanin 1971).

The rural development infrastructure was basic. Electrification had not reached the village. There were neither transport nor medical facilities, nor piped water. A small number of hand-dug wells operated by hand pumps (see Figure 3.5) provided for the villagers’ needs, alongside a few natural springs (see Figure 3.6). The village school took students only to grade six, the equivalent of the end of British secondary school education. There were no forms of technological communication. The nearest postal or telephone services were 15 km away in Negash town, which also was the site of the local clinic and the market.

In Tsaḥlo the plots of farmland were small and fragmented. The community produced food on a harvest to harvest basis and the methods of production in the village had remained unchanged over hundreds of years. Farming is labour intensive and there are no mechanical forms of technology, just simple hand-held wood or iron tools. Agricultural technology consisted primarily of the ox drawn plough.⁶ In this challenging ecological environment, a system of mixed farming is used as a strategy to minimise risk. Diversification is one method to avert total crop failure. It is not infallible, and annually there is a time period the villagers term ‘the hungry season’, occurring at the end of the year, pre-harvest (Wolde Mariam 1989). Successive droughts and a lack of alternative seasonal employment cause this phenomenon. It is not unusual to find a complete lack of grain reserves in the village.

³ The global positioning or geo location of the village is: North: 13 52 42 East: 39 33 55. The geology type is crystalline rock and phyllit slate. The soil is fine clay, good for crop production.

⁴ Sunset is early most days, between 5 and 6pm.

⁵ Dependent on shape of house and roof type.

⁶ The oxen are the most important domestic animal (Hendrie 1999).

The people are clear that their major problem is food insecurity.⁷ The farmers are offered agricultural extension packages [Global 2000] as part of an integrated health and nutrition programme central to the government's rural development plan. Fertiliser and selected seeds are sold to the farmers to improve crop production. An accompanying aspect of the strategy is the development of small farm-based agro-gardens to produce vegetables for consumption. However, this would only be an option for the wealthiest of the village as money is required to purchase the agricultural package. This is impossible for many of the villagers who are still reeling from the impact of the war and recurrent droughts.

Poor farmers whose harvests had not produced enough to sustain the family had sold off their livestock, primarily oxen and cows. These critical resources are indicators of a family's wealth and status, the poorest not owning any of the valuable animals at all. When many farmers sell off their livestock for grain to feed their families the local markets are flooded, so the price of oxen and cows falls dramatically, again meaning another depletion in assets.

In Tshalo there was a serious land shortage, all the available arable land having been distributed to the farmers during the early years of the socialist revolution. Real equalisation of land did not occur until after the TPLF had entered the villages in the 1980s. Implementation was devolved to a committee of local people elected from the mass associations. These committees were weighted towards poor and middle income households. Land was distributed to individual adults, rather than to households. This meant that women were granted rights to land for the first time regardless of their marital status (Hendrie 1999). All adults were allocated a share of land equalling half a *gibri* (about .3 of a hectare). A married couple received a full *gibri*. Additional allocations were made of a quarter of a *gibri* for every two children.

In Tigray the land tenure system is usufructuary. Although villagers had been allocated land it belonged to the state and people were not allowed to sell it. The problem young people in the village face is that there is no land available to settle. Young men and women have to migrate to the towns and cities in search of employment opportunities, creating spatial dislocation of families. Baur argues that out migration has a negative impact on the culture and religion of the

⁷ The FAO states that nine quintals of grain are necessary to maintain a family of five. The average yield in Tshalo is 5.6 quintals per hectare, barely enough for the average sized family of seven to survive on; the

people. ‘The peasants⁸ who had to migrate to the towns faced the consequences of alienation from the land’ (1977: 85).

Migration not only occurs as a result of land shortages, but also as a survival strategy in times of drought (REST update document 2000). Men left the village in search of employment. This had a negative impact on women’s workload as male labour migration led to women’s increased contributions to the household and family farm (Souza 1997, Snyder and Tadesse 1995).

Aid became another coping mechanism. Local government administrators were in control of allocating the resources that the village people needed. The villagers had many stories of the inequitable distribution of aid. They alleged that political patronage helped chosen individuals gain access to the coveted supplies. However, most of the farmers, men and women alike, were grateful to the state for its assistance in the form of ‘food for work’ programmes, which the government viewed as a means of distributing aid without creating dependencies (pers. comm., Haile, 2000).

There were important changes to the economy after the revolution. The village people praised the state (read TPLF) for other income-generating activities that supplemented their meagre incomes, as there were few opportunities for off-farm income generation in Tigray. A strategy the government adopted to improve food production was the use of hillsides to grow crops. This land had previously been considered unsuitable for farming as the annual rains and flash floods removed the topsoil and rendered the earth infertile. The TPLF had invested in a comprehensive programme of integrated water resources or watershed management (IWRM), known to the villagers as soil and water conservation. The activities consisted of making stone and earth terraces. According to the government, this ultimately led to increased chances of food security for the villagers. It also improved water retention, replenishing the underground aquifers and providing drinking water for the people and livestock. The villagers also benefited in terms of a cash income. Participants were aged between 12 and 70, and gender was not a bar to participation.

deficit is transparent. Data from the Bureau of Agriculture (pers. comm., 2000)

⁸ Baur uses the term ‘peasants’ as do most historians of Ethiopia. As anthropologists it is important to problematise such terms as they tend to ‘homogenise the experiences of rural people / livelihoods’. I shall therefore refrain from using the term myself and use it only in direct quotations.

It is important not to underestimate in some of the villagers' eyes the significance of water projects as employment generation schemes and easy access to water. However, there were claims of patronage and corruption as the agricultural cadres were accused of favouritism, giving control over location of water wells to their comrades in the local TPLF. Allegations of political patronage were rife and the less politically active members of the community were denied access to this strategic resource.

Administrative Structure

Government socialist policies were designed to turn on their head the pre-existing forms of class and status that accompanied a pre-revolutionary landed elite who oppressed and exploited the majority of farm workers, the poorest of whom had no access to land and paid exacting taxes. However, in my experience in Tsahlo village it seemed that these same elites had become political activists and maintained their links to strategic resources and the new forms of power and control through the *baito* system. They may have owned less land as it had been more equitably distributed, but they still ran things at the local level, thus gaining access to other types of resource.

This relationship between military and political structures had a significant impact on institutions involved in development and local government. The elites in the TPLF (ex-fighters) who held local government positions controlled access to resources, such as food aid, water provision and employment. They did not have to migrate when the poorest left the village in search of work. This indicates that there is another very powerful nexus that holds sway at the local level, namely the relations between REST, the TPLF and the *baito*. Critical resources such as food aid and water are brought into the villages through NGO activities. REST is the largest and most powerful NGO in the region and is in control of the resources. The *baito* is the system of governance that controls the distribution of resources from the NGO to the people. Accusations of patron/clientage are significant in terms of development interventions. This is a complex issue and I will argue in the following chapters, is mediated through the local institutions of kinship and relations of obligation and reciprocity. Power, status and prestige are salient factors.

Local rank and status in the village seemed mediated by several factors. First was political position and affiliation to the TPLF. Second was historical genealogy – if your family had been of the landed classes then respect was accorded by the majority of the villagers, even those who espoused Marxist/Leninist rhetoric. Third was ownership of livestock – the numbers of animals a family possessed expressed their wealth, although there was little disparity in Tshlo as it was such a poor village. Finally, land was also an indicator of wealth, but since land cannot be sold and was divided up in the revolution, this was limited. However, the more land one had the more grain could be produced and sold, raising the standard of living. The monies accrued from the selling of grain could also buy more livestock, donkeys and chickens, all of which were also indicators of socio-economic rank. Priests and educated individuals also gained a level of status and respect that others did not attain.

Taking these various aspects into consideration, I have divided the community into six economic categories. The wealthiest families owned the maximum amount of four *tsimdies* (approximately one hectare) of land. Their livestock holding consisted of more than two oxen, cows, donkeys, sheep and goats. These few individuals were either of the landed classes pre-socialist redistribution, or they belonged to the TPLF elite. The people in the wealthiest category could survive on a harvest to harvest basis without claiming food aid. Men in this category also were skilled in carpentry/manual trades and thus could also earn a wage in the towns to supplement their income. (Later in this chapter, I shall give an example of one family in this category.)

The second category was farmers who had three *tsimdies* of land and owned two oxen but might have to access food aid if the harvest failed. The third class of farmers owned two *tsimdies* of land and had a pair of oxen to plough but would still be reliant on food aid. The majority of the villagers fell into this category. The fourth class owned one ox and farmed one *tsimdie* of land. The fifth might farm one or two *tsimdies* but not have any livestock and would need to share-crop their land. Women-headed households often fell into this category, but if other variables came into play, such as remittances from outside the village, they might own more livestock. The sixth and final category were the landless, the poorest group, often living in an extended family situation. Young men or recently married couples who did not get land in the 1980s fell into this category.

Hendrie (1999) argues that significant wealth accumulation through agriculture is no longer possible as it was in the past. I would take her statement farther and would agree with Hartman (1997: 92) that 'mini-plots are a source of hardship', as the plots of land the majority of the villagers held were far too small to provide for their subsistence needs.

The state was proactive in addressing many of the practical needs of the villagers. The system was, however, top-down. An annual plan came from the regional government through the *baito*, and was communicated to the people via male and female cadres known as development agents (DA) and home agents (HA) respectively. They lived and worked in the village.

There were only 30 latrines in the village, and six new energy-conserving stoves. The elite families or 'uppers' (Chambers 1996) got these benefits. These interventions were the responsibility of the home agents. Their mission was to 'educate the villagers and encourage them to accept the new initiatives'. Small-scale 'on-farm income generation activities' had been introduced, utilizing the concept of the 'model household'. Twenty families were selected to act as role models to demonstrate the benefits of such schemes to the wider community. They included the production and sale of honey acquired through beekeeping and the trade in eggs from a selected breed of hens, adding much needed cash to the families' coffers.

At the time of my study, due to the war with Eritrea, there were more de facto women-headed households than usual. Absent husbands, having enlisted as soldiers, were engaged in military combat on the front lines. Gebriski, a local farmer whose brother had recently joined the army, lamented: 'War is not run by stone or animal, it needs human resources. People go to the front; in the countryside the workforce converts to the army'.

The war obviously had a significant influence on livelihoods, with some children taken out of school to farm the land and complete the chores that the missing siblings or parents used to do. There was, therefore, a detrimental impact on their education. Female sexuality was also commoditized as some women left the villages and migrated to the towns to work in bars or resorted to prostitution to feed their families. Women also migrated to towns to get casual labour in the marketplace, either selling wares or tending other people's stalls. Jobs were sought at grinding mills and on wealthier farmers' fields. The poorest sometimes enlisted, as joining the

army ensured a regular wage. Families also lost out financially through having to donate to the war effort. Divorce and separation became more common, another burden on women who had to adopt sole responsibility for the home and farm, in addition to tending the children, the elderly, and the infirm.

Another detrimental impact of war was the ‘missing’ family members who had previously left the village as economic migrants and gone to Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, to find employment (Asmara is closer than Addis Ababa both physically and linguistically). They had sent home regular remittances to maintain their families, but were rounded up and detained when the conflict began. Sons, daughters and other close relatives were allegedly being held in prisoner of war camps in Eritrea. Almost every family had been affected in some way. Narratives of torture were common.

Water as a Resource and Symbol

In Tsehlo I examined the notion of differential or gendered conceptions to water. I wanted to gain an understanding of male and female attitudes to water. I explored the categories of domestic versus productive or home versus farm, to elicit a deeper meaning of the social use value of this critical yet scarce resource.

There was a complex interplay between the productive or agricultural sphere and the domestic domain regarding the social use value of water. Women were responsible for food production and preparation, and they were aware of water not only in terms of potability but also as essential for the survival of crops and livestock. Women had a wider more comprehensive view, reflective of their participation in both productive and reproductive spheres. Men, however, appeared to focus primarily on rainwater for farming or groundwater for livestock watering. Men would rarely fetch water, only when financial benefits accrued, or when water was located far away and they had access to transport such as donkeys to ease the burden. In fact, most women did not want men to carry water. Tadbeb, wife of one of the most prosperous farmers, stated: ‘It is our duty, men work hard in agriculture and we fetch water, we don’t want them to carry it’ (see Figure 3.7).

To see if age was a significant factor I interviewed a group of young women from Gosemite, the local school. Ranging from 12 to 18 years old, all the girls fetched water twice daily. The

minimum time taken for the journey was 20 minutes and the maximum up to one and half hours. Masho awoke at 4.00 each morning in order to complete all her chores, including the trip to her nearest spring, before school started at 8:30. Wistfully she exclaimed, 'We do other tasks first, then when the earth looks bright we go and fetch water.'

I also interviewed a similar group of young men. All the boys maintained that they too fetched water and that they would continue to do so until they were married. Manhood appeared to be the definitive factor, and as still unmarried teenagers they had not yet reached the status of men. At the point of transformation, Tekla, a young man of 17, asserted: 'Then it is the woman's work and I will no longer carry water, my wife will do that but I will do all the hard and heavy agricultural duties that men do.'

A selection of voices from the village illustrates the importance of water; beginning with Negisti, a female septuagenarian, followed by the voices of Kiros, and Gebriski, both middle-aged male farmers.

Water is like your mother. You are never satisfied, whenever children get hurt they want their mother's love, just as we always need water. (Negisti)

Water is life. To live you must have food, to have food you must have water. Our country is in a drought right now, if we had water people would not starve. (Kiros)

God gives us rain from the sky, it is life for everyone. Plants grow, animals, cattle and humans need water to drink. We get food from the water, this is why the government helps us get clean water. (Gebriski)

Christianity: A Blueprint for Life in the Rural Milieu

In Tigray, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the Christian belief system on the lives of the rural populace. Religious laws, custom and practice dominate the social landscape and the doctrines of the church pervade the thoughts and actions of the villagers in the rural milieu. The Tigrean language is peppered with Christian symbolism and the polysemic metaphors of the Old and New Testaments. The villagers' experiences are mediated through the belief in a divine protector, a benevolent provider. From the womb to the tomb, people believe their destiny is in God's hands. It is divine will if they live or die. From complex issues such as land disputes, contested in the social court, to the simple minutiae of daily life such as the provision of food and water, all are perceived as existing by the grace of God.

In this agrarian subsistence economy, the church dominates the cultural and social landscape. It is the axis around which the villagers' world rotates and is literally the centre of all things. Time, space, food, fasting, work, rest and social relationships are ordered according to the psychosocial context of Christianity.⁹

Water and Christianity

In Tigray many rituals are mediated through the powerful symbol of water. Playing a significant role in the indigenous symbolic scheme, water is transformative. Rites of purification restore the social order (Douglas 1966).

Priest Hailu encouraged the village youth to avoid sin. For a breach of the rule pertaining to fornication, the transgressor has to be cleansed by washing his body daily for seven days in holy water. All sexual interdictions require ritual purification. As the water purges and cleanses the spirit, it is capable of erasing defilement after confession of sins. Ritual purification restores a state of wellbeing.

The constitution of personhood in Ethiopia is inextricably linked to the rite of passage known as baptism, mediated through the fluid medium of Holy water. It is at this point in the newly-born child's life that the baby becomes a conscious individual. Mirroring Comaroff's thesis, 'The baptism of the initiates dissolves former identities indexed in the corporeal body' (1985: 17).

The process of baptism [Christening] is highly ritualised and a cause of much celebration in the village. Family, friends and the clergy gather at the local church to mark the occasion. The priest 'drowns' the baby three times in Holy water and calls on the name of the Holy Trinity. The child symbolically dies, is reborn and given a Holy name. In the Julian or Orthodox calendar each day has a Holy name, representing a saint. It is referred to as their Christian name and will be used by all. Each individual possesses three names. The second name, chosen by the parents, is kept secret. This is the name the father confessor uses during intercessory prayer on behalf of the individual. In this system of patrimony all children also carry their father's first name as a surname.

⁹ The revolutionary politics gripping the region over the decades has not attenuated this ethic.

During my stay in Tsahlo, I discovered that the villagers' conceptions of water are inextricably linked to their religious belief system. Water has symbolic and spiritual significance, understood to be a gift from God, as 82-year-old Serdebre attests: 'God is the greatest power the creator, and we love God. After God water is the greatest thing. Water is central to life and our church rituals. Faith is required in all aspects, for example to bring rain, by the grace of God.'

The Christian view is also demonstrated through narratives of the farmers' experience. As Gebre, a local farmer, declared: 'God gives us good rain and good production. If the rain is not good nor is our production, so our life is interrelated to God. Sky rain is needed for groundwater, which we can get without walking or carrying; it simply comes from the sky.' This insightful statement demonstrated the indigenous ecological knowledge that the farmers possessed. Gebre demonstrated the awareness that without rain the underground springs would dry up. The water from heaven replenished the village sources of drinking water.

There is an interesting paradox inherent in the duality of thought expressed by the villagers in relation to religion and Marxist politics. These incompatible and contradictory belief systems coexist to order rural life through the system of the local administration, run by the ruling political party, the TPLF, yet influenced by the church. Pankhurst argues that in rural Ethiopia it is on the ideological front that the state has the least influence, religious beliefs remaining fundamental to the population.

The dichotomy inherent between two ideological spheres in opposition, Orthodox religion and Socialist politics, are played out in the dynamics of the social order, and can be understood in terms of the articulation of these two domains, the formal apparatus of power and the implicit structures of everyday practice (1992: 77).

Hendrie (1999) argues that under the *derg* regime, religious practice became a contested area of social life. The state's attempt to reduce the role of Christianity has had little success even at the national level, and the socialist regime retained elements of Christian culture, officially marking certain holy days (Pankhurst 1992). The Christian ethic also shapes the roles of men and women, and it is to gender power at the village level that I shall now turn.

Gender Power

In theorising gender power following Abu-Lughod, I attempt to ‘oppose the familiar dichotomy opposing tradition to modern, relegating women’s domesticity to the realm of conservatism and tradition and labelling women’s emergence into the public sphere, whether in politics, employment or education, as radical or new’ (1998: 11). Citing Najmabadi (1998), Lila Abu-Lughod considers it important to be sceptical of modernity’s progressive claims of emancipation, arguing that, ‘Feminist scholars feel a dilemma and cannot ignore the fact that gender power has, can, and does take many forms’ (1998: 12).

I wish to use this work to demonstrate that although it appears that women in Tigray are bound to the domestic sphere, this does not necessarily mean that they are subordinate to men in all ways. In fact gender power is complex in rural Tigray. As Abu-Lughod (1998) shows, there are many kinds of feminisms.

Gender power in contemporary rural Tigray has been shaped by the historical and political legacy of the country. It is inextricably linked to the past political economy and the armed struggle. Women have been represented in cultural discourse in contradictory ways. Historically, the country boasts some of the most powerful heroines in the world in monarchs such as the Queen of Sheba and the Empresses Zewditu and Taitu. There are also the folk heroines, the women revolutionaries who were martyrs, many of them from the rural communities. The stereotype of the silent, submissive Orthodox Christian Ethiopian woman was challenged. Hammond (1999) asserts that women fighters were sent into the villages to mobilise the people and to encourage them to join the revolution. Women had active and powerful role models to follow. Kudus, an ex-fighter of the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front and present chair of the region’s women’s association, maintains:

Under Haile Selassie and the *dergue* it was undemocratic. The system of Ethiopian governance oppressed all women. They were subdued politically, economically and socially, and not elected to the administrative bodies. Women had no say in decision making or policy and no rights to own land. Girls married early. If a woman divorced she was left destitute. Virginity was like a diamond. If it was found out that a woman was not a virgin on her wedding night she was an outcast. This is why the struggle started. The oppression of women was a key factor. Tigrean women were forced to fight.

The women of the village had experienced the various forms of discrimination of which Kudus spoke. Early marriage had indeed had an impact on gender power. Tadbeb was married at the age of 10 to Haile Selassie. He was almost 20. The marriage was arranged by both sets of parents and Tadbeb had to leave her family and friends and move to the groom's homestead in Tsahlo, far from her natal village. Tadbeb was quite lucky. Khassa was just 7 years old when she was married. Now in her 70s, she told me of her youth when bride abduction was common: 'When I was a girl I was guarded by relatives because men wanted to capture me. I was married to a rich man, so the payment was one big ox and one good rifle.'¹⁰

Marriage is characterised by complex and interwoven relations of obligation and reciprocity. The kinship arrangements include a process of negotiations between the groom's household, usually represented by the father, who goes to visit the bride's parents to discuss the conditions of the marriage. The first contact is to ascertain the girl's availability. The bride's family uses the opportunity to find out about the groom's respectability and reputation and discuss the marriage payment (*mihab kefti*). The ceremony takes place at the bride's house but the couple first dwell with the groom's family as the kinship pattern is virilocal. If they have access to land, once they have established enough livestock, they set up their own farmstead.

After the wedding the women braid their hair in a distinctive style of plaiting that signifies married status. Unmarried women also have a hairstyle that indicates that they are available for prospective suitors. Young girls often have semi-shaven heads. The transition from girlhood to womanhood is not marked by age, but rather by marriage and menses (Pankhurst 1992).

The Gender Division of Labour

In rural Tigray, women are primarily socially constructed as mothers. Their reproductive role is central to the definition of their identity and personhood. Fertility is valued as life-giving status (Pankhurst 1992). Childbirth is crucial in terms of labour power in the family farm, and barren women are customarily divorced (Hendrie 1999). Due to the high rates of conception in the village, women usually work with babies strapped on their backs. Multiple pregnancies are the norm. The average number of births per woman was seven. It was hardly surprising; farm work is

¹⁰ Guns were considered prized possessions. Khassa had been wealthy before the revolution. A landless widow, she now lived in the church compound. Her clothes were rags and she begged daily for food to survive.

labour intensive and the more labour power the better. I came to understand why having many children seemed to be a useful strategy adopted by the women.

However, it was still arduous work for rural women tending both children and farm. On an average day women in the village worked for over 15 hours. My observations reflected the outcomes of research conducted by Chant (1989). Her findings of over 20 time budget studies carried out in rural communities where women actively participated in agriculture and other income-generating activities such as soil and water conservation suggested that, on average, women's workday was 40% longer than men's (Chant 1989). It also resonates with Farouk and Ali, who state: 'In developing countries such as Ethiopia, women spend more time working and less time on other activities such as leisure and personal care' (1975: 22).

In the agricultural sphere in Tsahlo, women weed, reap, winnow and sift. In the domestic sphere, women gather fuel in the form of wood, cactus, scrub, thorn brush and dung. As well as their daily childcare responsibilities, they care for the elderly and infirm, wash and mend the family's clothes, clean the house, sweep the yard and regularly tend the livestock. Their time is also spent spinning cotton, going to the market or local shop and supporting friends and neighbours in preparation for religious or ceremonial events such as hosting *mehabirs*¹¹ and other church duties. Midwifery is another role that local women are skilled in. Without access to medical facilities in the village, women rely on friends and neighbours when they give birth and are continually on call to assist in labour. If the children are ill it is also the woman's responsibility to take them to the clinic in Negash, very often having to carry the sick child across long distances and difficult undulating terrain.

Role modelling starts early, and girls as young as seven learn parenting skills, playing surrogate maternal roles. The girls complete other tasks, such as tending livestock, with their baby sibling strapped to their backs. Small boys go out with their fathers and assist in building walls, carrying stones and tools. All children tend livestock, and another of their regular activities is to help their mothers fetch water. Robinson (1995) maintains that from the age of six girls begin to carry water, but in Tigray it is well before that. In fact, both boys and girls assist in water portage as soon as they are able to carry the water container. Children as young as two can be observed at the springs

¹¹ A *mehabir* is a rotating socio-religious gathering venerating the saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox pantheon. Twelve members in the group take turns at hosting the feast, one each month.

and hand pumps filling the household water pots called *etros*. Bah (1988) claims that water collected by children may constitute a substantial amount of the total collected. This is a serious impediment to both girls' and boys' education (Barot 1994). However, girls face a double limitation because, caught up in domestic and childcare duties, they are often substitute mothers (Popkin 1998).

Women are traditionally the gatekeepers of water in Tigray. Dependent on the location of the homestead to the nearest water source, the time taken daily in the collection of water can range from one hour to ten hours. They walk long distances, carrying heavy water pots strapped to their backs. Sieber (1996) suggests that fetching water may be one of the most time-consuming domestic chores.

Household Organisation

In Tsahlo, the rural household operated as a collective micro economic unit, engaged in reciprocal relations of mutual benefit geared to survival in a harsh, arid environment. The family's primary concern was cultivation for direct consumption. The household was characterised by complex and interwoven mechanisms. Women's productive roles were important in the village, where they managed consumption and thereby gained a measure of status and respect that was not accorded to women in other agrarian settings (Koopman 1997, Pankhurst 1992, Snyder and Tadesse 1997). This is well documented by Ethiopian scholar Rahmato, who stated: 'To one extent or another, decisions having to do with the family, its economy and the disposal of common assets are shared by members of the family' (1991: 31).

This was resonant with my experience in Tsahlo. Certainly it would be futile to argue that women's position in Tigray society is ideal, but I would like to demonstrate that, contrary to writings that represent Ethiopian women as oppressed and docile beings, they in fact inhabit a complex niche wherein women and men's relationships and roles are negotiated within countervailing discourses and structures (Abu-Lughod 1998). Women, although subordinate in the spheres of politics and employment/development activities, do experience power in the domestic sphere and over critical resources despite working longer hours, poorer nutrition and poorer access to education.

In rural Tigray, the gendered division of labour does not attribute status in the same manner as it is accorded in the West. Women's roles within the domestic sphere are not perceived as inferior or subordinate. Contrary to the simplistic dichotomy of asymmetrical gender relations put forward by scholars such as Ortner (1974),¹² egalitarianism was prevalent and equity in decision-making in the household the norm. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Tigray. As Rogers asserts: 'In some cultures decisions are made jointly and women's views and needs have as great an influence as men's' (1980: 7). In Tsehlo, gender roles were characterised by relationships of complementarity and mutuality.

Daily survival is paramount and fosters a close and interdependent nexus. I frequently listened to conversations between women and men in their homesteads as they negotiated which crops would be kept for food reserves and the excess to be sold off at the market. Women had equal say in what was to be planted for the next season; crop diversification was a constant theme and men and women debated the costs and benefits of each option carefully and thoughtfully. In accord with Hendrie (1999), I found that, during severe food shortage, women's roles were vital as they made critical decisions concerning food consumption and distribution. Women were also the gatekeepers of grain and therefore had a voice in terms of the cash economy. My observations backed up the proposition of Snyder and Tadesse (1995) that women in Ethiopia played a central role in the economy and were acknowledged for their contribution to the household income, thus giving them a level of status unparalleled in other parts of the continent (1995: 2). Snyder and Tadesse demonstrate how decision-making in the Ethiopian household is often a shared event, a mutual exchange of ideas. This builds on Kandiyoti's work (1997) which describes the complex interplay of bargaining that takes place in relationships between men and women in households.

The household development cycle usually begins in a Tigrean household by the parents of a young girl seeking out a young man, or vice versa. A representative or group comes from the potential groom's family to discuss with the parents of the bride if it is to be a suitable match. A decision is reached, then discussions about the marriage payment ensue. The young man or woman to be married can initiate the process.

¹² Sherry Ortner (1974) argued that women were universally subordinated to men because they were symbolically identified with nature, whereas men were associated with culture that transcends and devalues

People of both families can give a marriage payment, called *mihab kefti*. This can be in the form of oxen, cattle, sheep, goats or money. However, it is usually the bride's family that pays. If the marriage of a daughter should take place in a drought year then it could cause the financial ruin of the homestead, as the payment is usually double the average holding of the family's livestock wealth. The money is primarily for the couple to get started, so they have property to launch their own household. A virilocal system of settlement prevails, with the bride leaving the natal home to live with the groom's family until they are secure enough to set up their own homestead. This may be when a relative dies, leaving them land. It is a patrilineal kinship system. Monogamy is the norm since the new Family Law Act made the old informal practice of polygamy called *birkit* (for wealthier men) illegal. It is now punishable by five years imprisonment for both parties plus witnesses to the event.

The marriage event consists of ceremonial feasting and dancing at each of the homesteads in turn, beginning with the bride's. The marriage itself takes place in the bride's house, with a witness present. The families prepare food and drink, usually *siwa* or a honey brew called *tella*, and friends are invited to join the festivities. I observed this ceremony take place between a young couple who lived close to me.

Kiros had started his new post at the village school. Young and handsome, he soon attracted the attention of many of the young women in the village. Kiros started a relationship with a student aged 16 and asked her parents if he could marry her when she turned 17. As a stranger in the village, I had enquired if I could be present to witness the events leading up to and including the wedding. The family agreed and the first of several discussions took place that included the bride to be, the groom to be, and close kin on both sides. At one such meeting, however, there were just four of us present: the parents of the bride, myself, and Gedion, my interpreter.

I listened attentively as both mother and father shared their feelings. The father was unhappy as the suitor was not known to anyone locally, coming from an area far from the village. He was worried that if his daughter was mistreated the family might not find out and be able to intervene to help her. Also if the suitor lived closer and people knew the lineage he was from, they could tell if there was any madness in the family or other health issues that might affect the children. I was

nature. See MacCormack and Strathern (1980) for a critique of Ortner's hypothesis.

fascinated, and knew that it was the daughter's wish to marry the teacher as it would be a way out of the village, possibly even to Addis Ababa, the capital city. The mother outlined the hopeful prospects for the daughter of marrying someone with a regular income, much higher than she could command for her household if she married a local farmer and remained in the village. Eventually the father gave in and allowed the marriage to go ahead. The mother's arguments had won out and the future of her child was more secure. This type of negotiation was similar to others I witnessed in many forms during my one year in the village.

During my stay in Tshalo I interviewed families together and men, women and children separately to cross-check the information I had been given by individuals. I wanted to ascertain if women did enjoy equal decision-making power in the home, but also if they influenced decisions about things outside the domestic realm. I learned that women were involved in and influenced decisions about their children's education, the cost of school fees, whether to take children out of school if more labour was needed on the farm, whether it was profitable to take a credit loan or if it placed the family at risk. Could the family afford fertiliser, would it actually help the crops, would the harvest fail, would the rains come? Women were even involved in decisions about livestock and the process of buying or selling: Would it be possible to have a lamb or chicken to slaughter for a feast day or would it be better to wait another year? I occasionally witnessed the fruits of these discussions as I watched the children I had heard spoken of leave school or resume their education, migrate to find work, or join the army.

Purchases discussed in interviews appeared in houses or those marked to be sold off disappeared. Families negotiated over cash expenditure if tools were needed by the men, or clothes needed for all, including the children. Decisions were made about journeys to town or further afield, to visit relatives or to go on pilgrimage. Women seemed to be more heavily involved in the labour-exacting development activities such as soil and water conservation. The money gained from this activity was seen as belonging to the household pool. Again, I listened as women and men spoke of investing in new stoves marketed by the home agents and development cadres. They talked about whether or not they should engage in petty trade, invest in the beehives and chickens that the government encouraged. Should they buy blankets, new clothes for church? Should they spend money taking a sick child to the clinic or buy herbal medicines instead, a cheaper and possibly more efficacious option? Women were even included in discussions about the building or

repairing of their houses or those of their older children. I watched as these decisions and the effects of them were played out as children got married, family members died, claims were fought in the social court and daily life unravelled in all its complexity. This is not to say that women always won out or that discussions were always calm. But women's voices were mostly heard, and I was convinced that the work of Snyder and Tadesse (1995) was correct. Certainly women in Tsahlo did exercise an extraordinary amount of power both in decision-making and prioritising in the domestic sphere.

This power of women in the domestic sphere had been enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution, and at regular intervals women's rights were taught to the villagers through various government representatives who visited the rural areas. I observed this happening on 8 March 2000, International Women's Day. The villagers were called to a meeting. Negistae, the visiting woman attorney, stated: 'The equality of women is respected in the law.' Tigray Proclamation 32/99 on Family Law meant that women had equal rights with men to petition for divorce. Regarding property, a couple held in common any wealth or property arising from the marriage. Therefore, on divorce, there would be an equal division of property. If a man or woman had private property given by a family before marriage, it belonged to the individual who had inherited it, e.g. if a woman inherited land from her parents then it was her private wealth. Also according to the Family Law of Tigray, Chapter 102, no one could be forced to stay in an unhappy marriage. If a woman was a victim of domestic violence she had the right to divorce. In my year in Tsahlo no cases were brought to the social court and I heard only one rumour of wife beating. Women also had other rights enshrined in the law. Rape was illegal and a prison sentence given to the perpetrator and compensation to the victim.

Another positive move made by the regional government and adopted by the local NGOs was that a husband cannot get credit over 100 *birr* without telling his wife, and vice versa. This protects a woman from being liable to pay back a husband's loan.

It is interesting to note that in the literature on gender relations in Ethiopia (Hammond 1999, Hendrie 1999, Pankhurst 1992), the life cycle has not been rigorously theorised as is the case in parts of the Indian sub-continent (see for example Sharma's study of North India 1988). The reason for this, I argue, is that position in the life cycle varies little by sex in the Ethiopian context.

In Tigray both men and women are given more respect as they reach old age, although those young men and women who were fighters in either the armed struggle during the revolution or in the recent war have gained respect from all sections of the community as people willing to lay down their lives for their country.

There were, of course, ambiguities and contradictions regarding women's status and position. Diversity was based on local variances in wealth and power (Cornwall 2000). Economic rank and status shaped social relations of power in the village context; women did not comprise a homogeneous category¹³ (see Cornwall 2000, Kabeer 1994, Kandiyoti 1997, Li 1996), and neither did men. Factors that accorded prestige, privilege and power were based on: political position and affiliation to the TPLF, family history (of the former landed classes), ownership of livestock, possession of land, marriage status, and household headship.

Unless women-headed households were 'relatively well off' or 'politically connected', they were sometimes perceived to be of lower status, although this was contrary to the sentiments expressed by the TPLF political cadres who stressed at all times that all the villagers were equal. This did not always reflect the economic security of such women, who were often the poorest and most vulnerable. However, for married women whose husbands owned a few acres of land and much livestock, their situation was relatively more secure. To elucidate my point, I shall describe three households of various socio-economic standing.

Case Studies of Three Families in an Analysis of Gender Power

Haile Selassie and Tadbeeb

In this section I will examine the gender power/gender division of labour in three families. My first example is that of Haile Selassie. A TPLF member and on the *tabia baito* until just before I started my fieldwork, he was the head of one of the wealthiest households in the village. The family's livestock holding included four oxen, one cow, one calf and six donkeys. They farmed four *tsimdies* of land, the equivalent of one hectare. It produced just enough grain to prevent them

¹³ See also Gujit and Shah 1998, Nelson and Wright 1995, Cornwall et al. 1993 to compare.

from claiming food aid. His wife, Tadbeeb, was a beautiful woman in her early 30s; they had seven children.¹⁴ Tadbeeb described the complementarity in gender relations.

We get money from selling sheep, goats, oxen and cows. If a man takes the money how can we survive? We have to understand each other. We use our grain and money wisely without wasting them, otherwise it would be bad for the family in the countryside.

From an outsider's feminist perspective, gender roles appeared to be fixed and almost set in stone. Yet Tadbeeb was a strong and articulate woman, and in spite of her illiteracy, her conception of her roles and duties and those of the men-folk were a given, a tried and tested system that she argued worked in the village context.

You can see the crop in the field, and how we bring water and firewood, this is our life in the countryside. It is men's duty to plough, sow and reap. Even a lazy man can plough. I am strong. If I do not plough it does not mean that I am foolish.

Tadbeeb's words reminded me of research carried out by scholars such as Kandiyoti (1997), Snyder and Tadesse (1995), Raheja and Gold (1994) and Boserup (1970), who do not view sub-Saharan African women through the lens of the universally subordinate female but rather as autonomous actors with agency. Kandiyoti focuses on bargaining power within the household and describes how women from countries within Africa (among others) strategize to meet their needs. This interplay of contestation, conflict, accommodation and acquiescence gives women a stake in the forms of power available to them. Tadbeeb was a woman aware of the important role that she played within the family and the rural economy. This is interesting in the light of Amartya Sen's (2001) contrast between countries with basic gender inequality, mirrored in lower female child survival rates such as India, Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, to those of sub-Saharan Africa where female children have higher survival rates. Sen argues that enhanced women's agency in the latter is due to the perception in sub-Saharan Africa of women's greater contribution to the household. Khan Osmani (1998) draws on Sen's thesis of co-operative conflict to stress that the inferior bargaining power of women in Bangladesh is linked also to their lack of participation in gainful economic activity. Women who are perceived as not contributing to the household economy are in a weak bargaining position. This upholds my thesis that women in the rural households in Tigray have a stronger bargaining position as they are respected and valued within

¹⁴ The eldest boy, Gebre, was 16. Almaz, Leterbirhan, Ametebirhan and Liilti, all girls, were 13, 10, seven, and five respectively. Haile Mariam was two, and the youngest, a new born baby boy, remained unnamed until his baptism at 40 days of age.

the family because they are seen to contribute equally to the family's productive capacity. In fact, through soil and water conservation programmes, women may even bring in more cash to the household than their male counterparts, who may just farm their land.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) has written about the multiplicity of feminisms in the Middle East and describes how some strong young women are able to thwart the male-dominated systems they find themselves living in. She states: 'Young women politically active in state sponsored religious organisations can gain enough independence to seriously undermine the usual dynamics of the patriarchal family' (1998: 1). This is interesting to note as it demonstrates Kandiyoti's (1997) thesis that women are powerful in many different ways. Tadbab would never call herself a feminist, but in fact her qualities would be described in the West as those of a strong, independent woman with power over the strategic resources in the household. Parpart argues that a 'post modern feminist analysis into the construction of meaning, discourse, knowledge and power relations provides a more subtle understanding of third world women's lives, one that questions development discourses that represent third world women as the vulnerable other' (1993: 264). She asserts that such an analysis is grounded in the multiple realities of women's lived experiences in the South.

However, in the village there was no doubt in the people's discourse that the gender division of labour maintained strict boundaries that were based on what was perceived as natural and essential differences between men and women. Tekla, a member of the youth association and a friend of Haile Selassie, contended: 'Women don't plough, it's biological, they have a different metabolism.' Both men and women adhered to the biological model that binds women to the domestic context, and the role of child-bearer and rearer. Yet this did not seem to translate to a position of subordination in the narratives of the villagers. Women were respected, even though a strict segregation in activities was maintained. There was an implicit assumption in Tsahlo that the word 'farmer' signified the male gender, despite women having land. The tasks associated with that designation were sowing, ploughing, reaping and threshing. Haile Selassie awoke just before sunrise, approximately 4:30 am. On a typical day he began his routine by carrying animal dung to his fields to spread as fertiliser. Engaging in the seasonal agricultural activities listed above, he also had to maintain the boundaries around his land and home, rebuilding walls and fences and tending to his livestock. Gebri, the eldest son, was the only child strong enough to carry out such

demanding work. This was not a major problem for Haile Selassie. As one of the wealthiest families in the village, he could afford to hire workers to assist him.¹⁵

Although the farmers lamented their overburdened work schedule, leisure times were spent participating in a range of religious and secular activities. A committed Christian, Haile Selassie regularly attended church. An active member of the TPLF, he was seen at most of the political meetings in the *kushett* and *tabia*, and as a fully paid up member of the farmers' association his time was also spent in discussion with his peers about local agricultural developments.

Walalla Assefa's Family

The second household I have chosen to examine is that of Walalla Assefa (see Figure 3.8), a key informant, who was a formidable woman in her early 50s. She became a widow several years ago, when her husband Kiros, Haile Selassie's brother, died of tuberculosis. Although a female-headed household, Walalla's family was not as impoverished as other female-headed households in the village. Walalla was a literate woman with a basic education; she was able to participate in administrative roles and was an active member of the TPLF. Her six children, four boys and two girls, ranged in age from 25 to just eight. Alem, her eldest son, was a soldier active in battle at the time I was in the village. Privileged by a relatively wealthy family background (her father having been a prominent landowner before the revolution and subsequent redistribution of land), Walalla had recently been elected to the regional council based in Mekelle. This was a prestigious position -- her remit was to be the 'voice of the village people'. Just one of Walalla's many roles, she proudly asserted:

I am a member of the *wereda* women's association and the co-ordinator for the TPLF members. I contact the *baito* and find solutions to problems in the *kushett*. I run the co-operative shop from my house. I am a foreman for soil and water conservation activities in the village and development cadre. I am also the guard of the hand pump. I also do my farm work and domestic chores.

An astute politician and businesswoman, Walalla was a beneficiary of both the formal and informal economies in the countryside, taking the opportunities offered by the state and also by

¹⁵ Haile Selassie was an entrepreneur, one of the villagers who took advantage of the training opportunities offered in Wukro. This benefited the household in terms of the extra cash income gained during periods of off farm seasonal employment. As a trained mason he made a daily wage of 30 *birr* and carpentry skills earned him 20 *birr*.

local circumstance. Walalla opened her house to itinerant workers needing food and accommodation. Until recently the homestead was renowned for brewing and selling *siwa*, the local beer, but her shop now only sold matches, salt, coffee, sugar, pens and paper. The material benefits gained through this extra income enabled the household to display a range of consumer items coveted by other villagers. Walalla had a metal bed and mattress, and owned a radio cassette player.

The villagers congregated at her homestead where daily news of the war was juxtaposed by the sounds of Eritrean love songs and songs of the revolution. The war had not dampened the spirit of hospitality in the village. Food was an important part of the ritual process and visitors were always given the choicest offerings. Honey, yoghurt and butter were considered luxury items. The villagers' staple diet was *injera* [a fermented pancake] accompanied by various sauces. People ate with their right hand and occasionally fed each other as a sign of love and respect. Women seemed to consume smaller amounts and attempted to remain inconspicuous when eating. I noticed that when the men had finished their meal the women automatically stopped eating and cleared away the dishes (see Kynch 1994).

Walalla was fortunate and could afford some luxuries. Unlike many of the other villagers, she had a son who worked in Addis Ababa, and he regularly sent remittances to support her. This additional income raised her household expenditure to one of the highest levels in Tsahlo. Walalla spent on average 110 *birr* (approximately £10.00) monthly on food and clothes, surpassed only by Abraha Beyene, the richest farmer in the village, who spent on average 150 *birr* per month.

Tsegir's family

My third example is a family in the bottom stratum of the village. The poorest villagers were those from less fortunate women-headed households, such as Tsegir's family. With no external means of support, the monthly expenditure of her household was a mere £4. This 40-year-old woman, recently divorced,¹⁶ had three dependants, all girls, aged fourteen, eight and four. The household contents reflected her economic status. Tsegir's possessions included a couple of small plastic cups, several woven mats handmade from local grasses which were used as plates and serving dishes, and a small *fornello* or tin fire to cook on. Grain storage vessels made of clay took up most

¹⁶ Tsegir's husband lived next door, having set up home with another woman.

of the space in the small one room *hidmo*. An earthen and stone construction slightly raised from the mud floor in the corner of the room doubled as bed and settee for herself and her three children. Tsegir survived on aid in the form of cash for work; she was a beneficiary of the soil and water conservation programme that targeted the most impoverished families. Aid was not freely given in a bid by the government to counter dependency and poor families worked constructing hillside terraces, at a payment of 7 *birr* per day (about 70 pence sterling).

Unfortunately, this strategy had negative repercussions on the very people it was intended to benefit. Although the cash income was crucial to the survival of the household, the burden fell on women who found their workload tripled in the struggle to feed their families. Tsegir had to look after her children, work on the programme and maintain her farm. This burden has been theorised by scholars such as Abu-Lughod (1998) and Najmabadi (1998), who are wary of the modernisation projects claims of empowerment through development programmes, especially those with income generation elements. Najmabadi asserts that projects may be simultaneously regulatory and emancipatory, with good and bad effects (1998: 12). Although women may increase their income, giving them power according to the women and development paradigm as financial independence equates to autonomy and more power over decision-making, I suggest that Najmabadi is correct in highlighting the dual position of positive and negative outcomes. The time spent on the projects gave women less time with their children. If money is offered to you and you are desperately poor, do you have the option to refuse the work? Even if you are too tired to do it? This rings true of the triple burden described by Moser (1989), weighing most heavily on single women like Tsegir.

Single women have less access to labour for ploughing, which partially negates their equal access to land. One important factor contributing to Tsegir's impoverishment was the fact that it was culturally unacceptable for women to plough. Female-headed households had to partake in complex sharecropping arrangements that placed them at an economic disadvantage. They often lost up to 50% of their production, giving it as payment to the men who ploughed their land. Why did women accept this unequal division of labour? After redistribution some men found ways of increasing their land holdings by informally 'marrying' women with land allocations. Haile Selassie was rumoured to have four such 'households'.

Women's Access to the Public Sphere

Women do wield power in the domestic sphere, yet not in the public realm. Irrespective of the revolutionary rhetoric, in the village it was rare for women to be involved in political organisation. Women were largely absent from both the *baito* and *kushett* administrations. The primary reason given for their lack of involvement in local politics was illiteracy. This factor, however, did not seem to deter the men, who found ingenious methods to participate. Haile Selassie, for example, could barely read or write, but developed a system of signs and symbols to record information required by the administrative structure and held a seat on the *baito*. In order to gain an understanding of this complexity in gender relations, I interviewed Tamrat, the vice chair of the women's association (WA), at the head office in Mekelle. Tamrat confirmed that in rural Tigray very few women are members of the *baito*. 'Women are marginalised and excluded from politics at the village level because they have no education.' In Tsahlo, very few women were members of the TPLF and thus lost out on the advantages that political affiliations brought to their male counterparts (see Smet et al. 1993, Wiley 1998).

However, women in the village had seen radical changes in attitudes to women over the past several decades. Amete, a member of the local WA, said: 'The oppression of women in olden times was bad, women were like slaves, not allowed to go to public meetings, grind the grain all night long. Women walked behind men who rode in front on donkeys.'

The Women's Association (WA) – Empowerment and Access to Power and Privileges

As already noted in Chapter 1, Rowlands argues that empowerment is a complex phenomenon, which takes different forms in different spaces of a woman's life. Moreover, 'this is shaped by the particular cultural, ethnic, historical, economic, geographical, political and social location, as well as within her life cycle and the gender relations that prevail around her' (1998: 25).

Rahmato (1991) also states that although rural women are vulnerable in a patriarchal system they do have a high degree of resilience because of their position in the household food chain, and also because of particular reciprocal institutions. These are expressed when women provide food for each other's families at weddings and baptisms. Also because of mutual support networks shared by women such as the women's association.

Many of the villagers in Tsahlo were members of the government's 'mass associations', organised on the principles of gender, age and role. The farmers' association (FA) boasted a membership of all the men in the village. The women's association (WA) and the youth association (YA) were active although less well represented. It was interesting that in Tsahlo the membership of the YA and FA was men-only, and the WA served married and older women. This left young women with no place to engage in political activities. I was informed that in the towns, girls were members of the YA. Tamrat the Vice-Chair of the regional WA told me of the important role that the WA played in the lives of urban and rural women alike.

Women are advised of their rights and are given access to resources and employment. We give women access to credit and they achieve economic independence. Their self-esteem and confidence is increased.

I wondered if the narratives of the heads of the organisation were reflected at the village level. I approached Amete, a member of the WA in Tsahlo.

I am in the women's association, it is the light in my life. Now we have peaceful and equal relationships with our husbands, they have no right to beat us. We solve our problems through discussions. We do soil and water conservation and get money. The women's association taught me how to speak and how to express my ideas.

Mahret is the co-ordinator of the *kushett* WA. Consonant with the claims made by Tamrat she proudly professed, 'We give solutions to women's problems. We are now getting water thanks to REST, the TPLF and the WA. Thanks to the fighters now there is equality for women.'

Asqual is a TPLF cadre and secretary of the WA, organising campaigns and mobilising the people. She described her role:

Orders come from the regional government to the *baito* about political activities. Since I am a cadre I teach people and encourage them to fight against the Eritrean occupation. Only four women in the *kushett* are party members; there is a very strict screening process to join. They go into your background. You have to be able to keep secrets.¹⁷ The women's association mobilises women and collects money for food and grain to sell for the war effort. We go to the front to feed the fighters.

Alefu declared, 'The women's association told us that we have the right to participate in public meetings, to give our opinions. We participate in different things. We get access to resources,

¹⁷ Levine (1979) writes of the Ethiopian culture of secrecy, articulated through the poetic syntax of Qene.

micro credit and food for work.’ Walalla backed up her colleague’s statement: ‘The rights of women are respected in this community; the husband has no right to beat his wife like an animal, and fire [evict] her out of the house, women now have an equal share.’

The WA recruited its members for various government development activities and it was considered a perk of membership. A very strong theme in politicised women’s narratives was the inextricable link between the revolution and the position of women in contemporary Tigray. As Asqual professed, ‘There are no words to express how much the TPLF has cleared the road for our rights.’ However, the political rhetoric can still be undermined at the local level. The discourse of rights spoken of by Amete earlier was contradicted when she claimed:

The problem is whenever you express ideas in different public meetings, the administration can take revenge. Zekiros challenged his aid quota¹⁸ and Abade reduced it from provisions for three people down to two. The *wereda* said sort it out locally but Abade is chair of the local administration so there was no justice.

Political patronage and clientage ruled. Amete claimed that if the villagers did not have friends in high places they could not gain equal access to the perks that these strategic networks offered. As reflected in Crewe and Harrison’s work, ‘Challenging the social order is risky, to upset local government officials is risky’ (1998: 159).

The benefits of political affiliation locally needed to be examined. One informant had claimed that if women were not members of the WA they were denied access to credit. REST used the WA to oversee the payments from the rural credit scheme, as a form of insurance to reclaim the loans.

Conclusion

Tigrean culture places a value upon rural lifestyle. There is a strong importance attached to personal interactions and to the social organisation of kin, neighbours and church. In the economic stratification of the community, many local elites were from families who were once large landowners. They were upper class within the local situation and some had adopted some of the values of the outside world. Those with a relatively higher income sold their excess farm produce

¹⁸ Food Aid was distributed to the poorest families, although in theory this was linked to work.

and also sometimes their labour in exchange for cash, and they purchased consumer items such as radios and metal beds.

Primarily they had the same core values and lifestyle as the other small farmers, but in certain circumstances this local elite emphasised their identity as distinct to other villagers and at times expressed contempt for their neighbours, referring to them as 'backward'. Walalla, for example, would fit into this category, elucidating what Chambers referred to as demonstrating 'hierarchies of power and weakness, of dominance and subordination'. Chambers asserts that power is less fixed in persons than in the positions they inhabit vis a vis others: people can occupy more than one position, both upper and lower (1996: 58). Walalla was higher by descent and kin and lower (in the public sphere) by virtue of being a woman.

This relational portrayal of power mirrors Foucault's view of power as residing not in individuals but in the positions that they occupy and the ways in which discourses make these positions available to them. Walalla was a powerful woman in Tshlo due to her many and diverse community roles, her education and her background. I often heard her make comments about the other villagers' lack of knowledge and 'traditional values'. It is important to note that most women did not wield the political power that Walalla did. As a member of the TPLF, she had access to forms of patronage at the local and regional level that other village women could not access.

I argued that village women in general did wield a lot of power in the domestic sphere. This was their domain, equity in decision making appeared to be the norm and women were respected for their role as managers of the family farms food production and its sale or distribution.

Beneath the local elite were the smaller farmers whose production was also sold at the local market but they relied on food aid to survive. Women were disproportionately represented in this category. However, because land holdings were so small and the insecurity of adequate rainfall ever present, most people in the village, male or female, had to struggle daily to subsist. Thus if gender power is linked to wealth or landholding, men and women could be seen to occupy a similar category, all relatively impoverished and powerless. The cultural identity of the villagers is relatively homogeneous in terms of economic power, but I would argue there is diversity in political power. There were very few women elected as members of the *tabia baito* and most

women therefore lacked the political clout that village men possessed. Women were therefore at a disadvantage in the public sphere. This impacted particularly on women headed households.

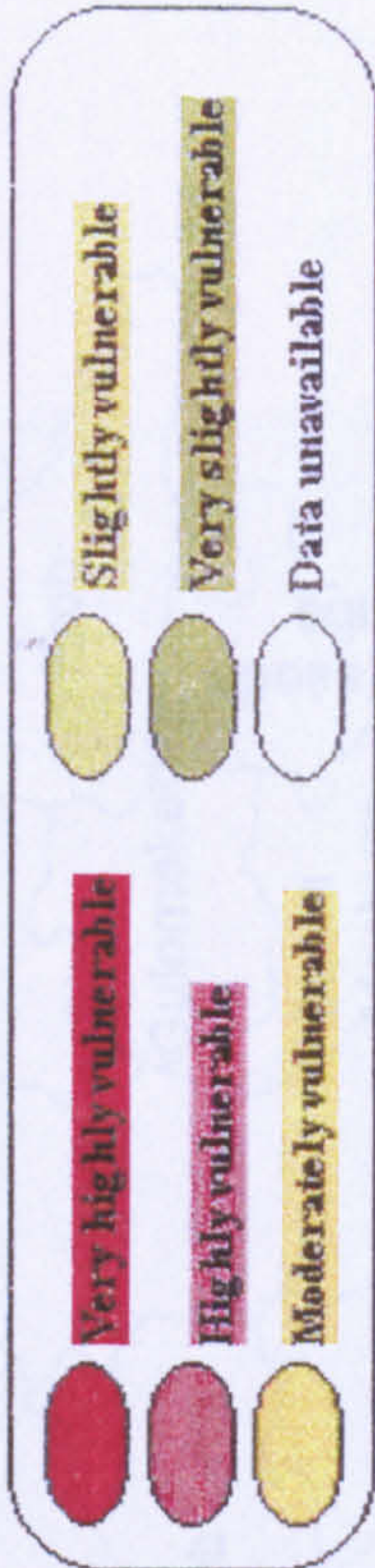
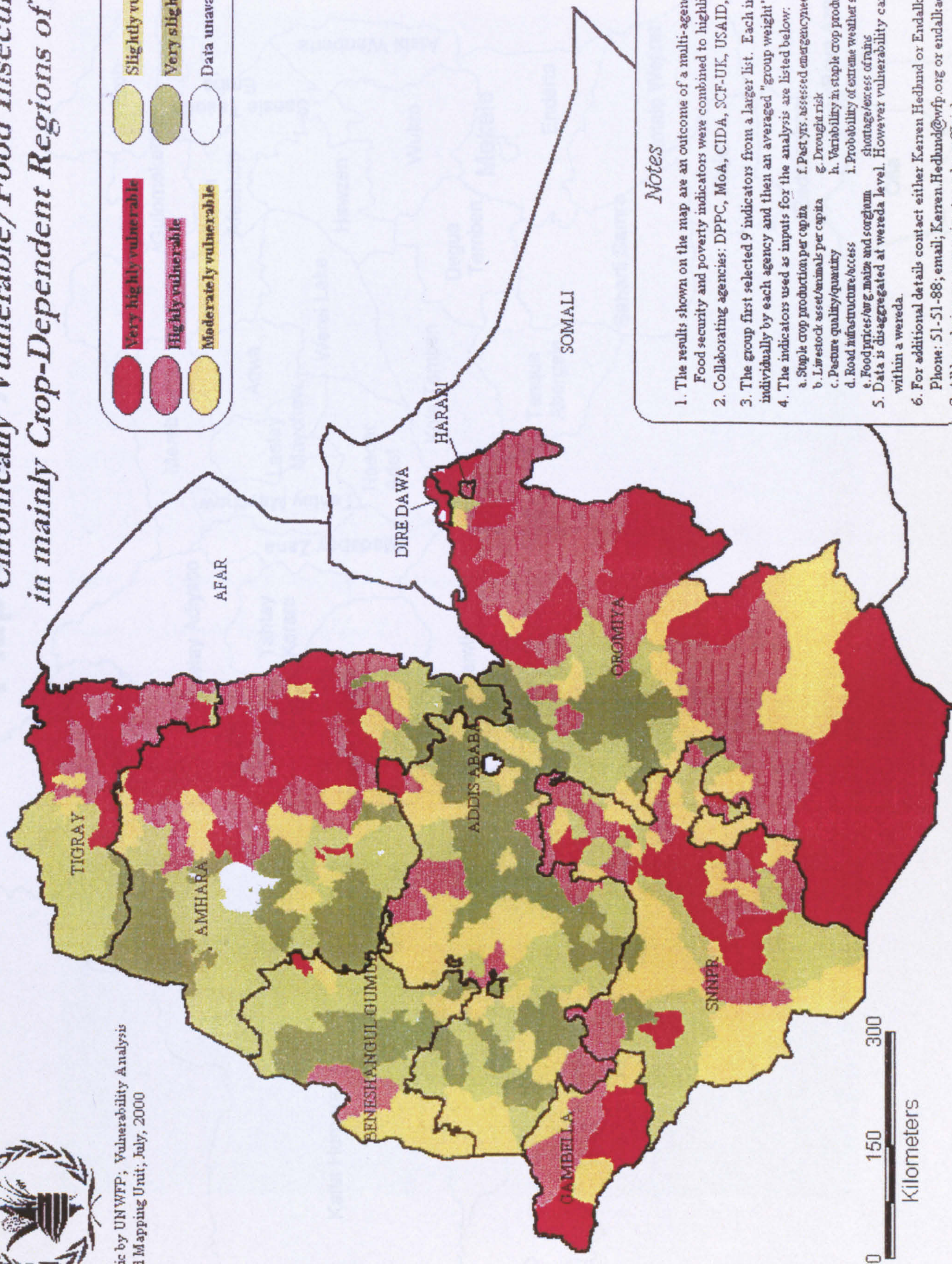
In the village there were complex cultural variables at play that demonstrated the interrelated aspects of power at its many levels. Power was gained formerly through reputation and from the status of being a fighter in the revolution. The most powerful members of the community were now the political elites TPLF members who sat on the local administration- the *tabia baito* and who mediated access to critical resources such as aid and the benefits of development. As I have mentioned, the state-funded survival strategies, such as food for work programs, were targeted by REST in order to encourage development and discourage dependency on aid.

Having outlined the social and political context of the region I outlined the discourses of water scarcity that were presented by the politicians and villagers alike. The farmers and government officials shared a form of ecological consciousness that stressed the importance of the social use value of water in this arid region. I outlined the importance of water in symbolic terms. In the rural milieu Christianity was central to the peoples understanding of the world and their place within it. It is to the relationship between water, health and beliefs that I shall now turn and will place this analysis in the context of global water development policies.

Chronically Vulnerable/Food Insecure Areas in mainly Crop-Dependent Regions of Ethiopia



Graphic by UNWFP; Vulnerability Analysis
and Mapping Unit; July, 2000



Notes

1. The results shown on the map are an outcome of a multi-agency analysis. Food security and poverty indicators were combined to highlight vulnerability.
2. Collaborating agencies: DPPC, MoA, CIDA, SCF-UK, USAID, EC, and WFP.
3. The group first selected 9 indicators from a larger list. Each indicator was weighted individually by each agency and then an averaged "group weight" was applied.
4. The indicators used as inputs for the analysis are listed below:
 - a. Staple crop production per capita
 - b. Livestock assets/animals per capita
 - c. Pasture quality/quantity
 - d. Road infrastructure/access
 - e. Food prices/wgt.maize and sorghum
 - f. Past yrs. assessed emergencyneeds/DPPC
 - g. Drought risk
 - h. Variability in staple crop production
 - i. Probability of extreme weather shocks: shortage/excess of rains
5. Data is disaggregated at wereda level. However vulnerability can vary significantly within a wereda.
6. For additional details contact either Karen Hedlund or Endalkachew Alarnew Phone: 51-51-88; email: Karen.Hedlund@wfp.org or endalkachew.alarnew@wfp.org
7. All boundaries are approximate and unofficial

Map of Tigray Weredas

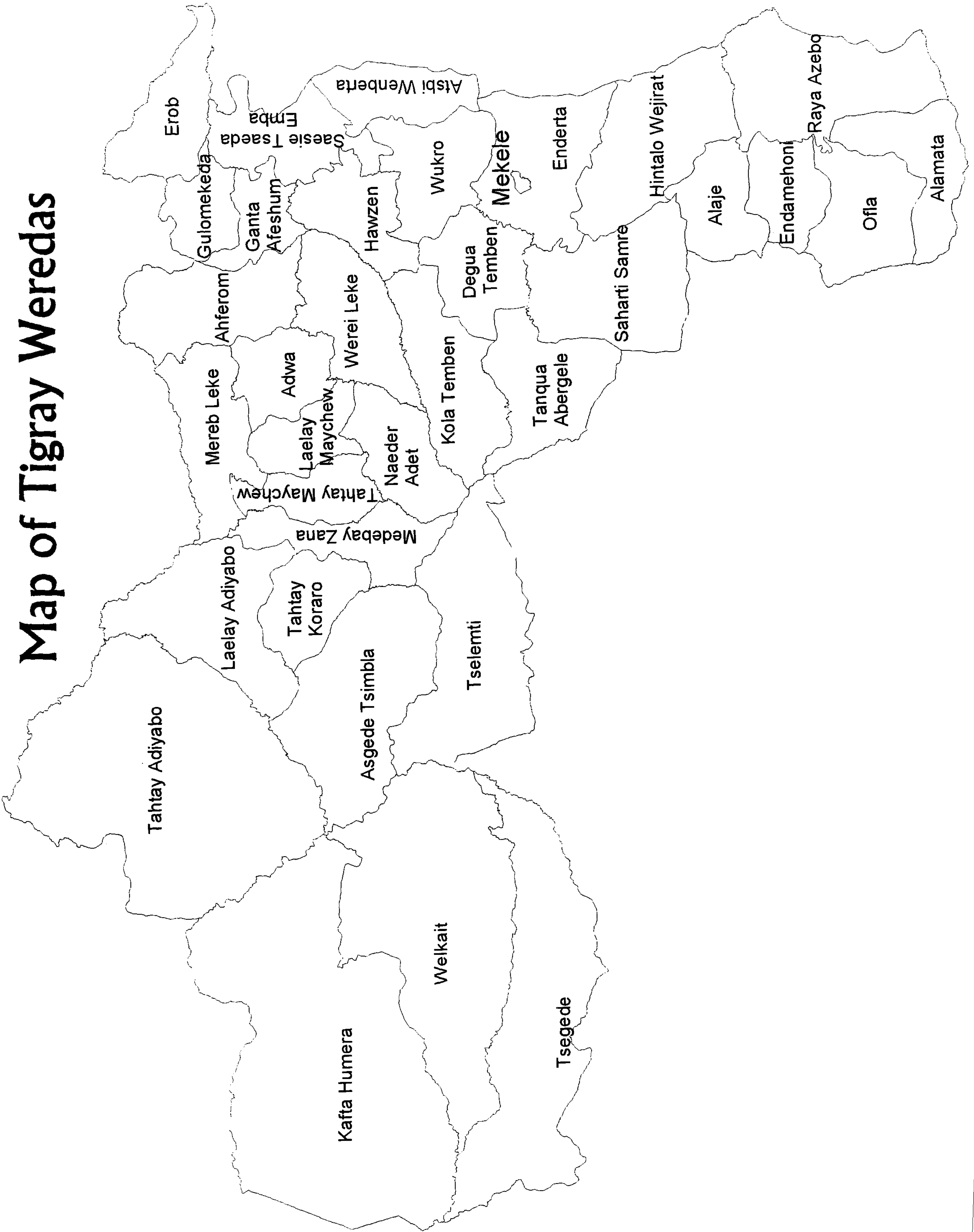
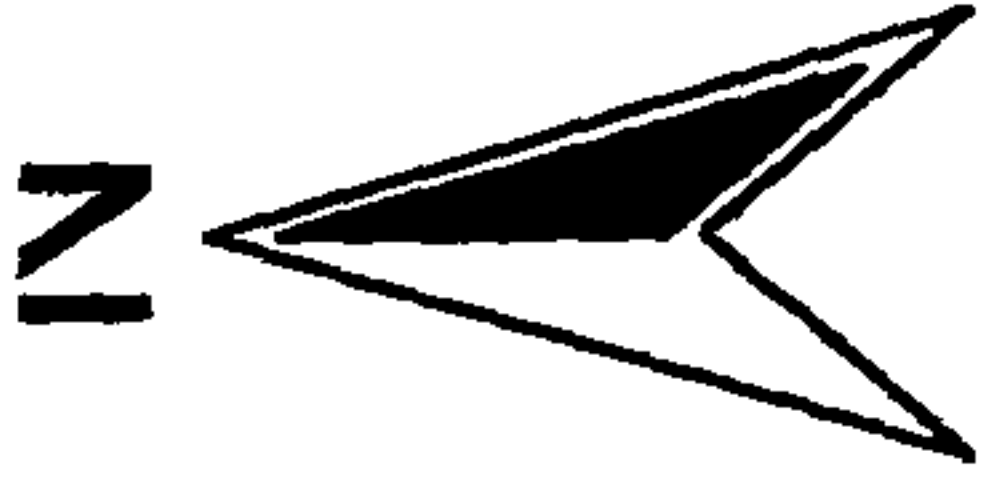


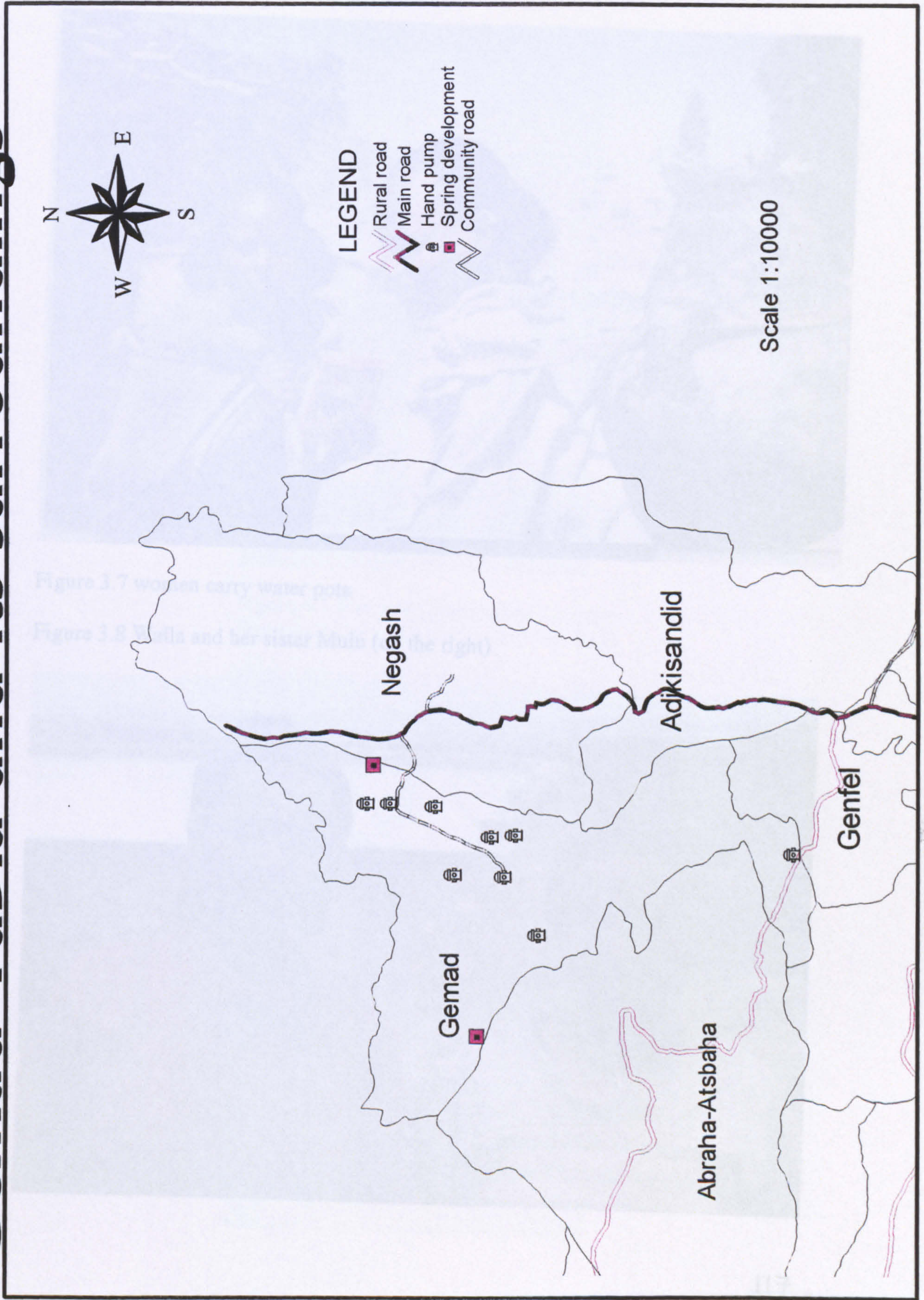


Figure 3.4 Typical landscape showing homesteads in Tsaïho

Figure 3.6 Natural Springs at Mai Eif



Gemad Tabia and its surroundings



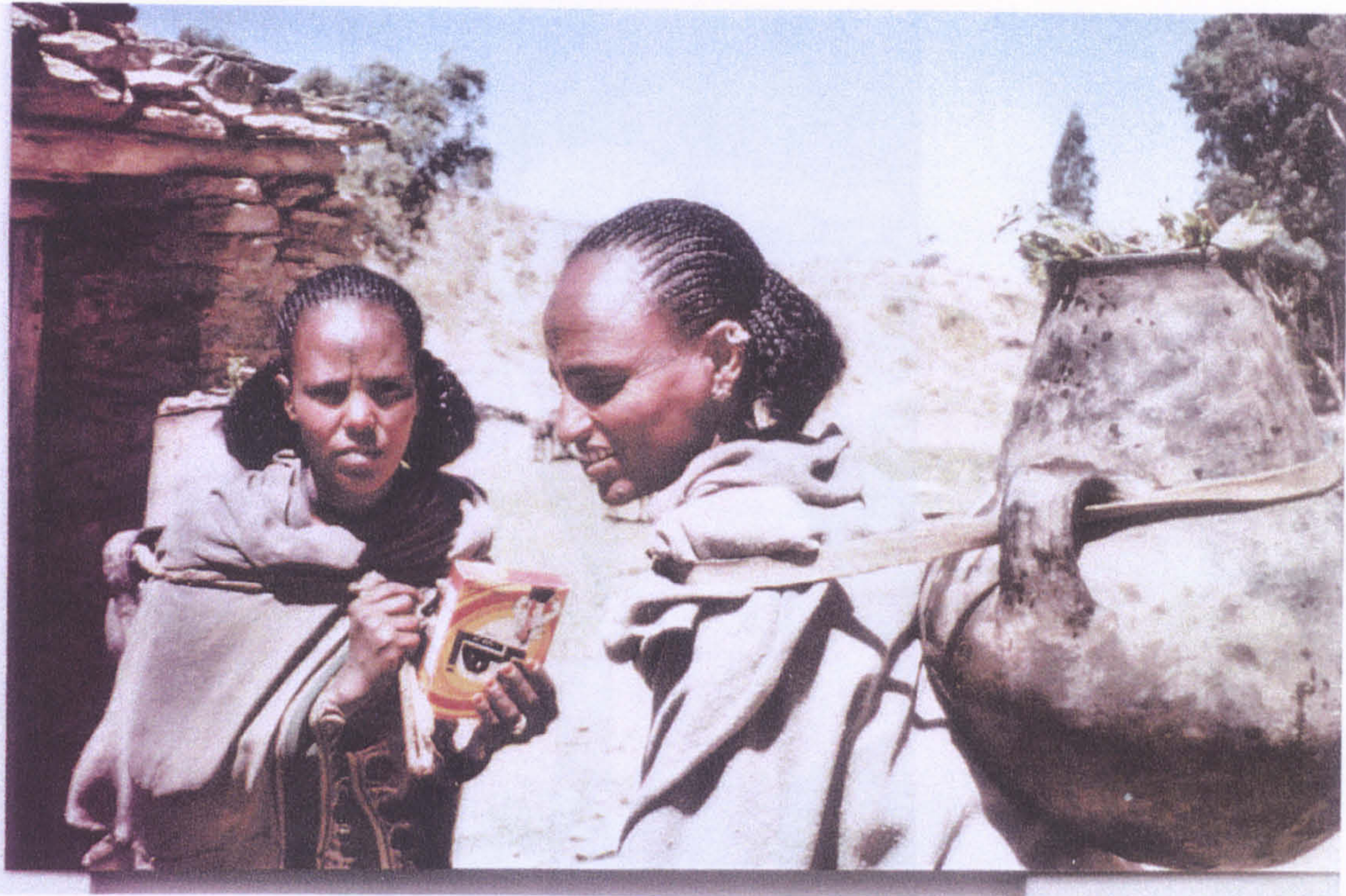
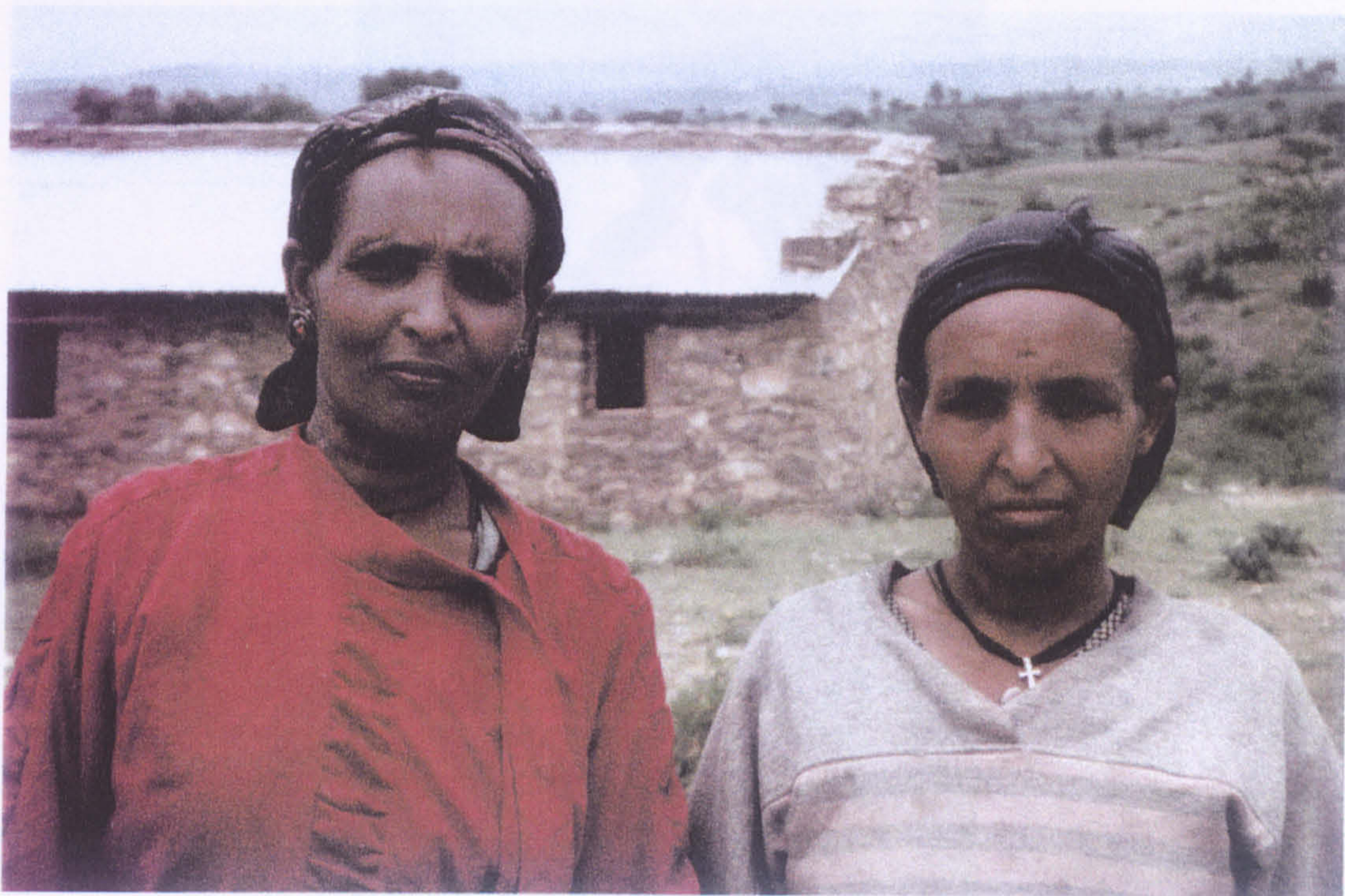


Figure 3.7 women carry water pots

Figure 3.8 Walla and her sister Mulu (on the right)



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chapter Four

Zemechial, Minister for social and economic development Tigray Regional Government

Abeba, Head of the regions water bureau

Dr Tederos, Acting Director of Tigray bureau of health

Dr Barakat, sanitarian in the bureau of health

Dr Mengistae, bureau of health

Dr Karen Witten, Epidemiologist Mekelle hospital

Dr Tewelde, REST health department

Maria, REST fundraiser

Birhane, Deputy Director of REST

Habtu, clinic worker at Negash bureau of health

Tsahlo villagers

Mulu, health *fana* and cashier of Mai Eif handpump, Walalla's sister

Hadish, health *fana* and priest of St Mary's church Tsahlo

Arayda, a male student at Gosemite school aged 16

Tekele, a male student at Gosemite school aged 25

Feramaryam, a female student at Gosemite school aged 15

Tsadkan, a female student at Gosemite school aged 17

Mezgabi, male, head of Gemad *tabia baito*

Tafera, gatekeeper Mai Rigo handpump

Walalla, gatekeeper Mai Eif handpump

Medhin, local woman married to Gebriski, related to Walalla and Haile Selassie

Birhane, male, secretary of the Gemad *tabia baito*

Birhan, female – Walalla's sister in law

Asqual, the secretary of the women's association and a health *fana*

Kinfe, water bureau technician works at village level

Gebre Selassie Nerai, Tsadkans father

These are the principle characters mentioned by name in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: WATER – SANITATION AND HEALTH IN TIGRAY

In this chapter I outline the approach of the western biomedical model to water supply and sanitation (WSS) interventions in the development encounter. I shall then describe the health care provision at the regional and village level in Tigray and present the discourses and narratives of the people as well as health workers in the local town and further afield at the regional level. To analyse people's health practices and beliefs in relation to water I shall call on the analysis of medical anthropology. I will also offer an analysis based on the work of Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) regarding the remaking of women in the development/modernisation process, linking this to discourses of nation building. Abu-Lughod sees development as part of a global process that impacts on gender identities.

Water and Sanitation: The Biomedical Model

In the development paradigm, health is one of the most important reasons for investing in water, sanitation and hygiene (Short 1998: 1).

Bradley and Feacham (1977) claim that water affects health in the developing world in either helping or hindering the transmission of communicable diseases.¹ By classifying the medical conditions affected by water they outline the differences between waterborne, water-washed, water-based and water-related insect vector diseases. Water-borne transmission occurs when faecally contaminated water transfers disease-causing organisms directly to a new host. Water-washed transmission occurs due to poor hygiene practices and also through insufficient quantities of water being used for personal hygiene.² Water-based diseases are parasitic infections of humans in which the parasite spends a part of its life cycle in an intermediary aquatic host. Water-related insect vector diseases occur where the insect spends a significant portion of its life cycle breeding or feeding around water.³ According to the western biomedical development model, improved water supplies, adequate sanitation and hygienic behaviour are all

¹ Bradley and Feacham (1977) conclude that safeguarding community water supplies, both in terms of quantity and quality, is dependent on an effective, integrated approach to the management of national and regional water resources.

² Where water use is low, the transmission of skin infections such as scabies, body lice, and eye infections such as trachoma and conjunctivitis is prevalent.

³ These diseases include malaria, yellow fever and onchocerciasis, otherwise known as river blindness. Although domestic water and sanitation projects are unlikely to influence such diseases, it is important to consider these in relation to larger scale water resources projects such as dams, which form part of the IWRM plans in Tigray.

vital and interlocking elements in the WSS sector. Beall and Cairncross (1998) maintain that investment in one element without complementary efforts in the others carries a strong risk that health benefits will not be achieved.

According to this model the main health benefits of both water supply and sanitation interventions lie in the reduction of faecal-oral diseases. Of all of these, diarrhoeal disease is by far the most important as it is estimated to kill up to ten million people every year, the overwhelming majority of whom are children. The toll is not just in mortality, but also in heavy morbidity. The median frequency of diarrhoea globally has been estimated at 2.6 episodes per child, per year, for children under five years of age (Bern et al. 1992). In Ethiopia, due to the lack of sanitation facilities, these rates are believed to be as high as five episodes per year per child⁴ (Claeson 1988).

The western biomedical model that I have just outlined could be considered as the ‘world ordering knowledge’ that Hobart (1993) alludes to, as it is the accepted justification for the large investment in WSS interventions worldwide. As this chapter progresses I will offer a critique of this intervention and introduce an alternative view from medical anthropology and will contextualise this approach within the belief systems of the villagers in Tigray.

Tigray: The Region’s Health Profile

The regional government in Tigray has adopted the ‘Rio Principles’, thereby instituting an integrated water resources management plan as a critical element of their rural development strategy. The ministers in the regional government offices stressed the importance of this concept in the development of the region and the country. The head of the economic development sector, Zemechial, claimed:

In Tigray, 80% of diseases are waterborne. The outcome is that members of the productive sector are sick or idle because of unsafe water. By providing clean water it reduces disease, contributing to a healthy, physically fit, productive population which provides food security.⁵

⁴ Ministry of Health, Addis Ababa. This situation is exacerbated by a shortage of skilled manpower in the country.

⁵ Pers. comm., 2000.

Consonant with this position, Dr Tederos, the director of the Tigray Bureau of Health (BOH), maintained: ‘The major health problem of the rural populace is mostly parasites and amoebas, which can be solved if the people have clean drinking water.’ A health impact study undertaken by the BOH (1998) revealed that 70% of rural children were infected with parasitosis. The top three diseases recorded at the regional level were due to poor hygiene and sanitation. Malaria was considered to cause the highest levels of mortality and morbidity,⁶ followed by diarrhoea and parasitosis. A similar health profile was reflected in the Eastern zone, but the highest recorded levels of patients registered at the health centres and hospitals in Adigrat were for infective parasites, with 831 people presenting.⁷ It is important to note that, added together, the likely water-related medical conditions outweighed all other ailments by a significant margin.

Health services were sparse in the region and the coverage of health care provision in the *weredas* was even poorer. In Wukro, the area of my study, there was one hospital, two health centres, four health outposts, and five clinics, to service hundreds of thousands of people. The Zonal Health Bureau maintained that urban sanitation coverage was estimated at 49%, but rural access to sanitation at 10.7%. The Director of Health in Adigrat maintained: ‘Links between water, sanitation and health are not strong, integration is not strong. We are trying to collaborate between the Water Bureau⁸ and the municipality; trying to mobilise the community to clean and manage the environment, and give training to the water committees in rural areas to keep the water points as safe as possible’ (pers. comm.).

Health Promotion at the Local Level

There was no permanent site for health care provision in Tsahlo; the nearest clinic was in Negash, approximately 10 km away. Staff occasionally came from there to visit the community, providing vaccinations and basic healthcare. The health workers were trained at *wereda* level in the hospital in Wukro. They fed data regarding epidemics back to the BOH at the hospital, and

⁶ Dr Karen Witten, an epidemiologist at Mekelle Hospital, conducted a study of the impact of micro-dams and discovered that the new water development initiatives had negative impacts regarding increased incidents of malaria. Seepage of water occurred due to poor engineering work, and dam sites became breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

⁷ Due to the altitude of the region, these figures outweigh the malaria cases recorded. Acute upper respiratory tract diseases presenting are 763, gastritis 577, dysentery 506, bronchitis 500, scabies 300.

⁸ The Bureau of Water, Mines and Energy (WME) are responsible for the overall maintenance, health and safety of the hand pumps. I shall analyse the institutional constraints in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

also to the *wereda* administration. There were two types of trained health workers. The community health assistants (CHAs) lived in the town and were predominantly men, waged and working within the BOH. There were also female traditional birth attendants (TBAs), as well as unpaid health workers, both men and women, called *fanas*, who lived and worked in the villages without a wage. They formed a second level of care. A third level comprised the villagers themselves, including their children, who may have attended school or have been college students.

I will begin by describing the *fana* level of health care, as this was the main source of health information for all the villagers and the ‘pipeline’ of knowledge transmission from the Bureau of Health to the people. There were two unpaid health workers in Tsahlo. Mulu, a woman in her early 50s, and Hadish, a priest of the same age, were both trained five years ago in Wukro. Mulu described herself as a *tiena fana*, meaning health flame or fire, imagery encapsulating Tigray’s revolutionary past. Mulu (see Figure 3.8) had several roles to perform daily. She was an active member of the TPLF, a health cadre, a traditional birth attendant, and secretary of the Tsahlo women’s association. A single mother with six children, her parents had been wealthy large landholders. Mulu gained a formal education up to the fifth grade and was thus able to participate in local administrative tasks. She received the nominal sum of 120 *birr* from the Bureau for attending an annual health course.

I interviewed Mulu about the training she received by the BOH with regard to water. Mulu replied: ‘In the beginning they added chloroquine to the water, after that they didn’t add any medicine.’ Mulu confused the human treatment for malaria (chloroquine) with the treatment for disinfecting water (chlorine). As health cadre representative on the water committee, Mulu was responsible for imparting information to the villagers who use the hand pumps. This statement alerted me to the consequences of such misinformation being translated to the people. Mulu informed me that there had been no chlorination since the inception of the water point four years ago. The hand pump had not been regularly maintained. Water quality tests had never been

performed, as the Bureau of Water, Mines and Energy (WME) had not implemented a rural water-testing programme.⁹

Having received inadequate training, she could not recognise the terms amoeba, ascaris or giardia, and knew nothing about parasites, all common conditions found in the village. Mulu was only aware of the presence of bacteria, and the importance of cooking raw food thoroughly. She described her role:

Health workers mobilise the people. I tell the committee to clean the hand pump. I advise the beneficiaries of water to clean their water pots and prepare the water storage containers in the house. Dirty water means bacteria enter your stomach and you get diarrhoea.

Mulu imparted the health education messages at the local church where she taught the people about waterborne diseases. Mulu stated: 'We tell the people when they come to fetch water.' This seemed a very good idea. However, throughout my stay in the village I did not experience such an opportunity being grasped. The well or hand pump would be a good site for public health education. The only confounding factor was that children fetch water regularly, which might prevent the message from reaching the women in those particular households. But no doubt many women would be included, redressing the imbalance caused by male-dominated public meetings. Mulu stated: 'We do a sanitation programme around the hand pump, we educate the people to clean the surrounding area alternate Wednesdays.' I only observed a sanitation programme at the spring/pump site occur twice in one year, once at the start and again at the end of my fieldwork. I attempted to find out who was responsible for organising the biweekly sanitation programme. Mulu announced: 'The different work plans come from the *wereda*, so we practice it concerned with health issues.' This surprised me as it implied a process of imposed, top-down development, running contrary to the development rhetoric of people-led action. It was confirmed by the other trained health *fana*, Hadish, a priest of St Mary's church and TPLF member. Hadish was literate and numerate. A male household head and relatively wealthy, he lived near by St Mary's spring, an unprotected water source, which he claimed was polluted. Like Mulu, the priest knew only the two waterborne diseases listed above. Hadish

⁹ The water may have been more injurious than beneficial, as was the case in Bangladesh where natural arsenic deposits were detected in the aquifers feeding the springs and wells, causing massive morbidity and high levels of mortality (Guardian 1999). Groundwater is easily contaminated by dirty surface water (Attia 1996).

informed me that he had held many health education awareness meetings at the church, imparting the latest messages handed down from the Bureau. Again, this statement highlighted the fact that the directives came from above and were not ‘needs-led’ or ‘driven’ by the people.

Health Awareness, School-based Education and the Clinic

The most well informed individuals regarding biomedical health messages were the school or college students, who had gained their knowledge in classes taught from the fourth grade upwards. I gathered together a focus group of boys aged between 11 and 25. Arayda, aged 16, declared:

To have clean water is a matter of economic strength. It is impossible to say spring water is clean, but we have no alternative. We are in the countryside. Our parents did not have the opportunity to get educated. We tell them, but we are their children, so our parents don’t listen.

The boys knew many types of waterborne diseases and were aware of the dangers and risks of zoonotic transmission. Tekele, a 25-year-old student at Gosemite school, maintained:

Different sicknesses are transmitted from animals to humans. Drinking spring water is bad. We want to give the clean water from the hand pump to the animals too. Germs hide themselves.

The students, both boys and girls, made the link between health and the water development process, yet because of the land crisis not many of them would remain in the village but would migrate to the towns in search of employment, taking their knowledge with them. The girls would leave when they married, as kinship settlement is virilocal.

Any serious health problems were referred on to Habtu, who was employed by the Bureau of Health and worked at the clinic in Negash, where he was responsible for health care and education in the surrounding villages, including Tsahlo. There was no laboratory to do stool or blood tests in the clinic; it was therefore difficult to identify types of parasite, but Habtu claimed to do so by checking people’s symptoms and the smell of their stools. Habtu claimed that the majority of waterborne diseases were the result of irresponsibility on the part of the people.

The villagers in Tsahlo don't protect themselves from diseases. There needs to be a mental change to protect the people from risks. The biggest problem is zero sanitation. Boys wash their bodies at the hand pump, and drink with dirty hands. They contaminate the water. Mothers don't wash the children's faces. Their eyes are stuck together with mucous, dust and dirt. Flies land on the children's faces, villagers touch their mouths, swallow eggs and transmit diarrhoea.

Habtu said that the villagers had been given the knowledge and information necessary via the community health agents, traditional birth attendants and health *fanas* but were resistant to change.

The Village: Water Resources and How Water Is Used

Water sources in the village of Tsahlo comprised seven small springs¹⁰ and two hand-dug wells operated by hand pumps. Approximately 70% of the villagers collected their water for household consumption from natural springs. The spring water was polluted with animal faeces, urine and a host of other contaminants. Humans and animals alike shared the source, including oxen, cows, dogs, sheep, goats and hyenas. Pond life and green algae covered the surface area (see Figure 3.6). A plethora of aquatic creatures of all descriptions was clearly visible, including helminthes and tadpoles. Although theoretically down stream should be used for livestock watering, in practice animals entered the spring to drink and defecated within or close by the source.

Walalla, a key informant and gatekeeper of one of the water points, confirmed that the majority of the villagers drank unsafe spring water. However Mezgabi, the head of the *baito* (see Figure 4.1) responsible for water development interventions in the village, briefed me on the importance of hand pumps to the people. He maintained that the villagers wanted access to safe drinking water closer to their homes: 'We want clean water, we protect the hand pump by cleaning it. Now our people don't drink from rivers, they only use hand pump water so we don't have as many diseases, there has been a mental change in our society.' Birhane, the secretary of the *baito*, added: 'The burning issue in our community is water.'

The two men belonged to the TPLF and, as representatives, they were responsible for development locally. It was not surprising that they espoused the rhetoric of the biomedical

¹⁰ The springs are Mai Eif, Mai Awso, Mai Rigo, Mai Chamit, Mai Kuraro, Mai Tsahlo and Mai Dur (Mai means water)

model, claiming that the villagers wanted the new technology and used the new safe sources over the local springs. They claimed that local attitudes had changed, but had they? Wallala stated that most people drank water from polluted sources. I decided to speak to the people and look at the issue from their perspective.

During my first week in the village I interviewed Tafera, the gatekeeper of the hand pump at Mai Rigo (see Figure 4.2). I was surprised to find the water point had been broken for almost a year but I took the opportunity to question Tafera regarding some of Mezgabi's comments on the care and protection of this precious facility. Tafera was an elder in the village, renowned for his abilities in oration and litigation; however, he had scant knowledge regarding health and sanitation. I was aware that REST, the NGO responsible for the implementation of this water point, had laid down a number of rules regarding good practice concerning the management of the hand pump.¹¹ Tafera knew only three rules, which he shared with me: the beneficiaries of the hand pump were not to perform hand-washing in the well enclosure, no leaves were to be dropped on the floor, and he was responsible for protecting the hand pump from animals.

I walked to the village's other pump at Mai Eif. The gatekeeper was not present. I sat by the water point (in this water-scarce region) and watched as hundreds of gallons of water were washed over the diversion ditch. One child after another tried to pump large volumes of water into small plastic Jerry cans (see Figure 4.3), the spouts of which were too small to cope with the deluge of water from the pump funnel. The area surrounding the hand pump, known as the apron, was in poor condition; there was no door to prevent animals entering the enclosure and animal excreta was clearly visible in and around the hand pump, creating the risk of contamination of the source. Leaves were blocking the drainage system, creating pools of stagnant water.¹²

¹¹ The rules are as follows:

- Do not let animals excrete or urinate around or near the water point.
- Humans must not urinate within 50 feet of the water point.
- No dirty water from clothes or bodies or waste products near the water point.
- Animals are not to drink near humans' drinking water, spring or water point.
- No latrines close to the water point.
- No stagnant water, dirty water, spoiled grass or straw near the water point

¹² Groundwater aquifers are vulnerable to pollution from human waste since they are recharged from the surface and groundwater is slow to accumulate and slow to move out (WHO 1992). This also increases the risk of malaria.

When I interviewed the villagers to see if they had been told how to protect the hand pump, I found the people had varying levels of knowledge regarding the rules. Some knew one or two rules, but mostly the villagers said they did not know any. It was therefore not surprising to witness children and adults washing their hands, faces, arms, legs and feet in the hand pump water (see Figure 4.4). All the safety measures designed to ensure the quality of the water and sustainability of the source were breached. Small children even rode up and down on the pump handle, using it as a hobbyhorse. It would only be a matter of time before this pump too would become damaged and inoperable.

I was intrigued as to why the villagers did not protect this critical resource. Did they resent the imposition of rules? Did they feel they were being told what to do? To analyse this it may be useful to turn to the work of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001). They draw on the second model of power I described in the literature review outlined by Bachrach and Baratz (1962), where knowledge and the processes of its production contribute strongly to what they referred to as ‘a mobilisation of bias’. This applies in this instance to scientific rules being used to declare the knowledge of some groups more valid than others, for example ‘experts’ over ‘lay people’, the western biomedical model over the villagers’ model (see also Hobart 1993). Gaventa and Cornwall claim that from this perspective, for outsiders’ knowledge to be relevant to the people and empower them, increasing numbers of local people must participate in the knowledge production process in the first place and their views be taken on board. Clearly, the villagers had not been consulted about the interventions and accompanying rules and regulations and did not perceive any benefit in learning them or applying them (see Cleaver 1998).

Abu-Lughod questions the politics of modernity and in particular how ‘new ideas and practices considered “modern” and progressive taken up by local elites might usher in not only forms of emancipation but new forms of social control’ (1998: 8). In Tshalo, this was evidenced in the formation of water committees at the village level, the imposition of various rules and regulations, and the placing of a guard to police the water point. All these mechanisms could be seen as the technologies of power described by Foucault (1977) which are linked to the discourses of biomedicine. Chambers (1996) also argues that professionals involved in the development encounter replicate hierarchies of knowledge and power, placing them in the

position of agents who know better and to whom decisions over appropriate action should fall. He uses the concept of ‘uppers’ and ‘lowers’ and argues that the way in which professionals impose their realities has power effects that obliterate or devalue the knowledge and experience of ‘lowers’. The lowers in this instance would be the villagers who have no say in the process and are just instructed to abide by the rules. This resonates with Foucault’s account of the ways in which ‘regimes of truth’ are sustained through discourses, institutions and practices. In the village instance this would be the health and education institutions, the clinic and the school, that have been reinforcing the biomedical messages.

Abu-Lughod argues that ‘To attend modern educational institutions is to be interpolated into new discourses about the training of minds and characters and new practices of disciplining bodies’ (1998: 13). Foucault articulates this in terms of such disciplining discourses and institutions having power over and within the body. ‘Power relations have an immediate hold upon the body; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs’ (in Abu-Lughod 1998: 13). It could be argued that by altering their daily practices to accommodate rules imposed from above, the villagers were being subjected to the disciplining regime of the scientific model. As Foucault states, ‘No power is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge. At this level, we do not have knowledge on the one hand and society on the other, or science and state; we have the basic forms of power/knowledge’ (p. 120). This could be why the people, who hadn’t been consulted, were reticent to comply with the health directives.

How did the women of Tshalo experience this form of disciplining power in relation to their daily lived-experience? How did the villagers’ narratives and beliefs fit the theoretical models? It is through a closer look at these beliefs and practices that I shall offer a more nuanced critique of development at the village level. First, it is important to hear the voices of the villagers in relation to water at the local level.

Although theoretically there were four hand-dug wells within the boundaries of the village, only two were easily accessible; two others were in the lowlands, a three-hour walk away from most homesteads. I accompanied Medhin, one of the village women, to the nearby spring to collect

her daily supply of water for domestic use. Contrary to the narratives expressed by the *baito* leaders, Medhin did not use the hand pumps. Sweeping the bottom of the clay pot across the top of the spring to clear the algae, leaves, and other floating debris, she plunged the pot into the water to fill it. I asked Medhin if the family drank the water she had just collected. She responded, 'We go to the river and have no problems, we clean the top of the water with our hands, the worms have no power to hurt us, we bring the water home and cook.'

Household Water Consumption

Esrey (1990) argues that the quantity of water used in the household is as important as the quality. However in Tigray in general, and my village in particular, household consumption remained very low. REST conducted a health study in 1998 which revealed that daily consumption in some rural communities pre-intervention was as low as 2 to 3 litres per capita. In my study in Tsaхло the amounts of water consumed ranged from 12 to 50 litres per household per day, divided between three to 12 members. One case was particularly shocking. Mebrehatu claimed that the seven members of her household consumed just 12 litres daily,¹³ which is less than 2 litres per capita. At the opposite end of the scale was Walalla's household in which five members of the household used 45 litres per day, on average 9 litres per capita. Generally water consumption per household was low, on average 20 to 30 litres per household, approximately 4 litres per capita per day. Socio-economic status did not seem to make any difference at all. Time and distance were the crucial factors. Walalla's house was literally on top of the water point; others farther away used less.

Birhane, the Deputy Director of REST, informed me that the principles the rural water supply department adhered to regarding consumption were based on the UNICEF standard. According to the biomedical model adopted by REST, water consumption should be 20 litres per day per capita.¹⁴ Birhane stated that higher consumption per capita was required to reduce both morbidity and mortality. In some rural villages that had been very water scarce, after REST water projects were implemented the overall consumption rates increased dramatically. My research however revealed that even when a hand pump was relatively close by, between 10 to

¹³ Mebrehatu is the wife of Gebrexavier, the Economic Development Head responsible for water development initiatives in the village. He is the chairperson of the local water committee.

20 minutes walk away from the homesteads, the villagers' consumption rates remained extremely low and had not risen as predicted.

Households – Hygiene and Risk

Black (1990) argues that women are the arbiters of health behaviour in the home and critical actors in the water development process. Other scholars (e.g. Cairncross 1996) agree that women are protectors of family health and educators of the new generation. The western biomedical model espouses the critical role of promoting health at the household level, to reduce disease transmission in the domestic domain. In Tshalo women appeared to be rejecting this new gender identity role being imposed on them from 'above', from the NGOs, clinics and health cadres, and also from 'below', from their children.

Lila Abu-Lughod (1998) and Afsaneh Najmabadi (1998) critique notions of empowerment that accompany the discourses of modernisation. They explore the ambiguities and contradictions of the programme intended to make women 'modern', specifically programmes related to education, marriage and rational scientific forms of conduct such as acquiescence to western scientific knowledge (e.g. the biomedical model). They ask not only what the new possibilities are but the hidden costs and unanticipated constraints of such interventions. They assert that through these discourses of domesticity come novel forms of discipline and regulation which have unintended consequences. Najmabadi (1998) describes a cult of domesticity linked to a particular type of nation-building promulgated by the discourses of development/modernisation that impose a western view of women as arbiters of health. In effect these ideas challenge indigenous knowledge and replace it with discourses of modernity implanted from Europe, shaped in response to colonial definitions of the backwardness of Africa. Rabinow elucidates this position, stating: 'Preoccupation with modernity lives on in the discourses of developmentalism that mark all national rhetorics in the third world' (in Abu-Lughod 1998: 7).

At this point it may be expedient to explore the usefulness of the polarity of the distinct realms of scientific/world ordering knowledge and 'traditional belief'. Abu Lughod argues that crucial for understanding the projects of remaking women is to ask 'how modernity – as a condition – might

¹⁴ The minimum requirement of 50 litres of water per person per day is suggested by Postel (1996)

not be what it purports to be, or tells itself, in the language of enlightenment and progress it is' (1998: 7). She argues that 'social and cultural studies of science have been chipping away at cherished signs of modernity, undermining its claim to be a rational enterprise, built on objectivity, devoted to the value-free accumulation and improvement of knowledge'. To put this into context at the village level, I shall look at the household in relation to water and sanitation.

In Tsahlo, the villagers' houses were one-roomed dwellings made of mud and stone (see Figure 4.5). They were overcrowded (by western standards), with as many as 10 family members living in one small space. This was the site for cooking, eating, sleeping and relaxing. Women fetched the household water supply twice a day, once early in the morning, and then again just before sunset. A large separate clay pot¹⁵ stored up to 25 litres of either spring or hand pump water in the house. Large flat stones covered the pots, but sometimes they were left uncovered, and flies often fell into the water. The villagers used a plastic cup to scoop water out of the vessel. This was kept on the mud floor, unless the families were one of the few to have made new mud and stone shelves.

According to REST guidelines, safe sources of water were to be used exclusively for drinking and cooking, and water from unprotected sources, i.e. natural springs, was to be used for other purposes, such as the washing of bodies and clothes and gardening. The rationale for this stipulation was the region's scarcity of water and the inadequacy of some hand pumps to meet all the household needs, due to low water yields.

In Tsahlo the women used both sources of water to do their domestic chores, to cook, to pour on the floor to keep the dust dampened down, and in a vain attempt to keep fleas at bay. Water was also crucial in preparing dung cakes as a form of fuel and in the making of charcoal. Biomedical hygienic practices were almost non-existent in most villagers' homes. The wooden stick used by the women to stir sauces was usually placed on the mud floor of the house between stirs, then put back in the pot.

¹⁵ In Tigray the water vessels were open clay pots. This increased the risk of contamination as they were not easily cleaned and the water contained was of a lower quality (Desai 1977).

In most cases there were no boundaries between animals and humans. Animals lived in a communal compound and occasionally shared the living space with the householders. Zoonotic transmission was a significant risk to the household on a daily basis. Animal management was minimal and therefore posed a constant threat to children and adults. For example, the yards surrounding the houses were continually full of livestock excreta. One day when I was visiting Haile Selassie I saw his two-year-old son pick up a clod of ox dung and throw it at the sheep in the compound, pretending to herd them. He then took some grain from his mother and ate it, putting his hands into his mouth.

The villagers had been told to keep a separate chicken house but, as I observed, the poultry and people often shared a living space, exposing the villagers to Salmonella infection. Coops had been introduced in a bid to prevent the risk of infection, and also to prevent the transmission of fleas and danger of subsequent typhus fever, but not many villagers used them.

In Tshalo, sanitation facilities were scarce. There was no functional latrine in Haile Selassie's house; he claimed that it had broken two years ago. The problem in essence was that after defecation the villagers used stones to wipe the excreta from their bodies. The latrines rapidly filled up, clogged with stones. There was no visible difference in comparison between the richer or poorer farmers. Teame, a relatively wealthy farmer and stone mason, had no latrine; there was no status attached to this consumer item (see Dudley 1993). Sanitation has been called the Cinderella of the drinking water sector. Esrey (1994) describes it as the poor relative that remains out of sight.

This was certainly the case in Tshalo, where sanitation projects previously implemented had not been maintained. I spoke to Birhan, the home agent for the village, who confirmed that out of 520 households only 30 had latrines, and not all of these were functional. I witnessed just three that were operative.

Women-headed households were at a clear disadvantage in this regard. They claimed there were no men in their homesteads to dig their pits; neither did they own the tools to provide for men to dig. Only two women in the focus group I convened had latrines, yet Mulu alleged that she had

taught women the importance of building them. Given the scarcity of latrines in the village, there was a high prevalence of open field defecation or ‘agricultural field disposal’ of solid waste. The villagers thought this practice added to the natural fertilisation of their soil. Few families in the village washed their hands after defecation. Taka explained: ‘We spend all day in the field, come home and cook, before we cook we wash our hands. In the day we excrete around the fields, we use a stone to wipe ourselves, any good stone.’

At harvest time ¹⁶ people plucked and ate the raw beans whilst working in the fields. As I observed, there was no hand washing. The women were also breast-feeding, and germs would easily be transmitted from the mother’s hands to her breast and then directly to the suckling child.¹⁷ The villagers rarely used soap in personal hygiene practices. I spent a day observing Mulu, the health worker, completing her domestic chores. Mending the broken lid of her injera stove, Mulu used ox dung as a sealant (see Figure 4.6). Covering the earthen circular disc with thick layers of dung, she then had lunch, picking grains and beans from her field and popping them into her mouth without having washed her hands. Soap was available in the local market, yet the villagers seemed reluctant to purchase it.

Meles, a village elder, professed: ‘Many people are selfish and don’t want to waste money buying soap rather than necessary household things. It depends on the person’s habits. Women use dung and don’t wash and they mostly have no problem.’ Soap cost one *birr*, equivalent to ten pence, for a bar. Mulu was responsible for educating the villagers regarding such practices.

When we ask people to wash their hands with soap they say buy us some, so we say, just wash with water. People would like to have a latrine but they give priority to food first, and they say they still grow.

Mulu again confirmed that the people’s priority was based on economics. Buying food was more important than buying soap. Very little water was consumed in personal hygienic practices, and bathing frequency fluctuated from once a week to once a month. Half the villagers claimed to wash their bodies fortnightly. Mostly the people went down to the local springs to wash or bathe

¹⁶ Peak periods of harvest coincide with higher incidences of diarrhoea (Chambers et al 1981).

¹⁷ Pers. comm. from Dr Karen Witten, Mekelle Hospital, backed up my observations (2000).

because the water was too heavy to carry home and the time taken to cart large amounts back and forth from the water source was perceived by women as time wasted.

Due to the altitude of the village, the children very often had colds, and their faces were often covered in mucous and flies. From my observations the water quantities used were too low and infrequent to make any significant difference to the health and well-being of the children, although mothers claimed to wash their children's faces each morning. I decided to observe if there were any variations between users of the spring or beneficiaries of the hand pump regarding water-handling practices. There were none. Leaves were put in the top of both the spring water and hand pump water to prevent spillage. Bathing occurred at both sites, including feet, hair and clothes washing (see Figure 4.4). Villagers cupped their hands to the mouth of the pump to drink directly from it, exposing it to contamination. There were no 'safe practices' clearly observable.

REST guidelines urged the villagers to separate animal watering sources from human drinking sites. If drinking contaminated spring water, the villagers were instructed they 'must boil the water to kill any germs, then cool the water and keep it in a clean container for drinking'. I watched the women to see if they boiled the spring water before using it. They did not.

I convened a women's focus group on health issues. All 12 participants claimed they boiled the spring water, but there was no evidence of this in my household visits. The women said that Mulu and Hadish had taught them how to boil and screen the water. I wondered why none of the women did. I questioned Mulu and she replied: 'People know that boiled water is better, the problem is they are too busy.' When I approached the village women with the same question, Hadera responded: 'There is no need to boil the water because it is clean and pure. It saves time and firewood.' The villagers resisted boiling the water because of the fuel the process consumed and the time 'lost' in fetching the fuel wood. In a kind of household cost-benefit analysis, the villagers perceived no benefit from the activity of boiling. Neither did they like the taste.

Grade four students in Gosemite, the local school, learnt about waterborne diseases and the benefits of boiling water. I wondered if the students took the health message home. I gathered a

group of girls together to discuss this. The class maintained that they informed their parents but to no avail.¹⁸ The students' knowledge was impressive. Tsadkan, a young woman of 17, knew of bilharzia, giardia, amoeba, tapeworm and ascaris. Yet when I interviewed Tsadkan's parents they claimed not to know about such things. In the girls' group, Tsadkan reaffirmed that her parents do not listen when she tells them about the health messages she had been taught in school.

Why were the parents resistant to these messages if they could benefit them in terms of better health outcomes? The villagers obviously resented the imposition of a knowledge system that challenged their own; it was almost as if the mothers felt they were being undermined by their children, for they were especially targeted by the health cadres and teachers alike.

Newton describes this induction of women into new domestic roles as 'ministers of the interior'. Referring to this process, she says that the 'professionalisation of housewifery, the scientizing of child rearing subjugated women to new forms of control and discipline' (in Lila Abu-Lughod 1998: 12). This can be seen in the village in relation to the boiling of water and in the transmitting of biomedical hygiene practices to the women. Shakry agrees, stating: 'The sphere of women was localized as a sphere of backwardness to be reformed, regenerated, uplifted for the benefit of the nation. Children too become the objects of training, new forms of scientific child rearing' (1998: 10). In this modernisation endeavour of remaking women, discussions revolved around women's roles as mothers, managers of the domestic realm, as wives and as citizens of the nation. This was evident in Tsahlo in relation to 'the power of the rhetoric of the new' (1998: 11). Water drawn from the hand pumps had to be taken, transported and managed in a completely different way; even at home the disciplining gaze of the new technological innovation was monitored in storage and use. Mothers' knowledge was undermined as their children returned home from school trying to teach them the biomedical scientific worldview. As Najmabadi states, the new education 'entails the inculcation of the good virtues in the child and the removal of evil germs' (1998: 10). These virtues also include thrift and industry with their unmistakable links to a modern capitalist order. Tim Mitchell also questions the relations of power and inequality in the discourses of development situated within such global relationships.

¹⁸ In Tanzania an innovative community health project entitled 'Child to Child' utilised drama to educate schoolchildren and effect long term change in water development project areas.

Mitchell (1995) argues that development discourse presents itself as a detached centre of rationality and intelligence. I shall explore this more in the next chapter.

I contacted the leaders of the local *baito*, Birhane and Mezgabi, and enquired as to the level of the villagers' awareness: did they want this new knowledge or did they reject it? Contrary to all my observations regarding water-handling practices in relation to the discourses of the medical model, they claimed: 'All the villagers have got good lessons in health.' This representation possibly was made on my behalf. As a westerner I may have had an impact on donor funds.

The ordinary villagers' indifference to other sanitation messages was demonstrated by the lack of participation in the environmental sanitation programme. I was informed that people were 'mobilised' at regular intervals to clean the spring and surrounds of the hand pump. The villagers were instructed to remove the carcasses of dead animals that had been disposed of under trees. Birhane (secretary of the *tabia baito*) claimed that the villagers had been told to bury such things, but their non-compliance posed potential health risks to elders and children who sat under the shade of the trees. The disposal of rubbish was supposed to be performed by the dumping of all extraneous matter into a pit; the directive was, however, ignored. Was this a form of power play, the villagers once again rejecting the technologies of power of the biomedical model?

Why the Villagers Drink and Use Dirty Water

The villagers' notions of depth, volume, colour¹⁹ and seasonality of the spring water accompanied notions of clean or dirty, pure and impure. The speed of the flow was associated with discourses of safe or unsafe water. Asqual, the secretary of the women's association and a trained health *fana*, noted:

In December the water is good, but as the water decreases the land dries, wind blows and dirt goes into the water. August to September is the best time. At the end of the rainy season the flood washes the gullies.

The doctor at the hospital in Wukro contradicted this theory, and argued that the time period Asqual considered most safe was the time villagers were most at risk of infection. He stated that

¹⁹ Feacham et al (1978) demonstrates that local concepts of water quality are based mainly on sensory perceptions, such as clearness, colour, taste and temperature. Other criteria are linked to magico-religious concepts (Ploeg 1979).

runoff carried residues of dirt, unhealthy detritus and germs into the spring water, thus episodes of diarrhoea and dysentery increased. Many villagers upheld the notion that the rainy season's deluge of water washed away germs, citing the clearer and cleaner appearance of the water as their justification.

Abreha, a worker at the grinding mill, argued around notions of heat and cold. Her idea of better quality water was linked to different times of the day: 'We fetch water in the morning because the water is cold; later it gets hot and the water is not good.' The villagers shared the idea that the depth of the spring water implied a greater degree of safety. Stagnant water was considered bad and the people believed that they would get skin diseases from it, but if the source was flowing, it was good. Medhin stated: 'Shallow is bad, deep is good, deeper is cleaner.' Eric Dudley's (1993) study of community water supplies in northern Pakistan revealed similar misconceptions, based on ideas of speed of flow and temperature of the water, but the idea of purity and depth is fertile ground for new analysis. The older people of my village had no idea of the unseen dangers of bacteria, because they had not been informed of it. Their reasoning was linked to visual perceptions of risk.

Giday, an older woman, joined us, and declared: 'We habitually go to the spring because we have adapted to it.' When I interviewed Araya, a TPLF member and head of the youth association (see Figure 4.7), to compare the discourses regarding the safety of the spring water, I encountered an interesting concept. Araya declared, 'I'm drinking spring water, our ancestors drank it, they didn't tell us it would make us sick or die! We drink with a clean mind.'

I interviewed Abeba, the head of the region's Water Bureau, responsible for water development interventions. I asked him about the villagers' preference for natural spring water. He maintained: 'The people think that water mixed with soil and mud contains vitamins and protein. The people's misconception is that if they drink it it's good for them, that the minerals in the mud in the spring water are better for them.' However, none of the villagers I spoke to postulated that particular notion. The critical factor was the distance the source was from their homesteads. The women maintained that the key to the source they used lay in the closeness to

their homes, saving them time, energy and physical stress. Carrying water makes heavy demands on children and women's health in a number of ways.

The Health Implications of Water Portage

'Time is critically important to the majority of women' (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 128). This statement underscores the reality I described in Chapter 3. Women in Tshalo worked long hours and were heavily burdened in their daily workloads – water portage was time consuming. This was compounded by the harshness of the rural terrain. The hills and gullies were potential zones for accidents as women and girls negotiated the steep slopes with heavy clay pots of water strapped to their backs. The risk of slipping and falling, breaking the pots and damaging themselves was [in my mind] ever present. The villagers, however, held a strong folk belief regarding their 'adaptation' to this arduous physical task and the inhospitable terrain.

I gathered together a group of schoolgirls, aged 11 to 16, and asked them if water portage was a daunting task. Eleven-year-old Kindahafti cheerfully professed: 'If we talk and play we don't feel the pain from the load on our body.' Masho (a teenager) spent two hours each day carrying a heavy clay pot containing over 20 litres of water. She lamented: 'The pains are in our arms and back, the rope hurts us, even when we tried to load the *etro* [water pot] on our backs we lose our balance.'

The girls carried the water high on their backs, supported by ropes that bind the pot around their shoulders (see Figure 4.8). It was a complex manoeuvre to load the clay receptacle that weighed 15 kg, plus the contents. Without assistance the girls might fall and hurt themselves. As they fetched water as early as 5 am, often they were alone and had to struggle to lift the pot and strap it on. To mitigate such disasters a well-designed hand pump enclosure could help – stone walls enclosing the well could be designed to hold the pot, balancing it on the wall to enable the girls to strap the pot to their back without twisting and causing muscular damage.

The children in the age group of 6 to 11 also confessed that the Jerry cans they carried make their hands and arms hurt. It is interesting that the girls admitted to feeling pain from the weight of the water, but the village women en masse said they had adapted to the burden. Although many

women complained of back and shoulder aches and pains and also headaches, they did not attribute these to water portage. The women even joked about it: 'If you carry water out of your capacity it will hurt you, if you don't carry out of your capacity the only thing that will be hurt is the water pot.'

The notion of adaptation and carrying beyond their capacity dominated the women's discourse. They believed themselves to be too adept to fall and break the pots or their bones.²⁰ Paradoxically the middle-aged and older women often complained of sickness, heart strain, and pains in their legs and back. I assumed that these ailments were experienced as a direct cause of the hard labour women performed in the fields and the strain from water portage, but that the village women were unaware of the connection. I sought medical clarification and discussed the symptoms with the zonal head of the Bureau of Health in Adigrat. Dr Gebru stated: 'Rural women get shoulder and headache because they work up to 16 hours a day. Bad backs, muscular damage, myalgia, is common.'

Physical impairment is one negative aspect of water portage. Another critical concern is the secondary impact on nutritional depletion. Many scholars assert that energy expenditure is a factor contributing to well-being²¹ (INSTRAW 1984, White et al. 1972). In the rural milieu families subsist on a limited calorie intake. If women and children have far to walk to collect water, it increases the amount of calorific consumption by the body. The impact of malnutrition and food insecurity on the well-being of both women and children is clearly demonstrable. Over the past decades, the average daily calorific intake in Ethiopia has been estimated at 1,620 kilocalories (kcal), set against the international standard requirement of 2,000 kcals (Jazairy et al. 1992). I would argue that in my village the intake was much lower, possibly as low as 1,000 kcals per day. Moreover in Tigray, as in many cultures, gender biases in eating customs privileged men and boys, while women and girls ate smaller amounts or what remained after the men had been fed. This may result in greater energy deficiencies for women. Infants in particular

²⁰ This contradicts reports of danger due to accidental falls as stated in many development texts (Water Aid 1998)

²¹ Carrying a weight of 3.5 kg is as energy consuming as the heaviest agricultural work done by women. Breast feeding women who collect water and firewood are left with only 17% of daily calories for other tasks (Ybanez 1995).

are at risk when mothers face conflicting economic/domestic demands and have poor nutritional status themselves (Nerlove 1974).

Abreha, the head of the department of monitoring and evaluation at REST, claimed that the positive impacts of water projects could be seen immediately, for example in the reduced workload of women and time saved, but health impacts, he argued, took longer to observe. Conscious of the stress of water portage on women, Abreha claimed: 'Health issues is a big one. Rural women are beasts of burden, they carry heavy water, grain, rocks. Practical surveys show the majority of women are ill at least half their productive time. There is a huge opportunity for change.'

Regarding the direct impacts of water interventions on the health of mothers and their children, Dr Witten claimed that hand pumps placed at strategic points in villages could save women valuable amounts of time. This could be used for a better quality of childcare, and the provision of hot food.²² These claims were reiterated by Maria, a REST fundraiser: 'Safe water close to the home means reduced time and workload, the whole family are more healthy. In practice the time saved is used by women to care for their children or engage in income generation activities.'

Although the literature on water development projects (Black 1990, Rao et al. 1991) cites such positive behavioural changes, the reality I observed in the village was not consistent with the theory. I interviewed a group of women from the women's association (see Figure 4.9) to gain an understanding of this claim. The women agreed that they used the time saved to clean their houses and spend more time with their children. It was difficult to find evidence to support these claims. I often saw many tiny children out herding livestock or playing on their own. The alleged higher level of care-giving was difficult to demonstrate by observation. Time was obviously crucial, and the women chose to use this precious resource in other ways. I would argue that time is not a commodity with a purely material exchange value. In accord with Crewe and Harrison (1998) I suggest that time freed up by women is not necessarily spent on income generation as the development discourses also state. Women prioritise their opportunities. In Crewe and Harrison's study women concealed saved time from their husbands because they did not want to spend it labouring on the land. Instead they chose to use their time to their benefit. Women in

Tsahlo were making similar decisions – not necessarily concealing their activities, but deciding what their priorities were, and these clearly did not fit the discourses espoused by the biomedical model. Instead they fulfilled kinship obligations and engaged in the relations of reciprocity and patron clientage that characterised the rural milieu. They prepared food for weddings, baptisms and visited sick relatives. I would argue that women do not see any tangible benefits for their extra labour. They cannot produce food by walking farther to a safe water point. Women therefore engaged in a power play, choosing to spend the time they had on what they considered most important.

This demonstrates the significance of the wider socio-cultural context that villager people are embedded in, and within which they make decisions (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 129). It is not possible to isolate economics from the social setting. The people in Tsahlo were vulnerable, food insecure, yet demonstrated a sense of autonomy and political freedom by making decisions to resist particular rules or interventions and choosing their own preferences. This was based on a combination of limits and opportunities, economic, social, moral, political and as a result of their history and present historical context (see Sen 2001). Resistance takes form in a myriad of ways.

Broken Hand Pumps and Unfathomable Consequences

Beall and Cairncross (1998) argue that the quality and continuity of the water supply are two of the most important aspects of water development interventions. When projects become unsustainable, the consequent failure of the intervention impacts upon the health of the beneficiaries, placing them in jeopardy. They state:

The dismal situation created by inadequate access to water supply and sanitation services is aggravated still further by large numbers of broken down or malfunctioning services. The health benefits of an improved water supply can be destroyed overnight if people are forced to revert to contaminated sources when the public supply fails (1998: 9).

Towards the end of my fieldwork an enlightening event occurred. The hand pump close to my dwelling at Mai Eif became inoperable and the villagers could not repair it. The beneficiaries did not express any anxiety that the safe water source had broken. The people had to revert to an

²² Cairncross and Cliffe argue that more water means that mothers prepare more meals (1987).

unsafe source. It was a good opportunity for me to observe if this would have a negative impact on the health of the villagers.

One of my primary objectives was to ascertain the extent of the sickness experienced, and whether the villagers would now boil or filter the spring water. Would the people walk further to a clean source? Finally, what impact would the broken hand pump have on the villagers in general?

The people appeared to be unperturbed by the failure of continuity in supply and access to their safe water source. It appeared to be no problem at all that the hand pump had broken. One and all reverted to drinking directly from a visibly polluted source without complaint.

The hand pump was supposed to be overseen by the local Water Committee (WC). To facilitate simple repairs a maintenance kit was given to the WC. The village level operation and maintenance (VLOM) was managed according to the stipulations of a signing agreement made by the village and the implementing NGO, REST. (In the next chapter I shall look at VLOM and the Water Committee in more depth.)

None of the above stipulations seemed to be operational, nor was the cleaning of the spring that was now the primary water source. I asked the *baito* about the bi-weekly sanitation programme to observe if the spring would now be fenced or 'cleaned' to prevent animals from entering the source. The villagers did not turn up on the allotted sanitation day because it fell on a holy day. For more than three weeks the people shared drinking water with cows, donkeys, goats and dogs, and appeared not to worry about adverse health affects (see Figure 4.10). The villagers seemed to exhibit a type of 'mass response', in unison claiming to have 'adapted' to the water. Even a 15-year-old girl, Kindahafti, exclaimed: 'It is impossible for us to be sick. If you are a guest or modern, the water will affect you, but residents are not sick at all.' Thus the young woman felt that, as a foreigner in the village, I was more at risk from the various contaminants in the water than any of the villagers themselves. Her response reveals the idea that habituation allows you to cope with illness, a view of 'resistance' not unsupported by bio-medicine.

In accord, Birhan, a woman in her 70s, added: 'How can we be sick? We started drinking this water from our early childhood time. I have never had vomiting in my life.' I was even more surprised when Walalla, the gatekeeper of the hand pump, alleged: 'In fact we had no sickness before the hand pump came.' Walalla's comment turned out to be more accurate than I imagined. The pump had broken, yet there was no significant change in the health status of the people. Kiefe, the technician from the Water Bureau, came to the village to assess the damage and fix the pump. He smiled and said: 'If people are told the water is good they are o.k. but if someone tells them it's poison they can die. People have adapted to the parasites. This doesn't mean villagers are healthy, they may have tummy problems. So now the TPLF have introduced clinics so people can get treatment.'

Kiefe was right; the people held a complex cosmological/theological/psychological explanation for well-being, based on trust, faith, and grace. Resonant with the work of Jean Favret Saada (1980), I witnessed a psycho-religious mechanism that shaped the behaviour and responses of the villagers. I experienced the power of belief 'to protect or harm'. I discovered the impact of their Christian world view on the health practices of the people. The villagers practised a form of 'medical pluralism' (Kleinman 1980): they called on indigenous healers, more rarely on biomedicine and most often on spiritual healing.

A View from Medical Anthropology

It would be expedient at this point for me to draw on the discourses of medical anthropology to understand the complexity of this situation. when analysing health care needs and systems in diverse communities. Anthropologists have pointed out that any society's health care system cannot be studied in isolation from other aspects of that society. Its social, religious, political and economic institutions reflect the presuppositions, assumptions and values underpinning the cultural context. Medical anthropology is a branch of social anthropology that is concerned with health and disease. It is necessary to examine the social organisation of health and illness in a society, including the ways in which people have become recognised as ill, the ways they present this illness to others and the ways this illness is dealt with. Foster and Anderson define it as 'a bio-cultural discipline concerned with both the biological and socio-cultural aspects of human

behaviour and particularly with the ways in which the two interacted throughout history to influence health and disease' (1978: 23).

The seminal work of Arthur Kleinman (1980) in the field of clinically applied medical anthropology is important to this analysis. Kleinman has argued that there are three interconnecting sectors of health care in all complex societies: popular, folk and professional. Each component part has its own method of explaining and treating ill health by identifying the role of patient and healer and mediating the relationship between the two. The professional sector includes the medical 'profession' and the discourses of the western biomedical scientific model and also may include folk healers co-opted into the system where payment of some form is made to those practising. 'Popular' refers to the lay, non-professional, non-specialist domain of society, where ill health is first recognised and defined. It consists of all the therapeutic options people use without consulting folk healers or offering payment, including self diagnosis and treatment, consulting family members or friends and neighbours.

The most important sector for this analysis is that of the folk healers (shamans, herbalists, bone setters, tooth extractors, clairvoyants, priests). It is usually a holistic approach dealing with all aspects of the patient's life, including aetiology, physical and emotional symptoms, relationships with other people, the natural environment and supernatural forces. In many non-western societies all these aspects of life are seen as balanced and an integral part of one's health. Therefore any transgressions of the status quo or social order such as breaking of moral interdictions, family or relationship breakdowns can disrupt the homeostatic equilibrium and result in physical illness. This was particularly relevant to the Tigrean context where spiritual healing, including holy water, laying on of hands and the use of herbal remedies, was used in tandem with malarial drugs and remedies for other sicknesses.

Resonating with Kleinman's position on applied medical work, Helman contends that anthropological research can be helpful by complementing modern western scientific medicine, 'highlighting the specific needs and circumstances of different cultural worldviews, incorporating indigenous people's beliefs about ill health or wellbeing into the medical process' (2001: 98). Finkler has suggested that in many countries folk healers are used in tandem with

modern western scientific practitioners because, although biomedical doctors tend to tell their patients what has happened, indigenous healers tell them why (1994).

Kleinman (1980) argues that indigenous healing works by definition, not necessarily 'curing disease' but rather healing illness. The process works via semantic networks that link physiological, psychological, social and cultural levels. Kleinman refers to this as a form of symbolic healing, fitting illness episodes into a wider context, explaining them in terms familiar to the local beliefs and practices, reaffirming basic values and group cohesion (resonant with Victor Turner's work on ritual healing (1967)).

Healing is not identical to curing (Kleinman 1980). Individuals and their families may feel that they have been 'healed' even though they have not yet been 'cured' in conventional terms. This distinction is clearer in some forms of religious healing, such as faith healing (Helman 2001). Kleinman gives the example of an elderly woman in Taiwan who had been experiencing severe headaches and visited a local healer or *tang-ki* and also presented at the local hospital to get a biomedical diagnosis. The doctor told the woman that she was dying from a brain tumour. The woman decided to get a second opinion and she visited the local healer. After a ritual consultation the woman claimed that she was healed, no longer experienced the headaches and instead expressed to Kleinman a state of well-being. Thus Kleinman speaks of her being healed but not necessarily cured. Kleinman explains this by referring to the mythic world that both the *tang-ki* and the woman inhabit that is different to the world in the biomedical model. The mythic world makes a symbolic bridge between personal experience, social relations, and cultural meanings.

Kleinman suggests that suffering individuals in any society must be able to understand their own situation and its resolution in terms of imagery and symbols with which they are familiar. As Finkler says, these 'symbols represent the deep cultural grammar governing how the person orients himself to the world around him and to his inner world, and serve to link the individual to the social world, and often the supernatural world as well' (1994: 8). How were these beliefs and experiences represented by the people in Tsahlo?

Local Views of Risk and Divine Protection

Spending a day at the site of the spring at Mai Eif, I spoke to people who came to fetch water, asking the crucial question: had there been any sickness experienced in the family? The results were surprising; one child had scabies, and only one child had been vomiting. I cross-checked with Mulu, the health worker, to see if there had been any increases in the cases of vomiting or diarrhoea over the contamination and manifestation period. Mulu said one pregnant woman had reported vomiting and one four-year-old child had been vomiting and had diarrhoea. I observed another child, Amit, who had a distended or 'pot belly', suggestive of a heavy parasite burden, but that would have been the outcome of a previous infection.

I gathered together a children's focus group at the local school (see Figure 4.11). One of them had experienced a stomach problem a week ago. I checked if there had been any episodes of diarrhoea over the past two weeks, and if so the duration of the sickness. The findings surprised me. There was no significant increase in vomiting, diarrhoea or other manifestations of illness. No significant health problems were detected. I asked the villagers how that could be possible, when they had been used to drinking clean water and now had to share their water source with animals, including the sick oxen I observed drinking from the spring we were all sharing (see Figure 4.10).

I discovered that the villagers did not seem bothered about the primacy of using safe hand pump water over spring water because they felt they had divine protection. Gebre Selassie Nerai explained why people were not sick from reverting to spring water:

When you see the spring it has no lid, but we believe that God has blessed that water so it is clean. I believe Angels of God come each morning and we have no problem.

Abeba reiterated the villagers' beliefs: 'An angel of God touches the water.'

Was this belief in God's grace a manifestation of the symbolic bridge between personal experience, social relations, and cultural meanings that Kleinman described (1980)? I went to the zonal headquarters of the Bureau of Health in Adigrat to seek medical clarification for my findings. When I interviewed the Director of Health and asked how it was possible that none of the villagers were sick, he exclaimed: 'It is a miracle.'

My question to Dr Tederos, who heads Tigray's Health Bureau in Mekelle, was on the efficacy of psychological or spiritual healing. The villagers believed that faith not only heals but also acts as a prophylactic. This was a notion dominant in the villagers' discourse. How might this affect the practices of the people, and did he believe that faith can heal and/or protect? The doctor responded that religious practices could influence the community. He argued that surveys could show that children were carrying intestinal parasites, but due to continuous exposure since childhood, it could limit the clinical manifestation of those particular illnesses. Then Doctor Tederos admitted that if the beneficiaries had reverted to an unsafe water source you would expect a high percentage of children to display symptoms. Surprisingly, my data revealed that they did not.

When I interviewed Dr Tewelde from REST concerning the view that the villagers possessed a form of resistance, I first informed him of our findings. I asked why the villagers and, more surprisingly the children, had not succumbed to sickness, even when bacteriological assessments of the springs at St Mary's and Mai Eif revealed the water sources were contaminated.²³ World Health Organisation guidelines stipulate the level of risk to be intermediate if the count of faecal coliforms is between 10 and 100 and high risk as anything upwards from 100 to 1000. Both springs registered an intermediary to high risk of contamination with faecal coliforms per 100 ml at 287 for Mai Eif and 338 for St Mary's.

Dr Tewelde claimed that the return to the unsafe source would have negative impacts on the villagers' nutritional status and the damage was more likely to be nutritional depletion. 'People may think they are resistant but there is long term damage. Children will have immediate diarrhoea, dehydration and death.' But that was not the case in Tsahlo. The children were not suffering as predicted. I informed Dr Tewelde of our research findings, the practices I observed at their project sites.²⁴ I asked if these practices made REST water projects unsustainable. Dr Tewelde blanched at the suggestion and defended the sites, professing: 'People need to change their attitudes, villagers are careless to change their behaviour.' I reminded the doctor that it was

²³ I put a sample in a Petrie dish to grow a culture. The del agua water test kit I used was purchased from Oxfam U.K. Eighteen hours later it was possible to see with the naked eye that the water was contaminated.

²⁴ Maria, REST's fundraiser, stated that Community Aid Abroad (a donor) wanted to integrate health and sanitation with their water projects. REST rejected the idea because they had health cadres. REST marginalised sanitation as it was perceived as not as important as water.

in the REST guidelines that they were responsible for training the people. The implementation of every water project was theoretically accompanied by the training of the village Water Committee (WC), the body responsible for the overall safety of the water point.

I asked Mulu why there was a lack of commitment and subsequent lack of management by the WC, which appeared to have been inactive for a long time. Mulu declared that the war was having an impact on development. Meetings in the *kushett* were to elect militia and discuss the movement of food and arms to the front line for the fighters, not about water issues.

Although this was obviously a significant factor, I wondered if the problem was more complex. I approached Walalla, the guard, who stated: 'Most of the Water Committee are careless about protecting the hand pump because they are not educated.' This was an interesting statement. Was Walalla expressing a feeling of superiority over her neighbours – was this statement about social relations, status and power at the village level? Walalla argued that she was better educated, more knowledgeable and trained in the western medical model. Her discourses might have been borne out of allegiance to the TPLF. The representation that Walalla wanted to present to me was that proffered by REST, who were representatives of the government at the local and regional levels. Maybe it was also about protecting patron-client relations with those in power in the *tabia baito*, ensuring the socio-economic benefits of development interventions would be shared by an elite few. What would be the costs, obligations, favours in return for saying the right things to me, the anthropologist, who in her eyes could damage the aid flows into the village? Walalla knew well what the NGO wanted in terms of representation at the village level: a picture of participation, collaboration and keeping to the rules laid down by the party.

This was unlike the narratives that I had been hearing and the scenes I had observed. Another stumbling block for the health professionals was the villagers' reticence to access the health care facilities offered by the Bureau. Clinics were underused, with the rural community preferring to resort to other 'traditional' forms of health care such as holy water and herbalism. Takah stated that the clinic was perceived as a last resort: 'The villagers do not use the clinics because they feel it is too far to go, they need to prepare food for the journey, there is the cost of accommodation whilst waiting in the town, so they say I will be better tomorrow.' Walalla

argued that it was primarily selfishness, and then lack of money, that prevented the people from going. She declared, 'Everyone knows that the clinic is good. It will never stop your soul from going to God, but they can cure your temporary sickness. The people don't want to spend the money.'

The villagers maintained that they knew about the limitations of allopathic medicine, and perceived a deeper eschatological meaning to illness and destiny. As Takah and Tadbeb revealed: 'Mostly in the countryside you just wait until you get healed, till the sickness leaves you; if not you go the clinic.' The people wait, believing that with time God heals, and they will be better tomorrow. I asked Haile Selassie, a respected leader in the community, if people believed in the efficacy of the clinic to cure them, or if lack of money prevented access. He declared:

Mostly people believe in God, but we also know medicine is a cure. Money may not be a big factor, because the belief is that God has the power to give life and take it. Many people go to hospitals and are carried back on a stretcher, then they go to the holy water and get cured.

This was an important point, yet again demonstrating the villagers' narratives embedded in their cultural belief system. They had an overarching belief that God's will rules, so why waste time and money on a visit to the clinic? Drawing further on medical anthropology, I will try to interpret the villagers' symbolic explanations (Kleinman 1980), placing them within a complex cultural context.

Explaining the Apparent Discrepancies: Applying the Approach from Medical Anthropology

Medical anthropology is an approach which emphasizes local realities – social, cultural and economic – as all these factors need to be taken into account. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, within medical anthropology there is a body of work on symbolic healing and the psychological functions of ritual, which explores the possibility that in situations of unexpected misfortune or ill health, rituals provide a standardised way of explaining and controlling the unknown. In social systems rituals both express and renew certain basic values of society, especially regarding the relationships between people, nature and the supernatural world – relationships which are integral to the functioning of all human groups (Helman 2001). As Victor

Turner suggests: 'Ritual is a periodic restatement of the terms in which men of a particular culture interact if there is to be any kind of coherent social life. In its creative aspect ritual creates or recreates the categories through which men perceive reality, the axioms and underlying structure of society and the laws of the natural and moral orders' (1974: 48). Resonating with Turner, Kleinman (1980) uses the term 'cultural healing' to describe the attempts of healing rituals to repair social tears, reassert threatened values and arbitrate social tensions. Healing takes place at many levels – not only is the patient restored to health, but so is the community in which she or he lives. This is interesting as it means that passive bystanders who may not be involved in the actual ritual performance are also included (i.e. healed) in this ritual context. In Turner's thesis, ritual works as it restates the values and principles of a society and reiterates how its members should act with regard to God, men, and the natural world, thereby helping to recreate in the minds of the participants their collective views of the world. This appeared to work in Tshlo not in actual healing rituals enacted after people were sick but in relation to the community as a collectivity with a shared belief system. Interestingly, there were no public religious rituals to cleanse or purify the spring water. In fact the only repetitive actions I could ascertain were the shared narratives of guardian angels invoked in the stories of the people (see Figure 4.12). However, it was obviously within the discourses of preventing illness that the villagers' beliefs were narrated regularly and shared by all I spoke to.

The point I wish to make here builds upon Kleinman's (1980) work that people are 'made well' in the social community even if they do not directly experience illness or healing. The symbolic, collective or cultural healing expressed in the village worked via an expression of psychological well-being that belied the fact that the people actually had no control at all over the natural environment. In other words, without the option or the power to transform the water from dirty to clean, polluted to safe, it may have been better for the people to create a symbolic bridge that explained away the dangers and risk that they could clearly see in the water. The myths that were created or shared by the villagers enabled them to feel as though they controlled the uncontrollable, the capriciousness of illness, sickness or even death. This could be seen in Kleinman's example of the woman with a tumour who claimed to be healed after visiting a *tang-ki*, only to die some time later from the cancerous growth in her brain. She may have been healed, but she was not cured. I would like to apply this principle to the village. It is possible that

I could not see the internal physical impact of the villagers reverting to drinking polluted water. Possibly the clinical manifestations would be seen in years to come, or might result in the poorer nutritional status and overall lack of well-being of the villagers, possibly even in a shorter life span.

In applying medical anthropology it is important to take on board people's belief systems and not to negate or belittle them. This would be difficult to understand for those operating rigidly within the discourses of western biomedicine. As Csordas points out, there are crucial differences between secular healing with its Cartesian body/mind dualism and religious healing with its tripartite division of mind-body-spirit (1988). Engel (1977) similarly identifies the medical approach as perpetuating this mind/body dualism, a way of thinking that focuses on identifying physical abnormalities whilst ignoring the patient and his/her attributes as a human being. Fabrega and Silver (1973) concur, stressing that the medical perspective assumes that diseases are universal in form, progress and content. This perspective does not include the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of ill health and the context in which it appears, which determine the meaning of the disease for the individual patients and those around them. Because biomedicine focuses more on the physical dimensions of illness, factors such as the personality, religious beliefs, culture and socio-economic status of the patient are often considered largely irrelevant.

One could take this critique a step farther to include a Foucauldian reading of the western biomedical model that is imposed on the villagers through the intervention of development, even with simple technologies such as hand pumps, linked to the discourses of education, hygiene and sanitation that accompany the products. In fact the biomedical model as seen by scholars such as Foucault operates to the detriment of the people caught in its disciplining and regulating gaze. When the villagers drank from the spring they had no worries about the impact on their health – it was daily practice, unchallenged and 'normal' procedure. As development experts came into the village the water that they consumed daily became a 'danger', a 'risk' to be managed, regulated by rules of behaviour alien to the people's words, thoughts, beliefs. The discourses of good health become part of a larger world tied to the clinic, the doctor, and the health care profession, 'modern medicine'.

Foucault conceives of discourses such as medicine as practices that form the objects of which they speak. Therefore discourse creates its objects – the people of Tsahlo are objects in a new world to which they may not feel they belong. The discourses of the clinic or the health worker are not just linguistic systems or stand alone texts; the scientific discourse of biomedicine is translated into praxis that exists in the village, town and city as its institutional, philosophical and scientific manifestations. Foucault (1977) suggests that we should not look for utopian theories but simply ask how power operates in our society.

In this context in the village the medical gaze translates to a form of power over and within the body: Power relations have a significant impact upon the body. This not only works in relation to discourses of water and sanitation, health and hygiene but also vaccinations, injections, and the taking of medicines for other conditions such as malaria.

Rather than see the worlds of biomedicine and the villagers' belief system as bounded and separate entities, it is important to remember that the healing systems used by some of the people were more fluid and interconnecting. Mezgabi and the TPLF cadres, the *tabia baito*, the DAs and CHAs all upheld the biomedical model. So too did Walalla and Mulu and the many women who had agreed to vaccinate their children. The villagers used a plurality of methods both to heal and cure, and also as a prophylactic. People relied on and shared the practices of the three interconnecting sectors of health care available to them: popular, folk and professional. So it is important to look again at why women and men may have rejected or resisted certain aspects of knowledge or practices shared with them by the health cadres or clinics and schools.

Gender identities might have played a part in this. As Abu-Lughod (1998) and Najmabadi (1998) assert, women's roles and responsibilities were being redefined and reordered, without their consent, into a scientific other that they had no power to challenge or negotiate. They were not consulted, just given rules to follow. Perhaps they did not view their gender identities as open for change as part of a wider process of nation building driven by the westernising modernisation process, a process called 'westoxication' by Jalal Al-Ahmad²⁵ (I shall link this to the work of

²⁵ Westoxication is used by the radical thinker in Middle Eastern studies Ali Sherati to describe 'a certain class of women who epitomized the loss of culture ... idle, made-up, consumerist westernized painted dolls' (in Abu-Lughod 1998: 14)

Abrahamsen (2000) and Mitchell (1995) in the following chapter). Women's social identities were being reconfigured. The project of 'remaking women' (Abu-Lughod 1998, Najmabadi 1998) might have been what was really being resisted by the women in relation to the scientizing discourses being introduced into the domestic domain, the realm in which the women felt they had the most power (see Chapter 3).

I suggest that the women needed to be consulted more about the changes that appeared to be impacting most in the domestic domain. If people cannot perceive the benefits to their lives, why should they just acquiesce to rules and regulations that have no direct bearing on their health or well-being as they experience it? Washing their hands and changing their water-handling practices did not translate to more food being put on the table or hungry children being fed. Women had too much work and too little time to perform their daily chores, let alone undertaking more work either by walking further from their homes to hand pumps or sitting in meetings and learning about health and sanitation. Consulting women first could be the key rather than imposing guidelines that make no sense to them.

Perspective of the Medical Professionals

Dr Tederos argued that sanitation was poor in Tigray because water and sanitation came under two different bureaus and also because of limited human resources, particularly sanitarians in the zones. The answer, he felt, lay in integrated health packages and formal education. Dr Barakat agreed that biomedical knowledge was the key, yet the health workers argued that people had knowledge but were still resistant to changing poor hygienic practices. Dr Mengistae stated: 'We need to educate people while they are in institutions and when they are sick in clinics and hospitals.' I argued that waiting until people were hospitalised appeared a rather post hoc solution, and suggested that the Bureau of Health give the villagers who requested it truthful, clear scientific facts. Dr Mengistae replied:

The villagers will never perceive there is a micro-organism in the water because they cannot see it. It is based on gross assessment. It is a stupid communication problem. How can a woman from the rural area understand that? They can't see it, for example it looks clean but it's not clean. If the health worker tells her that, she will never comprehend it.

The patronising attitude that the medical practitioners held prevented a clear and accurate transfer of knowledge to the people. The presupposition was that the villagers did not have the intellectual capacity or ability for conscious reasoning and understanding. I argue that if the villagers could discern complex political notions such as issues of territorial sovereignty and national integrity, based on Marxist/Leninist doctrine, then they surely could understand both the word bacteria and the organism itself. If the people were included in the theory it might bring about the desired behavioural change the Bureau seeks. Alternatively, if it was not explained to the villagers with clarity, they were likely not to understand the need for change, or the impact of not changing. For the villagers who were interested in learning about the biomedical model this could be fruitful, to understand the process of infection and the impact on food consumed, the links to malnutrition, ill health and loss of productivity. There was a caveat, however: there must be a choice. Some of the villagers had embraced the model and were using the services offered. I think the crux lies herein: it must be that people desire knowledge and change and not have it imposed from above but shared. The power to act and the decisions must be theirs.

Conclusion

My study clearly demonstrated that in response to questions on health and illness the men and women of all ages used the same explanatory model, a complex dual cosmological/psychological paradigm. A clear example of the incongruity in consciousness between people and professionals demonstrated by the interpretation made by medics when the villagers claimed that unprotected spring water tasted good. The Health Bureau suggested that this was an indicator of the poor awareness and perception of women on the quality of water. I argue on the contrary: the villagers had no choice but to use the water, and therefore adopted the psychological survival strategy of 'clean mind, clean heart', arguing that if your mind is pure and you do not worry about the water, you will not be sick. In their minds this rendered the water safe to drink.

This resonates with Kleinman's (1980) explanatory model, a cultural reading of illness and well-being. Kleinman argues that anthropologists engaged in the medical field need to look at the processes by which illness is patterned, interpreted and treated. The important thing is to situate personal and social meaning in the experience of sickness or the symbols deployed in narratives of health and healing. Questions asked may include: what has happened, why has it happened,

why now, what should I do about it? This would go some way to explaining the experience I had in the village, namely why the villagers did not seem to be experiencing sickness as defined by their own model or folk approach. For, as Kleinman suggests: ‘folk illnesses are more than specific clusterings of symptoms and physical signs. They also have a range of symbolic meanings – moral, social, psychological: In some cases they link the suffering of the individual to changes in the natural environment, or to the working of supernatural forces’ (1980: 18).

For the Tigrean people, health was an issue of faith. The context was the all-encompassing belief in the power of divine protection, underpinned by the knowledge that illness, curing and healing were in the hands of the creator. That is, healing that did not rely on any physical or pharmacological treatment for its efficacy but rather on language and the manipulation of powerful cultural symbols. Possibly the villagers were experiencing some form of physiological response to the contaminated water but did not conceive of their symptoms as falling into the category of illness/sickness/dis-ease and thereby not manifesting ill health.

It is important not to disregard the villagers’ beliefs but to analyse this as part of a symbolic system underpinning the lived daily experience of the village, not only in explaining misfortune, sickness and death but also as a way of feeling safe in a very insecure and fragile environment literally out of the people’s control. To understand the cultures in which we work, it is necessary to perceive the semantic networks that link the physiological, psychological, social and cultural levels (Kleinman 1980). It was important in Tigray to contextualise this experience. The current war with Eritrea, the fragility of the economy devastated by the shocks of drought, famine and displacement, all meant that people turned to religion to explain their circumstance and try to draw on a form of higher power in their daily lives.

The women did not accept the new forms of hygiene behaviour they were being encouraged to adopt. They would not walk further to a safe source or boil the water if they used the springs. They could not see the benefits of either action, financially or physically. I suggest that the women need to be engaged in processes of change at the village level, directing it themselves if that is what they want. Development rhetoric now focuses on analysis at the household level

(Kabeer 1994, Moser 1993). To bring the solution to the household level would, I argue, be beneficial, speaking directly to the people, and finding out what they want.

It is difficult to discount the realities of the relief that the biomedical model could offer to people experiencing potentially fatal diseases such as malaria or TB. In this instance I uphold Dr Witten's analysis that economic development is needed to precipitate real social change. Money was a factor in villagers seeking alternative health care remedies rather than biomedical ones. People used traditional alternatives rather than going to the clinics for a number of reasons, poverty being one of them. The paradox is, as Dr Barakat states: 'Human beings' most basic need is water, yet the cost of hospital treatment for those infected by waterborne diseases, could be as high as 200 to 300 *birr* a week.'

Overall, an economic and political analysis to this problem is vital. Mulu claimed that the people give priority first to food over all other considerations, e.g. water and health. Birhan, the home agent, backed up the health *fana's* claim by adding: 'The main problem is lack of food. People do not keep clean or practise sanitation because they say we are starving. The main thing is eating, not drinking.' This is one of those misconceptions the villagers need to have clarified. According to REST, the figures for stunting and wasting among children in Tigray were as high as 60%, meaning that arrested development was the norm. Women were under-developed physically at the ages of 14 or 15. These were signs of malnutrition that then impacted on levels of maternal mortality, which were high, and chances of recovery from infections contracted in labour were low.

At this point I must acknowledge the complexity of being a western researcher in another culture. I am undoubtedly influenced by my upbringing, which recognises the efficacy of the biomedical model. The health outcomes of people in England, my homeland, have been transformed since water and sanitation systems have been established. Thus in my thesis my desire for the people of Tigray to have access to better health, clean water and sanitation facilities is apparent. However, I also appear to support local knowledge and ideas over the biomedical model if people choose to resist the WSS interventions in subtle ways. I also seem disapproving of people's lack of care of water services. On the one hand I argue that the biomedical model is badly transmitted while, on the other, that it conflicts with local knowledge and

ideas. The key for me is about choice. I do acknowledge my ambivalence but argue that top down, inappropriate methods used in the Tigrean context for knowledge transmission leave villagers with little choice. This is also why I appear to be in equal part disapproving of the people's lack of care for the new water sources yet also supportive of the resistance the villagers demonstrate when not protecting them.

In some ways it also could be read that I am postulating a bio-psychosocial model, integrating aspects of the biomedical model with the people's belief systems and placed in their geo-political context. However, I place this within a global reading of power and discourses and practices of medicalisation and development or modernisation.

It is with this in mind that I also offer an alternative reading of the rejection or resistance of the villagers in Tsehlo to the interventions imposed by the modernisation process. It is possible to view the rejection of discourses relating to water and sanitation and the concomitant rejection of water-handling practices using the work of Abu Lughod (1998) and Najmabadi (1998). They describe the processes of remaking women in the Middle East as linked to the process of power relations and nation building in a global capitalist context. This form of westernisation includes the institutions of education and health in the scientizing of the domestic domain (Newton 1994). In this remodelling of women and children, gender identities are transformed as women become mothers of a future generation of citizens. To be a wife and mother in a new world is to be a very different kind of subject, controlled and disciplined in ways alien to one's particular local experience. How were these projects conceived and promoted in all their complexity and contradictions in the Tigrean context without the women who are being transformed being part of the picture, and what are the unintended consequences of such interventions? These discourses of development may not be purely liberatory.

Following Abu-Lughod (1998) I would suggest that women in Tigray should also be studied in a wider context through the differing political projects of the nation state. I shall explore this idea more in the next chapter, linking the ideas of Abu-Lughod to the work of Abrahamsen (2000), Crewe and Harrison (1998), and Mitchell (1995).



Figure 4.1 Mezgabi Chairman of the baito
Figure 4.2 Tafera Gatekeeper of Mai Rigo





Figure 4.3 Girl filling small bottle wastes water

Figure4.4 Boy washes hair and hands in hand pump enclosure





Figure 4.5 Typical homestead in Tsa'ho

Figure 4.6 Mulu using ox dung to make a stove lid





Figure 4.7 Youth Association

Figure 4.8 Girls carry heavy water pots



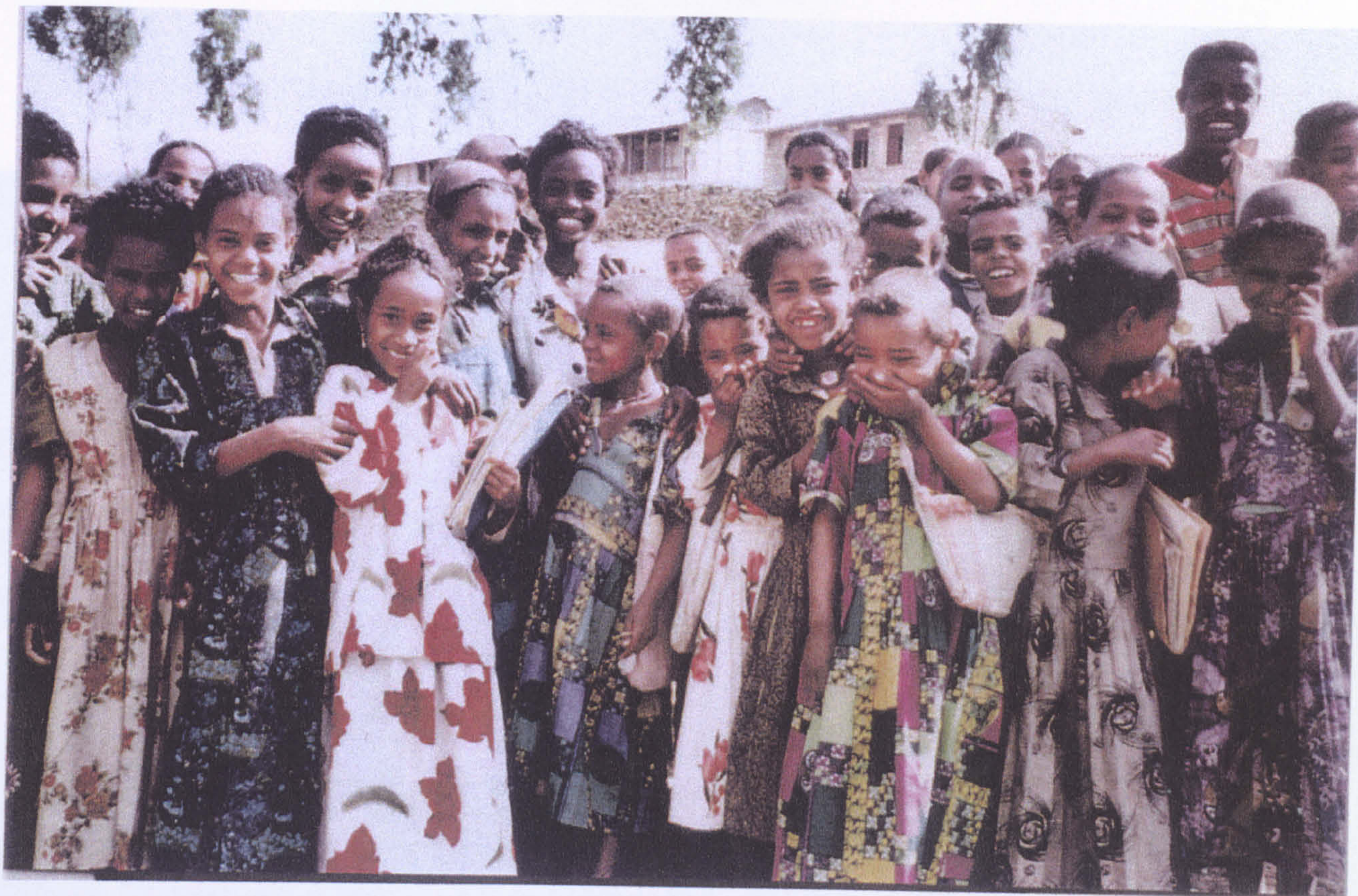


Figure 4.9 Tsa'ho Women's Association

Figure 4.10 sick ox drinks from a spring



Figure 4.11 Children's focus group





DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chapter Five

Walalla, gatekeeper of Mai Eif hand pump Tsahlo, women's association member, TPLF co-ordinator

Kunam, REST hydrologist, Walalla's brother

Mezgabi, chairperson Gemad *tabia baito*

Birhane, vice chair Gemad *tabia baito*

Mulu, Tsahlo water committee member, cashier and health *fana*

Birhan, Tsahlo water committee member – against her will

Zekiros, Tsahlo water committee member

Abade, Tsahlo water committee member

Gebrexavier, chairman of the Tsahlo water committee

Mahret, Tsahlo water committee member, women's association representative

Gebrehevit, secretary of Tsahlo water committee – now a soldier in combat against Eritrea

Habte Kiros, Walalla's son

Gebriski, farmer, TPLF member

Hadaas, local young woman, lives close to the Tsahlo hand pump

LemLem, teacher Gosemite school, female

Aberra, head of economic development Wukro *wereda* administration

Tadbeb, Haile Selassie's wife

Tsegir, poor woman head of household

Abreha, local woman farmer

Abeba, head of water bureau in Mekelle

Getachew, head of REST rural water supply department (RUWAS)

Wosen, REST water technician

Tafera, gatekeeper of the Mai Rigo hand pump Tsahlo

Gedion, my interpreter

Medhin, local woman farmer married to Gebriski

Kinfe, water bureau technician

Haloof, guard at Tsadenale handpump

Tabotu, member of Tsadenale water committee

These are the principle characters mentioned by name in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: WATER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AT THE VILLAGE LEVEL

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the operation of water projects at the village level, to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of interventions that are already in place. It will become clear that the water–gender–power nexus forms the link between relational and productive power that enables both quiescence and resistance to imposed development interventions. I shall describe how local women and men make choices whether to resist or to participate, to quiesce or acquiesce (Gaventa 1980) in what I term a ‘power play’. This analysis looks at the micro politics of power reflecting the macro politics of development with regard to water policies conceptualised in the West and imposed at the village level in Tigray. In a study about water, gender and power, a number of key questions need to be addressed. Wijk (1998) suggests that these are as follows: Who is given access to information – men, women or both? How are contributions in labour, time and payments divided between men and women? Who gets the project or programme resources, such as jobs and training?

I shall take Wijk’s concerns a step further by asking: How does an analysis of power and social relations throw light on the distribution of these strategic resources? Is the division of these resources among women and men different with regards to wealth, age, religious or ethnic divisions, or kinship relations? Do some people benefit more than others because of political alliances? In order to answer these questions I shall place this exploration of social relations at the local level into a wider context. I will use the work of Gaventa (1980) on quiescence and rebellion in the Appalachian region of Kentucky and the work of Mosse (2005: 159), highlighting the way that development projects work as ‘systems of representations’. I shall also continue to draw on Abu-Lughod (1998) to argue that power relations at the local level are complex and are influenced and constrained by the global discourses of development. I will question the rejection of water development policy in terms of the reluctance or resistance of the villagers to comply with the direction of NGO policy. This is translated at the local level as rulemaking or, as Foucault (1977) might argue, disciplining. I shall link this to the work of Mitchell (1995) and Abrahamsen (2000) regarding discourses of good governance, and the remaking of modern citizens (Abu-Lughod 1998). It

is clear that the residents of Tsahlo are the ‘objects of development’ (Grillo and Stirrat 1997) regarding the modernising interventions of local NGOs such as REST and also, by implication, the donors. In the development context, Crewe and Harrison assert that ‘Power influences action in subtle and complex ways and sets limits on what people can do’ (1998: 4). I shall now apply the questions raised above to the water development projects already established in Tsahlo to demonstrate differential empowerment in the village, the impact of patron–client relations on the water development process and the subsequent failure of participatory philosophy in practice.

Participation and Empowerment

Discourses of ‘participation’ and an emphasis on ‘community development’ are not new. In 1949, The Rt. Hon. A. Creech, the [then] Secretary of State for the British Colonies, stated that mass education was needed as

a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active *participation* of and, if possible, on the initiative of the *community*. But if this is not forthcoming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure active and enthusiastic response to the movement (Mayo 2002), emphasis mine).

It is interesting to note that a strong participatory ethos informs all REST mission statements, which reflects the international development policy outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The ‘REST White Paper on Water Supply and Sanitation Policy’ reads:

Development should be people led. Intended beneficiaries should play an active role in planning, implementation and management of water supply and sanitation schemes. Both remunerative and non-remunerative resources should be provided from communities for the development and management of water supply programmes. Local community structures will assume responsibility of governance of their own assets, with the assistance of government (2000).

What did the term ‘participation’ mean in Tigray? Through my study in Tsahlo, I wanted to find out if there was a gap between the rhetoric and reality of development as observed at the grassroots. The World Bank (1995) has highlighted the importance of people’s contribution to the development process as central to the success of such projects. This includes the

‘participation’ of rural villagers from the design process through to the implementation of the hardware, e.g. hand pumps or springs¹, and beyond to the maintenance of the water points. This is reflected in the Dublin Principles and has influenced water development initiatives globally and locally,² as is evidenced in REST’s policy document.

In Tshalo village, regardless of the comprehensive nature of the policy, the people said they had only participated in the labour-intensive stages of water project programming, digging the holes for the wells and building the outer walls that protect the sites. However, Walalla, the guard of the water point at Mai Eif, claimed that when the hand pump was installed there was a total lack of co-operation from the community. This narrative seemed extraordinary as it ran in total contradistinction to all the other villagers’ voices. Why had the guard made this assertion? Was this an attempt to establish herself as part of the local elite, more ‘modern’ and therefore willing to participate? Justifying her superior knowledge over the people’s lack of it, Walalla declared: ‘The villagers have no “know how” of clean water.’

Crewe and Harrison claim that ‘elite women in sub Saharan Africa construct alliances to gain material and symbolic resources’ (1998: 165). The authors assert that women use groups as part of personal strategies to obtain access to power and prestige. Was this the reason Walalla had not only participated in the construction process but had also taken the post of guard (giving her an automatic seat on the Water Committee)?

There were many competing and contradictory discourses regarding the water development process at the village level. The local political associations were mobilised to enhance the active participation of the villagers. Atseda, the chairwoman of the women’s association (WA), confirmed that people did participate. Why had Walalla claimed that no one participated? This raised several questions: who participates, and why? What are their motivations: political passion, coercion, need or self-interest?

¹ Local materials, rock or sand, ideally are also provided by the community.

² The four key points of the Dublin Principles (1992) are outlined in the Introduction to this thesis on pages 16 and 17. These principles have formed the basis for what also is currently referred to as the International Water Policy Consensus (Cleaver 2003).

Walalla informed me that REST had made two attempts to sink the Mai Eif well. The first time the people dug down 8m but did not find water. REST then brought in the drilling rig. I was surprised that on the first attempt the team had only gone to such a shallow point to stop digging as some attempts reach 20m before they strike water.

In Tsahlo, complex political and kinship networks came into play in the development process. Classic issues of patron–clientism were clearly observable. Kunam is the hydrologist at REST, responsible for making major decisions such as calling in the rig team when needed. Kunam is Walalla's brother. Other villagers claimed that she had tired of digging and had asked her brother to suspend the intensive labour and call on the expensive, labour-saving technology instead. The rig had been ordered and the well was situated right outside Walalla's house in spite of the fact that many villagers had voiced their disapproval at the selection of this site, and accused Walalla of using her kinship ties to secure access to an important secure water source.

Crewe and Harrison (1998) highlight the problematic of government and aid organisations changing local systems and thus impacting on local social relations. They also demonstrate how the office holders in one development grouping are usually the same in others. This is the most effective means of using or gaining access to restricted resources. They underscore the importance of locating studies in a historical, social and political context, as Mosse also demonstrates in his study of aid policy and practice in India. Mosse highlights the importance of identity and kinship placed in the context of 'a history of relationships with dominant groups in society,' (2005: 54) such groups often holding prime lands. This is significant and mirrors my observations in Tigray. Walalla and her family still owned fertile land on the site of the spring. She was directly descended from the large landlord who had dominated this area for decades. Although she no longer had the 100 head of livestock that her father had possessed, the villagers still respected her family name and remembered its former wealth and authority.

Kinship certainly did translate into status and power in Tsahlo, so much so that the first water development project was placed on her doorstep, even though this was not the most water

scarce part of the *tabia*. This demonstrates the importance of history and political context in acquiring the socio-economic benefits of development. Walalla had gained access not only to a cash wage as gatekeeper of the hand pump but also to water resources for her self and her family to irrigate their garden and benefit from the vegetables grown there. Mosse refers to this as ‘the inevitable but profound internal contradiction between participation and patronage’ (2005: 162), demonstrating that ‘Locally... participation is translated into patronage’ (p. 232). He shows that participation is a ‘mobilising metaphor’ (p. 230) which forms part of a system of representations that sustains the project of development. ‘Policy models have to be translated into the different logic of the intentions, goals and ambitions of the many people and institutions’ brought together in this process (p. 232). Moreover, he states that there is an assumption that collective action exists, which masks any conflict over resources or competing divergent interests at the local level. Such representations are a fudge of the real picture, and Mosse is correct when he asserts that access to resources is contested and is not a simple process of community participation or shared decision-making.

According to global policy principles, participation is not only significant in terms of labour power but also in terms of decision-making. The post-intervention stage is even more important in the successful longevity of water projects through village level operation and maintenance (VLOM). The regional water policy highlights people’s participation in all stages of the development process. I wondered how much the people knew about the policies that shaped their experience of water development at the village level.

As I have already discussed in Chapter 2, it is argued that participation is inextricably linked to empowerment (Chambers 1996, World Bank 1990). Once again, this is the theory – but do village men and women actually experience such changes? I approached Wallala and asked her if there were any water development policies or plans operational in Tsahlo. Walalla did not know and pointed me to REST as the people with such knowledge. I soon discovered that the questions I was asking about policy were not part of the knowledge economies of the people. However, this seemed to me to contradict REST’s rhetoric of participation. The people should know about policies and plans if the claims made by REST and the regional

government were to be believed. According to the region's Head of Planning, Haile, 'The people inform and shape policy'.

If the bottom-up approach is truly implemented, the process is in theory directed by the people in response to their needs (DFID 1998). Walalla should therefore be aware of any new development plans. Her link with the women's association and her regional political position suggested that she would be a key individual in the process. If Walalla did not know, what hope was there for the other less informed villagers?

Even though Walalla had a high profile and was a recognised personality, she was still marginalised in terms of access to knowledge. This disparity was a result of a gendered knowledge economy. Did Walalla, hailed as the voice of the people, not have access to certain information when less influential men did? Another possible explanation for this could be her lack of interest. Already having a hand pump next to her house, perhaps she chose to exercise her power at a higher level.

The *baito* officials claimed to be aware of the importance of gender sensitivity to the success of water projects. Mezgabi, the chairperson (see Figure 5.1), stated that women got to know about new developments through the women's association, the mechanism by which women were integrated into the decision-making process. The evidence I found at the village level suggested that women were kept in the dark about new projects (see Chapter 6). How could they then have contributed or had any say in decision-making? This lack of knowledge is a good indicator of powerlessness in terms of the political process and all the activities connected to social and economic development. Birhane, the vice-chair of the *baito* and member of Deriba Water Committee (WC), stated: 'There are no written documents about water policy, but at different meetings the people get lessons about water and sanitation'. If water was such a scarce and valuable resource, why did the people have such little access to information? Even Mulu, the health cadre, had no knowledge of water policies or even REST's community level agreement.

Village Level Operation and Maintenance of Water Supplies

Tigray's water sector policy³ is focused on the new government principle of decentralisation. This prescribes that water resources are to be managed by the people at the local level. The Water Bureau is not involved in the daily running of water points, which are in the hands of the villagers, administered by the water committees (WC). Local government officials state that the WC is required to 'look after the hand pump and to ensure the water source is sustainable'. The WC is under the jurisdiction of the local *tabia baito*. REST had established several of the water points in Tsehlo and provides a two-day training programme to teach the WC their various roles. In theory this ensures the smooth running of the project. The NGO is involved in the formation of the WC and provides a written partnership document, known as the community level agreement (CLA). This is signed by the villagers, the *baito*, the Water Bureau and the NGO (REST). It is a model that reflects global policy proscriptions of the Dublin and Rio Principles, yet is alien to villagers' daily practice. The CLA may be seen to be part of the technologies of power imposed on the people by higher authorities in regional and national governments and handed down to the people via REST, the implementing NGO. Crewe and Harrison state that many organisations involved in development have in common a strict bureaucratic structure: it must be 'properly constituted with elected office-holders and a committee' (1998: 35). The authors argue that this 'bureaucratisation of village life' is influenced from the outside by aid agencies.

Cleaver also critiques the adoption of committees as alien impositions rendering traditional resource management systems redundant, replacing 'indigenous' knowledge with the discourses of the International Water Policy Consensus (2003). This is based on the four key points of the Dublin statement; the need for improved water governance, capacity building, financing mechanisms including cost recovery, participation and the need for integrated water resource management. These principles are linked to the discourses of good governance and democracy at the local level. Although they seem to privilege grassroots politics, Cleaver (2003) suggests they mask a hidden agenda of global power. As Abrahamsen argues: 'Good governance, democracy and empowerment are all terms that allow for the continuation of

³ Pers. comm., Abeba, Head of the region's Water Bureau.

oligarchy under a different name' (2000: 144). The people in Tsahlo were given instructions on how to behave that were ultimately designed in North America and Europe, handed down via the Ethiopian national and regional government and imposed on the WC in the form of the CLA.

Community Level Agreement (CLA) and the Water Committee (WC)

The CLA is a contract that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the WC in accordance with the government policy, Proclamation Number 19. All WCs are composed of seven members who are elected by the people. (The definition of 'election' is open to interpretation and will be discussed further in this chapter.) They serve for two years.⁴ The WC is made up of men and women who represent various sectors of the community organised by membership of a mass association: one representative each from the farmers' and youth associations,⁵ two from the women's association, a *tabia baito* member, a health *fana*, and the guard.

I interviewed the Mai Eif WC members. Gebrexavier held the chair, and he was elected to represent the *tabia baito*. According to the REST document the post holder must be literate. In my village this clause excluded most of the women. The chair is responsible for co-ordinating the members and evaluating the committee. If anyone does not perform their duties adequately, it is up to the chair to take appropriate 'disciplinary' action.

The participation of members is contingent upon the chair directing them, sharing plans and ensuring the WC follow up the VLDM. If the hand pump becomes inoperable and it is not possible for the people to maintain it, the chair is responsible to report the fault to the Water Bureau and has overall responsibility to protect the hand pump. Gender-specific language used in the document assumes that the chair will be a man.⁶

⁴ Biannually there is a need for the training of incumbent members. This is not possible due to financial constraints.

⁵ As there are no women members in the farmers association, suffice it to say this is a male position.

⁶ There were in fact very few women chairs in Tigray (pers. comm., Comm. Kudus, head of WAT).

In Tsahlo the members of the WC, including the chairperson, appeared to be not fulfilling their roles. Why? Was it a manifestation of people resisting policies prescribed by the development/modernisation agenda (such as the Dublin Principles and the Water Consensus) which shape the local water development process? These are clearly reflected in the REST community level agreement kept at the village level. Was the document ever challenged by the people or was it uncritically adopted and accepted? Did the politics of poverty determine the actions and constraints of the players? Wasn't REST telling people how to think, shaping their consciousness to alter their behaviour? As I demonstrated in the last chapter, the villagers resisted the biomedical world ordering knowledge of health *fanas* and did not participate fully. The villagers could be said to strategically choose to engage in contests and roles that they perceive benefit them. Is this the reason that the water committee appeared to be inactive, however, people were still signed up in name?

Possibly the answer is that those in control at the local level do reap benefits. This is demonstrated in Tsahlo by the acceptance of villagers to positions on the water committee even though it theoretically meant more work for them. For example Gebrexavier, through his role as chair of the WC, had overall control of the finances and other properties. Tools could be borrowed and there was access to cash and scope for patronage relationships. Yet Gebrexavier was chair of the WC in Tsahlo in name only, and seemed completely unaware that two new members, Abade and Zekiros, had recently joined the group.

Abade had been given the role of controller: his task was to monitor the water point and manage the tariff and spare parts. He was responsible for ensuring that the guard was present. In Tsahlo this task was not performed and the guard was never present at the water point. Abade was also jointly responsible for the health and safety of the water point.

Zekiros was elected as the militia or security man and had only been a serving member of the WC for two months, having recently returned from a nine-month spell at the frontline during the war with Eritrea. He was responsible for reporting any problems to the *baito*. If the pump broke, he had to stop people from using it until the Water Bureau came to repair it. He was

also responsible for informing the beneficiaries of the rules and ensuring all receipts and bills were signed for.

The dual roles of controller and security person seemed almost militaristic. Within the WC it could be argued that the regulations and subsequent punishments for breaches of rules are manifestations of the discourses of surveillance, discipline and related technologies and practices of power that Foucault (1977) describes. It is important to link this idea with the work of Abu Lughod (1998). She refers to the global modernisation or westernisation process as the 'Dark underside of the modern state with its institutions, schools, hospitals, where the everyday practices of normalisation and disciplining that now have through society developed a way in which family, women, children become sites for intervention' (1998: 7). As I discussed in Chapter Four, the REST water projects were sites for the production of discourses about the self, and the identity of women as good wives and mothers with their new role as purveyors of hygiene and cleanliness (Newton 1994). This idea will be carried through by examining the cashier and health cadre.

For the post of cashier the people to contribute to the guard. The cashier also controlled the queue to cross-check that the health cadre's role was signed to the guard. The cashier was responsible for health and safety. She was also responsible for the overall health and safety of the beneficiaries biomedical safe system of checks and balances. Finally, she had to teach the handling practices to the villagers about 'good practice' for water and sanitation.

Why not for the role: responsibility
 should imp? would adv. team.
 WATER CTIEG. INACTIVE
 - pen. adv. (prevalence of
 who points of discourse of self
 (TVM...
 BUT OK)
 • hand check self in box) term 2
 • car through) expl. jels 11/12
 • vent to + blowed drum =
not for "just public"

Since Mulu did not carry out her duties, could she be resisting this biomedical discourse of good practice? Possibly the WC members were also suspicious about the way modernity is so easily equated with progress, emancipation and empowerment (Abu-Lughod 1998). Maybe Mulu could see the ambiguities and contradictions of the programme intended to make

Tigrean women 'modern'. The new education and training touted rational scientific forms of conduct. Possibly Mulu had experienced herself the hidden costs and unanticipated constraints of the process. Or, alternatively, did Mulu accept and enjoy having this new knowledge and power? We must not forget women from the southern hemisphere are not just passive victims but active agents in daily life (Mohanty 1997, Sen and Grown 1988).

The WC in Tsahlo appeared collectively to be completely unaware of their responsibilities. Was it simply an act of omission? Was the problem one of illiteracy or one of time span? Had the WC forgotten their duties? I needed to consider the relational dynamics of the water–gender–power nexus. What were the social interactions underlying this conundrum? Did this lack of participation display a contestation of power at the local level? Or, was this a form of resistance (Scott 1985)? Certainly I witnessed many of the experiences Scott described – ‘footdragging, desertion, false compliance, feigned ignorance and sabotage’ (1985: xvi). As Gaventa maintains, not participating may be an act of rebellion:

In situations of inequality, the political response of the deprived may be seen as a function of power relationships. Power works to develop and maintain the quiescence of the powerless. Rebellion, as a corollary, may emerge as power relationships are altered. Together patterns of power and powerlessness can keep issues from arising, grievances from being voiced and interests from being recognised (1980: 13).

Possibly not voicing resistance to the imposition of committees and posts, formal agreements, rules and regulations was an act of rebellion also.

Scholars engaged in deconstructing the discourses of development argue that ‘the portrayal of partnership as a process of co-operation between equals is inherently problematic’ (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 71), because of the differentials in power between the givers and receivers. Tigray has a history of aid dependency. The region has experienced two decades of dependency on foreign donors in the form of relief and development monies. People therefore know there is a price attached to speaking truthfully about the reality of ‘mobilising metaphors’ (Mosse 2005: 230) such as participation and its accompanying buzzword,

⁷ These points have been discussed in the previous chapter on health.

‘empowerment’ (Gardner and Lewis 1996). Crewe and Harrison suggest that in Sri Lanka aid has culminated in the following representations made by local people:

They may have expressed the view to present themselves as co-operative, often an explicit criterion for involvement in development projects. As they are no doubt well aware of the long history of aid in the region. In this way they can avert exclusion from future aid, knowing that when project staff have left the village, they can use selectively or ignore their advice without incurring their wrath. But new ideas can also become part of their own system of ideas/values and may give them status at the local level (1998: 160).

Some villagers may accept all or part of the discourses presented and use them to represent themselves to outsiders and to villagers as more knowing and thus more powerful, as Walalla had done regarding her many roles in development interventions.

Mulu was one of four women on the Tsahlo WC. Mahret was the WA representative along with Birhan, an older woman who lived close to the water point. I called a meeting of the WC to interview all the post holders. Birhan sat in the room and did not utter one word. When I asked her what her role was, she claimed to know nothing about the committee and emphatically stated, ‘I have not been elected by anybody.’ Walalla, who had invited Birhan to the meeting, put her head in her hands in embarrassment. Walalla spoke to divert my attention from Birhan and claimed that boys had broken the lock and animals now entered into the well enclosure. The WC reported it to *tabia baito* but no action was taken against the youth concerned. I believe the people did nothing because it suited the villagers to have 24 hour access to the water source. This interview took place on 30 March, and nine months later there was no change to the poor condition of the water point. In fact by that time the pump had broken completely.

Many villagers commented that Habte Kiros, Walalla’s 12-year-old son, used to look after the water point but had left the site unsupervised once he started school. Walalla did not resign her post because of the benefits she gained from the role: status, power, prestige and material gains in the form of produce such as fruit and vegetables grown from the easily accessible water source. It also placed this single parent in a more powerful position with regard to

patron-client relationships and the complex web of obligations and reciprocity which characterise many small farming communities like Tsaḥlo.

Walalla was responsible for overseeing the maintenance of the water point, keeping the spare parts and mobilising the WC and beneficiaries. When I first arrived in the village I had asked Walalla to set up a meeting with the WC; two weeks later it was still not done. Although she told me that she had contacted them, the members denied it. Who was telling the truth and who was not,⁸ and why? Did my links with REST make a difference to the things the villagers told me? It is also possible that the people may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear, fearing that I might raise questions with local government representatives, which could result in reprisals.

Or was this an aspect of the power play on Walalla's part, prioritising her political and kinship commitments over the unwanted extra work this interloper/anthropologist in the village brought? There was no doubt about the power of Walalla's kinship group as all three women – Mulu, Birhan and Walalla – were from the same family. Even Mahret, the WA representative, had a filial tie with her husband who was a nephew of Haile Selassie, Walalla's brother-in-law.

Election of Water Committee and Training of Members

In a 'democracy' candidates are chosen as representatives and mandated by the electorate to act upon their interests. In Tsaḥlo the WC was theoretically elected to the water development process by a public meeting. The aim is to keep the water point functioning in the best interest of the village people, especially the woman, who have a vested interest as bearers of water.

The WC is deemed to be a vehicle for participation, empowerment and to foster a shared sense of ownership (REST 2000). It is marketed as being an important tool of devolution, the power being transferred from the planners, experts, and professionals into the hands of the local people (Chambers 1996, Nelson and Wright 1995). Aberra, the head of economic

development for the *wereda*, claimed that it was his responsibility to select the WC from the various mass associations previously mentioned: 'The committee is formed then presented to the people who vote for them. If people accept them they are ratified members.' The process he described was at odds with the policy documents.

If people had already been selected, then how did the villagers have a voice in the selection process? It appeared a simple rubber-stamping rather than democratic election. Aberra informed me that the selection/nomination of members is carried out by the *tabia*. In theory they represent the people, so they elect the WC members. But most of the villagers in Tsahlo did not have a clue as to who represented them on the WC. This system of selection by the political elite was ripe for favouritism at least and patronage at worst. The members of the current WC were not accountable to the villagers because the people did not know who they were.

Gebriski was one of a handful of villagers who knew the names of the WC. When I asked him how he knew he stated honestly: 'I elected them.' Gebriski is a TPLF cadre who obviously wielded and possessed a lot of decision-making power. He was also related by marriage to Haile Selassie, who in the recent past held a key position in the TPLF. Gebriski also knew that REST was the implementing NGO of the Mai Eif hand pump, something few villagers knew. There was no doubt in Tsahlo the local elite (the TPLF) dominated all the local committees. The power of the REST–TPLF–*baito* nexus controlled the process of development at the village level.

Hadaas, a young woman, was obviously not enthralled by the present system of election, she declared: 'The women on the water committee are there in name only, they do nothing.'

I visited Birhan, the woman who had denied being elected to serve on the WC. Birhan stated that she had never agreed to join. This was interesting, as Mezgabi, the chair of the *baito*, had claimed that no one ever declined. Birhan alluded to our previous meeting and confessed:

⁸ It may be better to consider such inconsistencies in terms of complex negotiations, rather than discourses of corruption, subterfuge or possibly resistance over rhetoric (Agarwal 1994, Scott 1985).

Even when I had the meeting with you I had no idea of the rules or anything. They told me just then I was a member. I do not want to be on the Water Committee. I want to look after my children and my household.

Birhan told me that Walalla ordered her to come along to the meeting. Did she attend because of familial obligation to Walalla, kinship pressures, fear, or curiosity? Did Walalla want her around so that I would report that the WC had the correct number of women, even if all three women were from one family and occupied half the membership?

It was also interesting that both Mezgabi and Birhane had claimed that Birhan was a member. Is it possible they were complicit in her election? They may have done so due to kinship obligations (Birhan is Walalla's sister-in-law). They may have seen her as compliant to create an appropriate gender balance.

Mulu (Walalla's sister) declared that Birhan was chosen because she lived close to the hand pump: 'I told her myself she was a member, she may have forgotten.' This was wonderful – how could a woman be elected without her agreement? Mulu stated that women were free to decline the invitation to join. If Birhan had told me she didn't want to be on the committee, why had she not told them? Interestingly, in accord with Mezgabi, Mulu claimed that everyone was initially very eager to be on the WC because they were promised they would have an opportunity for training in *Wukro*. However, I suggest in this instance it was clear that kinship ties won out. Birhan probably did not refuse because to do so could jeopardise future development benefits; in this instance it was better just to attend, even against her will.

Mahret had been on the WC for four years, the lifetime of the Mai Eif hand pump, but she had not received any training. Gebrehewit, the former secretary, had promised her training but had since gone to war. Mahret confirmed that she was nominated by the *tabia* and not elected by the people. Walalla had told Mahret to be on the WC and she had agreed. Walalla stated: We elect the Water Committee, members of the TPLF executive nominate people. They have no salary, they were happy to work.'

Zekiros had joined the Mai Eif WC to get access to clean water in his own area. This supported a claim made by another villager, Abreha, that those villagers who work on the *baito* or join the TPLF do so for material returns, rather than political fervour. This was an accusation he levelled against Walalla.

Mulu was not able to inform me correctly of the membership of the WC, omitting both Zekiros and Abade. I wondered if Walalla had co-opted them for my benefit or if all communication had just broken down between Mulu and the WC. Either no one told her or the WC had been inactive for a very long time. Interestingly she included Birhan, the non-member. Mulu claimed that the *baito* had to meet to discuss, nominate and appoint a new member as part of the reselection process, but this had not happened. So how were Abade and Zekiros co-opted? Mulu stated that there had not been any meetings of the WC since the Eritrean invasion two years previously.

‘Democratically’ elected people were representatives of key associations and played a mixture of key roles. Mulu, for example, was a traditional birth attendant, health cadre, and a post-holder on the WA. The village men, however, took all the important roles on the *baito*. This raised issues of gender inequality and made it untenable for the local administration to claim democratic elections. If a person in the village did not represent one of the political groups then they were excluded from the process, once more undermining the claims of participation, empowerment and equitable development.

It is interesting to note, however, that because the *tabia baito* even held sway over who were nominated, the villagers did not have a free voting choice. In this scenario, ‘power to’ – where an individual influences decision-making over others to get their own way in an open debate – did not apply. Nor did ‘power over’ (Bachrach and Baratz 1962), in which certain issues are excluded from the decision-making agenda completely and therefore do not get addressed, as the villagers were not part of the process for deciding what issues were to be included or excluded. Nor was it a case of Lukes’ (1974) third approach to power, in which he argues that certain interests may be unarticulated or unobservable because people may be unaware of their interests. In this reading, society prevents conflict between dominant and subordinate

groups by shaping wants, needs and preferences in such a way that both oppressor and oppressed accept their role in the existing order and cannot imagine an alternative to it.

I did not think that any of these explanations fit the context in Tsahlo. I needed a wider theory to explain what was going on at the village level. Why didn't people challenge the nepotism of the dominant families, the 'old landed elites' who now appeared (in many cases) to hold the new mantle of the political elite? Gaventa suggests a similar situation in the context of his study in the Appalachians: 'Local politics in the valley take on the air of a ritual battle whose well defined rules, though unwritten are widely understood. Public challenges by the non-elite are deterred by feelings of inadequacy, fear of reprisal, or simply the sense that the outcome of challenge is a foregone conclusion' (1980: 95). In the ritual battle in Tigray, the game has a historical dimension. After generations of war, revolution and famine, the costs of the challenge are much higher for the powerless who already have sustained severe economic, psychological and physical shocks. 'That which is kept out of local politics seems to be as clearly understood as that which is allowed in' (1980: 95).

Were the people in Tsahlo resigned to a system influenced by patron-client relations? Was it a situation of coercive power that mimics a much wider scenario? Is the lack of participation an act of quiescence or rebellion, resistance or acquiescence? Or possibly a kind of 'power play'. The villagers clearly understand the interrelationship of the water-gender-power nexus as it is played out, resonating with their experiences of ecological vulnerability, history, local politics and kinship. Therefore, as active agents the people may choose whether to play or whether to sit on the sidelines and watch the game. Different people benefit at different times. It is not a simple dynamic of all the beneficiaries of development being oppressed unilaterally (Escobar 1995). There were definitely some winners from this development game. I wondered if the villagers saw it my way.

I asked LemLem Saeed, teacher and TPLF activist, about the WC. She immediately supported the party line: 'The WC and the guard are appointed by the people, not the government.' This exposition of TPLF ideological rhetoric reflected the global message of participatory development, while being unrelated to the reality. None of the ordinary villagers appointed

the guard, or became the guard or members of the WC for that matter. It was the *tabia baito* representatives, all TPLF members, representing the ruling party of government, who appointed people to the WC and dominated it. They also were connected to the old elite families, vestiges of the old powerful landed classes.

I wondered if the young had a voice. Tsadkan, a woman in her late teens who fetched the family's daily water, stated: 'I did not participate in any kind of election process.' Her family lived relatively close to the hand pump, but several of the other residents who lived close to the pump were committee members. Evidently age was a barrier to participation on the water committee. All the women on the WC were related and also were members of the women's association. Mulu, Mahret and Walalla were also politically active TPLF members. This fact made me cognisant of the asymmetrical access to resources and power between women in the village, not just between women and men. Even though all the women in my village were Christian and shared the same Tigrean ethnicity, there were still inequalities between them. These could be observed as constraints in access to opportunities and resources, as Wijk (1998) suggests. Women are not a homogeneous 'vulnerable' group. Some women do have and wield more power than others (see Cleaver 2000, Cornwall et al. 1993, Gaventa and Cornwall 2001, Kabeer 1994, Li 1996, Moore 1994, Nelson and Wright 1995, Wolf 1997). In Tshalo female members of the TPLF had more power and prestige than other women and some men.

Wolf (1997) suggests that it is important to analyse power in more nuanced ways. Politically involved women in Tigray had an advantage over apolitical others with respect to knowledge, information and the benefits of development. But did this political advantage translate to real power at the local level?

Women at particular historical moments are caught up in polemics about cultural authenticity and it is important to see how diversity among women is related to contemporary state policies and nationalist projects (Kandiyoti 1990). In the Ethiopian state building effort with its five-year plan of peace, development and democracy, women and men could be construed as 'the objects of development' (Abu-Lughod 1998, Escobar 1995, Grillo and Stirrat 1997).

Drawing on the theoretical orientation of Kandiyoti's work, it is interesting to trace how representations of Tigray women have changed over time. The 'submissive Christian housewife' (Pankhurst 1992) became the revolutionary fighter at the forefront of the armed struggle (Hammond 1999) and is now considered a newly empowered participant in the development process. These shifting identities and positionalities must be seen in the context of globalisation (see Stiglitz 2002), in which the distinct history of the region is linked to particular geo-political and social moments. Although Ethiopia was never formally colonised, 'the West' now has more political sway over the future of the Republic than during the colonial period (Donham 2002) and has continued to increase its influence through control of the country's purse strings via the development encounter (Abrahamsen 2000). Were the discourses of empowerment and participation handed down from the West merely illusions of inclusion (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001: 75)? In my experience many of the men and women in Tsahlo were not included in the benefits of development.

Tadbeb was an example of such exclusion. She did not belong to the TPLF and had no idea who the members of the WC were. Tsegir, a next door neighbour, was also in the dark. Alefu was in a similar state of ignorance, even though she participated in the construction of her hand pump. The 'empowerment' that the literature hailed had not occurred because almost all the village women lacked essential information and could not take part in critical decision-making. Although many of the village men did not have information regarding the water points either, on the whole they were better informed than the women. In Tsahlo non-politically active villagers were merely used as labourers. The TPLF membership held positions of knowledge or authority, whilst the mass of the people were disempowered.

There was only one 'knowledgeable' individual (re water development policy) on the *baito*. Abreha had received training in Adigrat by the NGO ADCCS.⁹ The programme had been run over four days and included assembly and disassembly, the care and protection of the hand pump, and how to collect the user fees. Abreha lamented: 'The people do not protect the water point because they have had no training.' Abreha claimed to be only 50% confident that he could fix the hand pump if it were to break. If he cannot do it, I wondered who could.

Village level operation and maintenance is at the heart of the government's water sector programme. For this to be successful according to the NGO model, both the beneficiaries and the WC must be trained according to the policy.

The *baito* declared that the rules of the water point existed and were adhered to but, when asked, the villagers appeared not to know them. An alternative reading may be that men and women in the village were given access to knowledge but chose to reject it as a form of 'westernisation' (Najmabadi 1998). Or were people resistant because the water pump was beneficial only to the elite, but they could not be opposed without consequence? Amete had already described to me how Zekiros made an open challenge to members of local government and his aid package was halved.

Mezgabi, the chairperson of the *baito*, capitulated and stated that the WC had not received any training, in contradiction to his earlier claims that all the villagers had 'a good lesson' [read knowledge] in all water issues. He said that 'REST promised they will give us training step by step, but they did not.'

The REST training programme operated on two levels. The first stage was a two-day course in assembly and disassembly, occurring at the implementation stage. Following this the WC had been promised a further four days' training. The villagers in Tsahlo had received only a one-day course.

Mulu confirmed this and stated that she had been taught how to operate the hand pump. The technician had demonstrated the changing of seals, and operation of the pulleys, and the villagers were given some spare parts, nuts, bolts and seals. Mulu argued that the people had all forgotten how to do this, as the one-day course had taken place several years earlier. Mulu was disappointed because other villages had received 'proper training' supported by a video film shown in Wukro the local town. Aberra, the *wereda* head of economic development, was, in Mulu's eyes, the guilty party. Walalla confirmed Mulu's statement. Aberra had promised them training: 'He always says we will call you but he never does.'

⁹ The implementing NGO has to secure the funds for training.

I approached Aberra and asked him why the Tsahlo WC members had been left out. He denied the claims, stating that all WCs in Gemad had been trained. Later he admitted that the villagers had not been party to any of the extended training programmes. This lack of training may have added to the people's confusion regarding their roles. The villagers were not capable of performing the supposedly simple village level operation and maintenance (VLOM).

Unfortunately, due to this omission, rules regarding health, sanitation, management and financial skills had not been transferred. Mulu had received only the most basic assembly training, and no refresher training had been offered. So it was clear that in this respect the villagers were not resisting the imposition of development but had in fact been excluded from the knowledge process, further disillusioning the people from participating in the process.

Mulu did not like the technical side of VLOM, claiming that 'it is heavy'. In my study, the role of women in water projects was negligible and stereotyped. Cleaning the equipment had been the sum total of women's involvement in VLOM in Tsahlo (see Ybanez 1995).¹⁰ Although shared management is the prescribed model, there was a disparity in power and representation in women's roles in Tigray. Women provided and cooked food, supplied drinks and serviced the male technicians. They provided shelter and offered their homes for the men to sleep, eat, and relax during the implementation of the water project.

Gender perceptions and relations can have a strong influence. In Dodota, Ethiopia, VLOM tasks were seen by both men and women as purely technical and a male prerogative. When questioned, men gave a variety of reasons for the exclusion of women, from biological determinism to political and economic roles in the public and domestic realms (Poluha 1993). This too was consistent with my findings.

Sharing work between men and women does occur in other development activities, for example in food for work programmes that include infrastructure building such as road construction. Women have constituted a high proportion of the labour force for such projects

in Ethiopia (Holder et al. 1982). This provides positive indicators for the full participation of women in water development projects in Tigray if they so choose. However, as Cleaver (2000) demonstrates, the participation of women cannot be taken for granted. Age, gender, class and individual agency may all shape people's willingness and ability to participate. For example, poor young women with small children commonly find it difficult to participate publicly in development projects due to their burden of productive and reproductive activities.

In Tсахло, men in the village were better educated and therefore participated more than women. Both men and women thought that technology equated to male control and management and hand pump maintenance was men's work. Ideas about appropriate behaviour were enshrined in the adoption of strict gender roles. In order for the situation to change, villagers would have to be willing to adopt the technology and accept that it was manageable for women (see Crewe and Harrison 1998 for a similar situation).

Elsewhere building women's capacity has overcome socio-cultural and economic constraints (see Wijk 1998). Such programmes challenge the cultural beliefs that women are weaker or less technologically capable than men. African rural women are physically strong and accustomed to heavy work in agriculture. There should be no problem for them to be caretakers and maintainers of the water points. With effective training, women become familiar with tools and gender stereotypes are easily broken down (Drangert 1993). This was not, however, the case in Tсахло, where the women did not seem confident with the technical aspects of VL0M and remained stuck in the menial tasks of cleaning the rods and preparing food.

Women's narratives trapped them in subordinate and less powerful roles in the public domain. Like Mulu, many women claimed that VL0M was too heavy. On the other hand if, as feminist academicians, we profess that listening to women's voices is critical in the development process, do we have a right to interpret their words in our own ways? If women's voices run contrary to the development rhetoric espoused by mainstream feminist scholars, an uncomfortable tension exists. The paradox for western feminists is that if we listen to women's voices in this case, it leaves technology and maintenance in the hands of

¹⁰ When the Mai Eif hand pump had broken, women on the WC expressed their inability to fix it.

men and relegates women's work back into traditionally female roles. In the past men have claimed that women were not able, but if women also feel that way, what should happen next? Do we respect that position and allow people to move at their own pace, or do we try and persuade them to do something they have stated they prefer not to do and use the flag of 'false consciousness' to justify our intervention? This is the stance that has been critiqued by women from the southern hemisphere, advocates of the DAWN position (see Marchand et al. 1995, Mohanty 1988, Sen and Grown 1988)

Were women in Tshalo offering alternative representations because they prioritised other activities and had no time to get involved in VLOM? I have suggested a different dimension of power, that of 'power play'. Do women choose to opt out in what they perceive as their own best interests? I see Tigrean women as having a certain important agency. They engage in protest when desirable or necessary or where they feel it might work. For example, when the money for the soil and water conservation work did not come through on time, Mulu and a group of other women actively voiced their protest. They walked to Wukro to demand and received their wage from the *wereda* officials. This is an aspect of the power play. In Tshalo women were conscious of their position and chose where to invest their energies. I saw them making informed choices about what to do and how and when to do it, and weighing up the consequences of their actions. Therefore, instead of presuming that women are excluded, women may actually be resisting inclusion. This is an active position that Gaventa describes as *homo politicus* (1980: 4).

In Tshalo, VLOM was definitely not working. The repair system collapsed, and many hand pumps remained broken. Sites remained unhygienic, threatening the sustainability of projects (see Green et al. 1998).

I approached Mezgabi, the *baito* chairperson. He claimed that the water development office in Wukro maintained the hand pump. He made no reference at all to VLOM, immediately attributing responsibility to the Water Bureau, the inference being that maintenance was beyond the capabilities of the people. The hand pumps were not as easy to fix as REST professed, at least in the villagers' estimation. Tesfai, the DA, backed this up. According to

the agricultural expert, the WC relied on the Water Bureau to fix the hand pump and make it operational. The ethos of empowerment and human capacity building remained an illusion. The lack of training resulted in the water points not receiving maintenance when required. Solid waste contamination of water points was a constant hazard, as the sanitation work scheduled to take place by the WC had not been completed. Mezgabi lamented the current situation, stating: ‘the *kushett* is very weak.’ When I asked Gebrexavier about the Water Committee, he admitted: ‘There have been no meetings to do with water because we are burdened by other issues. Meetings to nominate militia and *wereda* meetings go on for days.’

I went to see the head of the Water Bureau in Mekelle, the capital city. I asked him what he thought was the problem. Abebe responded: ‘We need more technicians to help people when they are out of their depth and cannot fix it themselves. We need to give training to the people.’ Abebe was right, but where was the money to come from? In a later interview he stated that there was no money available for training. The budget had already been spent. I countered, saying that our pump had been put in four years ago. Why had training not been given to villagers in Tsaḥlo then? Abebe replied: ‘These are common problems. There is no money to train replacements, or even new members.’

I went on to the regional government and approached Zemechial about the training of the WC. He confirmed that it is the responsibility of the Water Bureau but they did not operate in all the *weredas* because of the shortage of qualified staff. He noted this was a serious deficit in terms of the assistance and training of the WCs: ‘The government is responsible for the water sector to look after training of the Water Committees.’

If the situation is as grim as the professionals state, and there is no manpower and no funding for training, how can the government’s new five-year plan succeed? The document stressed the importance of training. Who will fund it, the government or the NGOs? Abeba stated: ‘The rural water sector is supported by the NGOs like REST. We are trying to get some monies; the government is interested in capacity building but we are limited by the budget.’ The government’s position reflected in the statement of Abebe is problematic. I assert that more than interest, it needs political will backed by hard cash if projects are to be sustainable.

REST claimed that they had established or were establishing 'Water and Sanitation Committees', and provided training to 'kick-start' the process for community maintenance (VL0M). Getachew, the head of the Rural Water Department, informed me that REST provided three days training to the WCs on how to install, maintain, assemble and disassemble a hand pump. Getachew had the rhetoric right, saying: 'The capacity building of the community is very important, it contributes to the sustainability of the water points.' Moreover, he explained how WCs were established by the water technicians, supported by a two-tier community-based maintenance system. REST as an NGO has to represent itself as a successful model reflecting international policy, producing measurable outputs and justifying funding, Getachew gave a 'legitimising representation' (Mosse 2005: 172).

On a field trip I observed Wosen Senget, a REST water technician, doing his job. I noticed how the technicians were bound by time constraints. All training and final construction touches were concluded in one day. No WC member I had spoken to had more than a few hours training. Getachew eventually admitted: 'The problem is the WC get training, and then they forget. There is no refresher training. That is why the hand-dug wells are non-functional, some with small faults easy to fix, but the WC is not capable.' No wonder sustainability is problematic. This may be another explanation as to why villagers are uninterested in participating.

However it was looked at, the outcome was the same. In Tsahlo sufficient training had not been given – just one day, including assembly and disassembly. There had been no integrated package regarding the installation of hardware and software, hand pumps, latrines and health education, thereby rendering the water projects completely unsustainable according to the biomedical model (Feacham et al. 1998, Green et al. 1998).

Problems in Achieving Cost Recovery

Rita Abrahamsen argues that ‘cost recovery is a euphemism for transforming healthcare, schooling and other public services into private¹¹, fee based institutions’ (2000: 145), as has taken place in the USA. The main aim of privatisation is in reducing the role of the state in the health and social care sectors. It is interesting to note that in the water consensus, reflecting the Dublin Principles (1992), the notion of water as a social and economic good means that people now have to pay for the water they use. As women are the gatekeepers of water, does this notion of payment for water cause problems for women? Do they have to assume the responsibility of paying for it? Why should they, if it always has been a common good and free?

According to the community level agreement, after the implementation process is finished and the hand pump put in, the WC and the *baito* ask the people to elect a guard. In Tsahlo, Walalla was appointed by the *baito*, probably because of her kinship ties (her brother Kunam was the hydrologist responsible for selecting the site). She was literate and on the *kushett* WA executive. While these factors made her an ideal candidate the situation did not advance equity of access to critical resources, as it is not supposed to be the most powerful or elite but the poorest and most vulnerable who benefit from development.

The guard’s salary was theoretically to be decided by the people and the *baito*. Abebe (head of the Water Bureau) claimed that 25 cents was the fee for water, which indicated that the government or the NGOs, and not the people, decided. In my experience this sum seemed fairly standard, and I believe it must have been set by the implementing NGO, REST. The guard’s salary is drawn directly from the beneficiaries’ user fees. In Tsahlo the villagers did not want to pay for the water. Walalla claimed to keep records of the beneficiaries and payments but I was never given access to the books. The maintenance of an Afridev hand pump costs only 30 *birr* per year, a relatively small amount. Abeba confessed that in many

¹¹ Companies such as Suez, Ondeo and Vivendi have monopolies over the world’s drinking water sources, and there have been vociferous protests around the world to the privatisation of drinking water, with several people being killed in riots in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

locations ‘villages did not want to pay even five cents. They say our ancestors drank this water and they did not pay.’

There was definite resistance to the imposition of a tariff. It seemed people were not asked if they wanted to pay for water. If the people had not been given real decision-making power over the critical issues such as site selection and access to the water resources, it is unlikely they had been consulted over this. In this poor rural village it must have seemed extraordinary that the people were being asked to pay for water. Each family is supposed to contribute 3 *birr* per year for their water supply. If there are 100 beneficiaries that makes 300 *birr* annually. This would be a good income for the villager who got the job of guard.

Tafera and Walalla take the total collected tariff as a wage and none of it is saved for maintenance. Walalla stated that the fee set in Tsahlo is 25 cents but claimed that after a few months the people stopped paying. Walalla declared that the user fee had not been collected at Mai Eif for two years, therefore there can be no savings to pay for future repairs. Although Walalla stated, ‘I have a plan to start collecting again’, when I left the village nine months later still no user fees had been collected or monies saved. The people’s resistance to payment had prevailed. Other villagers such as Lem Lem (see Figure 5.2) expressed the belief that water was a common good (see Ostrom 1990, Ostrom et al. 1994) and that it should be free. She reasoned, ‘It’s God’s water, why should we pay for it?’

The villager’s conception of water is as a gift from God, and therefore it has no part in the cash economy. Once again, however, it is important to acknowledge the diverse responses of the villagers, as some refused to pay, others agreed to pay while others voiced acquiescence but resisted by breaking off the lock, giving them open access.

There was surprisingly little discussion or decision-making in the community contra all the political rhetoric that both REST and the regional government [TPLF] espoused. Here once more was the power of the REST-TPLF-*baito* nexus visible. The people’s voices were muted, especially the women’s, apart from those of the politically powerful. The *baito* elite knew the policies of the government and Mezgabi claimed that the cashier collected money from every

beneficiary, maintaining the representation that he felt I wanted or needed to hear. It probably was also significant that my interpreter, Gedion, had been a TPLF politician in the past. Mezgabi may have felt that, as I was connected to REST/TPLF, he had to reflect the policy or it could impact negatively on the funds that the village, the NGO and the party gained.

I asked Walalla who was responsible for managing the hand pump. There was no doubt in her mind that the responsibility for the water point lay with the chairperson, Gebrexavier. This was interesting in that Walalla did not include herself as part of the management process. The new management speak of the NGOs had no currency with the local people (resonating with James 1999). Even Walalla did not express a sense of 'ownership'.

Walalla was so busy with her eight different political and domestic positions that it was literally impossible for her to fulfil her role as the guard as well as all her kinship obligations. As a respected member of the elite she was often called upon to assist with weddings, funerals, baptisms, cooking and providing food and her labour power, not to mention just her presence. Alefu stated that Walalla used to do her job but stopped because of different political meetings happening outside the village. She maintained that Walalla was absent because she was already 'too politically active'. This is a fascinating paradox, since the World Bank (1990) and empowerment rhetoric advocate women's greater political participation as a key to the success of development interventions.

Walalla was right about one thing. Gebrexavier was the man with overall responsibility as chairman of the WC. I asked him how this situation had come to pass: an absent guard and no tariff collected. Gebrexavier shifted the responsibility back: 'In fact we didn't follow up about payment, the guard is responsible, they get a salary from the collected money. Since the guard needs the salary they will collect the money. There is no need to push people or see what they are doing'. Was Gebrexavier fudging his response to cover the fact that the villagers all know who gets the benefits and why, and so it is not an issue if the 'elected' people choose to not play the game? What matters is not that you do the job but that you hold the post. There seemed to be many inconsistencies regarding the time scale of payments. Some people stated that they still paid, others said they stopped paying a few months ago, and some claimed they

had not paid for one or two years. Birhan smiled and astutely declared: 'I think now it is free. At one time Walalla used to look after it, there was a fixed time to fetch, but now it's not good, Wallala doesn't give attention to it. If she doesn't look after it, it will be broken.' Birhan was perceptive – a few months later the pump had broken. It was interesting that she had made a dig at her sister-in-law, who had put her in the embarrassing position of attending the meeting and having to admit to not wanting to participate.

Not all the villagers refused to pay. A young woman named Hadaas claimed: 'I believe we must pay the money but the government have not forced us to pay. Walalla is too busy and out of the *kushett* too often. Now the community, including myself, has the responsibility to elect someone else.' Hadaas was the first person to articulate any sense of power in the development process. Nine months later, however, the situation was still the same. There was no guard and therefore no tariff collection.

I wondered about user fees at the other pump at Mai Rigo. Medhin claimed that she had paid her user fee for three years. Tafera gave her receipts and she claimed to have them to prove it. Contrary to the claims of REST, financial management of all the hand pumps was not happening. It appeared that there was no organised accounting system at all. Receipt books to establish the number of users could have been used but were not. I enquired as to the problems with the accounting procedures. Gebrexavier answered: 'If people don't do what they are supposed to, they are criticised and evaluated.' The disciplinary actions that Gebrexavier referred to, however, did not ever seem to be put into play. Was this an example of the people in disciplinary roles refusing to discipline and punish? As Crewe and Harrison (1998) suggest, once the donors have gone, the people can do as they wish. Walalla claimed her absence from her role as gatekeeper had been reported. Obviously no action had been taken. If people chose to resist the new managerialism that dominated the water development process, what were the ramifications? The VLOM system had broken down, the water point was broken.

If the villagers choose to participate in the water development process as laid down by REST there is a need to select the guard carefully, not based on status or position. Walalla and

Tafera, both guards, were members of the elite. Tafera got the job because he was perceived as a highly respected elder and was also of the old land-owning classes. He was himself too old to maintain the technology, as he found it physically heavy and did not understand how it functioned. This was a problem regarding the safety of the water point. As Crewe and Harrison argue, 'People's actions are constrained by their ability or capacity' (1998: 115). It also meant that the resources spent by the donors could be used better on what the people themselves perceived as their own needs or wants. The principle of bottom-up development was illusory in Tshahlo.

Why did the villagers in Tshahlo say they prioritised and wanted clean water and hand pump technology if they then did not manage it efficiently? Did the villagers lack the skills and resources, such as time, energy or knowledge? This may have been a factor contributing to the failure of VLOM in Tshahlo. Development experts make problematic assumptions about people's motivations. As Crewe and Harrison argue, there is a general tendency among developers to rely on simple universal explanations of behaviour. Motivation can only be understood in the context of what is possible, e.g. access to land, cash, labour and, most importantly to the villagers in Tshahlo, food.

This reflects my notion of a power play. If people are not motivated and do not perceive the project to be their priority they will resist. They may appear to acquiesce but actually they are playing to win, and this means choosing the rules of the game. This does not only take place at the village level but also at the NGO level. As Crewe and Harrison state, 'Recipient agencies defy the control of donors by giving the appearance of obeying the rules of aid exchanges without actually putting them into practice' (1998: 89).

Looking for a Model of Good Practice: Tsadenale Water Committee

I decided to try to find a model of good practice in order to triangulate my research findings in Tshahlo. Mezgabi had informed me that there was 'a model WC in Tsadenale, the best in the *tabia* and an example to be followed'. The hand pump had been there for five years. When I went to visit the site I was surprised to discover that both the water points in Tsadenale had in fact broken down. Why was this hailed as a model of excellence? One of the hand pumps had

been broken for a year. Kinfе, the WME technician, claimed that the problem was that the pump had been built on wetland. The earth was subsiding, causing the well walls to collapse. REST had implemented that hand pump and the technician Haile had decided on the site of the water point. Kinfе stated that this was an error on REST's part.

The guard at Tsadenale was an older man called Haloof, aged 69. A lot of guards were male and elders, contrary to the discourses linking women to water in Ethiopia. Haloof told me that he regularly collected the user fees. The fixed access times were from 6.30 a.m. – 10.00 a.m. and 2.00 – 6.00 p.m. and were closely adhered to according to the guard. Haloof claimed only to allow Jerry cans with large spouts so that water was not wasted.

When I asked Haloof who was responsible for managing and controlling the water point he replied: 'I don't know, I am just like a water pot, uneducated.' Haloof had not received any training. Neither had the cashier, Tabotu, who informed me that the secretary had joined the army. Here was yet another negative impact of the war: neither the cashier nor secretarial posts were operational.

Over the past five years the pump had broken four times. The last time was almost a year ago, and it was still broken at the time of my visit. The rods had become disconnected and it was impossible for the villagers to fix it. The people could not even get access to the spare parts to change the seals. The model committee had confirmed that VLOM was completely ineffective. REST had to come and fix the seal. I wondered if gender issues had been taken on board by the model WC. The woman member present confirmed my worst fears, stating, 'Women never fix the pump. It needs men's power.'

The 'model' water point had no door – even after five years. Animals wandered in, licked the hand pump funnel and excreted around the apron. However, the Tsadenale chair declared: 'The people own the hand pump. The Water Committee administrates but it is also the responsibility of the beneficiaries.' This was the first time that I had heard the discourse of ownership coming from the people. Maybe this was why Tsadenale was considered a model committee. The good village was the one that articulated ideology the best. Haloof used the

discourses of development to represent policy translated as practice. Possibly there is a connection between villagers making representations that give them access to the continued benefits of development knowing the power of development. This may resonate with the regions historical Socialist past. During the *derg* regime, village people had to say the right things or the penalties were high. The villagers knew the power of words.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to present an explanation for the failure of sustainable water projects already established at the village level. In local development initiatives situations of coercive power were mimicking a wider scenario. I placed the dissonance experienced at the local level between global policy, the rhetoric of the implementing local NGO and the villagers' narratives as embedded in a nexus of power relations. I looked at the differentials in access to where the water wells are sited and who benefits. I also examined the processes of participation and village-level operation and maintenance and posited an explanation for the failure of participatory philosophy in practice. I asserted that power relations linked to political affiliation, kinship and social relations played a significant part in the whole process. But contrary to the analysis of power put forward by Lukes (1974), I have argued that a lack of participation or an unwillingness to change things at the local level was not a result of false consciousness or a lack of consciousness. Rather, there was a powerful nexus that dominated development at the village level, the REST-TPLF-*baito* nexus. I shall look at this constellation in more detail in the next chapter.

I also refer to the actions of the villagers and the WC members as a form of 'power play', the villagers deciding when to play the development game and with whom. There was no doubt that it was the old elite families who still controlled the resources critical to people's survival. Aid and global power relations prescribed patron-client relations that were also tied to the lack of land and alternative sources of earning a living. These relations were the only safety-net in a society that was ravaged by war and drought. People resisted development in many covert ways through employing tactics of acquiescence and quiescence. For as Scott argues, 'Most subordinate classes throughout most of history have rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organised, political activity. Or, better stated, such activity was dangerous, if not

suicidal' (1985: xv). Scott extrapolates on the statement made by Hobsbawm to clearly describe what I have referred to as 'power play' whereby people are engaged in 'working the system to their minimum disadvantage' (1973: 3). Complex patron-client relationships as well as kinship networks and systems of reciprocity and obligation underpinned decision-making at the village level. The logics of managerialism or of the neo-classical economic model made no sense to the beneficiaries of the development process.

There is no doubt that certain individuals did receive more than others, with hand pumps being placed strategically outside the houses of important TPLF cadres or those who held powerful positions as leaders of the mass associations (usually the same people). People engaged in development not because they were forced to but because they chose to. But representations of quiescence were maintained on every level, even within the NGOs. It is to this important theme that I shall now turn in Chapter 6.



Figure 5.1 Mezgabi
Figure 5.2 LemLem



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chapter Six

Gedion, my interpreter

The Village

Tesfai, development agent (DA)

Walalla, key informant member of women's association, co-ordinator of the TPLF

Haile Selassie, brother in law of Walalla

Mulu, Walalla's sister

Mezgabi, chairperson of Gemad *tabia baito*

Birhane, vice chair of Gemad *tabia baito*

Gebrexavier, economic development officer Gemad *tabia baito* and chairman of Tsahlo WC

Atseda, chairwoman Gemad women's association

Asqual, secretary of the Gemad women's association and a health fana

New Well Workers

Hadish, farmer, local priest and TPLF member

Kefla, farmer, TPLF member

Haile, farmer, TPLF member

Assefa, farmer, TPLF member

Kiros, Gebrexavier's son, student at Gosemite school

Wereda Administration

Yitbarak, chairman of Wukro *wereda* administration

Aberra, head of economic development

Government Water Bureau (BWME)

Abeba, head of Water Bureau in Mekelle

Kalyu, water bureau technician in Wukro

Kinfe, water bureau technician in Wukro

REST Staff Team

Tekleweini, Director

Birhane, Deputy Director

Kunam, hydro - geologist

Getachew, head of rural water supply department (RUWAS)

Tsehayie, head of environmental rehabilitation (ERAD)

Ermeas, hydro-geologist

Dr Tewelde, head of health department

Maria, fundraiser

Fiona, head of research and development

Wolde, water technician

Wosen, water technician

Yodannis, woman water technician

Giday, field co-ordinator

ADCCS Staff Team

Ledet, Director

Freheimenot, site foreman

Bahlibi, construction foreman

Tigray Regional Government

Haile, head of planning Tigray Regional Government

Dr Solomon, Minister in the Tigray Regional Government

These are the principle characters mentioned by name in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6: WELLS WITHOUT WATER

In this chapter I present two case studies describing the water development process in two different locations in rural Tigray. One programme had been implemented by a large and politically backed NGO (REST), the other by a much smaller religiously funded NGO (ADCCS). I do this to explore if the stated participatory and gender policies are translated into practice at the local level. As Moser (1993) states, development policy rarely gets translated into practice. I explore this disjunction between policy intentions and outcomes by presenting an analysis of power relations at the local level and the role that the discourses of participation, sustainability and gender play in access to strategic resources. In Tigray water is considered to be a women's issue (REST 2000), but do women have a voice in critical decision-making in the villages as the NGOs claim? I describe how contests of power and privilege are played out at the local level, as mediated by relations of patron-clientism and political affiliation. I fit this into the wider context of the international water policy consensus and the Dublin Statement, global edicts. As Rew (1997) states, development is rhetoric, official practice and political theory, Escobar (1995) highlights the tendency of development as a top-down, technocratic, process maintaining unequal power relations. Hobart (1993) demonstrates how there are several co-existent discourses of development. With relation to water these are framed in the context of western scientific knowledge. Hobart describes how decisions about what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded, and who is qualified to know involve acts of power. In this chapter it becomes clear that women are excluded and, as Sen and Grown (1988) predict, development often brings increases in gender inequality. I explore this gender dynamic in greater detail in the next and penultimate chapter. I describe the emergence of a more significant constellation of power at the local level – that of the interface between the people, systems of local governance and the NGOs involved in implementing water projects. The power of the ruling political party, the TPLF, represented by the *wereda*, *tabia baito*, and the NGO (REST), mediate access to resources via the elites in the villages, who rely on kinship and patron-client relations to secure their claims to the benefits of development.

Case Study One: REST and Rural Water Development

The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) is considered to be the primary organisation implementing water projects in Tigray (see Figure 6.1),¹ although several different NGOs are involved in such activities.² Kunam, a hydrologist working for REST, estimates that the Rural Water Supply department (RUWAS) covers over 63% of the region's water supply. Getachew, the head of the Water Department (see Figure 6.2), informed me that REST constructs up to 300 water points per year.³ Over the past five years, the organisation has constructed 734 hand-dug wells, 169 spring developments and 197 bore holes – a total of 1,100 water points. The region's total is 2,349, including the water projects constructed by other NGOs and the Water Bureau.

The RUWAS staff team alone totals 90 full-time workers (see Figure 6.3). Their aim is to 'contribute to improving the security of rural communities through developing safe, adequate, accessible and sustainable water supplies'. Reflecting global policies, they assert that there is a strong connection between water projects and food security. Food security indicators used in the monitoring and evaluation of their projects are the prevalence of malnutrition-related illness, and prevalence of preventable diseases, as well as under-fives' nutritional levels. The objectives of the team are as follows

- To provide a community-based sustainable solution to the water supply problems of rural communities in identified priority areas, through the provision of clean, safe water for people and livestock.
- To improve the sanitation and quantity of rural drinking water supplies, leading to improved health of the people through construction of water supply facilities, springs, hand-dug wells, bore holes and ponds.
- To ensure the availability of a safe and adequate water supply at a reasonable proximity to the homesteads of beneficiaries, in order to reduce the workload of women and children and to increase their participation in socio-economic development activities and school enrolment respectively.
- To transfer appropriate technology to the community through training and to strengthen the sustainability of the water points by developing the capacity of water and sanitation committee members and those responsible for maintenance at the local level.

¹ Donors for water projects include USAID, CAA, and OXFAM UK. REST apply for eight new programmes per year.

² UNICEF, OXFAM, World Vision, and Farm Africa fund water projects in the region but on a much smaller scale.

³ The cost of one hand-dug well is approximately £3,500. A spring costs £2,700 - £3,000. A bore hole costs £8,000.

- To minimise the socio-cultural problems faced especially by women and children related to shortage of water supply facilities.

The policy principles outlined in the Dublin Statement (1992) have shaped these objectives as they are part of the aid conditions on which donors agree to funding. If this differed from the organisation's list of priorities it would be very hard for REST to claim a separate list of objectives as funding would not be forthcoming. As Hayter (1981) describes, the World Bank, the IMF and USAID impose conditions attached to their lending. Governments are to adjust to their economic problems through austerity measures, such as cutting government expenditures, reducing wages, and placing restrictions on imports as well as the devaluation of currency.

Tim Mitchell (1995) argues that donors such as USAID and the World Bank imagine countries as empirical objects. Mitchell describes how in USAID literature Egypt is represented as 'something natural'. We could apply this equally to Ethiopia. Egypt could also be compared to Ethiopia in other ways. For example, in both countries there is no social security system and people have on average 7.5 children. As I described in the literature review, similar discourses from USAID are reflected in their policy documents regarding problems of over-population and environmental degradation. People are therefore in both places deemed as 'unable to feed themselves' because of these ecological and demographic factors. However, as I demonstrated in my Introduction to this thesis, many scholars do not blame famine on ecological factors but rather see them as resulting from political and economic power (Besserat 1989).

Both Mitchell (1995) and Abrahamsen (2000) explore the relationships of power of the donor nations and external political control. Mitchell argues for Egypt that aid dependency and high levels of indebtedness have given the United States a powerful position of influence within the Egyptian state. Mitchell refers to this aspect of policy leverage as a mechanism that locks Egypt into an unequal power relationship. Mitchell says that although 'Development discourse wishes to present itself as a detached centre of rationality and intelligence' (1995: 154), this masks the true relations of power inherent in the process. He suggests that by drawing on images of ecological scarcity the West is able to secure new markets, justified by the rhetoric of development discourse. Similarly, in the Ethiopian context, government ministers and planners adopt the discourses of development to sustain and maintain their power, by securing the constant stream of cash and aid

flows into the country.⁴ Maintaining representations supporting the mobilising metaphors of development are thereby crucial to this relationship of donor and recipient (Mosse 2005).

Integrated Water Resources Management

One of these metaphors of development is the term ‘integrated’. The majority of REST development activities are implemented within ‘integrated’ programmes, either Integrated Agricultural Development Programmes (IADP), Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDPA) or Integrated Food Security Programmes (IFSP). Tsehayie is Head of REST’s environmental rehabilitation and agricultural development (ERAD) department, which links agriculture to ecology. Tsehayie described the conditions that he believes have led to the present context of drought and water insecurity in the region. Again this narrative reflects the discourses of ecological degradation and over-population:

Erratic topography and land configurations in Tigray exacerbated by rapid population growth has caused the depletion of natural resources. The problem is that there is no economic alternative to subsistence farming for the majority of the peasants. REST employs soil and water conservation measures to increase the water table and replenish the aquifers.

Tsehayie connected food security to the environmental impacts of not recharging the aquifers where the water projects are implemented. ERAD is responsible for ensuring that physical activities include hillside terracing, stone bunds, check dams, micro basins, irrigation diversion and earth dams. Biological activities include vegetative propagating plants and broadcasting tree seeds. Grasses planted around the recharge sites help to feed the villagers’ cattle by providing fodder and pasture. These activities adhere closely to international principles regarding Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). REST also has strong links with the government body responsible for sustainable agriculture and environmental rehabilitation, SAERT. Imru, the soil and water conservation expert at SAERT, explained to me that IWRM is high on the agenda at both government and NGO levels. These principles balancing villagers’ needs with ecological concerns are currently reiterated in all the literature regarding environmental sustainability and development (Postel 1996, Ward 1997). Integrated programming is seen as one of REST’s strengths.

⁴ The amounts of donor funding are significant – just one three-year programme granted by USAID amounts to \$18 –

Birhane, the deputy director of the NGO, shared with me the strong points of the organisation: 'REST works very closely with the *tabia baito*'. Maria, their fundraiser, had already described to me the power of this local administrative system and claimed that: 'The *baito* is a unique feature of Tigray. It does not exist anywhere else in Ethiopia. The *baito* is the policy-making tool. ... It is the people's voice. It is the mobiliser, and it is the policeman.'

Birhane argued that in Tigray the connection between the democratic process, the revolution, and the people has minimised the conflict over scarce resources such as water. This political system is entrenched in the history of the organisation and its principles are reflected in projects. Birhane declared: 'The Tigrean people have democratic experience due to the legacy of the struggle against the *derg*. The TPLF organised the people so they are cohesive, they know how to work towards a goal collectively, they respect the rights of others.' Gebrexavier, head of REST's Relief and Rehabilitation department, agreed: ⁵

REST have a very strong democratic way of participating not only in food aid, but in all aspects of the development process. This is our strength. The people do not get food for free, they have to plan at grassroots level. Direct involvement is empowerment.

Following Abrahamsen (2000), I was interested in just how much the NGOs had also accepted without question the rhetoric of 'democracy' linked to development.

Birhane maintained that the micro credit and savings department the NGO had established (DEDEBIT) gave communities the impetus and structure to save money. This was important, REST argued, because such schemes in India have enabled the rural poor to sustain their water development interventions by saving money to buy spare parts for broken machinery and invest in new technology for future sustainability (see also Water Aid 1997). However, following Abrahamsen (2000), this could be seen to be transferring the cost to the local people, and part of the process of the rolling back of the state. Birhane claimed that water scarcity and lack of money to exploit groundwater resources are the biggest constraints that the RUWAS department faces. These factors together create a representation I term 'water insecurity'.

\$20 million plus 50,000 metric tonnes of food supplied. REST apply for 8 such grants per year from various donors.

⁵ An Early Warning System alerts the government to drought. REST report their findings to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC). If the price of oxen falls, it indicates people are adopting coping strategies.

Construction of a Well in Kollo Tembien

The procedure and process of a REST hand-dug well project in theory is as follows. The RUWAS department's yearly plan has to be approved by the Water Bureau. A number of hand-dug wells, bore holes and springs are allocated to the *weredas*. The plans are discussed in consultation with the *tabia* and villagers. The water technicians go to the selected field sites and teach the villagers health and safety aspects of the programme. The hydro-geologist performs an assessment, based on Global Positioning Systems, topographical maps and the indigenous knowledge of the people. Getachew stressed that '*especially women*' and older people are listened to.

I shall now describe the experiences I had whilst in the field observing the RUWAS team. My analysis will be drawn from my encounter with the rhetoric and reality of the development process.

I accompanied Ermeas, the hydro-geologist from REST, on a one-week field trip to Kollo Tembien. This lowland area is arid and extremely water scarce. We began the trip by contacting the *wereda* officials. The head of economic development was a man called Tolda, who identified three needy *kushetts* – Tseykeme, LemLem and Siye. Tolda and Ermeas had decided on a site by looking at maps, reports and data gathered on previous studies in the region. The selection criteria were based on several key points: the density of population, the amount of water coverage, and distance to source. The need was defined as scarcity of water and distance covered by women to access this vital resource. Tolda informed me that the population varied between 400 and 700 people in each *kushett*.

Water Histories and Waterscapes

Ermeas and I drove to the first field site on a makeshift dirt road. We met the chairperson of the *kushett*, called Kiros. Ermeas quizzed him about the waterscape of the village, eliciting paleo-hydrological data such as where water is presently found and where it used to flow. Having established a picture of the waterscape, we studied the geophysical environment. We walked in the path of a dry riverbed, where the elders said that water once freely flowed, but where for generations the river 'had not returned'.

Ermeas was sure that nearby he would find the telltale sign of the aquifer. Three old men came along and Ermeas extracted yet more local knowledge of the area. I was impressed by the time the REST worker spent listening to the people. This was excellent in terms of consultation (with the men) of the local community from the inception of the project.

Ermeas decided that all the signs indicated that there would not be enough groundwater, the site having failed the survey. The second site we visited also failed. We drove on to *tabia* Emba Sufufael, with a population of 80 households. The new well would service approximately 400 villagers. This site passed the test, and two days later we would return after the villagers had constructed a road to enable the rig to get through (see Figure 6.4).

Hand Pump Installation

The following day I spent with Wosen, the water technician assigned to the hand pumps in this particular project cluster. As we journeyed to our site Wosen told me about his work, ‘Hand-dug well depths range from 8 to 27m; one project takes 40 days. We can construct two wells in 50 days.’

We drove to a site in the final stages of implementation. This was my opportunity to observe the villagers being trained in assembly and maintenance. About 20 villagers helped the technician with the work. There were 11 men and five women present – five boys, but no girls. There were two types of hand pumps installed by REST, the India Mk II used for bore holes and the Afridev pump, usually used for a hand-dug well.⁶ These models had been chosen as they are perceived to be cheap and simple to maintain. REST hail these as appropriate technologies in line with their water policy.

I observed as the villagers received training, changing the seals, spare parts and being familiarised with all the mechanisms of the hand pump. I realised that none of the women was involved in any traditionally male roles (see Figure 6.5). A few attempted to change the seals but found it hard. The women ended up washing the internal pipes. The men did all the technical, construction and assembly tasks (see Ybanez 1995). Finally, Wosen added 20 grams of chlorine to the well to purify the water. The community stepped forward to draw water from the new Afridev pump. The

women ululated and the men shouted for joy. The Water and Sanitation Committee was now responsible for the management of the new water point.

New Water Committee (WC) and the Responsibilities of its Members

A meeting had been called a week earlier to inform the community about the project: 100 people had gathered to elect the seven WC members. The villagers did seem to have a voice and the power to make decisions about who controlled the water source and who had access to the benefits. According to the people present the WC here had been democratically elected and was comprised of three men and three women (see Figure 6.6), in addition to a male guard. Before this hand pump was put in, the nearest water source had been a two-hour trip away. Women would spend four hours daily in water portage, or eight if they needed more than the minimum requirement of 20 litres per day. Now 200 families, approximately 1000 people, would be beneficiaries.

Wosen informed the WC of their responsibilities according to the signing agreement. I observed that the villagers immediately began to wash their legs, feet and hands under the hand pump funnel. The technician intervened and told them to stop or they would pollute the groundwater. I wondered why Wosen had not briefed the villagers about health and safety. Was it, because of previous experience, that the technicians were aware that the villagers resisted the imposition of rules? (see Cleaver 2000)

I noted that the sanitation component of integrated programme planning had not been operationalised. I searched REST's annual report for the year 2000 and found that no latrines were installed simultaneously in any RUWAS project sites in Tigray, contrary to their policies (REST 2000, USAID 2000). I asked Dr Tewelde, head of the Health Department at REST, a challenging question: 'If REST states the importance of water and sanitation as an integrated package, why don't you integrate them as your policies profess?' Dr Tewelde replied:

Presently we do hygiene promotion training for people in the community. We also do capacity building for the water / sanitation committees. We are planning a revolution in

⁶ India Mk II can draw water from a depth of 60–70m. The Afridev pumps up to 45m.

our approach to primary health care re water and sanitation and food and nutrition; all will be integrated.

The international water and sanitation model espoused by the British Department for International Development (DFID) in their White Paper (1998) promotes a social marketing approach to hygiene education. REST appeared to emulate this model to some extent in their literature, but failed to implement it in practice.

In the marketing approach the sanitation programme focuses directly on households before the project is implemented to create all the necessary conditions to enable those who want to have a latrine to declare an interest. This tailor-made approach encourages demand from all sectors of the community and thereby, they argue, creates sustainable projects. The demand is then met promptly and properly as the water point is established (Griffith 1991). It assumes, however, that diverse groups will agree and will welcome the interventions. Black (1990) and Dudley (1993) on separate research projects argue that the implementation of latrines can be marketed to people as desirable consumer items, considered as status objects by the community, creating a demand not previously recognised. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, the people in Tsahlo did not seem to buy such a simplistic designer commodity approach and their own priorities prevailed over this fantasy of prestige.

Crewe and Harrison (1998) discuss the significance of symbolic factors, for example the association of hand pumps and development, and argue that it is important to acknowledge the symbolic meanings associated with objects and practices, even if they are not the ultimate causes of action. In other words, if some people do respond positively to water development interventions it may be because 'People adapt behaviours and responses to get aid' (1998: 45) rather than actively embracing the symbols of modernisation. People may simply mirror what researchers want to hear. But in fact the situation is more complex, as aid may mean more than just the item on offer at a particular moment. It may also be linked to ideas of food, wages and other tangible benefits.

I shall now present my second case study in order that I can make a comparative analysis of two different water development interventions at the local level.

Case Study Two – Adigrat Catholic Secretariat

It was the morning of 1 April 2000. My interpreter, Gedion, came into the house and exclaimed: ‘There is going to be a new water point in the village.’ An elder had just informed him that a group of men had started to dig a big hole relatively close to St Mary’s church. I was surprised. I had spent the last few months discussing water development activities with the *tabia baito*, and they had not mentioned anything about a new well. When I had interviewed the Tsahlo Water Committee a few days earlier, not one of them had informed me of the new development.

I approached one of my key informants, Walalla, a politically active woman and a member of the women’s association (WA). She too knew nothing. Neither did Tesfai, the development agent (DA). It transpired that none of the *tabia baito* had any knowledge of a new well.

I had interviewed Kalyu, from the Water Bureau, the previous day and asked him about future plans. Kalyu had mentioned three new water points. I assumed they were forthcoming, yet to be discussed with the people. In Kalyu’s interview we spoke about the development process and the power of the people’s voice in site selection and decision-making. Kalyu claimed that ‘The people are in control. They highlight the water shortage problem by reporting it to the *kushett* administration who then tell the *baito*, and they in turn report all issues of water scarcity to the *wereda*.’ Kalyu contradicted himself by stating that plans for new water points came directly from the government to the regional zones,⁷ passed to the *wereda* officials and then down to the *tabia* before finally reaching the *kushett*.

I visited Kalyu in Wukro to find out more about the new project. When I asked him about the site selection, he stated: ‘The Water Bureau and the *wereda* decided to make a water point there.’ I was under the impression that the process was bottom up, in response to the people’s needs, a model espoused by the regional government. I asked him if the villagers had been consulted regarding the location of the well. Kalyu replied:

If we have enough time to call villagers we have a meeting and say we decide here, what do you think? The problem is getting the people there at the same time as the professionals who come from Mekelle. They have transport problems. The villagers get fed up and go home.

⁷ The regional government does not allocate a budget for rural water development (pers. comm., Zemechial).

At that meeting Kalyu informed me that Gebrexavier was the person responsible for water development activities in the *kushett*, in his capacity as head of economic development for *tabia Gemad*.

The following day I went in search of Gebrexavier's house and was surprised to find out that he lives very close to the new project site. I questioned him about the new well. He responded: 'We had no information about this new project, they just came and told the people to dig.' My next question concerned the convening of a meeting with the villagers to discuss the new development. Gebrexavier stated that no meeting had been called. I asked him who was responsible for funding and implementing this new well. I was surprised when Gebrexavier revealed that REST, the NGO that I was working with, was the donor. I went to see the chairperson of the *baito* to find out what was going on.

Mezgabi thought that REST were responsible for the new hand-dug well. When I rang the organisation at their headquarters in Mekelle, it transpired that both men were wrong. REST was not the NGO concerned. It was clear that the *baito*'s plans had been thwarted, the usual procedures circumvented. As chairperson, Mezgabi had sent a report to the *wereda* regarding the villagers' water resource needs. This had been a year ago and it was pending, contingent on funds. Mezgabi said the new project proposals would not be put into practice until the following year. Stranger still, this new site had not been prioritised in the original plans that had been sent to the *wereda* by the *tabia baito*.

Mezgabi claimed that there were other places more water scarce than St Mary's. This new project seemed to totally contradict the ethos of needs-led, people-centred development. Even the chairperson of the *baito*, the representative of 'the people's voice', knew nothing about it.

When I contacted Kalyu he told me that Adigrat Catholic Secretariat (ADCCS) was the NGO implementing the new project. ADCCS is a small NGO, and its total budget for a three-year programme is only nine million *birr*. Their donors are all Catholic Church organisations (e.g. CAFOD). The head office is in Mekelle and the head of the Water Resources Development Unit is Ledet, who had managed ADCCS for the past six years. He began working in the field of water development in 1988 during a period of severe drought. The NGO had implemented 150 water-

points⁸ in Tigray: bore-holes, hand-dug wells and spring developments. Their plans for the year included 93 new water projects, which were to begin in July 2001 as part of a three-year programme. Ledet confirmed that ADCCS had started working on two new well projects in Deriba and Tsahlo.

As with REST, ADCCS also had a signing agreement, therefore in this instance the nexus of decision-making power operational was that of the *baito*–TPLF–NGO. As I have demonstrated in earlier chapters, the discourses of the new managerialism, including the rules and regulations of the international water policy consensus, are also emulated by this religiously based NGO (see footnotes 9 & 10).

Ledet outlined the seven steps in ADCCS's hand-dug well project procedure.

People dig till they strike water, enough to sustain the community. We construct internal walls with stone that is locally available. We construct a platform and leave a rectangular space for access in and out of the well for maintenance. A slab slopes to allow run-off so the water does not stagnate and contaminate the ground. Then we put a fence around with barbed wire. It is reinforced by trees, protecting the hand pump.

I had observed an ADCCS project at St George's church in a village close to Tsahlo. The fencing was an excellent idea and the well had been kept clean and free from animal contamination. I studied the policy framework⁹ that ADCCS followed regarding the water development process.¹⁰

By the end of the first week of April the new well at St Mary's was 5m deep. The manual excavation of the pit would take a couple of months. I left the village to attend a conference in

⁸ This figure demonstrates how small the NGO is in relation to REST, who had implemented over 1,000 water development projects during a similar time-scale.

⁹ The village level operation and maintenance (VLOM) is managed according to the stipulations of the signing agreement. The responsibility of the Water Committee (WC) is to:

Collect money from the beneficiaries for spare parts and for paying the guard.

The WC will have a monthly meeting to evaluate VLOM activities.

The WC is responsible for having regulations and rules of the hand pump.

The WC is responsible, if the hand pump is broken, for reporting it to WME/*wereda*.

A maintenance kit is given to the WC. The tariff (user fee) is decided by the local village administration – the *tabia baito*.

¹⁰ ADCCS have three main policy documents: a water resources development strategy including their 'terms of reference', a WME publication on WCs and VLOM, which included a signing agreement given to the WC at the point of handover in co-operation with WME (catalogue number 96.2017.0) and, thirdly, the 1998 Improved Drinking Water Plan – A Manual for Maintenance (P.N. 96. 2017).

Addis and spent some time in the capital researching the national water policy context. I returned to the village in August 2000 to find that the project had stopped. The workers had downed tools and were refusing to work. The pit depth had reached only 12m when it could have gone to 20m. This was really interesting as the workers obviously were not fearful of upsetting the NGO and had taken power into their own hands. I wondered whether, if this had been a REST project with its links to the TPLF, would the villagers have been able to resist so easily.

I visited the new site and found the ADCCS construction foreman Bahlibi who informed me that the site had three major problems. First, the well walls were collapsing due to the onslaught of the main seasonal rains. The workmen were not willing to continue digging because of fear of the earthen walls caving in on them. The second problem was that agricultural labour time had reached peak activity. The farmers did not want to spend all day digging, but wanted to work in their fields, procuring their harvest. Third, there were structural problems with the pit. The well shaft should be circular and perpendicular. At St Mary's, as the well deepened, the circumference was narrower at the base. This created the risk of the internal pipes hitting the masonry and the resultant friction eventually causing the pump to fail. Bahlibi felt that Kalyu was responsible for failing to follow up on the quality of the villagers' workmanship. He hoped that the two new well sites at St Mary's and Deriba would both be completed by September.

I visited the second site at Deriba to make a comparison. If the well project there was on schedule, I would analyse the problems in the specific village setting rather than in a project context to ascertain if the problems were personality driven, organisational or more complicated in terms of contestations of local power over water resources.

The ADCCS site foreman responsible for both new projects, Freheimenot, was present and confirmed that the Deriba site was on schedule. I asked him why there were problems with the St Mary's well. Freheimenot alleged: 'The people are lazy and not prepared to work.' I had to disagree with him. As Bahlibi had stated, the farmers were concentrating on their crops. I felt that they were prioritising their labour demands and in fact were engaging in an important livelihood strategy. Aragawi, one of the Deriba labourers, agreed with me and argued that the villagers resisted what they felt was an authoritarian approach of the NGO. This demonstrated to me that

the people did in fact exercise power. The workers at the St Mary's site stopped work till the donors would negotiate.

It is important to analyse how power relations are mediated across agencies and actors at the local level (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001). In a study of power and powerlessness in an Appalachian valley, Gaventa (1980) explores this question in an area rich in coal or 'black gold', which attracted British companies to the area to establish a lucrative mining industry. Yet the benefits had not accrued to the majority of the local people, who remained very poor. Gaventa explores the struggles between the miners of this area of Kentucky and the 'Coal Lords' over land and working conditions and describes how conflicts emerge and are resolved through compromises amongst competing interests. Gaventa highlights the fact that there was no organised protest to the corporate exploitation and outlines the subsequent government neglect that characterised the encounter. People feared the power of the local authorities, the political elite who could virtually ruin a family. I had experienced this same fear of political authority in Tsahlo, yet in this instance the people were quite openly resisting. It was an issue of livelihoods and the workers seemed to take a stance I had not observed so overtly before. The men were more concerned with food security than participating as workers in the new well project. Crewe and Harrison call for a more nuanced understanding of non co-operation. They argue that 'this may not be a conscious strategy of resistance but rather locals' priority may diverge from NGO expectations' (1998: 156). Moreover, 'Individuals are differentially constrained by their structural position, including their access to resources ... each makes choices within these constraints' (p. 156). Crewe and Harrison state that people resist in different ways and that the 'powerful' are not always in complete control (p. 155). This certainly was playing out at the St Mary's site and upholds the thesis of 'everyday forms of peasant resistance' that Scott (1985) alludes to. In this instance, the people were in control and the work had ceased, causing the NGO much embarrassment with the project staff failing to meet targets.

It was now October 2000. I spent several days interviewing the occupants of the households surrounding the site of the newly dug well at St Mary's. I had a range of questions. Did the villagers know the current situation regarding the new well? Why had work been suspended? Was the project terminated? Had the people been consulted? Who were the workers and how had they been selected?

There were discordant and divergent narratives regarding the development process as perceived by the people. No one had been consulted about the site of the new well. Even the women of the surrounding homesteads knew very little of the new project. I visited a house owned by an elderly man, Mahari (see Figure 6.7), who claimed that Gebrexavier, the head of economic development for the *tabia*, was employed as one of the hand-dug well workers. He listed three others as Kefla, Tekah, and Haile. That was all he knew. Abreha, a middle-aged woman, could name all five workers. Again Gebrexavier was listed as one of them, and the others were Kefla, Hadish, Haile and Assefa. Birhan furnished me with a really important piece of data: 'I didn't elect anyone, I just saw them digging.' Contrary to the policies espoused by ADCCS, Birhan confirmed there was no meeting of the *baito* to inform people about the project. Neither had the villagers been given any voice in the selection of the site or the selection of the workers.

The fact that Gebrexavier was one of the workers appeared to me to create a conflict of interest. I decided to visit his house to find out how he had been selected as a worker. Gebrexavier's son Kiros answered the door. He claimed that he and not his father was a paid worker. The labourers had come to borrow tools from his house and asked Kiros to join them as they were short of manpower. Meles, a 47-year-old man, maintained that the project stopped because of dangerous conditions in the rainy season.¹¹

It was time to speak to the workers. I contacted 40-year-old Kefla and heard his version of the troubled project.

Kalyu employed me to dig, he said 'if you don't start digging today I will report that you people don't want water'. We discussed the payment and negotiated. The problem was the rainy season. The hole was filling with water, we asked them to come and pump it out. They said they would solve the problem but they didn't. So we told them to choose others to dig. The foreman came and said are you willing to work or not? We said, it's dangerous. They chose another site but we had only 20 days to finish. Impossible! We would not sign a contract. He said, that's up to you, ciao.

Kefla highlighted three main areas of concern. I could see the obstacles, and termed the situation 'the triple F factor'. The constraints were fear, frustration and finance (or a lack of it, as in a dispute over wages). The major problem, however, seemed the lack of communication between

¹¹ REST have guidelines not to dig in the rainy season, to prevent the danger of slipping off the makeshift tree ladders down 36 foot drops into holes filled with water. The men may fall and drown.

the workers and the ADCCS water technicians. When I asked Kefla, who owned the new project, he stated that the *wereda* [read TPLF] ‘owned the project’.

The second worker I visited was Kiros, the son of Gebrexavier. He knew the project was over, yet the *baito* in Tсахlo did not. I wondered why, when his father was a member of the executive. Were the people reticent to tell the *baito* that this new well had failed? Were the people fearful? Gebrexavier was involved so how could the *baito* not know, as it is his sole responsibility to inform his committee on all development issues? Perhaps it was in his interest to keep the failure to himself. I moved on to the household of the priest Hadish. All the workers gave me different figures for the amount of wages received. I asked Hadish about the discrepancies in claims of monies owed. The priest gave me his version of the story: ‘People are counting the first free metre and the last metre, but it was not paid because it was not fully dug, it was a foot short.’

Hadish was well informed. He told me that the project was suspended and probably over. The time scale given had to be adhered to or the project budget would be lost. As for the role of the *tabia*, the priest remarked:

The *baito* was not co-operative with this new water project. We had no support. *Baito* members want the hand pump near their homes, on the borders of other *kushetts*, not on the land where most people are, around St Mary’s church.’

The major decision-making body at the local level is the *tabia*. The *kushett* has much less power or influence outside the village, but they can put pressure on the locals and can influence the decision-making in the social court. In an analysis of power to consider the aspect of a mobilisation of bias, it is significant to reflect on those who sit on the local councils, the *kushett* and *tabia*. The TPLF dominated both these committees. The priest had raised issues of corruption at the local level: The political elite dominated. The villagers’ voices and needs in the main were not heard or met.

Hadish informed me that the selection of workers had been contrary to the NGO rules. If the selection process had been properly followed (i.e. the people electing workers via a public debate), rather than the political patron-clientage that dominated, then many of the problems might not have transpired.

I verified the selection criteria by interviewing Aberra, the *wereda* head of economic development. He stated emphatically: ‘The workers must be selected by the *baito* administration. The poorest villagers are targeted for such employment. The workers are ‘democratically chosen by the people’. The *baito*, not the people, chose the workers, paving the way for patronage and clientage, as Hadish had confirmed. Four of the most well-off villagers were working on the project. Access to these resources – water and jobs – had been mediated by local power relations based on kinship, obligation and above all political status and allegiance. All four men digging were TPLF members.

After reflecting on the data I had gathered so far, I came to the conclusion that the development process was flawed. There had been no consultation, no negotiation, no discussion, and the ethos of people-led development remained a fantasy. The people had not been involved in the decision-making process at any stage of this project.

When I contacted the *baito*, Birhane, the secretary stated: ‘ADCCS didn’t tell us the problem, we could have found a solution.’ Birhane alleged that Gebrexavier had not performed his duties as head of economic development, he had not reported to the executive that the project had stopped. Birhane disclosed an important piece of information: ‘The *baito* has not discussed this new water project at all.’ I wondered why no meetings had been called to sort out this situation. If water was the burning issue that Birhane claimed it to be, why had the local level authorities not even bothered to meet to discuss it? Why had the *baito* not solved the problem? Mezgabi, the chairperson, claimed the problem was the lack of communication with ADCCS and, secondly, that the *baito* plans were ignored. They had prioritised other *kushetts*.

Mezgabi had confirmed my observations. There had been no shared decision-making. The ethos of people-led development in the ADCCS policy documents was mere rhetoric. In this instance family ties did not secure access to scarce resources, but rather patron-client relations mediated by political affiliation. The two key men in the agreement had been the head of economic development at the *wereda* level, Aberra, and his underling at the *baito* level, Gebrexavier, whose house was on the new well site. There had been no need to consult the rest of the executive as Kalyu (from the Water Bureau) had colluded with the powerful TPLF men.

The result was a conflict over water (Oodit and Simonis 1993). ADCCS demonstrated a complete lack of competence in dealing with the local community. The most undesirable form of top-down imposed development had been forced upon the majority of people. The *baito* had been completely bypassed and consequently this had caused friction among the villagers. Competition, self-interest and secrecy reigned. Unskilled men had acquired the jobs and the money, but the standard of workmanship had been so poor and taken so long to complete that the well walls had caved in. The depth of the pit had frightened the men, who were not used to being underground. There had been no election of the workers; the villagers were left out of the selection process. The principle that the poorest villagers were supposed to be targeted for such work opportunities had been ignored.

Freheimenot, the site foreman, placed the responsibility for the project suspension with the *wereda* for not informing the *baito*. The culture of blame had begun to take shape, with each actor pointing the finger at another.¹² I remembered a meeting that had transpired about six months previously with Aberra, who claimed that there was a good relationship between the Water Bureau and his department.

Yet the development process was still in dispute. It was now mid October 2000. The projects had started in May. My first question to Aberra was on the current state of play of the new hand-dug well in the village. He tried to evade the question, and stated that he had been away on leave for the entire period of the rainy season, which had begun in May and lasted four months. I reminded him that in our last meeting he had acknowledged that it was his responsibility to communicate with the village people to involve them in new projects. Aberra responded:

As you know, ADCCS came to us. Ledet reported there was a lack of people's participation. So I wrote to the *baito*, Gebrexavier and Mezgabi, for the people to cooperate with the project. We become involved if the situation is beyond the people's ability.

I countered that the situation had obviously exceeded the capabilities of the people, and that if restorative action did not take place soon, ADCCS would withdraw the project. Aberra made a

¹² See Katy Gardner (1997) for a fascinating account of the contested nature of development, and the subsequent failure of a project as different groups of actors struggle to take control.

surprising allegation: ‘When it comes to water projects there is corruption among *baito* members in Gemad. Things are not done according to plans.’

The *wereda* was accusing the *baito* of lying, patronage and corruption. The allegations were not new to me. Villagers had made claims regarding the practices of political patronage and clientism in Tsahlo.

Yet as I suggested earlier, the *wereda* must have been complicit in allowing the project to go ahead as they have the final say. This was interesting in the light of Scott’s work, when he refers to such actions as being ‘reinforced by a venerable popular culture of resistance and multiplied many thousand fold [which] may, in the end, make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would be superiors in the capital’ (1985: 65). Scott was right, the policies of the NGO, ADCCS and the regional government as prescribed by the *wereda* lay in tatters, but it was the *wereda* officials engaging in the acts of ‘slander, foot dragging and a refusal to understand’ (1985: xvi).

I asked Aberra about Mezgabi’s claim that the plans given to the *wereda* previously had been ignored. Aberra denied there were any *tabia* level plans. I returned to the village to see Mezgabi, the chair of the *baito*. When I reported the conversation to him, outlining the claims that corruption occurred in Gemad, Mezgabi was furious and shouted: ‘It is not true, we have the documents to prove it.’

Site Selection – Access to Critical Resources

I read extracts from my field notes. In capitals I had written, ‘the people never decide on the sites of water points’. Why had there not been a hand pump installed at St Mary’s before, when it was a prime site in terms of selection criteria? Hadish had alleged it was corruption. He claimed that the *baito* members wanted water close to their houses, enabling them to grow vegetables in their gardens, feed their livestock, and also demonstrate their political position and power. I checked out the old man’s claim. It was true: Mezgabi and Birhane both had hand pumps situated very close to their homes. Gebrexavier, an incumbent member of the *baito*, was now staking his claim. The new water point was to be located outside his homestead. I realised that, while there were no overt conflicts over water, the grievances were rarely aired in public but were deeply felt and

articulated in private. If the evaluation process or *gemgem* (as it is called by the TPLF/*wereda*) was the place to air disputes, how was it that this system hailed as a democratic space for ‘voice’ was non-functional?

Gaventa and Cornwall write that ‘relatively powerless groups may speak in a way that “echoes” the voices of the powerful, either as a conscious way of appearing to comply with the more powerful parties’ wishes or as a result of the internalization of dominant views and values’ (2001: 75). They argue that: ‘Treating situated representations as if they were empirical facts maintains the dislocation from the agents and contexts of its production in a way that is, in fact, still characteristic of positivism’ (p. 75). They speak of this in relation to the holding of public meetings wherein participatory processes can be seen to have taken place, and the relatively powerless have had the opportunity to voice their grievances in what is portrayed as an open system. If people don’t speak out in those situations the danger is that existing power relations are simply reinforced without leading to change in policies or structures. Participation without a change in power relations reinforces the status quo. Therefore the claims to a more democratic face are without evidence. ‘The illusion of inclusion means not only that what emerges is treated as if it represents what “the people” really want, but also that it gains a moral authority that becomes hard to challenge/question (p. 75).

This is important in the light of the work of Li, who argues that ‘Struggles over resources are also struggles over meaning’ (1996: 501). Li demonstrates the way in which contests over the distribution of property are articulated in terms of competing representations of community at a range of different levels and sites and argues that particular representations of community can be used strategically to strengthen property claims of potentially disadvantaged groups. However, she also draws attention to the fact that ‘Women may find their specific interests submerged by a community focus’ (p. 501). Li warns against simplified representations of ideal communities as masking the fact that all communities are heterogeneous, factional and stratified with a ‘multiplicity of interests at stake in the constitution of communities’ (p. 520), and I would add in the competition for resources of development. As Li suggests, the ‘Poor [people] draw on direct and indirect strategies in their day to day struggles to obtain or retain access to key resources. Identifying sources of power and leverage is an exercise in which relatively powerless people are, of necessity, particularly adept’ (p. 509).

I remembered a conversation I had with another member of the *baito*, Abreha, the head of propaganda, who had recently returned from the war. Not surprisingly he too had a hand pump near to his house, yet he asserted that he was not involved in the site selection process. He argued: 'Professionals and technicians come and contact the *baito*'.

I suggested that this practice defeated the democratic process and reminded him that the policies of the state and regional government advocate that the people are given a voice. Abreha retorted: 'I have not seen any kind of public meeting. It's only a problem if they don't inform us. People have to prove that water is in the place they choose.' Abreha's admission blends two divergent and paradoxical claims. He stated that the people were not consulted, contrary to the development discourses espoused by the NGOs and local government, and in line with Mosse's description of how 'Powerful representations of coherent and shared policy conceal such disjuncture' (2005: 196-197).

There were as many competing discourses about actors who had the power to make the critical decisions. Tesfai, the development agent, claimed that the *baito* choose the site of water points. Wallala and Kalyu both maintained that the experts choose, meaning the hydro-geologists like Kunam, Walalla's brother, who works for REST. Kunam claimed that Aberra from the *wereda* had the power to decide. There was obfuscation and a failure to take responsibility.

Kunam was right. Aberra had the power in terms of the interface between the people as represented by the *baito* leaders and the donor organisation. The *wereda* executive were the political gatekeepers, and all forms of negotiation and brokerage must come through them. No donor organisations were allowed into the villages unless authorised by the administrative chain of command. Yet they had money, so the nexus of *baito*–TPLF–NGO became salient. Once the donors had negotiated access it was, however, between the *wereda* and *baito* systems of local governance that the negotiations of patron-clientage and access to strategic resources were played out. This had important consequences regarding a gender analysis. There were no women representatives on the *kushett* or *tabia baito*. This reflects Charlton's (1997) work demonstrating that in most development programmes¹³ the decision-makers are usually male. Men dominate state

¹³ For accounts of male bias in the development process, see Boserup (1970), Elson (1995), Kabeer (1994), Moser (1989), Rogers (1980), Visvanathan et al. (1997).

bureaucracies at local, regional and national levels, and at the village level traditional administrators are usually men. Poor women-headed households did not stand a chance of getting the water points located near their houses in my village. Women were not involved in the discussions and negotiations regarding site selection. In this ADCCS project gender issues had not been considered, and women had been excluded (Leach 1998, Moser 1993). This can be viewed in relation to the second dimension of power discussed by Bachrach and Baratz (1962), who examine 'the questions that never make it to the table'. Women could not gain access to present their questions or stake a claim as they were not included in the water development process. The male elites who performed a 'mobilisation of bias' to get water points outside their own family farms achieved this by their links with the local *wereda* officials. This second dimension or – 'power to' – works in the following way: Some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out, and if issues are prevented from arising, so too may actors be prevented from acting.

Women in Tsahlo were in fact prevented from acting in the water development process. One of the most important aspects of power is to predetermine the agenda of struggle, to influence whether certain questions ever reach the competition stage. Women had not been consulted or given the opportunity to influence this well project.

As I have outlined above, in theory the selection process should follow the principles of a needs-led demand-driven model (when in reality other factors such as the nexus of power, influence and politics are involved). In Tigray this procedure begins (theoretically) with a report from 'the people'¹⁴ that goes via the *tabia* to the *wereda*. In response, a WME representative like Kalyu performs a pre-assessment study on water scarcity and population demand. Kalyu then goes to see the *wereda* economic development head, Aberra, to discuss his findings, and the two of them make decisions on where the water points will go. These two key actors, both part of the state apparatus, hold the power regarding site selection. Kalyu claims that the final decision is collective, in consultation with himself, Aberra and the chairperson of the *baito*. Although this is the written procedure, in an interesting twist Aberra made the claim that the experts have the final say. I found this deference to the professional classes fascinating. The *wereda* officials were ex-

¹⁴ The term 'the people' is like the term 'community', masking differences based on class, race, status, age and gender and the contestations implicit in this non-homogeneous category (see Cleaver 2000, Cooke and Kothari 2001, Crewe 1997 Gujit and Shah 1998, Mosse 1994).

fighters, revolutionaries and staunch members of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, a grassroots political party, yet Aberra seemed to elevate the voices of professionals over those of the people. I wondered if this was a fudge to cover the real dynamic of power that seemed to dominate the local level, namely the *baito*–TPLF–NGO nexus.

Gaventa (1980) asks interesting questions about power relations in the Appalachians. Why did the people not act to change the imposing modernising interventions that so obviously were inequitably distributed? This same question can be asked in Tigray. Similar to the context in Kentucky where the people were under an authoritarian political hierarchy who kept strict control of all local developments, the *tabia baito* in the *kushett* controlled strategic resources such as water and used these resources to further their own interests. Yet in a revolutionary context where an oppressive power has been challenged before and the outcome for the people was favourable (according to the TPLF), why did the people not register their grievances? Which dimension of power was at play? I argue that in this highly politicised context it cannot possibly be Lukes' 'radical' definition of power or the third dimension, as false consciousness is not an issue! There was a type of 'power blindness' at play.

Back in the village the impasse held. No one had seen the workers from ADCCS for weeks. I took a trip to the town to telephone the head office in Mekelle. Ledet informed me that the NGO had terminated the project because 'the village people were not co-operative'. This was interesting, as Crewe and Harrison (1998: 155) suggest that NGOs are more likely to speak of lack of co-operation rather than resistance. This was unfolding in front of my eyes. Ledet claimed that hydro-geological surveys had proved there was water in the St Mary's site, but he had made up his mind that 'the people were lazy and did not want to work'. The decision to terminate the project had been ratified by the Catholic Church, the project donors. I went directly to the *wereda* office and reported the news to Aberra. Immediately he accused the *baito* in Gemad of weak management. Aberra had already made an evaluation of the situation and come up with a scapegoat. I wondered why no action had yet been taken to resolve the dilemma, especially as, in the final analysis, the role of the *wereda* head of economic development renders him responsible for all water resources initiatives. Aberra knew that I understood that he was ultimately responsible and he stated: 'I will take this issue to the executive and the people in public.'

Aberra said an evaluation would be held to analyse what went wrong. I went back to the village to let the *baito* know that the project had been pulled. Mezgabi called a meeting of the administration and invited me to report back on my conversation with Ledet. The *baito* were furious with ADCCS for ignoring protocol and not working with them. They stated that even when the NGO offered to change sites they were not informed. The executive also blamed a member of their own ranks, Gebrexavier, who had not told Mezgabi about the problems until the beginning of September. Alluding to my research, Mezgabi proclaimed: ‘There is a weakness in the water process in this area. You have observed a lot of things. Thank you for bringing our attention to them.’ I wondered if the people really were glad that I had been there after all: the process was obviously not in accord with the rhetoric of the various actors who had tried hard to persuade me that the global policy principles were translated into practice at the local level, representations so important to the actors in this donor-led process.

Finally, Mezgabi requested that I negotiate with ADCCS, a role for which I had already informally volunteered.¹⁵ I travelled to Mekelle to try and resurrect the failed water project. I allowed Ledet to speak first. His frustration was apparent:

We have a water policy based on participation. If the people are unwilling, the project will be unsustainable. The people tried to waste time to get more money. The money does not harm us but the time is precious.

It was interesting to note that Ledet called upon the discourse of participation to use against the villagers.

Mosse describes how the interface between aid, power and development is complex (cf. Dahl 2001: 20 and Li 1999). Moreover, Mosse maintains:

The intersection of the world of policy thought and the world of development practice is partial and socially managed. Policy discourse generates mobilising metaphors (‘participation’, ‘partnership’, ‘governance’), whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is *required* to conceal ideological differences, so as to allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, to distribute agency and to multiply the criteria of success within project systems (2005: 230)

Mosse is right: development practice is socially managed, as we can see from this example. However, in this instance the mobilising metaphors he refers to were used not to conceal the differences played out in the village but to justify the actions of the NGO in abandoning the site.

I asked when Ledet had decided to pull the project. He replied: ‘I went myself and tried to negotiate with them, and give them a contract. The workers made the excuses. I already knew that they were not willing.’ Ledet confirmed that if the workers did not finish on time they would not get paid. He had visited the site eight times and argued that it was the duty of the *baito* to oversee the project at the village level. He also denied any lack of communication between ADCCS and the *baito*. As far as Ledet was concerned, ‘the people were lazy and unwilling to work’.

I disagreed, and after a two hour meeting I persuaded Ledet to restart the project. He would give the villagers another chance. However, the villagers did not resume the work, and by the time I left the village in December 2000 the project was abandoned. People power had won. The new managerialism, formal rules and the authority of ADCCS had been rejected.

Village Post-mortem Project Evaluation

When I returned to Tsahlo village Atseda and Asqual, two prominent members of the WA, told me that I had missed the *gemgem* the *wereda* had convened early that morning. Asqual informed me of the different actors that had gathered in the village for the evaluation process; Yitbarak and Aberra from the *wereda* administration facilitated and Bahlibi represented ADCCS. Kinfe, who had recently replaced Kalyu as the Water Bureau representative, also participated. Tesfai, the DA, was present and Mezgabi, Abade and Birhane represented the *baito*. Kalyu and Gebrexavier were absent from the main evaluation. It appeared that the villagers had also been excluded from the process.

The next morning, however, a message reached me about a meeting being held close to the St Mary’s site. A smaller evaluation was being held. I was grateful for an opportunity to observe the proceedings, and whilst I waited for the meeting to begin I took the opportunity to interview Tesfai, who declared:

¹⁵ This raised the ethical issues of the anthropologist as interloper, whether to intervene or merely observe.

The main faults are with ADCCS and Kalyu for not contacting the *baito*. The *baito* did not follow up the water project. Also the *kushett*, especially Gebrexavier who knew that work had started and did not report it to the *baito*.

The evaluation (*gemgem*) began and was a fascinating process, based on a Maoist model. I was surprised to see that Kalyu and Gebrexavier were present, in addition to Mezgabi, Kinfe, Birhan and Abade. The only missing players were the donors and the *wereda* executive. It would have been even more formidable the previous day with Yitbarak and Aberra, both ex-military men. Gebrexavier was on trial and was forced to confess to his failure. Mezgabi warned him that in the forthcoming elections the people would be informed about this evaluation. Gebrexavier would not be re-elected to office. Mezgabi also accused him of negligence regarding the already existing water points in the *kushett*.

I compared the stories about this failed project. I spoke to the actors involved in the evaluation, beginning with Kinfe from the Water Bureau, who surprised me by stating that the *wereda* were not at all responsible for the failure. Tesfai also claimed that the *wereda* was free from criticism because it had lacked information, as WME and ADCCS did not discuss the problems with the *baito*. I knew this statement was not accurate. I also knew that Ledet and Freheimenot, both ADCCS staff members, had informed the *wereda* and discussed the project with Aberra on more than one occasion. It was interesting for me to note that, regarding the role of the *wereda*, *baito* and villagers, Aberra and the villager labourers were deemed faultless. This reflects work done by Crewe and Harrison who demonstrate how in Sri Lanka 'local people are reified' (1998: 154). The difficulty of criticising locals led me to analyse the evaluation process in terms of the power and importance of the personalities involved. Kalyu from the Water Bureau was made the scapegoat. As a civil servant he was easily replaceable and had been transferred to Adigrat as punishment for his failings.

Kalyu stated that the NGO pressured them to start the project. I asked him why the site at St Mary's had been chosen. Was it the high population density? He replied that the professional assessments previously completed had highlighted that location. I asked why they had not gone straight to the spring, which would be similar to the hand pump site at Mai Eif. Kalyu stated that the area was not considered water scarce, yet that left the most densely populated area of the *kushett* drinking contaminated water. I inquired as to why the development process had been so

protracted when REST completed one hand-dug well project in just 40 to 50 days. Kalyu replied that the rains had come and delayed the process. But, I argued, the project had begun two months before the rains came.

Next I spoke with Yitbarak, the most powerful individual in the *wereda*. As chairperson, every activity in the administration is ultimately his responsibility. Yitbarak remarked:

The main agenda of the *gemgem* was to find out why the project was abandoned. The NGO, ADCCS, has accepted responsibility for the failure.

Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) draw our attention to the analysis of situated representations. They discuss the ‘pluralist’ or first dimensional approach to the study of community and power and suggest a focal point of analysis to be the formal arenas of local government. In a federalist democracy such as Ethiopia, citizens air grievances through the local system of administration. The *gemgem* in Tigray is the mechanism of evaluation. It is here that power and powerlessness can be discovered through an examination of who participates, who gains and loses, and who prevails in decision-making about key issues. This dynamic had been played out and the most powerful of the political elite had decided who was to blame and who to be punished. Although the *wereda* stated that ADCCS had accepted responsibility, I knew that this was not the case. I had to challenge the representations that were offered. It was not in the TPLF’s interest to blame the structures of power or the people.

In the village the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ appeared to be contradictory spheres. Power processes were made observable by the *gemgem* process. Community conflict was being mediated via the higher echelons of local government, the *wereda*. The power struggles or power play between the actors involved in the development encounter could be clearly seen and observed.

Gbrexavier was duly publicly punished. In this form of power play Foucault’s analysis of the disciplinary technologies of power is clearly visible as the administration reprimands the actors that step out of line. The man who was head of economic development lost his position on the prestigious local government committee and all the perks that went with it. He had transgressed the rules. Alternatively, had I not been there, Gbrexavier might not have been sacked. This representation of discipline and punishment may only have been for my benefit as I was seen by

the villagers to be connected to REST and, through my choice of interpreter, to the TPLF. Also the TPLF may have connected my 'western' background with 'donors' and hence future funding. The power of the researcher to influence people's behaviour has to be included here. The dismissal may have been for my benefit only. It is possible that with the complexities of village life, once I had departed, Gebrexavier might have been reinstated in his old post, the village relations of power returning to normal, without the anthropologist's intrusive gaze.

The solution to the failure, according to Yitbarak, was an 'integrated' approach to development. The management-speak that James (1999) describes became the rote response by all the actors post-evaluation. It must have been the recommendation proposed by the *wereda* and thereby adopted by all involved. The representations of the international water policy consensus reigned, presented as the solution to the problems encountered.

As head of economic development for the *wereda*, Aberra had to meet monthly with the implementing NGOs to assess any problem encountered in the development process and to prioritise action. His monitoring and evaluation had not been completed and he had not overseen activities. This fact was glossed over in the evaluation process. Those with most political clout, the *wereda* officials (all TPLF members), emerged from the evaluation blameless. The TPLF had closed ranks and protected the top dogs.

At St Mary's the villagers had not been involved in the selection of the site. There was no public forum for consultation. There were no meetings to elect the workers, contrary to the political rhetoric of the party. In exploring the notion of people's participation and bottom-up, needs-led development versus a top-down, dictatorship-type model, there appeared to be no difference. The rhetoric belied the reality. What was the difference if the people did not have a voice? The discrimination in site selection and worker selection had serious repercussions in terms of the failure of the water point. I suggest that the nexus of the NGO-TPLF-*baito* explains the failure of this project as Gebrexavier, the *baito* member, had colluded with the NGO and the TPLF [read the *wereda*] to access water as a critical resource outside his house. It is possible that the other *baito* members actually knew this and turned a blind eye –I shall explore this further in Chapter 7 when I discuss another mask I feel is of paramount significance, that of 'power blindness'.

Did the rejection of the project mean the people were resistant? Or was it, as Crewe and Harrison suggest, a case of ‘the users not being passively obedient, but ... responding to their own complex assessments, priorities and values, within the context of their own worldview’ (1998: 159), resonating with my idea of a power play?

It is important to note here that underlying all these local conflicts are relations of power that are embedded in the historical and political context of war, revolution and the new discourses of development and democracy in the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. A significant nexus has emerged through the discourses that I have described: (1) the power of the individual actors engaged in positions or roles of local governance (the *baito*); (2) the politicians whose power was gained through their roles in the armed struggle who are now represented at the *wereda* level (all members of the TPLF) and (3) the NGO, ADCCS, who have and provide the resources, both in terms of cash as wages and the technology to access water. However, without the added power of REST/TPLF, the villagers were at least partly able to resist the authority of ADCCS.

Putting Gender into the Picture

The most glaring omission so far has been the absolute lack of women’s involvement and women’s voice in the development process. A GAD critique of the failed project may argue that women, the most important actors concerning water, the gatekeepers of this vital resource, were not consulted and did not participate at all in site selection, project planning, or any stage of the implementation. Women were excluded from the entire development process (Leach 1998, Li 1996).

The paradox in Tsahlo was that women-headed households were the poorest, yet in the strict gender division of labour that operated at the village level, women were never considered able to dig and were excluded from the benefits of development in terms of access to the cash income from wage labour. As Goetz suggests, ‘Male power also operates through the organisational logic of public institutions, which favour certain actors, skills, bodies, capacities, over others. Class and gender hierarchies systematically and routinely benefit certain individuals and groups at the expense of others’ (1994: 498).

Following Gaventa and Cornwall (2001), a fourth dimensional analysis of the relational view of power (influenced by Foucault 1977) can be applied to bring in an understanding of gender exclusion. It is vital in exploring questions of power, knowledge and participation in relation to water projects as women are supposed to be the gatekeepers of water. In particular it will help to focus on the ways through which structural relationships of power are maintained by monopolies of knowledge. Gaventa and Cornwall argue that 'power works through the total experience of the discourses, as well as the institutions and practices that produce the effects of power. This frames the boundaries of possibility that govern action (2001: 76), by allowing participation or not, as was the case in Tsahlo. Women were not consulted and had been given no access to knowledge about the new project. The benefits of development were shared by only some women, the wives of the workmen who gained from the extra income for their households. Kandiyoti (1998) argues that women become experts in maximising their own life chances, through various strategies for ensuring their access to these extra resources. But there is a caveat, as I outlined in my literature review. It is also pertinent to challenge the idea of the benevolent patriarchal provider. It is possible that some wives may not have gained at all as the male workers may have chosen to spend the extra cash income they gained on local beer and other commodities rather than on direct contributions to the household economy (see Elson 1994, Kabeer 1998, Moser 1993).

Thus, one reason for the failure of the St Mary's project could be the fact that women were completely excluded from the development process. Dahl (1969) argues that A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests. In a gender analysis this can be seen when men use this form of power over women. A can influence, shape and determine B's wants and therefore B's conception of the issue even in the absence of observable conflict. Applying this principle, it could be argued that as the project in St Mary's was being implemented there was no observable protest voiced by the women. The historical context of revolution was supposed to have made women stronger and more vocal in the public domain according to Hammond (1999), the WA, and NGO discourse (ADCCS and REST). Why did the excluded women not voice any protest at the village level?

Gaventa concludes that after years of experience of banging their heads against political walls, exploited people perceive it to be a waste of energy. By not voicing a protest were women actively opting out? Crewe and Harrison (1998) uphold this choice as a form of prioritisation crucial to

people's survival. In my argument I have called this behaviour a form of 'power play', whereby women choose the games they want to play and resist the call to play at other moments. This is a position of strength, based on knowledge and experience. Therefore women may strategize not to opt in, actually resisting inclusion rather than being the victims of exclusion. I argue it is a play that stems from active agency and not necessarily a passive position (see Chapter 5).

I approached the head of the Water Bureau in Mekelle to discuss my findings. Abebe was cognisant of the critical role of women in water development projects and declared: 'Water and women are one. Women carry the burden of water portage literally, yet do not participate. Women's participation is crucial.'

The rhetoric of the Bureau resonates with international policy consensus on gender and water. Was it possible to operationalise these international policies on the ground, at grassroots, village level? I gathered together a focus group of women in my village to discuss what they felt had gone wrong (see Figure 4.9). In other chapters I have described some women actively opting out of development, but this group of women representing the WA claimed that they wanted to opt in but were constrained from doing so. Atseda, the chairperson, argued:

The problem is when people come to the village to do water development activities the men do not inform the Women's Association. The first thing they should do is come and involve us.

It is interesting to note the paradox of the strong political mobilisation (of women) historically through the revolution but also at the local village level of women actively signed up to the Association. This seems to contradict the weak development participation that I have described in this and previous chapters. I shall explore the relationship between political mobilisation and participatory development in Chapter 7. For the moment I want to focus on the point that women in general are mobilised as labour power, to work, but not to take control, plan or design. The women's focus group in unison stated they were never consulted regarding site selection. Sometimes high profile individuals like Walalla were approached, but the ordinary women were never asked and had no decision-making power and no voice.

Atseda clearly described this form of discrimination in practice. One morning she went to observe one of the water points under construction in Tsadenale. She saw two women sitting on the grass watching the proceedings. As she approached she encouraged them to participate. A man present said to her: 'Go away, it doesn't concern you.' Atseda then disclosed that the man who ordered her to leave was Gebrexavier, the head of all development activities in the *tabia*. If the leaders of development at the local level expressed this attitude towards women participating, what hope was there for women to be involved in the more complex issues of planning and design, or even policy-making if they wanted to?

Gebrexavier's comment was also interesting on another level, as a TPLF member he was stating that (water) development activities were not women's business. However as a TPLF member it was his duty to encourage women to actively participate in the war against Eritrea. Women could enlist as soldiers and be politically active in the war effort, but paradoxically he was stating that women did not have a place in the public domain of development.

The women gathered together for the focus group discussion were concerned. Mulu declared:

If they had discussed it with us the work would have been done properly, but they ignored us. The problem is they don't involve us in the planning. There are no women represented on the *baito*, the men do everything themselves, but as women we are concerned with water issues. We are the victims, walk long distances, we should participate but we do not.

Certain women did voice their unhappiness at exclusion, yet they still appeared to engage in quiescence publicly. In this historical context it is possible to understand the 'genesis of this prevailing law of anticipated reactions' (Gaventa 1980: 18) that causes quiescence. Fear of reprisal may have been a significant factor – loss of aid and other inputs, farm technologies, wages from soil and water conservation, and other possible tangible benefits of development opportunities.

I asked the women what the solution was. What could they do to be more involved in the process? Atseda declared that there was discrimination, arguing that power remained in the hands of the men. I asked why women were not elected to the *kushett* or *baito* executive. Kidane, an older woman in her late 50s, answered: 'The men are not willing to involve women in administration activities, especially in the *baito*. The Women's Association is weak, and this has a negative

impact on women's power issues.' I inquired if there was anything that could be done to involve more women in the *baito*. A woman replied: 'The problem is we are illiterate, so our participation in the administration is impossible.'

It was interesting to hear these women who were politically involved in the Women's Association argue for the benefits of the modernisation programme and uphold education as the key to their participation. It was true, from a western feminist perspective, the women were constrained in terms of education, knowledge, skill and ability and thereby claimed that they lacked self-confidence in the public arena. These women felt inferior to the men in this aspect and articulated it. This was, they felt, the main obstacle preventing women's participation in local level politics. Very few women could read and write like Atseda and Walalla. The older women tried the literacy campaign, but said they were too old to learn; they found it hard to cope with the lessons and gave up. This is interesting because these women do uphold the tenets of the modernisation paradigm, contrary to what Abu-Lughod (1998) and Najmabadi (1998) suggest, as I outlined in earlier chapters. This shows the complexities of the many and diverse 'feminisms' that exist (see also Moore 1994).

The WA argued that this lack of skill impacted upon gender participation in decision-making, implementation and management and was a serious constraint in the water development process in Tigray. Important issues such as gender relations in project procedures were overlooked as both men and women relegated women to the traditional roles of gatekeeper and provider. Women in the village had fewer opportunities to participate in discussions and decisions in spite of their key role as users and managers of water. Women were restricted in terms of knowledge and access to information.

In Tigray all the implementing NGOs and the government rhetoric claimed to be gender sensitive and address women's issues. In reality they did not. The gap between rhetoric and reality seemed to widen into a gulf. Burton (1974) suggests that gender divisions in local resource management are subtle and may be overlooked. This was not the case in Tsahlo where they were overt and unchallenged. Men were on the decision-making bodies and held the power while women performed traditional roles and were excluded from the process.

Sieber suggests that: 'Gender divisions in indigenous management systems deserve more attention as a basis for new water management and to avoid a situation where men's indigenous resources and influence are built upon while women's are overlooked' (1996: 31). In my village women had indeed been overlooked. Holistic water supply and sanitation management, which acknowledged multiple interests, did not exist. Abdullah and Boot do not blame the village people for the lack in this area:

If water and sanitation facilities are not in use, demanded or supported, it is not attributed to lack of interest or cultural barriers or inherent conservatism of the poor but to one-sided design decisions by agencies without attention to men and women's choice-making (1989: 12).

Comparison of the Two Projects

I began this chapter by observing REST water projects being implemented. The NGO did have some very good working policies and practices. For example, the rainy season begins in mid-July and lasts till September. REST have a policy not to work at these times because the water levels can mislead the technicians as to the amounts of groundwater available. Also, it is risky because of the danger of well walls collapsing, as I witnessed in Tsahlo. Furthermore, the volume of the groundwater would be so great that to de-water the well would be time-consuming, in Tsahlo the pump had not arrived and the villagers were carrying buckets up and down a hand-made ladder, which could easily lead to accidents. Getachew claimed that REST's work is therefore well-timed for maximum efficiency and safety, for they do not construct new wells during July and August.

It had taken REST just 43 working days to construct one hand-dug well, approximately 15m deep. This was vastly better than the ADCCS projects in Tsahlo that had taken over 10 months, and then were shelved.

However, water security is not only about constructing new sources, but also about maintaining them. Giday, a field co-ordinator, stressed to me the importance of the maintenance of the well post-construction and the problems REST encountered:

The Water Committees are trained, but stop taking responsibility after only six to eight months. People do not pay the tariff. The pump breaks down. The Water Bureau do not

do their job effectively, they do not have transport for their water technicians. People constantly over-pump, 14 hours daily, and the water yield decreases. It breaks down.

This was a fascinating revelation from Giday and demonstrated how unsustainable the water projects were and confirmed all my research findings in Tsahlo described in the previous chapter. As soon as the donors had departed the people reverted to non-compliance. The system of VLOM had serious problems. The reality was that some Water Committees were trained, but then after a short while the people stopped participating and refused to pay the tariff for all the reasons I elucidated in the last chapter. The pumps did break down as I had seen and the people were left drinking unsafe water from polluted sources whilst the new pumps lay rusting and idle.

It is interesting to place these observations into the wider context of the development process in terms of policy and aid. The discourses I had heard and read from the national and regional government and the implementing NGOs regarding the integrated aspects of project planning highlighting participation, empowerment and sustainability were not happening. This is interesting in the light of the research that Mosse describes regarding his study of the KRIBP, a development programme in India:

The success of the overall project, however, required not only the delivery of visible schemes with demonstrable livelihood impact, but also the achievement of wider participatory development objectives and the validation of a project model. In particular this model established a link between better programmes and sustainable livelihood improvements, on the one hand, and 'people's participation' (i.e. participatory planning and skills and capacity development), on the other. Here, KRIBP was a project organising itself not just as a system for the delivery of development benefits (operational system) but as a 'system of representations', a set of validating ideas about participation or people's knowledge, which needed to be maintained. ... Participatory goals are oriented upwards (or outwards) to legitimise action, to explain, justify, validate higher policy goals, or mobilise political support rather than downwards to orient action (2000: 27).

I would argue that this is one of the keys to the development enterprise, the 'system of representations' that Mosse describes, justifying funding, validating global policy principles and legitimising and underpinning the entire development encounter. Getachew was well versed in the discourses of development and was aware that I was making a comparison between the ADCCS project and REST. Although both organisations are local, REST has political roots and ADCCS a religious association. Competitive discourses abound and Getachew stated:

We try and make our work as cost effective as possible. Rather than spend one million *birr* on 100 hand-dug wells, we want to spend it on 200. ADCCS prioritise looks, not quality. They do not appreciate cost effectiveness. We buy cement locally. ADCCS use expensive fencing. We prefer to buy spare parts with that money or strengthen the capacity of the WC. We have good, well-trained technicians.

REST run an efficient, cost-effective and accountable programme according to Getachew. He was right that REST had excellent organisation systems regarding logistical support. The workers were not left waiting on supplies such as rock, or mechanical equipment and tools, as was the case in Tsahlo where work was suspended for several weeks, awaiting the arrival of the de-watering pump which never materialised.

ADCCS do spend money on strong wire fences. However, these keep animals out and protect the groundwater source from contamination. Many of the REST projects were not securely fenced, walls were half built and when fully built the absence of doors left the enclosure and apron open and vulnerable to contamination from children and animals. REST left construction up to the villagers' discretion and in many cases they were not completed, rendering the project potentially unsustainable. Getachew did, however, make an important point: 'We also have timely communication with the *baito* to mobilise people.' In Kollo Tembien, the people did have a voice and it appeared they were consulted.

The fit between REST's aims and objectives and regional policies is fairly strong. I feel there is no dissonance between the aims and objectives of the government and REST as an organisation, due to the political linkage/affiliation between the two. REST also demonstrated good practice in monitoring and evaluation in that they kept a daily labourers' record. If ADCCS had done that then problems with the workers would have emerged earlier on in the development process and might have been solved before the situation escalated out of control.

ADCCS do not test the quality of the water at all, whereas RUWAS had just purchased their first water quality test kit from Oxfam UK and were training their staff how to use it. Getachew maintained that health and sanitation education was important. He asserted:

Health and sanitation education is given to the technicians because they have to train the Water Committee. The focus is on hygiene to keep the water clean from the start at the

hand pump to the house. We advise people in meetings, to transfer the rules to the people so they will not wash their feet, faces, hand or clothes around the water point.

Again, these representations of 'good practice' I had not observed at any of the field sites I visited, nor were there such transfers of knowledge. Alternatively, ADCCS pay for the training of the WC and organise and facilitate the sessions. I questioned Getachew about the lack of synchronicity between the implementation of water points and sanitation hardware. Getachew countered:

RUWAS do not install latrines at new water points, but in the next five-year plan we are integrating sanitation and hygiene programmes in collaboration with the Health Bureau. In most *tabias* health cadres provide hygiene education; we focus on water.

Getachew revealed that RUWAS view their work as purely technical. It is the role of the Health Bureau, as the health educators, to train the villagers. He stated: 'We have some problems with the Bureau, some *weredas* are without Water Bureau representatives when we hand over the scheme to the community.'

The understanding is that the village health cadre is co-opted as a representative on the Water Committee, therefore there is no need for more information. However, without proper training linked specifically to safe water-handling practices, the knowledge of the health *fanas* may be incomplete at best or misinformed at worst, rendering the project unsustainable according to the biomedical model (which REST purport to uphold). Getachew's views reminded me of Maria's comment that in the early days REST felt that any health work done was the responsibility of the Health Bureau and did not need duplicating by the NGO. I think that belief still permeates the organisation, which is still largely male dominated and technically biased. I believe health at the village level is considered women's domain and therefore not taken as seriously as men's business, which is technical and political. This last point was mirrored in both field sites I compared. There were no integrated water and sanitation programmes.

Getachew claimed that the technicians moved around the villages, with the women and elders gaining indigenous knowledge. This also seemed a little too romantic, as paleo-hydrological data was gathered primarily during the field assessments. The theory that REST targets women and elders was not evidenced. In my observations male elders seemed to be the main sources of information. A couple of women were consulted regarding pre-existing water and rainfall patterns,

but issues of historical water sources, geomorphology, seepage and catchment were much more likely to be discussed with and targeted at the men. Especially TPLF members.

Conclusion

In this chapter I used two case studies of NGOs involved in water interventions to examine the disjunction between policy intentions and the outcomes of the water development process in rural Tigray. I examined events at the local level using the works of academics engaged in a critical analysis of the discourses and practices of development such as Abrahamsen (2000), Crewe and Harrison (1998), Gaventa and Cornwall (2001), Mitchell (1995) Moser (1993) and Mosse (2005).

I explored how local people negotiate power in different ways. As Mosse (2005) points out, survival for rural communities depends on external patronage with those who have access to better resources. This is mediated through NGOs and their interface with systems of local governance, the *wereda* and *tabia baito*, who distribute the benefits of aid/development to the villagers.

Historically determined factors shape the relationship between rural Tigrayan villagers and new development projects. Elite ex- TPLF soldiers from the armed struggle now hold posts in strategic government councils at the national, regional and local level. In this chapter I analysed how local people negotiate access to strategic resources via these power structures and the impact that these relations have on the sustainability or success of water projects. Images of community are central to questions of resource access at the local level. It was as important for the project workers in the NGOs to secure the peoples participation.

Both the TPLF officials and the NGOs under study attempted to present an authoritative voice, deemed to represent 'the community'. This led to 'simplifications ridden with power' (Li 1996, Mosse 2005, Crewe and Harrison 1998) as many people's interests and claims were left out of the account and especially, with relation to the St Mary's project, those of women. It appeared that there were many levels where power relations were demonstrated, particularly in terms of quiescence, acquiescence, compliance and resistance, exposing the type of strategies employed in the course of day to day struggles over resources.

Although the poorest are meant to be the primary beneficiaries of development, with influence on where water points are located and benefits in terms of jobs, income and training, the majority of the poorest people did not benefit. Local elites were the main recipients, and this relationship invariably reflected local politics. Hand pumps were placed outside the homesteads of the members of the *tabia baito*. The important factors underlying all these struggles were embedded in the historical and political context of war, revolution and now 'democracy'. This chapter makes clear a more important nexus has emerged from the comparison of the two projects, that of the power of local governance (the *baito*), military struggle represented through the political party (the TPLF), and the NGO (REST). I used the term power blindness to describe how the knowledge that people held about this powerful constellation was not voiced, people at several different levels appear to 'turn a blind eye' to the patronage relations that dominate.

However, the villagers in Tshalo did resist development interventions and the workers at the St Mary's site thwarted the objectives of the implementing NGO: the projects duly failed. 'People agree/refuse development projects, influenced and constrained by complex set of social/political/economic circumstances. Some people agree to projects because to disagree upsets local government' (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 125).

What does this mean in relation to the dynamic that I term the 'water-gender-power nexus'? I argue that this is 'the connecting inter-relationship of relational and productive power that enables quiescence and resistance to imposed development interventions'. It explores how and if people resist, participate, or adopt positions of quiescence and acquiescence.

Why do aid receivers participate in development if the ideologies underlying it legitimise the power of the benefactor. There is no doubt that some people are motivated by material gain (actual or expected). Mosse (2005) argues that people may participate to retain locally influential patrons.

Crewe and Harrison argue that development 'is not a monolithic machine with one single group exploiting another' (1998: 192). If, however, as Escobar (1995) argues, inequalities, injustices and poverty remain unchallenged by development, it is perplexing why actors apparently participate in the process, especially when many lose out. It is important therefore to locate this analysis of aid and development in terms of power relations, not just at the local level but also in terms of

globalisation and the mechanisms of capitalism, including the relations of trade and debt. These factors are 'far more significant in perpetuating poverty' (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 193). Inclusion and participation in development do indeed lead some local elites to put themselves forward and increase their visibility. In my analysis it was true there were differential aspects to the beneficiaries of development, in this particular instance women en masse were excluded – they were not only less visible but completely silent. In both case studies women were marginalised and were not involved in non-‘traditional’ roles or planning or decision making.

I shall now look more closely at the issues of gender in REST, both on an organisational level and in terms of service delivery to the rural community, to examine the paradox of the strong political mobilisation of women along with weak development participation. I shall explore the relationship between political mobilisation and participatory development.

Organizational Structure of REST

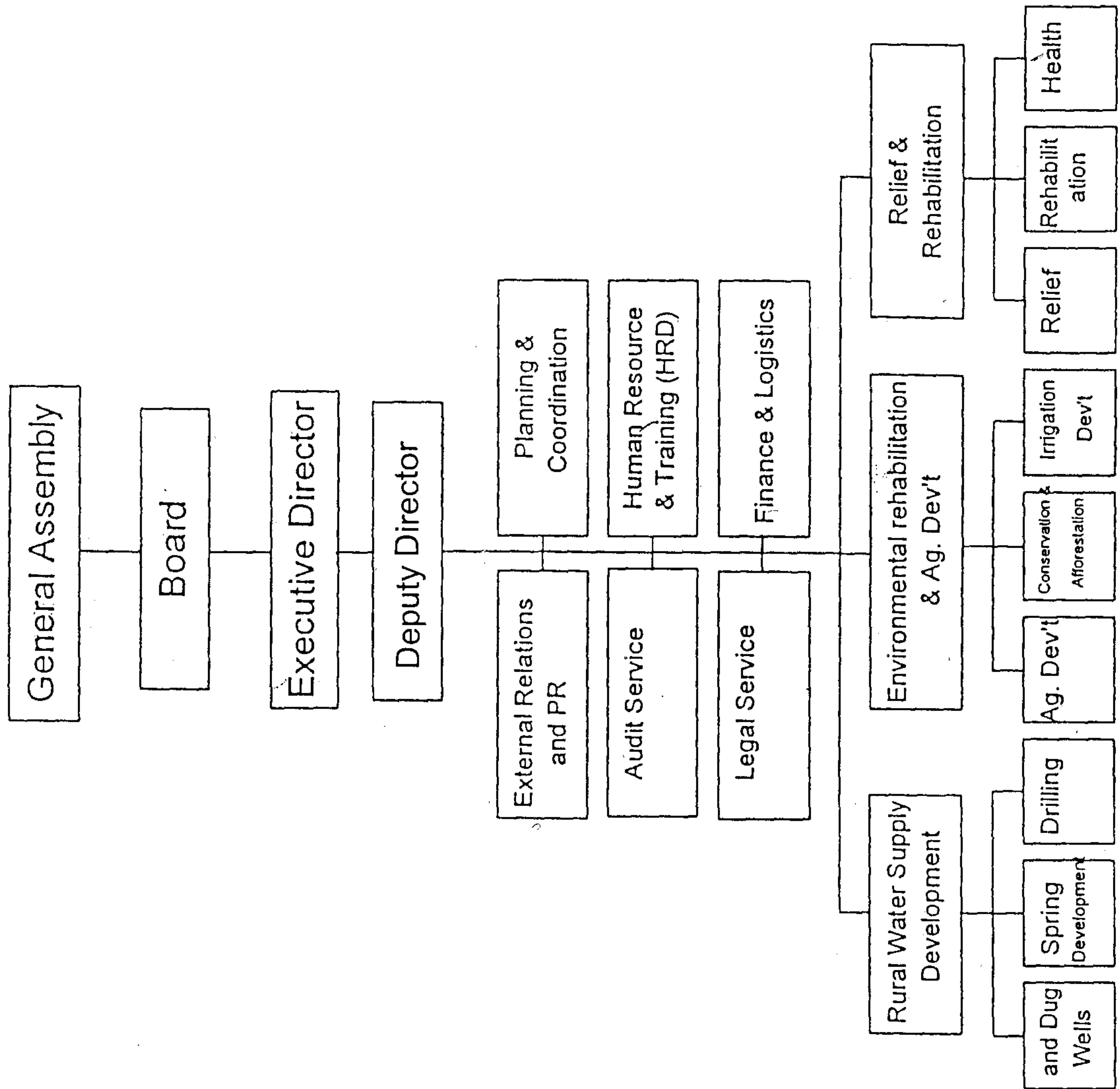




Figure 6.2 Getachew Head of RUWAS in REST

Figure 6.4 Drilling Rig at Kollo Tembien



Organizational set-up of Rural Water Supply Development Department

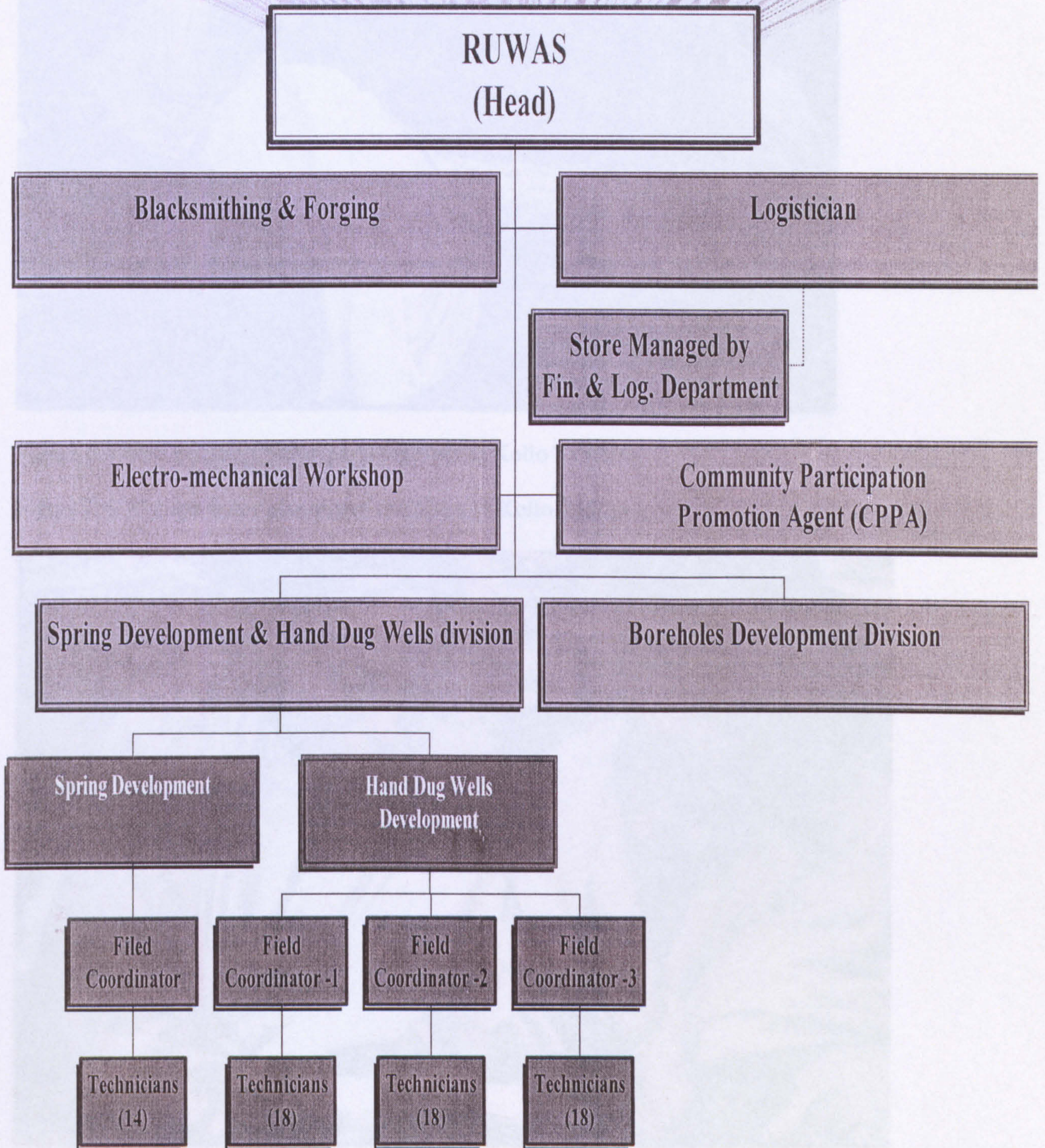
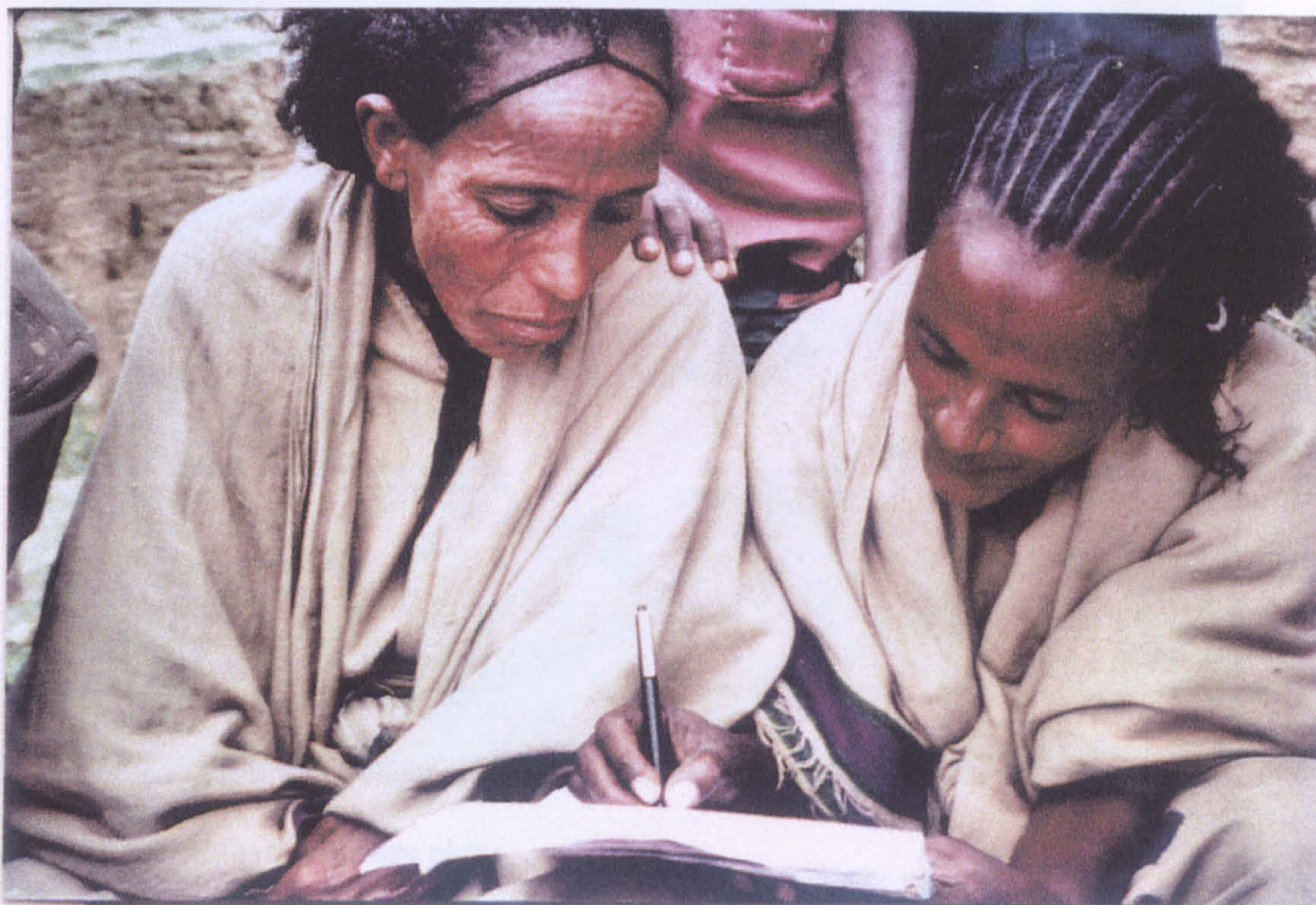




Figure 6.5 Men put hand pump parts together at Kollo Tembien

Figure 6.6 Women water committee members at Kollo Tembien



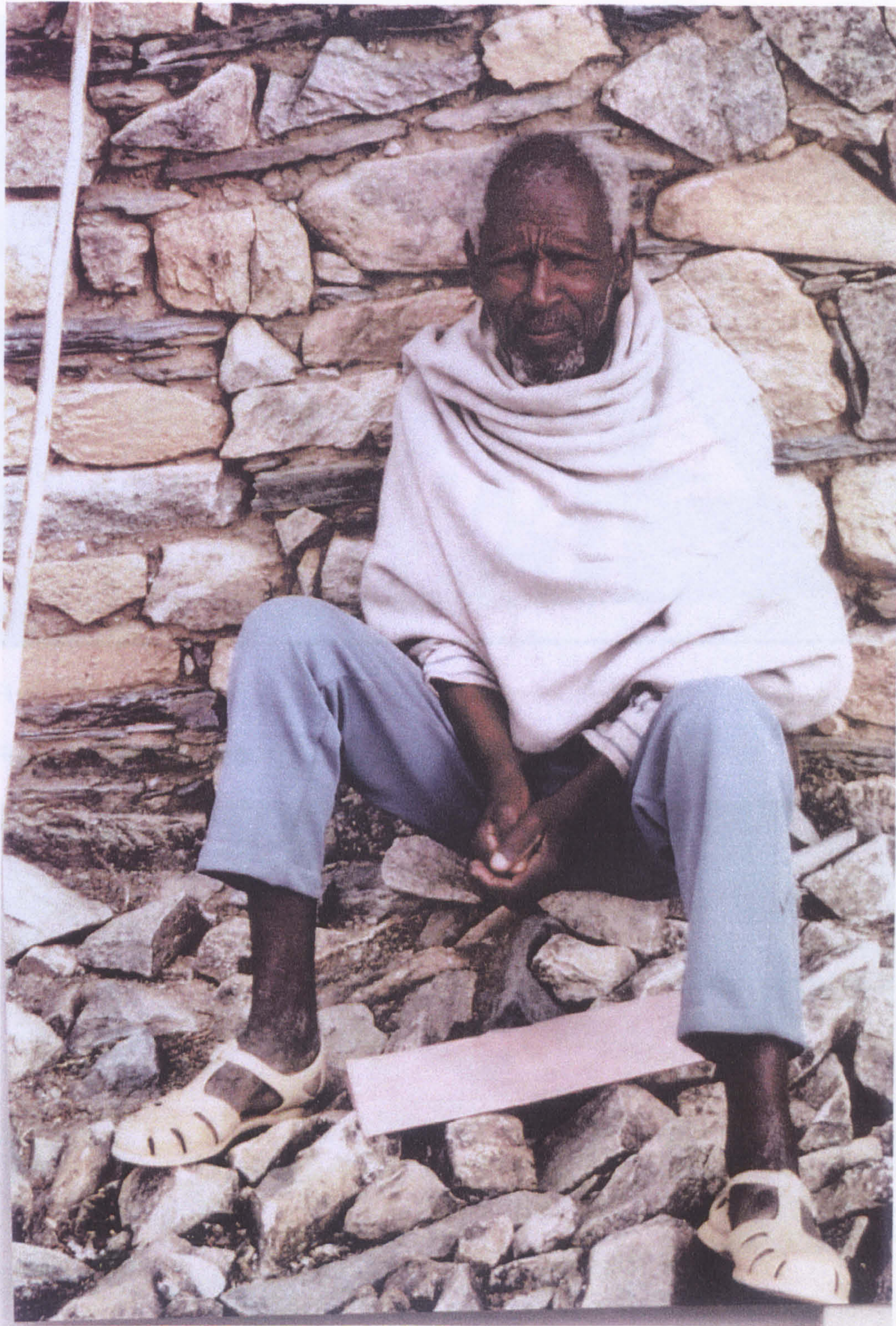


Figure 6.7 Mahari a village elder

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Chapter Seven

REST

Tekleweini, Director

Birhane, Deputy Director

Kunam, hydro - geologist

Getachew, head of rural water supply department (RUWAS)

Tsehayie, head of environmental rehabilitation (ERAD)

Dr Tewelde, head of the health department

Maria, fundraiser

Fiona, research and development

Wolde, water technician

Wosen, water technician

Yodannis, water technician (woman)

Giday, field co-ordinator

Women's Association – Regional

Kudusan, Director of the Women's Association of Tigray (WAT)

Tamrat, Deputy Director of the Women's Association of Tigray (WAT)

These are the principle characters mentioned by name in this chapter.

CHAPTER 7: FOCUSING ON GENDER AT NGO AND PROJECT LEVELS

In this chapter I plan to explore the discourses and praxis regarding gender in water development interventions which come as part of a wider package of policy conditions attached to aid funding for NGOs such as REST. I will examine the policies and practices of this powerful local NGO and examine the lack of genuine participation at the village level. Then I will return to the highest level of policy and planning and examine how to gain funding NGOs have to bow to western policy prescriptions.

I aim to place the discourses of gender in the development context into what Cooper and Packard describe as ‘a regime of unequal international relations’ (1997: 5). I will place this global policy framework into the local situation by highlighting the way power works through the agencies and institutions involved in water development with regard to gender relations. Mosse draws our attention to the ‘gradients of power’ (2005: 242) that crosscut these relations. I will use this idea to highlight the political and economic reality of globalisation and the modernisation project in which REST is embedded and which has complex concrete manifestations on the local level. As Crewe and Harrison (1998) demonstrate, NGOs are constrained and coerced into accepting the discourses and practices of development such as ‘partnership’ and ‘participation’ or the aid funds they rely on may be affected (see also Mitchell 1995). I argue that power cannot be considered without taking gender into account. I shall look at how REST deals with gender issues within their organisation and why they operationalise things in the way they do. This links to my arguments about local manifestations of global processes.

In an earlier chapter I described REST as more powerful than the government. It is important therefore to understand the power of a hidden but more profound nexus in the particular context of Tigray. This arises from the historical experience of military struggle, represented through the TPLF interfacing with the most powerful NGO in the region, REST, connecting with the third mechanism operating at the village level, the *tabia baito*, which mediates all development activities and project implementation.

Gender Policies within REST: Coercion or Compliance?

The NGO under study, REST, is a stakeholder in water development in Tigray. As a significant 'partner' in the development process, REST is a key player interacting with the major donors (primarily USAID), alongside the Tigray regional government, but I argue it is in a structurally unequal relationship with its donors (Abrahamsen 2000).

Mosse describes how 'aid policy has become more managerial, its ends – the quantified reduction of poverty or ill health – have narrowed, but its means have diversified to the management of more and more: financial and political systems and civil society' (2005: 237). Abrahamsen (2000) explores the power of the donor over the project, demonstrating how discourses of good governance are inextricably linked to aid flows. In sum, international development is about generating consensus, and the most powerful are the donors who invest aid funds in Ethiopia. However, as Mosse shows, the picture is complex. Power is relational and diffused throughout the development spectrum. It operates at every level from the NGOs in the cities to the local elites at the village level. Consensus is a powerful concept, a form of entrapment, constraining actors – especially NGOs – to acquiesce to the dominant discourses of development.

It may be the case that REST are coerced to adopt gender policies emphasising participation and empowerment to ensure a continued flow of aid (Mitchell 1995). The caveat is that the NGOs need not necessarily agree with, believe in, comply with or adopt international policy principles in daily praxis. This is another form of what I term a power play.

REST, like most NGOs is a conduit for development aid (Tvedt 1998) and thus has been reshaped in the ways they operate and conceive themselves. Adopting the prevailing rhetoric of aid donors pursuing a neo-liberal agenda, the NGO employs the same language, follows the same reporting procedures and uses the model of the logical framework analysis in the same way as northern NGOs in most donor countries. They are accountable to the agreements of donor states and international institutions accommodating the requirements employed by donor states.

In Ethiopia NGOs are defined as 'humanitarian organisations which, using their own resources, participate in the country's effort to eliminate poverty and deprivation' (Tvedt 1998: 14). I shall

examine this statement and demonstrate how in fact REST as an NGO is tied into a relationship that means they must represent themselves as fully conversant in the rhetorics of partnership and gender in development and, in particular, as proponents of the participation and empowerment of women.

REST Water Projects: Tools for Empowerment or Vehicles for Rhetorical Discourses?

How did REST, the largest NGO working in the water development sector, perceive the gender dimension of its programmes? Maria, a key informant working in REST, explained:

We needed to recognise the rights and responsibilities of women from the outset. Water is simply a tool for development and empowerment, particularly for women. The context is one of extreme poverty, where women fare the worst.

Maria highlighted the themes of gender, participation and the empowerment of women. Reflecting on the belief that water and sanitation projects have a profound potential for social change, Maria situated herself as an actor representing the NGO for which she works. Fully conversant with the latest development jargon, she claimed to believe in the power of the mobilising metaphors of which Mosse (2005) speaks. Maria considered herself an integral part of the NGO and passionately upheld the organisation's mission, professing an anti-poverty stance. The discourses of participation and empowerment that Maria used can be perceived as providing the NGO with a form of legitimacy and verified their adoption as players in the international policy arena (Crewe and Harrison 1998).

Maria drew on the discourse of human rights within the development paradigm, stating that what is required in Tigray is a healthy and productive society. This statement reflects the WID theoretical position. By including women in the development process it improves their health and productivity, raising economic productivity nationally. Improving women's access to education, training, income generation, property, employment and credit are integral to this process (Connelly et al. 2000).

It was important to Maria that women in Tigray are not sick and overburdened but, through the implementation of water programmes, may become more energetic and active participants in all

areas of society. Yet Maria was aware of the limitations in contemporary discourses of development, adding:

We now talk about the practical and strategic needs of women. These shifts that donors expect are set against the harsh context and reality of Tigray, backward and without adequate resources. To meet donor expectations re women is very hard. It needs attitudinal change to achieve equality of power between men and women. How do we give women a voice so they can participate in community governance and decision-making?

It is interesting that Maria used the phrase ‘backward’ to describe the Tigrean context – language that locates Ethiopia in an inferior position globally, resonating with social evolutionary theories of the continent that are frowned upon in today’s progressive post-colonial world (Sachs 1992). As an expatriate of Australian descent, Maria appeared to place herself as socially ‘other’ in relation to the NGO that she previously worked for. However, she also expressed solidarity with the local Ethiopian NGO she was now employed by. This placed her in an ambiguous position between the Australian donors and REST.

Maria raised some very interesting questions and highlighted some important points. Women in Ethiopia historically had been subject to inequality, particularly during earlier times. Women had to walk behind their menfolk, who rode on donkeys in front of them, a symbolic yet structural representation of their inferior position. Maria claimed that since the TPLF had raised people’s consciousness during and post-revolution, women’s roles had been transformed.

However, the problem for REST was in convincing the donors who funded their programmes that these claims of social transformation were accurate reflections. Familiar with western feminist principles, Maria argued that the subordination of women was universal and western cultures also had oppressive sexist practices. Maria stated that gender inequality needed to be challenged in all contexts globally in which women were oppressed: ‘There are basic human rights issues. In Tigray, water has been the key to mutuality, and respectful relationships between men and women.’

My experience at the village level did not match with Maria’s claims. I had not observed this dynamic in relation to development activities locally. A form of egalitarianism was observable in the household, but in the public domain water had not been a tool to facilitate social

transformation. Maria was obviously trying to persuade me that REST really did put its gender policies into practice, complying with the international prescriptions on gender and development. Reflecting Molyneux's (1985) thesis, Maria had placed the importance of water as most salient not only in terms of meeting women's practical needs but impacting on women on a deeper level as a medium for changing gender relations – in other words, meeting strategic needs by challenging inequitable power relations.

Notions of power and empowerment are central to my analysis of the water–gender–power nexus. Is the distinction between practical and strategic needs useful in the Tigrean context? I argue that it may be more fruitful to interrogate the assumption in the gender and development literature that women in the southern hemisphere need to be empowered re the claims of the modernisation paradigm. Indeed, as Abu-Lughod (1998) questions, can women be empowered from the outside, or is the discourse masking another agenda, that of nation-building, the formation of a new modernised democratic Tigray (see also Najmabadi, 1998), at the same time enabling powerful organisations with political agendas, such as REST, to grow and consolidate their power base as Tvedt argues (1998)?

Why had the change that Maria described not taken place in the village that I studied? Molyneux suggests women adopt the position of strategic false consciousness, arguing that attempts at empowerment have to take note of the trade-offs that women make in order to cope with the ramifications of oppressive relationships in their lives:

Power is fluid, pervasive and socially embedded. It lies not only in men's ability to mobilise material resources from a variety of arenas in order to promote their individual/general interests, but also in their ability to construct the rules of the game in ways that disguise the operations of this power and construct the illusion of consensus. So even though women successfully pursue ends and constrain men in the process, women's goals are still shaped by social systems which deny them ready access to social privilege, authority and esteem enjoyed by men of an equivalent class (1985: 2).

Molyneux focuses on the main structural mechanisms by which women's subordination is maintained and reconstituted in specific contexts, but the power from within ultimately entails the experiential recognition and analysis of these issues. Such power cannot be given – it has to be self-generated. This is the empowerment that Rowlands (1998) describes. But does this formula have currency at the grassroots level in Tigray? Molyneux describes men deciding the

rules of the game to construct an illusion of consensus. I challenge this idea, and turn it on its head. Men can only engage in the game if women agree to play. Rather than women being fooled or deluded in a state of false consciousness, women do not agree to play unwittingly but, on the contrary, they too make the rules and break them, acquiesce and control according to their own priorities and choices. This is the power play.

Women in Tsehlo were competent but socially constrained actors who were capable of making choices, articulating priorities and taking responsibility and were not the passive clients in need of enlightenment and uplifting that some development texts describe (see IDS 2004). Win (2004: 3) challenges representations of African women only portrayed as being ‘perpetually poor, powerless and pregnant’. Win describes these representations as revealing the ‘alienating and limited social, political and research identities available to African women in a world dominated by development institutions and development discourses’ (p. 3).

Fiona Meehan, a REST colleague of Maria’s, also had strong views. Fiona heads the research and development unit in REST. She had spent several years in Tigray and agreed with me that gender relations in the domestic domain manifested the characteristics of mutuality and complementarity.¹

Women did possess agency and power and were engaged in daily struggle as subjects constructing their own worlds. It is important to acknowledge the specificities of local feminisms (Abu-Lughod 1998).² Ethiopian feminisms may take many forms, and if Tigrean women conceive of themselves as powerful without adhering to a particular western model, then this must be viewed as a valid assessment.

Fiona argued that understanding gender relations within the rural household was central to the way REST operationalised its projects. Fiona confidently asserted that REST facilitates women’s empowerment. However, she was also aware of the tensions inherent in contemporary development discourses:

¹ See Raheja and Gold (1994), who argue that women in patriarchal systems can experience empowerment through the same structures and institutions that are simultaneously oppressive to them.

There is a contradiction in letting the community decide, because inevitably the traditional community is not going to promote women's rights. We are intervening on the basis of our own political ideas. The dilemma is we want their decision to be the same as ours.

As Fiona spoke I was aware of a contradiction. Both she and Maria (like Hammond 1999) claim that the TPLF revolution transformed women's lives, yet they also said that men are still not willing for women to participate equally. Implicitly supporting a GAD approach, Fiona advocated programmes to empower women through education and training improving their social and economic status and raising consciousness. But as I have discussed earlier, empowerment initiatives are in danger of becoming 'empty rhetoric' (Rowlands 1998) masking hegemonic relations of power between states and developmentalists (James 1999). Drawing on the practical/strategic needs discourse, Fiona maintained that REST focuses on the practical needs of the people, and by so doing the strategic needs of beneficiaries are also met indirectly. If women have access to clean, safe, easily accessible water, it meets their practical needs. It eases their labour burden and frees up their time, but does it actually achieve or equate to 'empowerment'?

Why did Fiona uphold the GAD perspective – was it bolstering her position as an expatriate European woman, a mediator between the place of the developed and that of the developing? As a self-proclaimed feminist, Fiona believed in the idea of women's empowerment, but like Maria was critical of the imposition of 'western ideals' into the African context without cultural mediation. Fiona believed in the REST mission and was politically active, both she and Maria having connections to the TPLF elites. These two white women were effective conduits for the communication of information in both directions, from the donors to the organisation and vice-versa. Both women gained considerable social status and power from this privileged position, even occasionally meeting the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and other visiting dignitaries in Mekelle and Addis Ababa. They were well-versed in development-speak and could represent the organisation in their bid to attract funding from the major donors, and successfully did so. The relationships they had at all levels of the organisation reflected their high status positions within the NGO, and also in the larger political community, where they socialised regularly with the military elites and TPLF cadres.

² Abu-Lughod (1998) draws on a broad definition of feminism and includes a wide range of projects having women as their object. Setting these within their historical, political and social context, she looks at the ways in which women shape and reshape projects that affect them in the Middle East.

I asked Fiona how REST measured empowerment. Fiona admitted that REST did not have a clear set of indicators for evaluating such benefits. She argued that this meant that the organisation had difficulty with accurate impact assessments. However, Fiona maintained that this reflected not gender blindness but the fact that REST did not have a clear enough set of indicators to address their donors' concerns. Donors desired both qualitative and quantitative measures of REST's performance in terms of meeting gender objectives, achieving set plans and also the efficient utilisation of funds. Like Maria, Fiona was cynical about the fit between donor expectations, theoretical positions and possible outcomes.

I suggest that it is more difficult for external agents to offer solutions to the complex problems of the rural areas. REST are better placed to do so, drawing on the voices of the villagers and their own indigenous experience of history, culture and context. I argue that REST needs to spend more time talking to the women and men in the villages rather than just working through their connected political structures in the *baito* (read TPLF cadres), embedded in the patron-client relations that ensure they remain the 'men' (predominantly) in power with all the benefits that brings, i.e. strategic access to water points, food aid, status, favours and influence. REST is aware of the complexities of power at the village level. I suggest they use a mask I call 'power blindness' to veil the complexities of the rural milieu. They know that relations of patronage, clientism, obligations of kinship and reciprocity dominate village life. However they continue to make representations that meet donor expectations ignoring the power dynamics that exist on the ground.

It is clear that what has emerged during the course of this thesis is another nexus within which power relations are played out that is central to many of the region's development projects and programmes, that of REST--TPLF--*baito*. As the reader will have seen in Chapters 5 and 6, the policy principles coming from the international water development arena prioritise the benefits of development reaching the poorest and most vulnerable – and in particular the women of those categories. These aims are not being met. The explanation for the failure of these principles is embedded in the social relations played out at the village level that are complex and historically and politically contingent.

Cornwall et al. (1993) argue that 'the local community' consists of many different people who have different priorities and ways of seeing the world, and who also have different positions of power and status and differential access to resources. Li (1996) draws our attention to competing representations of community and the multiplicity of interests at stake in the constitution of communities. This resonates with the work of many scholars who question the myth of a homogeneous, unified, solidaristic 'community' (Cleaver 1998, Gujit and Shah 1998, Leach 1998, Nelson and Wright 1995).

REST staff are aware of these power differentials. Fiona also raised issues and posited questions similar to Maria's: how best could REST intervene to shift entrenched gender relations? Did the solution lie in the legislation of equality issues through the existing and now institutionalised power structures, through policies, laws and plans of the democratic government of Tigray?

The politicians know the context: they could allow all the stakeholders, particularly the people (both women and men) as well as the development activists and intellectuals, to come up with the solutions. I argue there needs to be a fit between the problem as perceived by the people and the solution as realised by them, with the help and support of REST, and not imposed by outsiders, i.e. donors. Woodford-Berger writes of 'the gender recipes of donor agencies, their Euro-centric ingredients ill-fitting the realities of women's and men's lived experiences and relationships in other cultural contexts' (2004: 4).

The institutional isomorphism that Di Maggio and Powell (1993) describe is certainly echoed by the voices of Maria and Fiona, western women upholding an idea of women in Tigray in need of modernisation. If our ideals are imposed on others, then it must be asked where does the power [of the people] reside? Notwithstanding this, Fiona espoused the view that, 'We know about the position of women, we need to know what strategies to adopt.'

Again, the question needs to be asked: by whom should they be designed? Surely the strategies and solutions need to emerge from the people themselves. Maybe it is western experts who need to question their perceptions and the parameters of their analyses. As Hobart (1993: 2) contends, 'we should deconstruct those forms of world-ordering knowledge that devalue other forms of cultural knowing which are summarily dismissed as ignorance'. Fiona seemed to be asking for

the answers to come from external consultants. As a member of the TPLF, a political party so adept in the past at agitating and mobilising the people for the revolution, Fiona now claimed to be unsure of how to influence thinking at the local level. Political parties and groups focus on changing what benefits them; the rest may be left to chance. Resistance³ from the people is considered a positive trait when it fits with our ideals, and seen as false consciousness that needs progressive change when it is in disjunction with our personal politics. Aware of the paradox, Fiona asked:

How forceful should you be? What is the trade-off? How do you compromise between your desires and the organisation coming up against different levels of awareness or different sets of objectives within the group of people you are actually working with? If the rhetoric is 'it is for the people', then let them decide.

If the TPLF were gender conscious from the start of the struggle, then why did the villagers not respond to that particular stream of thought? Had the villagers actively resisted the gender agenda because it had no particular significance for them? The villagers had participated in the revolution because the *dergue* had threatened their life and liberty. Their sons and daughters were tortured and killed so people made a choice to stop the terror. But that mobilisation was by choice. People saw an immediate advantage. In this case the majority of the people could see no obvious tangible impact to their livelihood by participating in water development activities unless the new projects were to be situated on their doorsteps.

Fiona reiterates her thesis on economic empowerment as the best the organisation can do to change the unequal position of women in Tigrayan society. This once more relates to the practical needs of women transforming strategic gender relations. The WID literature states that women's subordinate position in society can limit their access to and control over resources and benefits. If women are excluded from the wage economy, their condition or material state may be that of impoverishment; they lack power and the ability to transform their lives. They may be financially dependent on their husbands, fathers or brothers and, furthermore, vulnerable to violence in the home and on the streets. The positive side of economic empowerment is that if women have access to cash, this can meet their strategic needs by giving them greater control over their lives. If women have access to land and are free to decide on their spending priorities,

³ For texts describing resistance to development interventions see Agarwal 1990, Cleaver 1998, Connelly et al. 2000, Cousins 1999, Elson 1996, Ferguson 1990, Gujit and Shah 1998, Kabeer 1994, Scott 1985.

they can provide for themselves and their children in terms of their immediate needs such as food, shelter, education and also health costs, especially in the case of divorce, desertion or widowhood. Financial security reduces their vulnerability and increases their opportunities. It may even give them greater decision-making power in the public and private arenas and therefore greater access to financial and social power (Dwyer and Bruce 1988, Evans 1989, Folbre 1986, Hanmer 1998, Kabeer 1998, Parpart et al. 2000). This standpoint is particularly pertinent to the Ethiopian context, echoing Fiona's claim that women in Tigray have little choice or opportunity outside rural marriage.

The Women's Association: A Partner in REST's Gender Enterprise

Fiona acknowledged the salient position of the women's association (WA) in the region to address these issues. REST was careful not to duplicate activities but to enter into a partnership with it. Fiona stated that there was more the organisation could do in the way of collaboration with the WA and to support women working within REST.

A number of REST employees responded somewhat elliptically to questions about whether women staff members had a voice in terms of policy and general day-to-day organisational decision-making procedures. Birhane, the assistant director of the organisation, answered by stressing the linkage of REST to the WA. He claimed that the WA had a very broad constituency up to *tabia baito* level. The women pressurised the government to ensure that women's needs were prioritised and addressed. Abreha, a senior officer in the organisation, similarly linked the WA to REST, claiming that the two agencies worked closely together.

I travelled to Mekelle to meet the leaders of the Tigray WA at the regional level. I approached the newly built marble building, where a huge poster adorned the outside wall. It showed a peasant woman working in the fields with a baby strapped on her back, a familiar picture in my mind as this was the reality of so many of the village women. A beautiful, tall and gently-spoken woman ushered me into the office. It was Kudus, the director. When I asked her about the links between the WA and REST and inquired how the WA felt about REST's response to gender, she suggested that REST needed to be made more accountable when it came to gender

issues. REST may have mainstreamed the rhetoric of gender and development into all its policy documents and literature, but the practical implementation was lacking.

It is interesting to note that Tigrean women in the WA uphold the position espoused by western feminists and use the discourses of mainstreaming, gender equality, empowerment and liberation from patriarchal domination. Abu-Lughod (1998) suggests new ways of thinking about feminism and the politics of modernity, demonstrating that in Egypt and the Middle East there are many different types of women who define themselves as feminist. For example, some wear a veil and identify themselves as Islamic feminists. Abu-Lughod stresses the multiplicity of feminisms⁴ in the global arena. I suggest in Tigray these standpoints have a historical precedent. Women in Ethiopia have been politically active for centuries. Local representations of modernity and diverse manifestations of Tigrayan feminisms can be seen in Mekelle, where students debate their rights, adopt western dress and gain employment in activities previously deemed undesirable for women, in shops, offices and cafes.

Women in the WA had managed to maintain a position of power in Tigrean society. They had fought alongside the men in the armed struggle and had not returned to the daily domestic role, as had many women in the rural context. From being soldiers, these women were now development activists, acquiring the status, wages, respect and prestige in Tigrean society that these important positions gave. Housed in a brand new marble building, these women activists were attempting to make social change a reality through the legitimate structures of governance and institutions established in the capital.

Kudusan argued that there was a need for gender methodologies to be operationalised in REST, with an officer appointed at a senior level in the NGO to ensure that gender issues were taken seriously. Kudusan also claimed that when plans were drawn up for projects and programmes in REST, women were often excluded. There was a need for a gender desk to provide a focal point for the organisation.⁵ In terms of its gender policy, Kudusan maintained that REST lacked

⁴ This links with the thesis of Snyder and Tadesse (1997) who describe women proactively organising in Africa at particular historical moments, contrary to representations of African women in the European media, where they tend to appear primarily as objects of reform and manipulation.

⁵ At a REST Partner Conference convened in December 2000, the WA explicitly asked for the implementation of a gender desk and the involvement of the executive to sit on a gender board. The women voiced their concerns that they

accountability, which agreed with my own analysis. In my observations there was no senior executive level input when it came to women's issues. The only high status post-holders who seemed to want to make positive changes regarding gender issues were Maria and Fiona, both expatriates and the only two women in the organisation with high status positions. Tigrean women, working as secretaries, cleaners and cooks, were still marginalised within the organisation.

Kudusan maintained that an androcentric gender bias was observable at many stages of the development process in Ethiopia from the grassroots to the highest levels of the largest organisations. Kudusan was an articulate, intelligent woman, a member of the TPLF and an ex-fighter, a revolutionary. Aware of current discourses in development studies, she argued:

Gender paradigms have constantly shifted. They are now mainstreamed in many agencies from small NGOs to bilateral and multilateral organisations such as the World Bank. Gender is now a global development issue, and the integration of gender awareness in development packages, such as health, education, food security and water, ensures the equitable inclusion of women in the development process.

Kudusan stated that it was important for women to share their experiences, and transfer skills to one another. She insisted that the support of men was essential for the integration of women into all aspects of the development process to become a reality. Empowering men⁶ by making them aware of women's issues would facilitate the smoother inclusion of all. Tamrat, the vice-chair of the WA, argued that REST needed to incorporate a gender awareness strategy that was more visible in the day-to-day activities of the organisation, across all departments, projects and programmes.

In reference to these points, Fiona stated that studies of gender had been carried out when the gender policy was first established. Following these, REST had initiated discussions to raise awareness about gender issues, gender blindness and empowerment, familiarising staff on gender issues in training and workshops. This was performed at different levels in different contexts at different times, but not by the whole organisation. In other words 'mainstreaming' was on paper only. Fiona argued:

did not want token men from the lower echelons of the organisation. It must be staffed by and have representation from senior management.

Change needs to come from the top, from your own peers. We need to be careful with the terminology. Feminist phrases can act as triggers setting in motion a ritual dance. Gender training needs to be culturally appropriate, not these silly ice-breaker games. We need training tailored to this context.

Fiona denigrated the gender and development (GAD) process, noting that there are complex cultural nuances that need to be taken on board and challenged, and problems to be answered with subtlety and tact. There was a definite need for the conscientisation of male staff members in REST.

I needed to reflect on my own position as a western feminist. I did agree with the positions of the WA but I was also aware of critiques by eastern scholars such as Mervat Hatem who states that 'modernisation runs through even the best feminist scholarship' (1994: 9). These scholars draw our attention to the complex ways that the 'West' and things associated with the West are 'embraced, repudiated, translated, and implicated in contemporary gender politics' (p10).

Fiona responded to the accusations that REST was not doing enough regarding gender issues by revealing strategies for future projects that were designed to address the specific constraints related to women both within and outside the organisation. These included better community participation, capacity building, and a focus on sustainability. At a major donor conference in December 2000, REST reiterated this promise. Fiona declared:

Gender sensitive planning and implementation will be integral to all programmes. There will be a focus on women's participation at all levels including planning, the integration of all activities and stakeholder collaboration.

Although representations such as this were made in front of major donors, e.g. USAID, the practicalities of who would implement these strategies, how, where and when were left unanswered. REST stated that the main thrust of its development activities would be measured by the impact at the level of the household. Gender concerns were to be incorporated into all programmes, but also activities would be targeted specifically at women and women-headed households. It is important to place the discourses and representations made by Fiona and Maria and REST into the context of donor funding. Without making the appropriate verbal nods in the direction of policy requirements, the NGO would find itself at risk of losing legitimacy and

⁶ There is a really interesting paradox here. Empowering men with knowledge about women's issues may mean that they must dis-empower themselves (Nelson 2003, pers. comm.). See also Rowlands (1998).

being unaccountable to the donors by not doing what they say. This is linked to wider discourses of the good governance agenda and aid conditionality that REST finds itself tied into, having to adopt the discourses (and policies) of development to survive financially and credibly.

Gender and REST: Policy at the Project Level an Illusion of Consensus.

A policy which emphasises decentralisation and devolution dictates that the roles of water and sanitation agencies are changing. The aim is to help local communities to choose, plan, construct and manage their own systems with a maximum of local resources and skills (Evans and Appleton 1993: 25).

The translation of these sentiments into practice necessitates a radical change in the way that most agencies in the water sector perform activities. This would include working with men and women of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and matching plans and designs to local conditions. The aim is to strengthen the skills with which men and women plan and manage their service⁷ (Meehan and Viveros 1982). The DFID (1998) model speaks of NGOs engaged in water development programmes playing the role of enabling agencies. Had REST made a shift from operating centrally managed, technically oriented and gender neutral programmes to more demand-responsive, decentralised programmes. This was also a requirement of USAID policy documents to which the organisation was held accountable.

It is interesting to note that as international policy shifts in orientation (e.g. from simple technological interventions to accompanying social and political aspects such as gender mainstreaming), organisations globally are forced to comply with the changes even if they have not had the training or have the financial means to operationalise these changes on the scale required. Kabeer talks about the 'magic bullet mentality' among policy makers as the idea that 'complex issues of gender and poverty can be dealt with through a single strategic intervention. In reality, lives cannot be divided into neat compartments insulated from one another. One arena

⁷ This does not mean that beneficiaries in all contexts easily accept such project aims or practices. If we look at cross-cultural examples, in India for instance, men did not want a reduction in water collection time or in women's energy expenditure. This was because the men wanted to preserve women's traditional roles. They feared the time gains and energy savings would make women and children idle and provide opportunities for undesirable behaviour (Kumar 1993, Misra 1975). Contrary to this position in Tanzania, men wanted water projects to keep women closer to the house, under surveillance and therefore under their control (Ploeg 1979). These positions were not reproduced in Tigray where both men and women wanted water closer to home.

has implications for all others' (1994: 234). In response innovative NGOs deliver a complementary package of resources and services so that needs are met.

REST was technically oriented: although gender was talked about, it was rarely evidenced in terms of women's involvement and voice at all levels of the development process. Integration was highlighted in the policy documents but not fully operationalised at the grassroots level. Birhane, the deputy director of REST, informed me that the regional government did not have a gender policy, but REST did.

Why Do So Few Village Women Participate in Development

It is interesting to consider what difference the gender policy had made within REST as an organisation, given that the policy was adopted in 1995, almost five years previously. Fiona maintained:

REST from its origins was linked with the TPLF, and always had a progressive political position on women. The language of gender and development was new but the ideas of empowerment and working with women have been part of REST's agenda from the beginning. REST is still pretty much a male organisation at the higher levels, but more women have been employed since the new five-year plan. The policy includes the principle of funding human resources development, ensuring women are sent for training.

This mirrors the sentiments of the WA, who argued that the lack of educational and training qualifications impacted disproportionately on women in Tigray. The lack of fluency in spoken and written English hampered access to employment. REST found it difficult to get women with technical qualifications to work at expert levels because the small pool of qualified women usually migrated to Addis Ababa to work for international organisations. The wages they could attract in the capital city were much higher and living conditions more luxurious, and REST could not match such salaries or perks. This was a major constraint and partially accounted for the fact that very few Tigrean women had senior positions in the organisation.⁸ Another factor that prevented Tigrean women from being employed in the water department was their lack of mobility due to their traditional domestic roles. Men were more free and able to travel around for

⁸ In fact the only two women in senior posts, Fiona and Maria, were expatriates of Irish and Australian origin respectively.

work, but women stayed relatively close to their children and homesteads and were in the majority of cases more family based.

Only 23% of the employees in REST were women. More women staff may contribute to a greater gender awareness and involvement in projects. It is important for REST to learn how other institutions develop the skills and attitudes to gender and develop strategies tailored to their particular development context. Gender competency is an important factor to analyse. I had experienced androcentric beliefs in an interview with one of the field co-ordinators in charge of REST's eastern zone projects. I asked Wolde why there were only two women, an electrician and a mechanic, working in the water department. If REST had a working gender policy, why were so few women employed? Wolde replied:

The hand-dug well programme is very hard work. A month ago we had two women. Yodannis was fantastic, the other woman had a child; it is difficult in the field with a child. The problem is that the people want water quickly. Women take more time. We need men's power.

I pondered that if the village people had waited decades for clean water, waiting an extra couple of weeks would hardly have made any difference. The positive comments about Yodannis were merited. The first woman water technician in the unit, Yodannis was one of the cohort of technicians trained within the organisation by Wolde in 1995, and she graduated top of the group. She had become involved with the organisation when she encountered the REST water crew at work in her village.

Maria informed me that another woman had also been nominated for the course because she was poor and the authorities thought it would help her family. At that time there was an informal approach to recruitment, through word of mouth, which allowed women to come forward into the system. Maria claimed that male workers in the water department were not happy and saw women only as potential concubines, not colleagues. Maria commented:

I would talk to the men about including women in the work, and they would say, 'women cannot do it!' There was that real classic paradox, the Tigrean woman TPLF fighter, a soldier in the armed struggle, standing side by side with the men fighting for equality, but equality for men. Even though a lot of social change transpired for women during the struggle, divorce laws, family laws, property rights, land rights, when you come down to the

personal level there is all that traditional sexism. There is always this gap between rhetoric and reality.

If women had been revolutionaries (see Figure 7.2) and had gained so much in terms of social and political rights, why was it that the levels of participation in development activities at the village level and their election at the political level in the rural areas was still so low? My observations did not indicate that life for women in the countryside had in fact been transformed. They were still poor, food insecure and working a 16 hour day, as before. This did not mean that women were incapable as the REST men stated but I argue that the inordinate amount of work and poverty that life in the countryside necessitated meant women strategize to survive. They understand the struggles and use the power play to suit them. This allows for differences between women at the village level to be explained: women who are financially better off such as Walalla or those who can maintain a position without jeopardising their family/community commitments will participate, but those who prioritise their domestic roles choose to opt out.

The difference with the participation of villagers regarding political mobilisation may also be explained in terms of power from above. The villagers had observed the sanctions and punishments of defying the might of the *dergue*, so responded to authority in a strategic manner, whether this be the TPLF or the *dergue* (see Figure 7.1). However, as my earlier example (see Chapter 1) showed, even when the TPLF mobilised villagers to turn up for the donor's visit, as soon as the visiting dignitaries had left the site the farmers returned to their fields, thus prioritising their livelihoods.

Yodannis was no longer on the water programme because her husband, also a technician, had infected her with HIV. He had recently died of AIDS⁹ and so had their six-month-old baby. Losing Yodannis was a major blow for Maria, not only because she could be seen as a living demonstration of gender equality issues being taken on board by REST in terms of recruitment and selection, but also as a role model for other women.

Maria felt that some of the men in RUWAS would use this loss as an excuse to obstruct the recruitment of other women.

⁹ I would like to undertake some research in the near future on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the Tigrean NGO sector. Rising HIV infection rates will have a devastating impact on the trained workforce in REST specifically and in the region in general. De Waal argues that in regions of Africa whole sections of the government and

When women are employed some men dissect them like they are under a microscope, then they make a thousand excuses why not to employ women. But maybe in the end we need to question if women should be digging that deep hole. It's back breaking, that's the difference between the West and here. Some of these mass activities like road building are such hard work for women who are already overburdened. How do we tell the donors do women really have to be involved and, if not, will you judge the programme?

It was interesting that Maria continually referred to the bind that she felt herself in: having to walk a tightrope, keeping the donors happy by creating representations that portrayed REST as compliant to the gender policy that was so obviously imposed from above and not subscribed to by the organisation as a whole – even if she and Fiona did hold the same beliefs as the gender experts she referred to.

Maria once again contradicted her own earlier statement that the TPLF men in the organisation were advocates of women's empowerment from the start. These were the same men she now accused of using women technicians who failed as excuses for excluding new job applicants. Maria was caught in the position of a western feminist wanting the gender discrimination she saw to be eradicated but also, as a staff member of the NGO, not wanting to appear to betray the organisation (REST/TPLF).

Maria claimed there is a constant tension between realists and idealists – those who just want to make something look good (idealists) or bad (realists) in a report. She termed this her cynical approach:

These are the development and empowerment questions in all developing countries. How do you have these checks and balances ensuring that you are enshrining and protecting the rights of women, without killing them? Water is classic, it raises issues of opportunities and threats in equal volumes.

Maria claimed that most donors acknowledged that REST's water programmes were the best-managed and executed in Tigray, especially regarding efficiencies, management style and construction:

But the donors want to see a reflection of what's going on in their own countries, more women in institutions. They want genuine proof that women are equal partners in all development activities, not just in output but in decision-making and starting to take control.

civil workforce will succumb to the disease. Paper given at Royal African Society meeting, SOAS London, May 2003.

Maria stated that she could meet REST and the donors half way. As she had the privileged positionality of having worked on both sides of the fence, with Community Aid Abroad, one of the donors, and now within REST, Maria thus claimed to see from both perspectives. Her role for seven years as donor representative was primarily as a kind of trouble-shooter, particularly around issues of community management and gender. She claimed to have been continually experimenting and encouraging REST to do better on gender issues. Maria stressed that REST needed to take on both the donor perspective and the people's perspective. I thought that Maria needed to deconstruct the notion of 'the people' as a homogeneous group. In my experience there is no one perspective, but competing and contested claims and positions among 'the people'. Regardless, Maria proudly stated: 'We at REST are development activists.'

Nevertheless, Maria maintained that things still need improving in REST and the regional government:

They say we are doing our utmost and I say there is room for improvement. The donors say you are not doing enough, it's not the perfect model of emancipation and I say get real. So it's that mental shift that needs to happen on both sides. Doing gender assessments and impact assessments is a business.

Maria was right, there was more to development aid than meets the eye. The power rested with the 'senior partner' (the donors), and REST found itself in the position of trying to maintain a representation of legitimacy and authenticity. The discourses of the NGO were oriented upwards. Maria and Fiona, although aware of the power dynamics in this unequal relationship and critical of the donors' unreal expectations of the NGO, were as development practitioners to some extent constrained when speaking to me, an outside researcher.

The Gender and Development Committee in REST was currently under review as it had not been operational for some time. This was strange if, as Fiona and Maria alleged, the TPLF was so aware of women's issues from the beginning. Why was there such inconsequential progress within REST? The organisation's gender policy was not comprehensive and had not been reviewed. It made me reflect on the dissonance between the poor participation in development of women against the good mobilisation of the villagers re the war and revolution. I suggest that another factor may be that it is not the priority of REST/TPLF to mobilise the villagers in terms

of gender equity. The political will to do so was not there or the villagers would simultaneously have implemented gender consciousness alongside the revolutionary Marxist/Leninist ideology.

REST claimed that in the field they measured their performance by using gender disaggregated data¹⁰ and argued that they worked with other agencies in an integrated manner. Fiona claimed that most of the male workers at the expert level in the organisation had a low gender sensitivity but that awareness among the TPLF cadres was high. I thought this was over-romantic since many of the TPLF cadres and ex-fighters expressed sexist sentiments quite openly and without challenge. They also held all the top positions, e.g. Birhane headed up Relief and Rehabilitation, Kunam was the hydrologist, to name just two. Gender empowerment re the conscientisation of male cadres had not transpired to the extent that Fiona claimed.

REST Rural Water Supply: Programmes and Projects, Rhetoric and Reality

In this section I will examine the constraints on realising the goal of women's full participation in the village. It was not clear if REST kept data recording the impacts of the water projects differentially on male and female beneficiaries. Getachew maintained:

In the water supply department we have procedures for women to participate in every stage of the process. Five years ago village men told us women did not have the capacity to be involved in decision-making, they are not able to think. But over time, men have changed their attitudes. Women have greater confidence, they have their brain, and know they are almost equal to the men.

Getachew may have been conversant in 'development speak', but there was little evidence that the village men had changed their attitudes. There was cognitive dissonance in knowledge, attitude and practice. Some of the village men still thought women have 'no brain', as Atseda's example demonstrated. The male chair of the water committee in Tsahlo had told her to keep quiet and go home when she was encouraging local women to get involved in a new water project (see Chapter 5).

When Getachew was asked what women's contribution to the water development process was he responded:

¹⁰ Although whenever I asked REST for such statistics they were not forthcoming.

We encourage women to participate in the meetings. Culturally women are considered to be silent but we want to change this attitude. We want men and women to be equal during the whole water development process, exercise their democratic right. REST is gender sensitive and practises the gender policy.

Getachew headed up the rural water supply department in the NGO, and his job and status relied on the continued funding and growth of his jurisdiction. He held a senior position in the organisation and was accountable to the highest level of management. It was important that Getachew convince me of his awareness of the current policies and his commitment to implementing them. Since as an outsider the impact of my research might have implications for their funding, it was important to Getachew that the donors read positive accounts of how 'modern' his department and his thinking were – his inclusion of the terms 'democracy' and 'participation' framing the international policy context demonstrating to me his knowledge of the development arena. Getachew did wield a lot of power. He could decide where water projects were located, and I often saw him in the expensive and elite Axum hotel fraternising with the other men of high status from the organisation.

There is no doubt that his position in the NGO gave him many perks, such as the opportunity to participate in higher educational degree programmes overseas, and also training him to aspire to higher employment positions, possibly in Addis Ababa, as well as often having access to REST vehicles – a rare luxury in Tigray. Getachew could also give people jobs. He was, as a result, a patron. Was Getachew saying all the things that he thought I wanted to hear? This was certainly the case in REST regarding the implementation of its gender policies in the organisation and beyond. Getachew certainly would not want to jeopardise his own position and his financial security. Yet in my observations and conversations, the gender speak that Getachew espoused was far from practised. Perhaps this was a manifestation of acquiescence and rebellion (Gaventa 1980) on the part of the staff in the NGOs. Getachew may have not agreed with the donor model of feminist emancipation, and although he espoused it that did not ensure that his staff team put the policy into practice. This may be viewed as another form of power play.

Although Getachew claimed that women chaired local water committees it was, unfortunately, not enough according to the leaders of the regional WA. His claims that REST works through the WA at the local level were also not borne out by the women in my village, who felt that they were regularly ignored. When I asked Atseda and Walalla if REST had involved the WA when

the hand pump was put in they said that only individual women had been approached. Walalla was one of them, because she was well-known, educated, important, and Kunam's sister.¹¹ Getachew was very well versed in the development rhetoric as reflected in REST's policies. He smoothly moved the discussion to the importance of women in health promotion, providing hygiene education for women.

We empower women so they can spend their spare time doing other development activities. We are building their capacity in social and economic aspects. Women get credit and become rich.

Getachew reflects the precepts of the Dublin Principles linking the empowerment of women to the wider development or modernisation enterprise. Abrahamsen critiques the discourse of empowerment in its global manifestation, as embedded in particular relations of power. She asserts:

Analysed within the overall setting of good governance discourse, empowerment becomes a highly instrumental term, indicating that people should 'pull their weight' and make development projects more cost-efficient. It signifies the expectation that people will be more responsible for their own welfare and development, more willing to contribute to community projects and pay user fees for state services (2000: 143).

Abrahamsen widens the definition of the term to describe the shifting of responsibility for welfare and security from the state to unpaid labour. The policies of participation and empowerment have been criticised for their negative effects on the poor,¹² and for overburdening women in particular. It is a significant critique that fits neatly into the Tigrean context where women are already overburdened, and it is difficult to see the transformations promised from the discourses of development, especially that of empowerment in tangible ways.

The leaders of the WA were not as glib about the benefits of the water programmes for women. Tamrat, the vice-chair of the regional organisation, articulated the constraints on women:

The reason for women's lesser managerial roles and lack of participation in water development programmes is threefold. Firstly there are the domestic problems such as household and childcare responsibilities. The second factor is that women are less likely to

¹¹ Kunam is the REST hydrologist who selected the site of the hand pump directly outside his sister Walalla's house.

¹² This is particularly pertinent in the light of water privatisation and an inflation of the price up to 300% in Ghana. There have been several protests at this tariff imposition that the poorest cannot afford.

be elected to the *tabia* or *wereda*; because of illiteracy they are under-represented at the decision-making levels. Third is the fact that there are traditional assumptions, cultural barriers preventing women's participation. It is a slow politicisation process.

Tamrat was right, there were cultural constraints, ingrained sexist assumptions and perceptions that were overtly visible in the discourse and behaviours of the male workforce. As Fiona had commented, the 'experts' working in the NGO lacked a gender consciousness. They could make the right speeches but their actions betrayed a lack of awareness. When I spent evenings out with the male workers from the RUWAS department, it was clear from their attitudes towards women that sexism was an integral part of the work culture, language and discourse.

Sexist practices were also reflected at the village level where the interface between male technicians and village people occurred. Community ownership and management meant decision-making and control in the hands of the villagers. If the men (local or NGO) displayed sexist behaviour it often resulted in the marginalisation or total exclusion of women in the development process, as I demonstrated in Chapter 6 with regard to the new well project. The reason for the lack of women's participation may also be located in the power nexus that has emerged throughout this thesis. If the men in REST/TPLF held sexist beliefs and were not committed to the aims of gender equality, then the relations of power that historically have dominated the rural context will be reproduced without challenge. And there was the added problem of the 'triple burden'. Did this prevent women from participating? Or did women choose to absent themselves from the process for some other reasons? Both men and women in the village stated that it was shameful for men to carry water. It was a woman's task.

Fiona critiqued the current view in development doctrine that stressed the importance of women's time gains, enabling women to attend political meetings and to become politically active. Fiona claimed that rural women worked so hard that they were exhausted and needed to spend the time gained through water projects just to rest and relax. The statement Fiona made rang true. In Britain we do not expect all women to be involved in politics, it must be about choice. I argue that there is a patronising outsider/donor/development expert attitude that presupposes that the people in rural contexts need to be told to participate in politics. Women and men in Tigray are painfully aware of the political context within which they live. I argue that Tigreans do not need to be told to become politically active. They are not ignorant or apathetic

about the political process. They have experienced revolution, war and martyrdom and are very capable of making their own informed choices, to participate or not to participate – to play the game or not: the power play.

My interview with Maria had revealed similar sentiments. Maria had questioned the way that development ‘experts’ feel they can prescribe the activities that women and men do with the benefits they gain from projects.

Women are saving up to six hours a day, so they can spend more time with their kids, washing them and keeping them cleaner. Along comes another gender consultant who says ‘What, she has gained six hours to spend in her house, to cook and clean for her husband? That is not change’. This is Tigrean women’s lives, part of the social fabric, women marry and gain access to resources. We have achieved social change through technical input. Women can also do income generation activities, like soil and water conservation. The time saved could be used for literacy, productivity, economic independence, or participation in politics. We want women and girls to be literate, gaining economic independence, getting involved in community decision-making. Women chosen on Water Committees gained experience and used it as a stepping stone to politics. They were elected to the *baito*.

Upholding the tenets of the modernisation paradigm, Maria stressed all the key points outlined in the development literature, focusing on processes of empowerment as meeting the strategic needs of women. The aims of water projects encapsulate the wider issues of the changing positions of women and the practical issues of improved quality of life, better health and a way out of poverty. However, I felt that the rhetoric espoused by the REST staff did not truly reflect the abject position that women hold within the development process. Fiona claimed that there was a high percentage of women participating in the programmes. This was not the reality of the situation I found during my research. My data was backed up by a report that came out of a government study at the end of my fieldwork (Tigray Regional Government Five Year Plan 1995–2000).

Mosse describes ‘the mediating function of the key polysemic and ambiguous concept of ‘participation’ (2005: 35) as a master metaphor invoking the impression of social change. In this process contradictions on the ground are concealed. Participatory goals may be posited in theory and denied in practice. This is part of the politics of representation, the illusions of the

participatory process leading to livelihood changes but not actually doing so on a grand scale. The illusion ensures that reputations at both the NGO and village level are maintained.

Contrary to my experience, Fiona argued that the water programme addressed a key aspect of women's lives and made a huge difference. On a daily basis, women's lives become less burdensome and women do gain more time, but Fiona questioned if this equalled empowerment. Reflecting my position, she stated that it was a necessary but not sufficient condition for facilitating empowerment. The categories of practical and strategic needs are useful but there can be an overlap between the two. Fiona gave an example:

Health surveys show the majority of women are ill at least half their time. Providing clean water is a huge opportunity for change. Women are literally sick and tired. Mother and child health care has a direct impact. Women's health is linked to empowerment, facilitation brings change.

This is textbook 'WID' discourse, but was it true? REST maintained that through its programmes 'Women are actors and owners and share in the development process.' This means both men and women must be actively involved in the technical aspects of projects. However, 'it has long been recognised that the engineering sector is predominantly a man's domain' (Arboleda 1994: 35).

Mosse exposes the fragility of policy models by asserting that they are 'poor guides to understanding events and the practices and effects of development actors, which are shaped by the relationships, interests and cultures of specific organisational settings' (2005: 230). This is similar to my conception of power blindness – things that are known but not stated. An obfuscation of power dynamics at the local level.

The DFID (1998) guidelines suggest that technologies and levels of service must be commensurate with the communities' needs and a capacity to finance, manage and maintain them. Communities must be willing to take responsibility for the system. Without adequate training it would be hard for women to gain an understanding of these new technologies. REST had produced a woman water technician (Yodannis) who dispelled the myths about women being incapable and unable to understand and operate the hardware or mechanised aspects of the programmes. Yet the women in Tshlo had not had their strategic needs met through the REST water projects installed.

It is important to challenge development illusions. In this particular nexus REST/TPLF and the *baito* maintain a complex system of representations. REST and other NGOs in the water development sector have to present themselves as successful models translating international policies such as those promoted in the DFID guidelines into practice. These are measured quantitatively and qualitatively through log frames and other statistical and performance indicators. Likewise, people in the village present themselves as consenting to development and yet some resist development. Others are skilled at strategizing and benefit from local projects, in wages, status and access to critical resources.

Women, Water and Nation Building: Gender Policies of the Tigray Regional Government

In this section I am going to examine the contradistinction between the stated aims and objectives of the NGO. Are these needs led from the grassroots? If not where do they come from? I will examine the discourses of the regional government, which are closer to the donors' standpoint, this is where the NGO aims and objectives arise. I shall do this to explore the fit between global and local policies.

Despite strong legal enshrinements of the rights of women in the new constitution and importance of women in the water development process, there is still surprisingly low participation rates of women.

A paradox emerges in that the history of the region seemed perfect for women to participate in line with international policies. But the women and men who had so readily been mobilised to fight in the revolution and the war against Eritrea now voted with their feet and did not participate in development activities. Only a handful of politically-motivated ex-fighters had become transformed into development activists, as the international community and regional government desired. Whatever the new policies designed and adopted from above (to suit the powers that be), women, it appeared, were now choosing strategically not to participate and not play the game. They could not see or feel the benefits that the developmentalists promised and saved their energy for battles that they deemed a priority.

Tamrat, the vice-chair of the Tigray WA and member of the TPLF, stated that under TPLF leadership customary laws were pro women and children. When the EPRDF were elected, women were involved in drafting and approving rules for the country's new democracy. Tamrat declared: 'The rights of women are now enshrined in the Constitution of Ethiopia.'

Western development policy principles prescribe the role of governments in water development programmes as shifting from provider to enabler. In enabling and monitoring, governments have a particular responsibility to protect the interests of the groups that the profit sectors will not consider, e.g. domestic water users in low income households, of which women are heavily represented (Wijk 1998). The Ethiopian Water Resources Management Policy mentions women in the sixth fundamental principle. Wijk notes that 'it is important to place women centrally to all policy recommendations, not just as add-ons, and to focus particularly upon women's participation' (1998: 2). In the Tigrean context, did the specific mention of women as far down the agenda as the sixth point mean it was an add-on? DFID (1998) doctrine argues that sustainable development cannot be achieved without women.

Contrary to the policies and political rhetoric, the review of the Tigray regional government's five-year plan (1995–2000) stated that one of the problems encountered in the water development sector was the low participation of women. Various government officials had similar views – Abeba, head of the water resources department, commented:

It is a big problem. If we go to a small town and say the women should participate the men say 'no, because they cannot even write'. We do not want to see our water projects fail, the women's association do not look after this issue, yet women and water are one.

Abebe tries to place the responsibility with the WA. I was, however, impressed by the honesty and awareness he demonstrated. I was also aware that he too was well versed in the rhetoric of women's participation.¹³ I decided to take my investigation a step further up the government ranks. Haile, the head of planning in the regional government, claimed gender was taken seriously but cited the constraints discussed above

The environment, gender and woman centred development policies and regulations are very important. For example, water supply in rural areas, the first beneficiaries we target are

¹³ In my experience women sat on the periphery, minding and feeding their children. Meetings went on for hours and women spoke little; the main discussions were held between the men.

women. Also at the level of the regional council women are elected and participate, this is another way of empowering women. We are not gender-blind; in education and training, priority is given to women. We believe that if we make women aware of their rights we can change our whole situation.

Haile reeled off the perfect GAD rhetoric, emphasising the empowerment of women embedded in the wider context of the 'situation of women in Tigray'. He was responsible for the planning of development interventions in the context of chronic structural poverty and food insecurity in the region. Wendy James' work on the Ethiopian Sudanese border revealed fascinating insights into the world of relief and rehabilitation (food aid). Critiquing the discourses of empowerment, James, who is highly sceptical of 'the current new world of management speak', states: 'Perhaps we should ask whether this seemingly benign and democratic liberal language does not mask the practical realities of the political and financial decisions shaping relief and development aid today, and helping to shape the structural political realities of tomorrow' (1999: 14). This statement sheds light on Haile's description of government's policies, they purport to discriminate positively in favour of women to redress the balance in unequal employment opportunities. For example, fewer points were required for girls to obtain entry into tertiary education. However, little is done to ensure girls complete their education and the drop out rate is high. Also through their links with REST, the government - TPLF / REST partnership is in dual control of the distribution of food aid (relief) in the region. Thereby having control of actual life and death situations when people are starving. This also involves gender policies as women headed households are perceived to be particularly at risk, poorer and less able to provide for their children.

The economic involvement of women is perceived by the government as a major part of Tigray's anti-poverty strategy. From a western feminist WID perspective the discourse was commendable. Haile considered women to be the foundation for social change. He claimed that international NGOs and donors come to the region with their gender agenda and the government accommodates them. Although I was in favour of gender sensitive policies, it appeared to me that the government was responding to external demands of donors, rather than leading from within the republic. If the people at the grassroots refused the policy principles could the Tigrean government (read TPLF) exercise their right to represent the people and also exercise the right to refuse? Could they negotiate with the donors at USAID and the World Bank who funded the

development programmes to omit the gender agenda from the project proposals? Did the government have the power to resist?

Did the discourses of the development experts in relation to the international policy principles such as the Dublin Statement influence the regional government? It seemed obvious that these gender policies had not come from the grassroots. The salience of the role of gender was paramount in the DFID and USAID guidelines about the sustainability of water projects, and was imposed on the villages from the doctrines made at the global level and reiterated at the World Water Forum. Global decisions had been made but people in the villages in Tigray had not been invited to say if 'safe' water was what they wanted or prioritised. Outsiders have been telling the villagers what their needs are over their own choices. The possible failure of the projects I witnessed was not due to people's ignorance, but may have been a dissonance between policy objectives that had little bearing on people's lives generally. Prioritisation is key. As the social and political relations at the village level were so complex and historically embedded, the poorest rarely got a chance to benefit from development inputs. People aware of the local dynamics of power strategize which games to play and those to opt out of. This is why participation is so poor and why projects are failing; sustainability is an illusion.

Haile defended the government position:

Even our policy on the distribution of land is based on equity, is gender sensitive; every woman in the rural areas owns a plot of land.¹⁴ The theory is that as women get access to resources they can empower themselves, attitudes change.

It was interesting that Haile stated that women getting access to land and resources had facilitated an attitudinal change. This was not the picture I had got from the village. Women had been granted land almost two decades earlier and men's attitudes had not changed. In fact the old relationships of patron-clientage still dominated and male heads of elite families were predominantly in control. In the main, women (especially women-headed households) were not getting access to resources because the administration was dominated by men. All development activities in Tsahlo were controlled by the TPLF. It is interesting to note that the federal government's policy of decentralisation shifted exploitation from one powerful agency to

¹⁴ The TPLF refuses to commoditise land. Women do not own the land they live on.

another, from the political elites at the centre to the political elites in the regions and at village level. In Tigray the power to mobilise supporters and resources was through political patronage, the TPLF cadres. Social and kinship relations reflected these power dynamics.

However, Haile was right in one way – some women did benefit. Communities are not homogeneous, and in Tsehlo one woman, Walalla, who was the head of her household, had significant landholding, oxen, status and power. Walalla was, however, from one of the dominant founding families of the village, who often (unsurprisingly) had larger land holdings in the best agricultural sites, near water. That is why both Walalla and her brother in law, Haile Selassie (typical of the dominant lineages), were promoted to positions of village leadership. The village elite became politicians and now were the richer farmers doubling as the new government brokers, as Walalla's recent election to the regional council in Mekelle demonstrated. The result of such patron-client relations was institutionalised unequal access to project benefits and not the picture of gender equity that Haile asserted. Haile said all the right things, but the reality in the villages was far from this top-level government rhetoric. The poorest were not participating and not reaping the benefits of development interventions. The TPLF cadres involved as agents of development were aware of this and took the stance of what I term power blindness.

Haile claimed that the Tigray regional government's progressive gender stance came from Tigrean political history, the armed struggle, during which women were sacrificed as they fought on the front lines. Women's equality was part of that struggle. These claims were reiterated by Kudus, the chair of the WA, who gave her reasons for joining the armed struggle as being to achieve gender equity or women's liberation and freedom from oppression. But things had not changed much in two decades.

Haile declared that women have 25% membership on the executive committee in the government and are represented at every level – regional, zonal and *wereda*. He claimed that their participation is high, but I knew that this was a public relations gloss as only a few women were represented according to the WA. This was backed up not only by my observations but also by the conclusions of the regional government's five-year plan.

In terms of gender and water resources development, Haile stated that development policies in Tigray were based on the regional instruction: conservation-based, agriculture-led development industrialisation. The management and utilisation of natural resources is central to this process, and women, traditionally the gatekeepers of water, had control over the most important of these resources in this region. I asked Haile how women were being included in the design and implementation of these policies, plans and projects, specifically in the water sector.

Haile claimed that women contributed in the planning process, situation analysis and assessment. Identification was carried out at grassroots level. In theory the people discussed their own issues and solutions, prioritising, assessing their constraints and providing the regional government with ways to overcome problems. In my experience political patronage and clientage shaped the development process. It was a seductive suggestion that the people provided the answers to the problems, but when the problems were of such an intense structural nature such as food insecurity embedded in politico-economic problems based on lack of resources, how could the people have had the answer? Haile responded by stating that the people were committed. If, for example, they needed to build a new school, they provided voluntary labour power, collected local materials. Participation and local resource contributions, he claimed, were forthcoming. The constitution had developed the umbrella for the policies, and the issue now was having enough capacity to implement it. That was the key, he argued: the implementation capacity would determine to what extent the government could realise these aims:

Any policy when you design it and formulate it, you have to assess its impact. The effect on the beneficiaries, we do policy analysis. For example if we raise the tariff on water we ask, who does it affect? If it adversely affects the poor then we have to reconsider the policy.

I realised that a moment ago Haile had claimed that the policy came from the people in the first place, so then why would they need to oppose it?¹⁵ Haile also had to represent the government as upholding the rules and regulations set up by the donors. Even bottom-up projects come from the top because of unequal power relations. Orientation is invariably upwards in international development. Hierarchies of power in the village ensure villagers comply with donor policy theorising to ensure further funding and support. Projects reflect external agendas, the narratives

¹⁵ The majority of the villagers in Tshalo refused to pay the water tariff, this is happening globally, in Bolivia, Ghana and the Philippines (pers comm, World Development Movement, World Water Day 2005).

of the more powerful players, rather than reflecting an organisational (NGO) or social reality. Herein lies the importance of the power that is exercised through the social relationships in the TPLF–REST–*baito* nexus. The NGO is an arm of the government implementing projects at the local level because the government does not allocate funds to rural water projects.

Haile stated that the first stakeholder they consult is the beneficiary, because the government needs to ensure that the policy will be implemented smoothly. Using water as an example, He declared:

All development has impacts. You have to try and know them in advance, and address any social conflict ahead. Our greatest resource is our people, their commitment and labour, human resources. Women are part of that.

Haile argued that even though the poor and food insecure are resource deprived, women and men in Tigray are well aware of the social, political and economic factors that affect their lives, and therefore know how to overcome their constraints. He conceded that not all women were aware, but education, media, training and information would change their world and help them overcome poverty and food insecurity. As Abu-Lughod (1998) points out, all the technologies of modernisation Haile had called up in Tigray's new project of nation-building would mean women were being remade in that process, whether they wanted to or not.

What motivates the beneficiaries of development? Crewe and Harrison (1998) question the simplification of human motivation. This may provide one of the keys to this study. Why did people at the village level state that they wanted water when they refused to participate? Was it because they wanted modernity? Or did they resist and reject the new project of modernity as prescribed by powers outside their realm, as Abu-Lughod (1998) demonstrates. Because of the political history of the region and the fear and terror of brutal regimes of the past, did the people just pretend to acquiesce because the government says so and they were too frightened to say no? The villagers appeared not to want to change their behaviour or lifestyle. What would motivate them to change? I suggest the answer is: if they wanted to. There must be a perception of a tangible, self-evident benefit. After all, the villagers are called beneficiaries. They must therefore have to feel as if they have gained some benefit, either material, psychological or social (Moore and Vaughan 1994).

Haile was caught in a similar position to that of other aid agencies such as REST. The Tigrean regional government also had to become a ‘representation-manufacturing machine’ (Mosse 2005: 197), keeping up with the rapidly shifting policy prescriptions from the West and having to adopt different positionalities and reconfigure relationships of power accordingly. In a shifting aid world, donor aid workers and African governments have constantly to negotiate the contradictory messages that are constructed by the global policy makers. As policies shift and change, people are expected to respond accordingly, even if the policies completely contradict the country’s own political or ideological position. Years of political campaigning towards a socialist state in Tigray have now been turned on their head.

I enquired what impact the government five-year plan had on women’s lives: Haile stated:

In every sector we have achieved our targets, like education. Men and women’s participation rates, immunisation rates, water coverage has risen to 38%. Now people will not die of famine because we have a better infrastructure. Services are delivered to the needy.

The budget of the regional government of Tigray is 219 million *birr*. Education gets 79 million, health 30 million. The strategic sectors are human resources development. Haile argues that resource allocation justified this and reflected the way the government planned. James asserts that the ideology of aid in theory helps the weakest but in practice the effects of empowerment are unpredictable, and sometimes serve to strengthen existing elites (1999: 25). Shrestha¹⁶ speaks of the power of development to seduce: ‘As envisioned and practised, development legitimized the ruling elite’s authority’ (in Eade and Ligteringen 2001: 92). Both these statements reflect the reality I observed in Tigray.

It is important to reiterate here that the income REST gets from aid packages is triple the budget of the Tigray regional government. When Maria argued that REST was more powerful than the government, it appeared she was right. However, it was difficult to distinguish REST from the government, because the organisation had become more powerful as it had grown, and the highest levels of management were closely connected to the highest realms of government. REST fits the picture that James perceptively describes: ‘These latter certainly strive to make

¹⁶ Referring to his experience growing up in Nepal, Shrestha describes how every morning he went to school excited to see new chairs and chalk board, yet almost every day he experienced hunger (Eade and Ligteringen 2001)

alliances with the aid-givers in ways which profoundly affect the political and military scene but are not always admitted. As their power grows, the scope of the destitute to handle their own predicament may be further restricted' (1999: 29). I feel that REST has become very adept at performing the part of benevolent provider. They utilise all the rhetoric that is seen to secure them access to the millions of aid dollars on offer by the international community, even if they do not necessarily believe in or desire the particular types of social transformation expected from the programmes. The empowerment of women is one such rhetoric. As Clark (1990) posits, in many cases NGOs provide a power base for people from the same social stratum as are in government: politicians, planners or civil servants. In Tigray this is also a gendered experience. Male political elites appear in complete control.

REST has a highly politicised agenda, which is not one born out of free-market capitalism but from a history of guerrilla communism and armed struggle. I am not questioning their ideology, merely questioning their easy adoption of principles and practices that seem to run contrary to their previous beliefs.

It would be of particular interest to make a cross-cultural comparison, making connections regarding Tim Mitchell's (1995) analysis of aid/donor relations in Egypt, especially as the USA now sees Ethiopia as an ally in the 'war against terror'. Ethiopia has become the 13th country to obtain debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund by receiving US\$3.3 billion debt relief. A press release from the World Bank stated:

Ethiopia has made sufficient progress and taken the necessary steps to reach its completion point under the (HIPC) initiative. The track record of the Ethiopian authorities in policy and reform implementation has been strong, and the authorities have borrowed prudently despite being adversely affected by a severe drought and lower coffee prices (22 April 2004).

The (HIPC) initiative was launched in September 1996 as an anti-poverty measure to relieve poor countries from heavy debt service payments. The Cologne Debt Initiative, launched in June 1999 by the G8 industrialised countries, aimed to bring about major changes to the HIPC initiative to secure broader and faster debt relief by releasing resources for investments in health, education and social needs as well as support for good governance and sustainable development.

Hilary Benn MP, Secretary of State for International Development, announced a significant increase in Britain's development programme in Ethiopia, with the contribution to be raised from £19 million to £57 million in 2005-6. There is no doubt that playing the game at the highest level has significant financial benefits. As the discourse outlined by Hilary Benn suggests,¹⁷ Ethiopia has accepted the conditions outlined, those of becoming a 'democracy' participating in the discourses of good governance and providing the health and social care programmes such as water and sanitation that bring with them the discourses of gender and development.

This demonstrates the argument I outlined earlier made by Crewe and Harrison (1998: 69) that 'an important aspect of much aid is the fact that it comes with explicit conditions'. These are symptomatic of donors' assumptions that they have a better understanding of a country's needs than its own government. The notion of 'governance' reflects a belief that democratic pluralism is the most appropriate and just method of social and political organisation. It is not surprising that REST and the regional and national government accept the discourse and praxis of development, or at least maintain representations, as they too are locked in relations of upward accountability and brokerage roles. They need to manage their relationships with the donors as the region's and the nation's survival depend on it. Possibly Scott foresaw the future of Tigray when he wrote:

Whatever else the revolution may achieve, it almost always creates a more coercive and hegemonic state apparatus – one that is often able to batten itself on the rural population like no other before it. All too frequently the peasantry finds itself in the ironic position of having helped to power a ruling group whose plans for industrialisation, taxation, and collectivization are very much at odds with the goals for which the peasants had imagined they were fighting (1985: 29).

Conclusion

In this chapter I focused on four key areas. I outlined the major stakeholders involved in the water development process in Tigray and their varying positions in relation to gender policy and practice. I described the dynamics of gender power in REST, an NGO borne out of the revolution. To this end, many of its senior management staff members had been fighters in the armed struggle and were vociferous proponents of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Over the past

¹⁷ Newsletter of Ethiopian Embassy, December 2004

decade the organisation has grown simultaneously with the ascendancy of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, which has become the most powerful party in the new federal government EPRDF, located in Addis Ababa. As the EPRDF have adopted the neo-liberal economic model, so too the TPLF/REST now reproduce the doctrines of the free-market economy, and this is reflected in the discourses of the Tigray regional government and mirrors the policies of the global water development consensus.

REST as an organisation is also closely connected to the military structures of the region and nation, and many of the senior military officials (TPLF members) could regularly be seen socialising with the senior managers of REST who were their TPLF comrades. The relationship REST has with the grassroots is mediated through the ex-TPLF fighters who now hold positions of power in the structures of local governance, the *wereda* and *baito*. This formal nexus maintains legitimacy and authority over any informal systems of power that operate at the village level. In the public arena, this is represented in the triad of the unit of local governance (*baito*), whose leaders are all members of the party (TPLF) embedded in the historical past (the military struggle), and one of the regions most powerful NGOs (REST). This nexus is equally as important as the water–gender–power nexus in understanding the complexity of events in relation to development, and the successes and failures of policy implementation in Tigray. This is key, as many of the region's development activities are mediated through this nexus. Regardless of the rhetoric of gender equality that REST/TPLF espouse, very few women were included in decision-making and policy formulation in the water development process. Only two white western women were of high status within the NGO and could influence policy, though not organisational practice.

I presented several arguments put forward by women within the NGO, and from the Tigray Women's Association concerning local women's agency. At the village level, beneficiaries' participation in water development programmes was not as forthcoming as the government and NGO gloss proclaimed. Contrary to the voices of the major stakeholders I interviewed, women especially were under-represented. I highlighted the paradox of highly politicised women appearing disempowered in relation to water projects at the village level. This was completely opposite to the representations made by the government and REST, and in this chapter I demonstrated the way that REST and the government are obliged to replicate the current

development speak on gender. To this end, I have shown that an analysis of power in the water development process in Tigray cannot be considered without taking gender into account.

Relations of brokerage and patron clientism did not only happen at the village level. Key informants in this chapter were situated in particular social positions, whether as NGO staff (development activists) or government ministers in relation to the donors. They were constrained to some extent by the policy context and maintained representations as responsible, legitimate actors and stakeholders upholding the specific conditions of their policy agreements and mediating the complex and unequal relationships between the international global multilateral and bilateral institutions that funded them.

Why do countries (e.g. Ethiopia), governments (e.g. Tigray) and NGOs (e.g. REST) adopt or acquiesce to the discourses of development? The answer, I suggest, is that if they do not, they jeopardise future funding and the continuing benevolence of the aid provider. The politics of poverty is complicated and embedded in international relations of aid and debt in a globalised world. Many nations are in no position to refuse the policy prescriptions and conditions attached to development programmes via aid grants and loans (Abrahamsen 2000, Mitchell 1995, Stiglitz 2002). Power operates at every level from the highest, those in charge of distribution of aid funds, to those that distribute the benefits of development at the local level. I argue that donors, governments and NGOs operate within a dynamic of 'power blindness'. By this I mean that the key players are cognisant of the fact that local women are not involved in the decision-making, and policy formulation stages of development as the policies prescribe. Rather, they choose to turn a blind eye, accepting the representations of the full participation and empowerment of women at all levels, to ensure continued aid funds.

Moreover, I also offered an alternative explanation of how women at the local level might resist the rhetoric of the global policy arena and suggested that they choose the position of the power play instead.

It is possible that women were resisting participation in some aspects of the modernisation encounter, because Ethiopia's changing ideological, economic and political principles were against their will.

Women were refusing to be remade to reflect the new nation-state. They were not going to be the subjects under construction, in the making of docile bodies, the good citizens reproducing the discourses of development and modernisation in the democratic republic of Ethiopia.

I shall now bring all these points together in my final chapter, the Conclusion.



Figure 7.1 TPLF motif

Figure 7.2 Woman fighter



CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this thesis I set out to explore and examine the complexities of gender and the cultural politics of water in an arid land. The village in which I conducted my study was characterised as food insecure and, it may be argued, water insecure. Land shortages, recurring drought and a war with Eritrea precipitated migration and exacerbated poverty. However, rural life was highly valued, and society held together by firm beliefs in Ethiopian nationalism and religious faith. Kinship relations dominated a relatively egalitarian society, a strong complementary gender division of labour in the household and relatively inegalitarian gender power situation in the public arena. These factors, together with a long history of patron-client relationships, represented the social landscape on to which the benefits of development are mapped.

My aim was to interrogate the discourses, including praxis of development, in the Tigrean context. To do this I drew on the theoretical works of scholars such as Escobar 1995, Esteva 1992, Gardner and Lewis 1996, Grillo and Stirrat 1997, Mosse 2005 and Sachs 1992, who place these global power relations in a dynamic that is politically and historically embedded.

I began by putting forward an important dynamic I called the water–gender–power nexus. The central question of my thesis therefore used this nexus to focus on power relations at the global, regional and local level and to examine the problematic translation of global policy into local praxis through the lens of acquiescence and resistance (Gaventa 1980, Gaventa and Cornwall 2001, Scott 1985). This process revealed a notion of the relational view of power I called the ‘power play’ that operates at several levels simultaneously. First, I looked at gender relations between men and women in the domestic sphere in Tigray, where women are active and powerful agents with a range of interpersonal strategies. They bargain and negotiate with men not only for ‘survival’, as Molyneux (1985) argues, but also, I suggest, to exert their own gender power.

This dynamic was central to my research in the exploration of the rhetoric and reality of development at the grassroots. I described women as key figures in the development process because of their role as bearers and managers of water resources at the household level. However,

through the course of my fieldwork another equally important nexus emerged which provided a coherent explanatory framework for understanding power relations in the water development process. This triad of actors consisted of the *baito*, a system of administration unique to Tigray, intersecting with the TPLF, the political party in power, and finally, with the most powerful NGO in the region, REST – responsible for facilitating and enabling relief and development in Tigray through the donor funds they bring to the water development process. This configuration, I argue, is of equal importance to the water–gender –power nexus in understanding the events I observed over the one year period of my research.

Global Power Relations and Policy: The Heart of the Development Encounter

In Chapter 1, I outlined the interface between development, democracy, good governance, debt and aid, using scholars such as Abrahamsen (2000), Crewe and Harrison (1998), Hayter (1981) and Mitchell (1995). In the following chapters I demonstrated how Ethiopia is entangled in this global process. As Escobar (1995) has argued, the western modernisation project has been the technology of power facilitating this endeavour, whereby the ‘South’ has been dominated by the hegemonic powers of the ‘North’, primarily the USA and Europe (the G8 industrialised countries). I used Abrahamsen (2000) to demonstrate how African countries are made to mirror western political systems because state survival often depends on financial assistance from institutions such as USAID, the World Bank and the IMF.

There is no doubt about the unequal power dynamic between aid givers and receivers, (Crewe and Harrison 1998). In Chapter 7, I described how, as a beneficiary of international aid, Ethiopia has to acquiesce to the terms and conditions set by the global powers (G8) in order to ensure aid flows to sustain the economy. Ethiopia earns over half a billion dollars from the export of various agricultural commodities, a third of it from coffee. The government (EPRDF) engages in international trade, exporting the country’s cash crops to raise foreign exchange to pay off previous debts that have crippled the Ethiopian economy. The politics of poverty is complicated and embedded in international relations of politics,¹ trade and aid in a globalised world (Abrahamsen

¹ It is interesting to compare Mitchell’s (1995) analysis of aid and the arms trade in Egypt to Ethiopia. The Republic of Egypt is now considered an ally of the USA in the post 9/11 environment of the ‘war against terror’. Mitchell describes the multi-billions of dollars of USAID that funds the Egyptian military. Gaining Egyptian support in the 1990 war

2000, Mitchell 1995, Stiglitz 2002). By agreeing to the policies of the 'North', and the conditions prescribed by their donors, debt relief has followed. Thus Ethiopia has turned away from revolutionary socialism and become a 'democracy', participating in the market economy and allied to the G8 industrialised nations.

This demonstrates the highest level of the dynamic I term a 'power play'. In this instance the top players, bilateral and multilateral agencies such as USAID, DFID, the World Bank and the IMF, decide the rules. With their access to vast sums of money, they literally have the power over life and death (e.g. to provide or refuse food aid when needed²). The government of Ethiopia and the regional government of Tigray, as well as NGOs such as REST, must accept the discourses and conditions attached to the modernisation project. If they do not they jeopardise future funding and the continuing benevolence of the aid provider. (This is particularly pertinent in the Tigrean water sector as the regional government had no budget allocation for rural water development interventions, placing REST and the government in a position of absolute reliance on western donor monies to access clean water for the rural poor.)

The G8 countries posit that aid funds should be used for investments in health, education and social needs, as well as support for sustainable development. These discourses are adopted not only by the national and regional government but also by the NGOs, the implementing agencies of development.

against Iraq, the USA subsequently wrote off billions of dollars of Egyptian military debt. Post September 11th, Ethiopia is now a strategic ally and there is a new political agenda. The Americans are using donor funding (USAID) to combat the Islamic 'Al Qaeda', fearing the organisation has a presence in Muslim nations such as Sudan and Somalia. Ethiopia, as a predominantly Christian state situated on these nations' borders, has been co-opted into the 'fight'. As Abrahamsen states: 'the period after WWII has seen religion entering centre stage in world politics in many arenas' (2000: 217). The new agenda of peace, development and democracy in the post-Cold War era is inextricably linked to the processes of globalisation in its many manifestations (Abrahamsen 2000, Stiglitz 2002). I would like to do further research into the links between water, war and the arms trade in Ethiopia, building on Mitchell's work.

² During the war with Eritrea, Claire Short, the then British Minister for International Development, threatened to cut off all food aid packages to Ethiopia unless an agreement to cease hostilities was reached. Simultaneously a drought was claiming the lives of millions in Harare and the Oromo regions of Ethiopia (World Service Broadcast 2000).

Representations of Sustainability and Gender Power at the NGO Level and Beyond

In Chapter 6, I presented a comparison of two projects, one implemented by a local NGO, ADCCS, a Catholic-funded organisation, and the other by REST, a large, politically-affiliated grassroots NGO. I used these case studies to look at how power is operationalised through local politics in the water development process.

The failed new hand-dug well project I described at the St Mary's site in Tshahlo had been implemented by ADCCS, an NGO which lacked the political clout that REST wielded. Disagreements between the project staff and workers culminated in a dispute in which the villager workmen resisted the authority of the church-based organisation and stopped work, bringing the expensive project to a halt. I argued that this situation could be explained because ADCCS was not as powerful as REST: it did not have links to the TPLF, and thus the people could actively resist as there was less danger of retribution. ADCCS could not affect aid quotas as REST could. Power can and should be viewed in its multiple dimensions. I used Gaventa's (1980) work to demonstrate how the mechanisms and processes within each power dimension are specifiable. In Tshahlo the village workmen thwarted the power of development by refusing to participate, and the project subsequently failed.

In my comparison I contrasted a project implemented by REST, the installation of a new water point in a dryland zone. I described the election of a new water committee, the procedure for which appeared to have followed all the gender policy guidelines of the Dublin Principles³ (1992). Three men and three women were duly elected and the people of Kollo Tembien appeared acquiescent. However, as I described in Chapter 6, I was subsequently informed by the REST field co-ordinator responsible for this arid region that the people would accept the rules and regulations only until the donors (USAID) and the NGO, REST, had left the project site. After a few months the pumps would fail, as no one takes responsibility for maintenance and payments cease. In my experience three out of four water points were broken, hence such projects appear unsustainable. It could be argued that this failure was due to what Tvedt (1998) refers to as the possible 'clash of civilisations'

³ See the Introduction to this thesis, pages 16 and 17 for the four key points of the Dublin Principles.

that occurs in the development encounter as western funds, donors and aid programmes impact on ‘the other’?

I described REST as one of the region’s largest and most powerful NGOs, also being constrained and controlled by global policies.⁴ The organisation is tied into fulfilling not only its own targets but also to contributing to the fulfilment of the regional government’s five-year plans. While REST represents itself as a grassroots organisation, the relationship the NGO has to the grassroots has changed as the global forces I described above have shaped the policies and practices of the organisation. These policies incorporate the current rhetorics of the modernisation encounter. The notions of participation, gender empowerment and sustainability are central tenets of the project process in the development of the water supply and sanitation sector in Tigray, reflecting global water policies and principles (the Dublin Principles 1992, now often referred to the International Water Policy Consensus).

The most powerful stakeholders in Tigray (government ministers and NGO managers) claimed women were participating in water development projects when actually, in the main, they were not. REST and the Tigray regional government maintained representations of successful implementation and adoption of gender policies and plans, reflecting what the donors wanted to see, but at the village level they were colluding in and therefore reproducing local hierarchies of gender power. As my examples in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrated, women were excluded from the development process in both decision-making and implementation, yet these realities were not apparent in the narratives of senior women staff in the NGO or in the regional government/TPLF.

It is important to reflect on the voices of informants in terms of their social and professional positions. Maria and Fiona, key figures in REST, had to maintain particular representations of consensus in relation to donor policies. Had they not done so the funding for their organisation might have been cut. Thus the NGO espoused all the rhetorics of sustainable development. Getachew, the head of the Rural Water Supply Team (RUWAS), often called upon the mobilising metaphors of partnership, participation and empowerment and claimed that in the villages where

⁴ This is ironic in some ways as the NGO has gained much of its power through its phenomenal growth, funded by aid packages from western donor organisations such as USAID, DFID and Oxfam. REST is very wealthy in financial terms, their income and assets far outstripping the entire budget of the Tigrean regional government.

REST water projects were situated, gender policies were adhered to and sustainability reigned. This is not what I found in Tsahlo. In Chapters 5 and 6 I questioned why women had not voiced any protest to this situation. Women had been active in the revolution and were contributing to the current war effort. Yet, there was a paradox between the strong political mobilisation of women, who had in the past fought side by side with men in the armed struggle, and their weak participation at all stages of the water development process. The exclusion of women from decision-making in the public arena undermined many of the rhetorics of gender and water development policy. This is significant given that some anthropologists have critiqued the apolitical nature of the literature on participatory development strategies, for example (Cleaver 2000, Cook and Kothari 2001, Nelson and Wright 1995).

Gaventa (1980) has argued that in powerless positions many people remain silent; they tire of banging their heads against political walls they cannot impact. But this reading applied to my thesis is too passive, and denies people – especially women – agency. I suggested an alternative interpretation for women's silence, based on my notion of the power play. Women had chosen which arguments were worthy of fighting, opting out of those that were not a priority. They had neither the time nor energy for futile struggles. I suggested that women may have resisted inclusion rather than being victims of exclusion. In Tsahlo women prioritised as a conscious strategy and instead chose not to participate or protest unless they gained tangible benefits.

It is important to present a nuanced view of development. As I have demonstrated, REST certainly benefited from the donor funds that poured regularly into the organisation. Also, at the village level, elite men and women gained resources, power and prestige. Some others also obtained a cash income from soil and water conservation activities and from food aid flows, and a select few got better access to clean water. Kinship was salient. Hand pumps were situated in relation to family connections, political affiliation and complex patron-client relations.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, in the operation of already established water projects at the village level the discourses of sustainability could not be matched in praxis. Water was not the burning issue, as the secretary of the Tsahlo *tabia baito* argued. The water projects had not been maintained or protected. I experienced the failure of the hailed decentralisation of management, known as VLOM or village level operation and maintenance, and I witnessed a high percentage of broken

hand pumps and people drinking from contaminated sources. There was only a feigned participation, as I showed in Chapter 1, with the farmers turning up when USAID donors arrived only to return to their fields the moment the jeeps had left the village. The donors from both multilateral and bilateral agencies were never in the field for long enough to witness the realities played out at the local level. I suggested this renders them ‘power blind’ to the realities of patron-clientism and in general to the embeddedness of socio-economic realities in the rural milieu. This denial of power relations at the local level has rendered the projects unsustainable. I argued that the NGO, REST, is aware of these relations of power at the village level. They are also locked into their own form of power play, and do not expose the inequalities in local power relations because that would destabilise the dynamic of which they are a part in the *baito*–REST–TPLF nexus.

I described this nexus as being the interplay of the most powerful who command and control the distribution of critical resources such as access to water and the benefits of development interventions. At the village level the people in control of development are the *baito*. I see this structure of local governance as inextricably linked to the TPLF, as the *baito* representatives are invariably party members. The TPLF is deemed very powerful at the local level where the party is perceived as synonymous with liberation from the *derg*ue and the heroic military struggle that the TPLF orchestrated (Hammond 1999). The third and most powerful element of all is REST, who ultimately control the flow of funds and consequently almost all relief and development efforts in the villages, *weredas* and beyond. Therefore the nexus *baito*–REST–TPLF becomes equally important as the water–gender–power nexus in understanding events concerning the water development process at the local level, failures and successes.

Gender Power – Power Play

In Chapter 3, I outlined several theories on power including Bachrach and Baratz (1962), Dahl (1969) and Lukes (1974). I challenged Lukes’ third dimension or Power 3 that describes women as having their consciousness shaped or changed by men, a seemingly passive or manipulated positionality. Instead I argued that women in Tigray are cognisant of gender power relations and choose strategically which ‘games to play’. They have the power to resist, to be quiescent or to acquiesce. Resonating with Kandiyoti (1997), my research stresses the power and autonomy of African women who are expert in maximising their own life choices. I used the works of several

women scholars to bolster my argument, for example Snyder and Tadesse (1997), who stress that in Ethiopia the historical and political context stemming from the revolution added another dimension of regard for women. Hendrie (1999) and Hammond (1999) also stress the relative power of women in the Tigrean domestic sphere and beyond. I also cited Koopman (1997) and Agarwal (1994), who both describe women's power in the household in subsistence farming economies in Africa as significant. They highlight women's crucial role in food production, storage and distribution, as well as their ability to bring a waged income into the household (see also Khan Osmani 1998), as adding to their gender power. By stressing this aspect of women's power I am not suggesting that in Tigray all is perfect regarding gender equality. In the village women appeared to eat less than men and carried a huge work burden, and their roles were entrenched in a division of labour that left little time for leisure. Yet, as I have described throughout this work, gender relations are complex and contested, constantly refined and renegotiated (Kandiyoti 1997).

Academics and activists from the South such as Mohanty (1988) and Sen and Grown/DAWN (1988) describe women as active agents, not passive and vulnerable subjects. In Tigray women had participated in the armed struggle and some even held government positions in the capital. However, at the grassroots level very few women appeared to be politically active. In Tsahlo, political male elites held all the positions on the *baito* and women had minimal if any decision-making power in development activities. Women in the village had very little control over the development process. The majority of women were still excluded from the benefits of water development interventions and had no voice at the highest levels of decision-making.

Women's Resistance to the Making of Docile Bodies

In Tsahlo, women did not heed the health messages of the Bureau of Health or guidance prescribed by the implementing NGOs. REST assurances stressing health education at the village level via lessons taught by their technicians at the point of implementation did not match the observations I made in the field. The hardware or technological input was supposed to follow the software (health education elements) concurrently. However, I argued that the latter may have been construed by the villagers as part of the technologies of power of the development/modernisation enterprise. Possibly this is why people in Tsahlo, especially women, resisted the government and NGO health doctrine, including the policies and principles of the new water supply and sanitation model.

In Chapter 4, I applied the work of Abu-Lughod to critique the biomedical aspects of the modernisation project, highlighting the impact of development discourse in the remaking of women and the reconstruction of gender identities. Abu-Lughod (1998) links the discourses of nation-building to development, describing a global process that impacts on gender roles and responsibilities. I also used the work of Najmabadi (1998), who similarly highlights the way children also are perceived as worthy receptacles for scientific discourses, which are designed to turn them into the future citizens of the modern state. And I used Newton's (1994) notion of women being recast as 'ministers of the interior', their behaviour reshaped as new knowledge involves adopting an accompanying set of western [biomedical] values and practices. I witnessed a failed attempt at such a transformation in Tigray in the role reversal of children coming home from school and telling their mothers how to use, boil and filter water. This was met with resistance and incredulity by their parents. The cultural norm of respecting elders clashed with the modernisation mission and the parents rejected the information.

Abu-Lughod (1998) applies a Foucauldian reading of biomedicine and asserts that, through development, a disciplining gaze is cast over people's everyday practices. In this vein I assert that the water that (for centuries) flowed freely in the village of my study suddenly became labelled as dangerous and risky to drink through the lens of the western biomedical model. Water had to be managed and regulated by rules of behaviour alien to villagers' beliefs and daily praxis. The formation of the water committee and the rules and regulations of the community level agreement as well as the policing of the water points by a guard all point to the disciplining regimes that Foucault imagined. The discourses of health preached in the clinics and the schools could be construed as the tools and technologies of power used in the disciplining of villagers' bodies, creating new docile subjects of the nation-state.

By refusing to acquiesce to the game of development as prescribed by the western biomedical model, women and men in Tigray may have been resisting the new gendered subjectivities designed and imposed by the developmentalists. The villagers may have been resisting a reconstituted personhood, refusing to become the objects of development that Grillo and Stirrat et al. (1997) described.

The Dublin Principles, in tandem with the discourses of the western biomedical model, had been imposed on the villagers by the power structures that governed at the local level, yet these ideas and practices were not taking hold. Interestingly the nexus of the *baito*–TPLF–REST was undermined as women refused to change their behaviour and values. I argued that this is because women exercised power in the domestic domain and did not want to lose the power they had by acquiescing to new ways of being that they did not choose. For example, regarding sanitation, the latrines marketed by the Health Bureau in Tsahlo were scarce and when present were often not used. The development agents had problems getting families, especially women-headed households, to accept them.

In Chapter 4, I also offered a view from Kleinman’s work on medical anthropology to highlight the importance of the symbolic aspect of water and its relation to health and healing. Kleinman focuses on semantic networks that link the physiological, psychological, social and cultural elements of life. I argued that all these factors taken together explained people’s rejection of the world-ordering knowledge that Hobart (1993) so clearly describes. Women would not boil the spring water, or stick to hygiene rules; they would rather drink from a polluted spring than walk further to a safe water source. Women did not spend the time saved by having water points closer to their homes in the pursuits that the NGOs posited, in cleaning their houses or ‘better’ childcare. Women instead chose the power play position. Important to them was the prioritisation I described earlier. Kinship and relations of obligation and reciprocity shaped their leisure activities. Women made decisions about how to spend their time based on social, economic, moral and religious commitments. Another variable that cannot be overlooked is the impact of the war on the development process. Men had gone to the front and the loss of labour power and support must have had a detrimental effect both at home and in the public sphere where development activities take place. I argued that it is essential that an economic and political analysis be considered. In this area of extreme impoverishment people prioritised food over water and health and spent their time, in the main, making sure that they had procured their daily subsistence needs. An important explanation for villagers’ lack of participation in the tasks of development may be fundamentally about hunger and the politics of poverty.

The empowerment claimed by REST commentators that was supposed to transpire as a result of water projects meeting practical and strategic needs had definitely not happened. I described a

scepticism regarding modernity's claims of emancipation, and this resonates with other critiques of empowerment I described (Cleaver 2001, Gardner 1996, Rowlands 1998). After my fieldwork I had to agree that most of the women in my field site had not experienced a gender revolution.

Summation

Many of the policies of the global water development consensus had been imposed through the TPLF–REST–*baito* nexus cascading down to the grassroots without any consultation or discussion in the rural villages. Therefore the concepts of partnership, participation and gender empowerment the donors and NGOs used for legitimisation and accountability had not been translated locally and were therefore not visible at the village level, rendering them an illusion.

In Tigray the lack of participation of women in water development projects was seen as problematic by the Tigray regional government, the NGOs involved in development and the Women's Association. But was this non co-operation an act of quiescence or rebellion, resistance or acquiescence (Gaventa 1980)? I challenged Lukes' (1974) reading of power relations and argued instead for an alternative view of power in the Tigrean context, one in which both men and women made active choices daily. I suggested that by not participating in development activities women made a lucid choice to conserve energy. The interrelationship of the water–gender–power nexus is played out through the experience of history, kinship, global and local politics and the environmental or ecological factors of vulnerability. People choose whether to play the development game or whether to be spectators. They act strategically, using their power to prioritise the issues that are most important for them.

I argued that REST adopted a position of power blindness, overlooking the real relations of power they understood so well at the village level. The NGOs as representatives 'of the people and for the people' are cognisant of the power of kinship ties played out through relationships of obligation and reciprocity. In Tsahlo there is a strong adherence to patron-clientage and the multifarious social and cultural norms and mores that dominate village life. Communities are not homogeneous (Cornwall 1993, Li 1996), but REST appeared to ignore these complexities and instead made representations of consensus, participation and empowerment as a 'reality' which masked the conflicts and unequal

distribution of resources that lay below the surface at grassroots level. Representations of coherence (policy) dominated over practice.

Power blindness can also be used to describe the mask that obscured the relationship of the *baito*–TPLF–REST. This nexus was more pertinent in explaining the power dynamics that shaped development at the village level and above and replaced the water–gender–power nexus as the dynamic in which the location of power was most salient.

In Tsaḥlo people reacted and responded in a myriad of ways to the modernisation encounter – there was quiescence, acquiescence and resistance. I suggested that the power play operated in the local context through responses of non-cooperation to development projects and programmes. This is the link to my central question. In Tsaḥlo global policies were not being translated into local priorities. The power that was supposed to have been decentralised and in the hands of ‘the people’ at the local level remained in the hands of the political elite. Sustainability was merely a word bandied about at the highest levels and was not a reality at the grassroots.

I argued that not only the beneficiaries but also the NGO (REST) are cognisant of the game being played. They know that villagers stop playing or adhering to the rules and regulations of the game. Therefore people at the grassroots are challenging the water policy consensus or the gender policy consensus, as do the NGO (implicitly). This represents a higher level of power play. Power appears in the hands of policy makers who lay down the conditionalities attached to aid, such as ‘gender’ and ‘democracy’. Aid policy is, however, constantly shifting. In the water sector the focus used to be more on technology, then affordability (users pay); now gender, community participation and empowerment are fashionable. Development becomes complex as people can at any stage resist or reinterpret the rules, and projects can fail. Regardless of the good intentions of gender policies, overriding them is the knowledge that, at the grassroots, development in the main benefits the elites, primarily men but also a few women. In Tsaḥlo it was therefore not worth the poorest people’s time and energy to be involved. The priority for the majority of the people was food.

Regardless of this, people made representations of acquiesce to the policies of the water development process at many levels: the national government, the regional government, the NGOs, and the villagers. It appeared that all were involved in the same power-play game. In Tsaḥlo people

acquiesced because they did not want to upset the *baito*–TPLF power structure. REST acquiesced because it did not want to displease the donors (USAID), the regional government acquiesced because they did not want to alienate the bilateral and multilateral agencies that give the loans and grants they depend on (e.g. IMF/World Bank).

Development is complex indeed. Tvedt asks the question of ‘how should one care for the other without invading him, or how to advise without governing?’ (1998: 225). Escobar (1995) has called for the end of development. Mitchell (1995) reveals the power of the discourses of scarcity, fragile ecological landscapes and visions of over-population to justify aid interventions, creating new markets for the West⁵. This work has made me wonder if indeed the world really does have a shortage of water. Are the discourses of water scarcity accurate? Are they designed to maintain the unequal dynamic of power between nations of the ‘South’ so that they will remain entrapped in relations of aid/trade and debt?

⁵ Although I did not cover this aspect in my thesis because it has not yet become an issue in Ethiopia, the global privatisation of water may be the hidden agenda. Recent riots in Bolivia, Ghana and the Philippines show the grassroots resistance to such plans. I wonder if Ethiopia will be next.

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Appendix 1

Policy, Legislative and Institutional Framework for Water Supply and Sanitation in Ethiopia.

Until very recently, the water resources sector of Ethiopia did not have any articulated policy or legal documentation for the appropriate management of water resources, except for some fragmented ministerial directives practiced within the relevant government administration. In 1976 an attempt was made to prepare a National Water Code, yet the implementing regulations were not prepared till the mid 1980s. The government however failed to approve these laws although they provided a holistic and comprehensive approach for the management of water resources in Ethiopia. In 1994 a proclamation was issued which for the first time directly dealt with water resources management of the country. Entitled 'The Water Resources Utilisation Proclamation No 92/1994. This included some aspects of the earlier draft code in that it stipulated that certain water users required permits, and it allowed for water charges to be levied by the appropriate government authority.

In September 1995, the Ministry of Water Resources was finally established. At this time the regional structure of the country changed to a federal system of governance. The transformation meant that the decentralisation of water resources management with federal and regional governments having specific responsibilities for water resources management and consequent institutional reorganisation for water resources management at federal and regional levels.

With respect to the environmental management and protection of the country, the responsibility had previously rested with the various government sectoral agencies responsible for different areas of the natural and human environment. This led to fragmentation of environmental management and protection activities and consequently to serious deterioration and damage to the environment. As a response to these problems the government established the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) at the federal level with regulatory, co-ordinating, monitoring and enforcement functions with respect to the environment.

The Constitution, as ‘the supreme law of Ethiopia’ provides the framework for all national policies, laws and Institutional systems of the country. ‘The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia’¹ contained in Proclamation 1/1995 has several provisions which have direct policy, legal and institutional relevance for the management of water resources of the country.

The Constitution provides that the Government recognises the right to a clean and healthy as an objective and basic right of the Ethiopian people. It recognises that the design and implementation of development programmes and projects should not damage or destroy the environment. Importantly it provides the legal right of the public and the community, including women [emphasis mine] to full consultation and participation in the planning, and implementation of policies and development projects that affect them. The right of compensation for displacement of local populations as a result of state programmes is also enshrined in the constitution.

The current land tenure system is essentially unchanged from the previous regime. Article 40(3) of the Constitution provides for public ownership of both rural and urban land as well as all natural resources. Thus private ownership of land and other natural resources including water resources is excluded. This is a contentious area for debate with peasant groups voicing increasing insecurity over tenure. The policies of redistribution of land practiced by previous regimes meant a more equitable access to land for the poorer people yet a loss of land to others. The government guarantees Ethiopian peasants the protection against eviction from their possessory rights. Art 40(4) Moreover the recently enacted Rural Land Administration Proclamation No 89/1997 has the objective of restoring confidence in the peasantry by vesting them with a stable holding right.

¹ ‘The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia’. Proclamation 1/1995 , *Negarit Gazetta*. 23 August 1995

Federal Water Resources Policy

The federal water resources policy adopted by the Council of Ministers (1998) addresses both cross sectoral and sectoral issues of water resources management and is very comprehensive and detailed in nature covering most aspects of water resources management. It has a separate section dealing solely with water supply and sanitation (WSS).

The overall objective of the WSS policy is the promotion of the well being of the people and enhancement of public health through the provision of water supply systems of acceptable quality and quantity, appropriate sanitation facilities and mechanisms for water resources protection.

“The overall goal of Water Resources Policy is to enhance and promote all national efforts towards the efficient, equitable and optimum utilisation of the available Water Resources of Ethiopia for significant socioeconomic development on a sustainable basis” [sic] (1998:1)

There is an express recognition that WSS especially for domestic purposes shall be given priority over all other water uses except for multi purpose uses that include WSS. (Domestic use is defined as the use of water for drinking, cooking, sanitation or other domestic purposes) It also provides the need to promote and enhance traditional and localised water harvesting techniques which include rainwater harvesting through cisterns, dykes, shallow wells, springs, and the like due to the perceived advantages that such schemes involve local resources and indigenous skills.

The Environmental Policy of Ethiopia was approved by the Council of Ministers on 2nd April 1997. The policy contains ten sectoral and ten cross sectoral policies and also has provisions required for the appropriate implementation of the policy itself. The policy on water resources, although it does not specifically mention WSS as an issue has several provisions requiring the recognition of watershed protection as fundamental to maintenance of water quality and quantity. It also provides for the involvement of water users, particularly women [emphasis mine] and animal herders in the planning design, implementation and follow up in their localities of water policies, programmes and projects.

The environmental policy on WSS issues has however been critiqued by external multi lateral agencies such as USAID accused of,

“lacking a rural perspective especially in a country where the majority of the population live in rural areas and have critical problems in getting access to adequate sanitation services”. (2000:3)

An important aspect of the policy is to ensure that environmental impact assessment consider not only physical and biological but also address social, socio-economic, political and cultural conditions.

Recently a new water resources proclamation was submitted to the Council of Ministers, approved by parliament and on the 9th of March 2000 became ratified as the new water resources management law. The stated purpose of the proclamation is,

To ensure that the water resources of the country are protected and deployed for the highest social and economic benefits of the people of Ethiopia: To follow up and supervise that they are duly conserved: To ensure that harmful effects of water are prevented: And that the management of water resources are carried out properly’. [sic] (2000) ²

The proclamation states that water resources are the collective property of the Ethiopian people. This implies that the state will have a major role in the management and protection of water resources of the country. The proclamation allocates responsibility for the planning, management, utilisation and protection of the water resources of the country between the federal government and regional states.

² Ministry of Water Resources. The Water resources Management Proclamation No 197/2000 Federal Negarit Gazeta. 9th March 2000. Addis Ababa.

Appendix Two

REST White Paper on Water Supply and Sanitation Policy

Fundamental policy principles: The principles are based on the political vision and overall development strategies of the Tigray Region. The principles will be the milestone for the policy formulation of water supply and sanitation.

1. Impartial appropriation of resources.

The region's scanty resources earmarked for the development of water supplies will be shared between Weredas by considering the number of unserved population without any prejudice on the basis of political affiliation, sex, religion or race.

2. Development should be people led

Intended beneficiaries should play an active role in planning, implementation and management of water supply and sanitation schemes. Both remunerative and non – remunerative resources should be provided from communities for the development and management of water supply programmes. Local community structures will assume responsibility of governance of their own assets, with the assistance of government.

3. Development interventions should be demand led

Sustainability of development programmes can not be ensured unless there is a clear need from communities. Identification of the problem by the people is *sin qua non* for the initiation of activities. However this would not mean that any thing asked by the community would be materialised by the government or other bodies. It would mean that the communities should have the motivation for their own development.

4. Water has economic value

Water is a very scarce resource in Tigray and the development of water supplies is becoming an expensive venture. The way in which provision of water resources are made should therefore reflect the scarcity of water resources and value of development and mgmt of water supplies.

5. Some for all rather than all for some

Funds for water and sanitation will be primarily allocated to communities who have less access to safe water and sanitation compared to others.

6. Financial sustainability

Users should contribute water fees commensurate for the maintenance and future replacement of water supply facilities. User fees are critical for the sustainability and any subsidy for maintenance should not be encouraged.

7. Environmental Sustainability

Ground water is a finite resource and is the major resource for water supplies in Tigray. Excessive exploitation of the ground water resource will result in permanent depletion of the water table resulting in other negative environmental impacts and expensive water supply alternatives. Development of ground water should therefore be strictly integrated with soil and water conservation programs. Appropriate types of conservation measures will be constructed at selected catchments aimed at enhancing the rate of the ground water.

8. Integration with other programmes

Development of water supply and sanitation requires a holistic approach. Apart from the environmental aspect, it needs to be integrated with development activities in other sectors. The programs of other line bureaux of the government including, but not limited to health, education, and agriculture, should be integrated with water and sanitation programs. Emphasis should also be given by the Women's Association of Tigray to assist the empowerment of women by using water supply programs as a tool of developing the capacity of women.

9. Appropriate Technology

Selection of appropriate technologies is another important aspect for the sustainability of development programs. In the water supply and sanitation sector, technologies and water supply alternatives with proven durability and cost effectiveness whose maintenance both financially and technically, could be handled by communities should be used. It should however be noted that 'appropriate technology' does not mean cheap and nasty products. Appropriate technology is a relative term and could be high tech but should also be appropriate to local expertise and socio – economic conditions of end users and the region.

Appendix Three

Interviews conducted in Addis Ababa

Minister for Water Affairs in the Federal Government - Shiferaw Jarso

Head of the National Water Resources in the Ministry of Water Resources- Dr Hagos

World Food Programme - Judith Lewis

Director of the Women Lawyers Association- Aster

Miscellaneous interviews conducted in Tigray

Dr Wray Witten of Mekelle University Water Law,

Imru Assefa SAERT, Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Rehabilitation. Terfenish,
Gender Desk Bureau of Agriculture.

Irish Aid, Watershed Management Programme donors.

Girmae Kidna Maryam (Head of Bureau of Education).

Head of Bureau of Health in Adigrat. Gebru

Head of DPPC, (Disaster control, Prevention and Preparedness Committee). Yemani

Head of Zonal Water Mines and Energy, Samuel Gebrewold

Head of Zonal Economic Development, Araya Tesfai,

Head of Zonal Planning, Haile Yohannis

The Head of the Eastern Zone administration, Terfu Kidnamaryam.

NGOs

ADCCS: Director Ato Ledet, Regional Head Bahlibi. Site foreman Freheimenot.

REST: The Director - Tekleweini, Deputy Director – Birhane Gebru, Head of RUWAS

Water Department - Getachew, Head of Research - Fiona, Head of Fundraising- Maria

Head of Health – Dr Tewelde, Chief Field Co-ordinator, Hydrologists, Head of Relief

and Rehabilitation Birhane Gebrexavier, Head of Environmental Rehabilitation and

Agricultural Development - Tsehayie, Water Technicians, Storekeeper, Mechanic.