“Development from Abroad:” Ethiopian Migrants and Community-level Educational Development in Ethiopia

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation research explores how Ethiopians living in the United States network to support community-level educational development in their community of origin. A qualitative case study of Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association (ASAA), an organization whose members come from Kilte-Awlaelo located in Tigray, Ethiopia discloses how the group is networking, fundraising, evaluating and monitoring educational programs they support in their community of origin while living abroad. Fifteen participants were purposefully selected for interviews. The study also used participant observations and focus group discussions. ASAA members are leveraging existing resources within their group and community of origin to accomplish their objectives and goals. Their work is done through one hundred percent volunteerism and their major networks are their friends, families, and community members all of whom raise funds, gather information from their community of origin, and make decisions. Educational and economic programs that promote self-sufficiency are among the resources that many students in Ethiopia are lacking. The ASAA members have taken a role to help and collaborate with their community of origin to enhance the overall educational resources.

Approved: __________________________________________________________

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the Ethiopian children and youth especially the girl-child struggling to attain education and make a difference in their life, for they are the leaders of tomorrow.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2002 and 2003 I was able to go to Ethiopia with a scholarship from Wheaton College. During the summer of 2002 I had the opportunity to do a volunteer/internship in the Tigray region, located in the northern region of Ethiopia, where I worked within a non-governmental organization, Relief Society of Tigray (REST). The head office is located in Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray and I was assigned to work with the youth organization. I attended a language center in Mekelle. In Wukro, I had the opportunity to work at the Wukro Youth Center and with guidance from Dr. Teweldebrhan Hailu, I was able to provide communities with information about sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, and contraception. I spent most of my time exchanging valuable information with the youth in Wukro and learned how difficult life was for the Ethiopian people, especially for the women. Therefore, when I returned to Wheaton College, I decided to apply for another fellowship within Wheaton and went back to Tigray.

In the summer of 2003, I chose to do my undergraduate anthropological research project on Gender Dimensions of HIV/AIDS which allowed me to study women’s lives, their adversities, and the power they have in their communities. The project revealed a lack of access to adequate general healthcare, reproductive health services, education facilities, and transportation. I found out that in northern Ethiopia, war, lack of education, and cultural constraints are some of the reasons for the increase of these epidemics. I encountered a 22 years old young woman, in Agule, a small town near Wukro, who was
working in a bar and was involved in the local sex trade. Fana (not her real name) told me her painful story, which profoundly touched me. Fana said:

I was sixteen years old when I started working in the bar, but my goal was not to sleep with men to get money. I lived with my extended family members in Mekelle, because I did not have close family. My family members were in southern Ethiopia, but most of them are no longer alive. Living with my extended family was hard. They treated me like a slave. I did all the housework. I was like a housekeeper with pay. At times, I did not even have time to eat. I was always running around to satisfy them. I had nowhere to go. There was no job; I could not go to school. To have a shelter I would have to keep slaving.

However, there came a time when I had to leave. I kept working, but then I got ill. I was like a dead person. No one cared to take me to the hospital; I felt I had to find money. I borrowed 800 berr ($100 U.S.). The woman I borrowed it from was the owner of a small bar. My goal was to get better and maybe ask someone for a job so I could pay back the woman, but I had no chance. Months passed, and the woman told me that she would charge interest. My other choice was to help her work in the bar. That way I could count how many hours I worked to pay off my debt.

However, that did not work. I stay in the bar cleaning after every mess, but every time I eat she counts and it adds up. I am a slave all over again, but this time I have to sleep with strangers so I can have one meal a day. I slept with different customers each time because most of the men are from the countryside,
and they only stay for a night. I seldom used protection. When I give them
condoms to use, most of them refuse. They tell me they will only pay me half. To
stay for a night the man has to pay fifty berr [which is about $5 U.S], but if I ask
the man to use a condom he tells me he would only pay me less than [$3 U.S.] for
the whole night, which would leave me with a meal a day. The money would not
even be enough to pay for the bed we slept on. I wished I was dead. Every day I
worry about my health and pray not to be punished by God for what I am doing,
but I have no choice. I have to survive until the end or die from hunger.
Sometimes I wish for death. I cannot be with the man I love because I have to
sleep with strange men who could care less if I die or survives.

I wondered if one day this young woman would be able to get out of this
situation. Would Fana have been facing this situation if she had been given the
opportunity that I had, to go school and use her education and experience to make a
difference in her life and in her community? Inspired by her story, I realized I was one of
the few Ethiopian women lucky enough to receive higher education. Consequently, I
made a commitment to do my academic research on Ethiopian issues and find solutions
that could improve the livelihood of the people.

My internship experience in 2002 allowed me to spend all my time with youth
and the community. Every day I spent time with the students and we explored ideas about
culturally sensitive ways of spreading information. It was during this time that I
developed my interests in social, cultural, educational and gender issues in Tigray.
That trip taught me a great deal about the socioeconomic challenges in Ethiopia. Although I was born and raised in Ethiopia until the age 14, I have lived in the United States for many years. Consequently, going back to Ethiopia helped me see in a different light the conditions of those living there. Sadly enough, I found so many people, including women and children, devastated by poverty and health problems. In small and rural areas, every time I was interacting with people, I kept thinking about the children I saw working on the family farms. These are children who were herders, and the girls, as young as seven, were cooking and cleaning to help their mothers. The children help to generate income. In addition, most of the parents do not have the money to send their children to school.

I have become particularly interested in studying educational development in various communities within Ethiopia and have become involved with programs and organizations that address Ethiopia’s social and gender inequities and educational concerns. Throughout my graduate studies at Ohio University, I have researched issues of social change, gender disparity, and economic development that affect people in Ethiopia. When I write about African issues, I have tended to focus on Female Genital Cutting (FGC), HIV/AIDS, and the poverty affecting many African communities. As an Ethiopian immigrant, I have also become particularly interested in how Ethiopians are portrayed in the media. I hope to do more research, find ways to share stories, and discover solutions that will address the education, social, health, and economic challenges facing Ethiopia communities.
To understand the changes that have occurred and the socioeconomic contexts have caused in situations such as those faced by Fana one has to delve deeper into the social, political, and economic conditions of Ethiopia. According to the World Bank (2005), Ethiopia’s economy is based on agriculture, as 80% of the population makes a living mostly from rain dependent agriculture, and an estimated 44% of the population survives below the poverty line. People depend on their farmland for food and employment. However, when it does not rain they are faced with drought and there is no other way to get water to help grow food. There is also lack of employment, and many people have only one meal a day. People do not have adequate surplus food for their livestock; their ponds and traditional watering holes are dry, and this has led to an increase in malnutrition rates (World Bank, 2005).

Lack of educational resources, access to adequate school facilities, overcrowded classes, and a shortage of school materials are common in Ethiopia. According to Serbessa (2002), classrooms in Ethiopia are usually overcrowded with eighty to a hundred students per single classroom. This environment makes it difficult for teachers to facilitate an active-learning educational atmosphere. According to the CIA World Fact Book (2008), most Ethiopians, 15 years old and older cannot read and write. It is estimated that 42.7% of the population can read, of which 50.3% are male and 35.1% are female.

As a sub-Saharan African country, Ethiopia has one of the largest human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) infection rates in the world, as well as one of the lowest socioeconomic and health indicators.
Ethiopia is one of the 15 countries of former President George W. Bush’s emergency plan for AIDS relief because the pandemic is one of the key challenges for the country’s development. It has reduced life expectancy by seven years and has reduced productivity, led to poor farming conditions and recurrent droughts (President’s Emergency Plan AID Relief, 2007, Country Profile). Many Ethiopians do not have access to adequate healthcare, especially reproductive health services. Between 2.2 to 3.0 million HIV-infected persons lived in Ethiopia. In the year 2005 alone and it was estimated that about 1.2 million children in Ethiopia were AIDS orphans in 2005 (Kloos, 2007). HIV/AIDS had a dramatic negative effect on the development of their agricultural sector. The issue of HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia is a devastating one; it is not only exacerbating poverty, but also destroying the family structure (Kloos, 2007). Furthermore, health issues are not the only tribulations Ethiopians have had to endure; for many years the political situation in Ethiopia has been one of the most catastrophic in Africa.

For 17 years, Ethiopia was controlled by the dictatorial Derg regime run by General Mengistu Hailemariam. In the beginning of Hailemariam’s rule in 1977, he used the slogans “Ethiopia First,” “Land to the Peasants” and “Democracy and Equality to all” to gain support. The Ethiopian people were excited because they thought he was going to build and unite the nation. However, they soon realized he was not sincere in his goals and that he would violate their rights. The majority of Ethiopians were ready to vote the government out; unfortunately, people who were suspected of disagreeing with Hailemariam’s policies was tortured and executed. According to Rapoport (1991), Hailemariam, the president of Derg adopted a Stalinist policy and declared the “Red
“Terror” (mass execution): “During one week of Red Terror in the spring of 1978, his secret police and army security squads murdered 5,000 high school and university students and imprisoned 30,000” (p. 1). Thousands of students were executed and many people escaped to Europe, the United States, and neighboring countries such as Sudan.

Many Ethiopians have migrated to the United States to find peace, stability, and to attain higher education. According to Haile (2008), when large numbers of Ethiopians moved to the United States, the U.S. public perception was that they were starved, weak, uncivilized, sick, and poor. However, according to the Ethiopian immigrant and refugee community, Ethiopians living in the United States have great strength and, most importantly, resilience as survivors of war and political persecution (Haile, 2008).

According to the U.S. Business Database Source, in the U.S. much economic investment is done by the estimated 250,000 to 300,000 Ethiopians living in the United States (Larry, 2001). Ethiopian communities in the United States have also added to the revitalization and diversity of the U.S. culture in the visual arts, music, dance, and culinary arts. Many Ethiopians are professionals such as doctors, professors, lawyers, restaurant owners and architects, and constitute the backbone of service industries, working as parking attendants, security guards, taxi drivers, and housekeepers (Haile, 2008). Furthermore, Shinn (2002) illustrated that the majority of Ethiopian people who come to the United States, including professors and health professionals, do not return to Ethiopia. However, many maintain a connection to their homeland and look for opportunities to contribute to the development of the country.
It has been well documented that the out migration of millions of Africans from their countries of origin is the result of armed conflicts, human rights abuses, and poverty. In recent decades Africa has lost one third of its skilled professionals. Since 1990, Africa has been losing 20,000 professionals annually. Each year about 23,000 qualified academic professionals emigrate looking for a better working environment (BBC News, 2001). There are more African-born scientists and engineers working in the United States than there are in Africa; for example there are more than 2,000 Nigerian doctors working in United States, an estimated 600 Ghanaian doctors working in the United States and more than 1,000 professionals left Zimbabwe for other countries in 1997 alone (Shinn, 2002). According to the International Organization for Migration, over 300,000 professionals reside outside Africa; and, in the case of Ethiopia, between 1980 and 1991 the country lost 75% of its skilled workforce Yau & Assefa (2007). The issue of migration in many African nations has greatly impeded economic and educational development. However, my research aims to examine the other side of the migration issue: the role of grassroots work among Africans attempting to address their home country’s social challenges while living abroad. Much has been written about remittances, which involves sending money to individuals in ones home country. However, there is lack of research on how individuals support educational development in their community of origin while living abroad. This dissertation research project explores the ways in which Ethiopians living in the United States have been able to network and support community-level educational development and attempts to understand why they select particular projects to support.
Scholars such as Paulo Freire (2005), Myles Horton (1990), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002) sparked my interest in researching educational development. Each of these authors addressed the significance of empowerment, representation, local development, and looked at how supporting knowledge within communities is an effective way to effect social change. Moreover, if people are subjugated, neglected, and dehumanized, there will always be disaster and underdevelopment. My research project owes debt to Paulo Freire’s ideas regarding humanistic and democratic concepts relating to education. Freire (2005) work emphasizes the power to bring about positive social change that comes from within the community, not from people outside the community. My research provides an example of a particular kind of community practice among people who have felt compelled to leave their homeland but maintain their sense of connection to their home country and responsibility to contribute to its development (Haile, 2008).

While reading the works of Freire and other scholars, I was also inspired to study more about grassroots movements and realized that there are many Ethiopian groups within the United States that have organized themselves to directly support grassroots educational development in their communities of origin. For example, the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) in Washington DC, whose mission, among others, is to assist Ethiopians in the United States, has both direct relations with the Ethiopian community in the U. S. and Ethiopia. Furthermore, organizations such as the Awlælo Schools Alumni Association (ASAA), Atse Yohannes Alumni (AYA), Agazi Alumni (AA), and others have created nonprofit organizations within the United States to mainly support educational development in their local communities in Ethiopia. These
groups support local-level educational projects, and their members are mainly people who come from the communities where their projects are organized. The projects are fairly successful. For example, some have built the first-ever libraries in their communities while others have extended existing school facilities and provided funding for school materials. The existence of these projects compels us to ask how is it possible for Ethiopians to engage in community-level educational development while living abroad?

Statement of the Problem

There is lack of research on how individuals are networking to do community level educational development in their communities of origin while living abroad. Not many scholars have researched Ethiopians living in the United States who are taking action in contributing to educational developments in Ethiopia. Why has the work of these groups not been studied? Most researchers tend to focus on Ethiopia’s ancient history, political turmoil, educational concerns, health crisis, and the contribution of external non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). None has paid attention to the work of the community-level educational development done by Ethiopians living abroad. Thus, this research project will explore the ways in which Ethiopians living in the United States have been able to network and support community-level educational development in their community of origin in Ethiopia.
Purpose of the Study

The overarching research question is: How are the Ethiopians living in the United States networking to support community-level educational development in their community of origin in Ethiopia? The following research questions will assist in addressing the series of community-level educational development and operations of the ASAA.

Research Questions

1. What contexts gave rise to the formation of ASAA in North America?
2. What are the basic operational structures of the ASAA?
3. How does the ASAA raise funds to support projects in Ethiopia?
4. What communication strategies are utilized within the group to stay connected?
5. What criteria does the ASAA use in deciding, on monitoring and evaluating the educational projects it supports?

Significance of the Study

Given the multi disciplinary nature of this project, the significance of the primary research will contribute to the current discourse concerning educational development, organizational theory, social network theory, communication studies, Diaspora studies, and grassroots movements.

This research will assist in understanding general community-level educational development and will also provide insight into unique aspects of development efforts. An analysis their work will reveal how and why people living in the Diaspora are choosing to organize themselves and take action in developmental work. This research will add to the
educational development literature on existing groups primarily using communication and networking to do developmental work. Furthermore, understanding how they manage to stay engaged in community-level educational development in the community of origin while living in the United States might shed light on transnational networks and contribute to literature on social network theory.

This research attempts to identify successful outcomes to provide suggestions to different development programs such as, USAID, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and ECDC. This research might help understand how to approach development from select communities abroad and provide alternatives to development work done by government or NGOs.

This research will benefit ASAA and similar groups and/or organizations that are supporting and working on community-level developmental project. ASAA can use the results of this research when evaluating its programs and include the ideas reflected in this research. This might provide ASAA with useful perspectives from its own members about the organization. In addition, because this research includes networking theory and community-level development ideas, the findings might be useful to community-level groups and organizations working at grassroots levels.

Delimitation

I have chosen to interview the Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association (ASAA) members for several reasons. First ASAA is a nonprofit organization group located in the United States doing community-level educational development in Ethiopia; ASAA has executed impressive projects in a short period of time and I have a personal connection
with the group. The goal of the organization is to help communities in building schools in all the cities of Kilte-Awlaelo located in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and to provide better education and create a comfortable learning environment to all students of Kilte-Awlaelo (Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association, 2009).

Limitations

The limitation of this research is that the study is not setup to provide information that challenges the view points of the participants of the study. Additionally, another limitation of this research is not going to Ethiopia to conduct a study on the perspective of community of origin about the contribution of ASAA.

Definition of Terms

*Afro-pessimism:* the concept that the continent of Africa is riddle with multitude of *problems*.

*Community of origin:* to the community where people were born or where their primary families are from or a place they call their primary home.

*Diaspora:* to people who share a common ethnic/racial identity and who have migrated outside of their homeland or whose ancestors settled/now live in another country.

*Educational development:* to expanding school facilities, providing school resources, and encouraging students’ academic achievements.

*Social network:* sets of ties between two or more people or other social entities.
Traditional institutions: society in the form of self-help traditional system that are socially constructed to address community concerns; these institutions are organized by farming groups, women groups, elders and youth in the society.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one includes a concise background of the research project, such as the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation and definition of terms.

Chapter two includes important literature that has contributed to the research project. This section includes literature about Ethiopia, Ethiopians in the United States, community-level development, and social network theory.

Chapter three discussed the where the study was undertaken the methods utilized to conduct the research, and the challenges. Research questions and approaches taken to interview members of the ASAA are also included in this chapter.

In chapter four, the data analysis section, I provide description of all the information I have acquired from my field research. Moreover, the research findings are demonstrated using the literature review and the theoretical framework namely, social network theory and organizational theory. Social network theory also is utilized to examine the networks used by ASAA to form the group, fundraise, and network with each other and the community of origin.

Chapter five includes a summary of each chapter. It provides suggestions to ASAA and assesses productive ideas that ASAA has utilized that might be useful to other
organizations, with the hope that this research will enhance the international focus of community-level educational development from abroad.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will include a brief history of Ethiopia’s socioeconomic and political background as well as history of education and the migration of Ethiopians to the United States. This chapter will also incorporate literature on ideas of community-level development, the significance of networking, social network theory and organizational theory.

It is imperative to provide a brief background on Ethiopia, the history of education in Ethiopia and history of Ethiopians living in the United States because this will provide a context to understand why individuals decide to focus on educational development in Ethiopia. An important aspect of this research is to highlight the value of community-level educational development that Ethiopians are undertaking; therefore, it is vital to describe what community level development is and the major benefits of community-level work. In addition it is crucial to include the remittance and/or financial activities involving Ethiopians living overseas. This will contextualize the involvement or financial contribution to one’s home country while living abroad. Furthermore, it is important to include the role of social networks and why organizations are now attracted to using technology to achieve their objectives.

The Context of Ethiopia

Ethiopia is located in the horn of Africa. It is bordered to the north by Djibouti, and Eritrea, to the south by Kenya, to the east by Somali, to the west by Sudan; and it is a landlocked country. According to Haile (2008), there are approximately 76 million people; about 54% of the population is below 20 years of age. There are diverse ethnic
groups and 70 different languages; the official language is Amharic, the culturally
dominant spoken language in Ethiopia. About 86% of the population lives in rural areas;
people depend on their farmland for food and employment. Ethiopia is known for being
the oldest Christian nation and for being one of the African independent nations (CIA-

**Political Situation**

For 17 years, Ethiopia was controlled by the dictatorial Derg regime run by
Mengistu Hailemariam. In the beginning of Hailemariam’s rule in 1974, he used the
slogans “Ethiopia First”, “Land to the peasants” and “Democracy and Equality to all”
which helped him to gain support. However, he soon became a dictator and Ethiopians
soon realized that he was violating their rights. Thousands of students were executed and
many people escaped to European countries, the United States, and neighboring countries
such as Sudan.

Fortunately, the people who escaped had the opportunity to support the opposition
military group; they sent money and relief funds. Ethiopians all over the world began
organizing themselves. Those people living in Ethiopia formed regional organized
committees, such as the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian People’s
Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Oromo
Liberation Front (OLF), and later the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF), to help
defeat the government. The EPLF had been fighting long before Hailemariam’s reign to
obtain their independence from Ethiopia. Therefore, when they realized that the
Ethiopians were also against the government, they unified to oppose the system. The
TPLF, EDU, OLF and EPLF banded together on the borders of Ethiopia, by Sudan and hid in rural Ethiopia. They hid in surrounding Ethiopian boarders where the Derg regime would not be able to easily discover them. Citizens supporting the movement living in Tigray, Amhara, Oromo, and Eritrea were able to send food and money to these groups (Joireman, 1997). Most high school and college students left school to join them at the borders. People were working from inside and outside of Ethiopia to prevent the government from staying in power. During the “Red Terror” the government killed mostly high school students, partly because he wanted to prevent them from joining the military groups. Even though the government was committing numerous atrocities, the people did not give up (Joireman, 1997).

The actions of the people against the leadership made the Derg government furious and it took every action to stop the people from fighting for their freedom. For example, Halemariam “used food relief as a political weapon in the 1984 famine, which ended up costing nearly two million lives, withholding supplies from rebellious areas of the vast country” (Ethiopian Treasures, 2008, p.1). Consequently, with the support of the people living in Ethiopia and people living overseas, the EPLF overthrew the Derg government. The movement forced Halemariam out of Ethiopia and he fled to Zimbabwe. Consequently Eritrea got its independence from Ethiopia.

For eight years the country was at peace; however, in 1998, a border conflict arose between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The causes of the Ethiopian and Eritrean conflict of 1998 stems from economic, political, and historical factors. Following the independence of Eritrea in 1992, an agreement was made between the once unified countries to
maintain peace. According to Tadesse (2002), this ambitious agreement had the goals of eliminating barriers between both countries customs polices. This agreement included Ethiopia’s use of Assab and Massawa as free ports and Ethiopian Birr as the common currency until Eritrea was able to issue its own currency.

According to Dagne (2004), following the conflict, about 52,000 Eritrean and 40,000 Ethiopians were subjected to expulsion. The 1998 border conflict between the two countries lasted for two years. It is estimated that about a million people were killed and more than 100,000 were displaced. Beyond the displacement of thousands, there were other human rights violations, which led to the divisions between these two countries that had lived peacefully beside one another even during the border conflict. Due to the lack of peace and harmony in these countries, there has been little dialogue (Dagne, 2004).

In December 2000 the peace agreement ended the war and established a boundary commission and claims commission and provided for release of prisoners of war (Human Rights News, 2003). However, there is still tension, both countries have blocked communication, and they do not import or export goods to each other. People from both sides can not call each other and are not allowed to cross the border. The peace agreement did not last.

**Economic Situation**

Even though Ethiopia is known for being the oldest independent country in Africa, in recent years, it has become synonymous with hunger, famine, health crisis and conflict. Ethiopia’s economy is based on agriculture and over 80% of the population depends on rain-fed agriculture and nearly 70 million people survive below the poverty
line (The World Bank, 2005). When it does not rain, farmers are faced with drought with no other access to get water. Therefore, lack of adequate food supplies for livestock common.

**Social Structure**

There are traditional institutions (society in the form of self-help traditional system) that are socially constructed to address community concerns; these institutions are organized by farming groups, women groups, elders and youth in the society. Some of the traditional institutions among many are Debo, Afarsata, Maryam Sebale, Equb, and Idir, which operate within communities to address communities’ concerns. Some of these institutions formed to improve the lives and conditions of members. According to Yimber (2008), these existing traditional institutions are national phenomena that are embraced by Ethiopians across linguistic, religious, or ethnic background. Furthermore, since the 1960s, some of the traditional institutions are registered as neighborhood associations. Yimber (2008) stated:

Many Ethiopians believe that the socio-economic and political development of the country should be based on existing traditional institutions. Some in facet try to explain the underdevelopment of the country due to uncritically adapting western ideas and practices without filtering them trough existing and time tested institutions.

These institutions are community-based organizations, and each traditional institution has its own goals and interests.
The traditional institutions in Ethiopia, such as harestos’ mahber or Debo (farmer’s organization) provide systems of mutual support among farmers. Gebre-Egziabher (2002) reported that farmers who benefit from the aid of others usually contribute food and drink to needy members of their communities. Furthermore, in most villages, there is also Afarsata, which is a local court of village elders which meets after a crime has been committed and works to achieve reconciliation and payment for injury. However, according to Gebre-Egziabher (2002), this particular traditional system is disappearing because of social and political changes. Idir, which is the most common system (organized by community members irrespective of religion, ethnic origin, gender, or social class), deals with burial services whereby people organize themselves either in a certain neighborhood or even in different districts. Each member has to contribute money on a regular weekly or monthly basis. The main aim of this traditional institution is to support members in case of emergencies. For instance, the organization’s group members would provide financial, social and moral support in the event of member’s or family member’s death.

Equb is an organized neighborhood group that utilizes a traditional banking system. These groups assist in traditional financial organization, whereby people in groups contribute some amount (the amount depends on the agreement of the group) weekly or monthly and provide the amount contributed to one member of the group according to order of selection. Each member will get money at one point. This is a traditional way of supporting each other without needing to be involved in the “modern” banking system. Local Mahber (locally organized and usually connected to a religious
group the Ethiopian Orthodox Maryam Sebale) are part of the nation’s sociocultural system. Among Ethiopian Muslims, Ezen is a self-help system, where contributions are made by each individual to the mosque and during the days of a funeral (Gebre-Egziabher, 2002).

Marame Sable is a religious group which only includes women. These women are respected, not because they are religious, but instead because they are the community builders of the society. Women generally play a powerful role in their communities’ activities. The Marame Sable women help one another during their times of need. They believe that as women they should empower and encourage one another and also celebrate their womanhood. According to Gebre-Egziabher (2002), these traditional institutions are civil society institutions in the form of self-help groups in Ethiopia. These traditional systems were formed for the purpose of dealing with different social problems. One aim is to enhance self-reliance of individuals and society in general.

Educational Situation

As stated in chapter one, lack of educational resources, access to adequate school facilities, overcrowded classes, and shortage of school materials are common in Ethiopia. Overcrowded classrooms in Ethiopia with 80 to a 100 students per classroom create an environment that makes it difficult for teachers to achieve an active-learning educational environment (Serbessa, 2002). Furthermore, most Ethiopians who are 15 years old and above cannot read and write. It is estimated that only 42.7% of the population can read, of which 50.3% are male and 35.1% are female (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). According to Kobel (2008), very few Ethiopians have an opportunity to extend their
education beyond basic literacy; Ethiopia has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world extending to over 60% of the total population. Over the years, Ethiopia has faced a challenge in expanding formal education because historically formal education was not part of the education system.

*The History of Education in Ethiopia*

Historically, education in Ethiopian was church-based education; formal education was not part of the social system until the late 19th century. According to Ofcansky and Berry (1991), before World War II, education in Ethiopia was confined to a system of religious teaching; the script used is called aegis still used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Church schools taught people how to be clergy, how to perform religious duties and teach religious education. This educational system was mainly served to the Amhara and Tigray people who are predominately followers of the Orthodox Christian religion. Islamic schools also offered some education for a small part of the Muslim population.

Until 1907, church education was the only educational training in Ethiopia. The first formal primary school was formed in Harer in 1908. Elementary schools offered mathematics, religious, subjects, and science in Amharic and in French to a limited number of students. In the 1925 the government worked to expand formal education. By 1935 there were only 8,000 students and some students were given government funding to study abroad (U.S. Library of Congress, 1991). From 1936 to 1941 Italians occupied Ethiopia and closed all schools. After Ethiopia was free of occupation by foreigners, schools were reopened; however, there was a shortage of teachers so the government
recruited foreign teachers. Since the 1960s, 310 mission and privately run schools have been established. According to Coeyman (2001), Emperor Haile Selassie tried to increase the enrollment of girls and established a number of public boarding schools to assist rural girls. However, many of his reform efforts deteriorated when he was overthrown by the Derg 1974. In the beginning, the Derg government worked hard to increase the literacy rate in Ethiopia.

During the imperial regime, the literacy rate was under 10%. The change from church-based education to the establishment of formal secular was difficult. The Derg administration continued to try to expand formal education and increase literacy. This government had one of the major successes with a literacy campaign and literacy rate improved by 1984. According to the government there was an estimated 63% increase, although, different sources reported that it was only a 37% increase. It was still clear that there had been significant change in literacy during the 1970s. The major change occurred in 1975 when the government arranged for more than 60,000 students and teachers to go all over the country to teach (Ofcansky & Berry, 1991).

In 1979, the National Literacy Campaign Coordinating Committee (NLCCC) launched a nationwide effort to increase the literacy rate. In the beginning, literacy training was conducted in five languages: Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Welamo, and Somali. However, it expanded to 15 languages that represented an estimated of 93% of the population (Ofcansky & Berry, 1991). The effort started in urban centers and spread to rural areas of Ethiopia and an estimated 1.5 million people gave services freely. The government distributed books and focused on subjects such as agriculture, technology,
and health. For people who were beginning to read, over 22 million books were distributed and for post literacy students, over 9 million texts were provided. As a result, in 1980, Ethiopia received an award from International Reading Association Literacy Prize awarded UNESCO. By the late 1980s, it was estimated that 17 million people were registered. Out of 17 million, 12 million passed the literacy test. Although one half of the people enrolled were women, the studies do not specify anything further about women’s enrollment and the role they played within education (Ofcansky & Berry, 1991).

It is well known in Ethiopia that during the Derg regime, it was mandatory for both men and women to learn how to read and write. Even adult mothers and fathers had to attend adult education; the government’s aim was to eliminate illiteracy. All ages and genders were encouraged to attend school and to learn to read. Today, the only positive thing former President Mengistu Hailemariam is praised is for the successful literacy campaign. During “Red Terror,” he killed mostly high school students, partly because he wanted to prevent them from joining the military groups that were fighting to overthrow him. Although the majority of Ethiopians were ready to vote the government out anyone suspected of disagreeing with any of Hailemariam policies was tortured and executed and the government committed numerous atrocities (Joireman, 1997). The regime used various tactics to oppress different ethnic groups such as the Tigray, who were being targeted and killed. According to Coeyman (2001), during the Hailemariam era, which lasted for 17 years, students were afraid to attend school.

In the late 1970s and 1980s Ethiopia became one of the largest refugee-producing countries in the world and lost many skilled laborers (Getahun, 2007).
International Organization for Migration, between 1980 and 1991, Ethiopia lost 75% of its skilled workforce Yau & Assefa (2007). According to Haile (2008), it is estimated that over 2 million of the nation’s educated individuals were spread around the world, largely across the United States, seeking peace and better opportunities. Haile (2008), “Ethiopia suffers from brain drain due to lack of job availability, inadequate salaries and lack of political and personal freedom” (p. 25). According to International organization for migration, Ethiopia has one of the highest African Diaspora populations; this affects the social, political and socioeconomic ramifications for the nation and the government’s sustainable development (Yau & Assefa, 2007)

It is clear that the Ethiopian people are the victims of political crises throughout Ethiopian history. As stated above, many Ethiopians migrated to neighboring countries as well as to the West. In the next section, for the purpose of the research, it is vital to discuss the livelihood of Ethiopians who migrated to the United States, their contribution to their communities, and how they have stayed connected to their native land.

Ethiopians in the United States

According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), in 1991 there were an estimated 50,000 to 75,000 Ethiopians living in the United States and between 1982 and 1994, Ethiopians have been the most heavily represented group from Africa (Kobel, 2008). When Ethiopian refugees arrived in the United States, they moved to different states where Ethiopian communities already existed, such as Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Dallas, and New York City. Haile (2008) stated that Ethiopians living in the United States have strong ties to their families in Ethiopia and are always concerned about the
well being of the people. The author further stated that many of the Ethiopians living in the United States have pooled their personal resources for relief to people in the war zone and refugee camps in Ethiopia. This dominant concern unites most Ethiopians living in United States.

Ethiopian immigrants have different ways of promoting their cultural activities and providing opportunities for Americans to learn more about Ethiopia’s culture and history. For example, The Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America (ESFNA) is a powerful organization that has existed for over 25 years; it has 27 different soccer teams from all over the United States. ESFNA’s goal is to create positive role models for Ethiopian youth, promoting good will between the Ethiopian communities in North America and creating a bridge where people from Ethiopia and North America can interact in a mutually beneficial manner. ESFNA has annual meetings in selected states within the United States, the organization holds a four-day event where people from all over the world (including Ethiopia) come to attend a soccer match and a cultural festival. At this event, Ethiopian American showcase their music and dancing, sell food and hold different performances including religious and educational events (Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America, 2009).

Ethiopians living in the United States have found different ways to stay connected to their home Ethiopia. They still maintain their social and cultural values. There are Ethiopian restaurants and coffee shops that showcase their traditions. Furthermore, there are publications such as Tadias Magazine which publishes stories about lifestyles and businesses. This magazine is a medium of communication for individuals who have
academic, business, professional, or personal interest in the Ethiopian-American communities and is devoted exclusively to Ethiopians living in the United States. In addition, one of Tadias Magazine’s objectives is to serve as a bridge between the Ethiopian community and U.S. mainstream culture (Tadias Magazine, 2009). Furthermore, Ethiopian scholars have held conferences to share, investigate, and illustrate the cultural aspects of Ethiopia. For example, on April 13-14, 2008, at Harvard University, Ethiopian academics had a conference entitled, “Cultural Creativity in the Ethiopian America Diaspora.” This conference included social, cultural and political aspects and the art and music of Ethiopia and the perspectives on the Ethiopians in Diaspora (Wondimu, 2008).

As Haile (2008) notes, Ethiopians in the United States maintain strong ties with their families and communities in Ethiopia and many try to help by providing resources for relief to people in war zones and living under difficult conditions. Furthermore, the study shows that remittances sent by Ethiopians living abroad help the economic situation in Ethiopia. According to Tensay and Hadgu (2008), remittances are a vital source of financial, economic, and social developments in Ethiopia. According to the World Bank 2008 reports, international remittances received by sub Saharan African countries doubled in the “last five years” and it reached 10.8 billion dollars. In the year 2008, Ethiopia received an inflow of 172 million dollars. The funds are received through formal channels, but informal remittances going into Ethiopia are not accounted for. According to the data of National Bank of Ethiopia, there is a significant increase in the flow of remittances through the formal channel. The amount of remittances transferred through
formal revenue increased from 93.3 million dollars in 2001/2002 to 632.5 million dollars in 2006/2007 which reflects a considerable increase over time (Tensay & Hadgu, 2008). According to Haas (2005), remittances are typically destined for relatively rural regions that are most in need of development capital. Remittances are a more effective tool for income redistribution than are large, bureaucratic development programs or development aid. Remittances are probably a “bottom-up” way of redistributing and enhancing welfare among populations in developing countries (Haas, 2005).

Through remittances, the transnational community in the United States has greatly contributed to Ethiopia. A study done by Al-Ali and Koser (2002) about transnational communities and the transformation of home, discusses the different U.S. communities that send money to assist in educational development of their families and contribute to the fundamental needs of Ethiopians’ native communities. For instance, Al-Ali and Koser (2002) argue that the Ghanaian communities in the United States were likely to send money to their country to support relations and educational expenses of family members. Whereas, the Sri Lanka communities in the United States tended to send money for “communal ritual purposes, such as one’s memorial service or marriage and significant rituals held by the communities” (p. 202). Whether it is for education or rituals, different transnational communities settled in the United States are contributing to their home countries through remittances. It is apparent that Ethiopians are sending money to their families and supporting their home country economically.
Networking from Abroad

According to the International Development Research Centre (2005), virtual linkages create networks that mobilize skilled Diaspora members for the development process in their countries of origin. These virtual linkages are nonpolitical, nonprofit networks that assist in skill transfer and capacity building.

According to Fisher (1998), grassroots organizations (GRO) are using new forms of communication to develop informal networks and get the word out about their cause. Furthermore, Pang (2001) illustrated that organizations are no longer constrained by traditional barriers of place and time because technology enables organizations to create and maintain flexible networks of independent entities, linked by information technology to share skills and knowledge. More organizations are adopting a form of virtual organization (VO) which enables them to use a flow of telecommunication and computing technologies to share skills and knowledge and communicate across geographic borders (Pang, 2001).

According to Boeder (2002), media is reshaping how people understand and think as technology has enabled global distribution of information in real time. Furthermore, different organizations are using the Internet to generate fundraising, to identify their donors, and to build individualized relationships. The Internet offers a valuable platform for communication, fund-raising, and informing the public about the organizations’ missions. Furthermore, the Internet offers access to information and it has the potential to reach an infinite number of individuals and groups across geographical borders and continents. Using e-mail as a tool offers many advantages: it is simple, effective, and can
be widely adopted by private individuals and the educational community. The use of the Internet in NGOs is a comparatively new phenomenon; different organizations have used the Internet to create online news and information services, whereby groups are using the e-mail as a tool to interact, organize, and fund-raise for virtual foundations. However, interactive sites only begin to emerge in the year 1999; consequently, there is lack of literature on the subject (Boeder, 2002).

According to Mills (2005), studying the field of transnationalism in migration studies is essential to gaining a fuller understanding of the way individuals and groups function across nationwide borders in today’s world. There is growing evidence that many migrants perceive their communities of origin and their communities as a social field or network. As transnational studies evolve, it is important to establish a theoretical framework and to clarify the differences between transnationalism and other forms of migration (Mills 2005). Furthermore, Mills (2005) conducted research on how the transnational network provides critical support to the home community in Carriacou, Grenada. Carriacou community members in the United States organize themselves to support disaster relief; medical services; and contributions of technology, equipment, educational materials, training, and cash for infrastructure improvements. Mill’s findings demonstrated transnational development aid at the grassroots level that directly improves the daily lives of the people in Carriacou.

Currently, the Ethiopian people, the government, and NGOs are working to improve the educational state of the country. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ethiopian government at local, regional, and federal administrative
levels are closely working to achieve the Millennium Declaration Principles and
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to eliminate extreme poverty. The development
of the education sector is one of the most important aspects of their developmental goal.
They work to improve the quality of service, access to education and development of
education in the country (UNDP Ethiopia, 2008). One of the main aspects of this research
project is to explain the significance of educational development at a community level;
therefore, it is imperative to understand the nature of development and the importance of
local-level development in Ethiopia.

The Concept of Development

History has shown that groups of people or nations who have tried to “save” the
poor or the underdeveloped have frequently worked in communities and nations with the
mentality that they are the actor with more knowledge of development and the people that
they are trying to “save” are dependents who are impoverished and ignorant. Various
approaches of development theories, such as modernization theory in the 1950s and
1960s, promoted the idea that developed nations have the obligation to assist the less
developed to become more industrialized and “developed” many of the projects
constructed from such approach have failed, left nations dependent, and marginalized
their traditional communal spaces. According to Freire (2005), “the means that are used
are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change
them into objects” (p. 85). If the people are not included in the process, development
programs or education might not convey social change, and if educational approaches do
not reflect on the experiences and authenticity of the community’s existence, the people
will not benefit. However, if education addresses the issues and reflects the lives of the community, it has the potential to empower, bring about positive social change and assist in enhancing grassroots development.

According to Esteva and Prakash (1998), the:

blueprints of modernization, conceived by conventional or alternative planners for [the people’s] betterment, leave ‘the people’ less and less human.” Furthermore, when people are “forced out of their centuries-old traditional communal spaces into the modern world, they suffer every imaginable indignity and dehumanization by the minorities who inhabit it. (p. 4)

The ideology of “modernity” is not the solution. Accordingly, dependency theory (which became popular during 1960s and 1970s) has not unveiled a solution to “development” which benefits developing nations. Even though dependency theory was the outcome of criticism of the modernization theory, which promotes development tied to classical and free-market economics, dependency theory still was not able to fully tackle the issues. However, according to Herath (2008), “the gap between the rich and the poor countries steadily increased, [and] the classical development theory failed to account for the failure” (p. 820). The dominant thinkers of the dependency approach acknowledged the international division of labor as a cause of underdevelopment and articulated the view that obstacles to development which are external to underdeveloped economy (Herath, 2008).

According to Esteva & Prakash (1998), local economies are overrun by the global economy, and global thinking alone destroys local values and development. Therefore,
people who support local development and grassroots movements can make a difference by thinking small. People can start to think about what they eat to what they wear, moving from global thinking to local thinking. People at the community level have a lot to offer; nevertheless, this ideology of research, representation, development, and written history has not done justice to people who are indigenous and those who have their own traditional values. Instead of including and respecting people for who they are, what level of “development” or what type of traditional values they might have, if they are different from what is considered “developed” or “normal,” they always have been misrepresented. In any research, the attitude and ideology of representation needs to change. Educators or researches have a responsibility to support, respect and represent local or indigenous people the way they want to be represented.

In the current world, local development or traditional values are devalued by “modernity,” and grassroots development has become secondary to “modern development.” Societies that are not technologically advanced and those that value farming and harvesting are becoming more dependent because of globalization and the effects of capitalism. Communities are forced to compete with large industrial institutions or countries. In the process, nations or institutions try to “save” the people who are considered “underdeveloped.”

According to Smith (2005), local or indigenous people who are represented by this ideology are labeled “rural” or “illiterate” and are blamed for being oppressed. Smith further stresses that there should be empowerment from within the community. The perspective of the native people should be as valued as the western educated perspectives.
Furthermore, in her research on indigenous people, Smith asserts that people should be free to “name” themselves, to “name” their fears or hopes and be respected by researchers who go into their community.

To assist or to teach people, one has to respect the people. One has to start from the level in which the people perceive themselves and their reality because this is what makes their knowledge valuable. It is significant to understand what they know and teach them what they don’t know. Additionally, one has to be aware of one’s knowledge as a researcher because, according to Freire, sometimes the knowledge that one is trying to teach might not be needed or necessary (Horton & Freire, 1990). Having a dialogue between the person who is trying to assist or teach and the community is fundamental, because without communicating with the community, the results would not reflect both parties and one would end up dominating the other.

Community Level Development

According to Esteva & Prakash (1998), it is important for local communities to control their local economy. Ordinary women and men need to learn from each other at the grassroots level to challenge the very nature and foundations of modern power. The authors discussed the challenges of modernity and globalization and addressed the significance of ordinary people coming together at a community level to preserve and create local development and fight against modern corporations that are destroying local grassroots development.

Furthermore, Esteva and Prakash (1998) illustrate how the global economy has dominated and is destroying local developments and discuss the movement of local
community and people who are fighting this domination. They also noted that there are many people already making a difference by “thinking small,” such as buying foods daily from local businesses. Relating this that of idea to Smith’s (2000), historians, feminists, development programs, and researchers in general can make a difference by including the ideas and knowledge local interests and efforts of local communities in their work. Freire (2005) promotes the idea of a communal change, awareness of reality, humanism, knowledge and self-determination. Many scholars such Horton (1990), Freire (2005), Esteva and Prakash (1998), and Smith (2005), have supported the idea of empowerment, local development, and the idea of effective social change. All their ideas support the idea that relevant and sufficient knowledge is within the community and the people of the community are the most effective agents to bring about social change, ensure representation and promote development. People who are part of the community have power, and those who want to teach and assist must join in dialogue with the people and work together to learn, relearn, and gain knowledge that can lead to very constructive social change.

Theoretical Framework

To further understand the work of ASAA, this study adopted social network theory and organizational theories as lenses for interrogation.

Social Network Theory

Social network theory shows that social interactions have the power to potentially influence attitudes and behavior (Kadushin, 2004). According to Burford and Hudson (2000), a social network is defined as a set of links between two or more people or other
social entities. Social networks are viewed as determinant of the social support accessible
to people as individuals or in a social unit. Social network theory understands social
relationships as networks of individuals in a social system. Individual actors within the
networks have ties and associations with other actors in networks. Moreover, associates
develop for various reasons or take different forms; one form is a social network map of
all the applicable ties between individuals being studied and the network can be used to
verify the social capital of these actors (Either, 2009; Wade & Schneberger, 2005). Social
network theory applies to different level of networks, from small groups to a global-scale
network. These networks contain a set of interconnections that can be mapped or used to
explain relationships between objects and individuals (Kadushin, 2004).

Network models offer a more structured approach to social communication by
focusing on the precise links that tie individuals and groups. Social networks have been
used to examine how corporations interact with each other, distinguishing the informal
associations that link decision-making together, in addition to links and connections
between individual staff members at different companies. These networks offer ways for
corporations to collect information (Wade & Schneberger, 2005).

The theory is significant for the research project because the overarching research
question is about how Ethiopians living in the United States are using social networks to
support educational development in their community of origin in Ethiopia. Therefore, to
understand the network aspects of the group communication, it is essential to use social
network theory as a theoretical framework. This will assist in understanding how the
ASAA members are networking with each other to accomplish their goal and what
network strategies the group utilizes to stay connected and to contribute to educational development in their communities of origin.

Organizational Theory

Organizational theory (OT) is the methodical study of social organization behavior, attitudes, performances, success, and the activities of individuals as collective within organizations (Hillstrom & Hillstrom, 2002). According to Cunliffe (2008), the term “organization” entails that there is a structure and category within the institution, such structure assists individuals to manage their events and attain specific objectives. According to Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) organizational theory draws on the sciences, the humanities and the arts, and so presents the intellectual challenge of thinking in interdisciplinary ways. Some turn to organization theory in the hope that it will improve their chances of becoming successful executives in business, government or non-profit organizations.

According to Cunliffe (2008) OT is a collection of theories and models that attempt to elucidate how organizations function and relate to situations. The author explained that the dynamic force behind organization theory is that if we comprehend the theory, then persons can design associations in such a way that they operate efficiently, effectively, and responsibly. Swanson and Droge (2006) stated:

Organization theorists are interested in why organizations exist and how these social systems function. This interest has yielded a body of research on the organizational-societal relationship and the formal and informal aspects of organizational life. (p.72)
Organization theories are concerned with why and how social systems function and the relationships within the organizational system. Therefore, to understand and analyze an organization or a group of people who have organized themselves to support a cause, one needs to use OT. In the case of ASAA, I will use OT to understand social and cultural aspects of the organization. This theory will assist in understanding what criteria the ASAA uses in deciding, on monitoring, and evaluating the educational projects they support.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter demonstrates the overall methodology that is used in the study. It encompasses the research design, site selection, the researcher’s roles, and data collection procedures. I have proposed a qualitative approach to investigate this topic. The qualitative approach includes in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group interviews, document analysis and Appreciative Inquiry. A case study is used in this research design.

I have proposed qualitative methods for my research because the qualitative research approach seeks to understand how people feel about a topic and the reasons why they feel the way they do. Qualitative research approaches are used to obtain insight into people’s cultures, lifestyles, attitudes, behaviors, motivations, value systems, and concerns (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Furthermore, Patton (1990) states that “the point of using qualitative methods is to understand naturally-occurring phenomena in their naturally-occurring states” (p. 41). Using this method has been important for this research since I have interacted with ASAA individuals in their natural settings. Furthermore, Patton (1985) defines qualitative study approach as the:

Effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. (p.1)
In exploring how Ethiopians living in the United States network to support educational development in their country of origin, it is critical to use the qualitative research approach because a qualitative research approach assists in obtaining the nature of that setting in this case, the ASAA participants’ thoughts, concerns, motivations, and viewpoints from their own perspectives. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), qualitative research method can be used when the researcher seeks to explore the actual, as opposed to stated, organizational goals. Therefore, I have utilized a qualitative research methodology in order to gain a better understanding of how Ethiopians have been able to support educational development in their community of origin and assess the impact of these issues at the community level. As Patton (1990) also notes, this approach provides a framework “within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view about the world” (p. 24).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), there are several qualitative approaches and researcher may choose one or more of them. One of the approaches is to be descriptive, which the authors maintain assists researchers to “reveal the nature of a certain situation, setting, processes, relationships, systems, or people” (p. 148). This research project has utilized a descriptive approach because I have explored and described what contexts gave rise to the formation of ASAA and its basic operational structures.

According to Thomas (1993), when conducting qualitative research one must challenge oneself to go beyond one’s assumptions, because such assumptions might not be true. A researcher should be continually asking the question, “Are you measuring what
you think you are measuring…Within this wider conception of validity, qualitative research can in principle, lead to valid scientific knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, p. 238). A researcher should be conscious of his/her actions and be driven by a motive or agenda that is realistic and which can result in a high-quality research product. Furthermore, a researcher should go beyond just learning about the ideologies. He or she must take the necessary steps to comprehend the totality of the subject matter. It is vital to know several ways of communicating, not just the rules, but understanding the meaning of the message and interpreting ideas that are culturally shaped (Thomas, p. 15). While conducting my research, I kept challenging myself to be conscious of my actions and be aware of my research agenda.

The significance of research is to assemble facts in order to expose theories and theorize, According to Kvale (1996), in order to collect relevant and accurate information, one should understand the challenges of validity in qualitative research and must understand the term “validity.” Validity is one of the most important principles of qualitative research. Carspecken (1996) stated, “A researcher report consists of validity claims: that the data or field records are true to what occurred, claims that analysis performed on the data was correctly conducted, and claims that the conceptual basis of the analytic techniques used were sound” (p. 57). Validity is significant; therefore researchers should investigate possible errors and explain the possible biases in dealing with the key task of the research. In addition, researchers must be aware of unexamined assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that support and inform their research, because they are key aspects of the design (Maxwell, 1996). In addition, Carspecken
(1996) explains that researchers should be careful not to lump things into categories that
could lead to generalizations and they should be critical and look beneath the surface. I
have tried not to make generalizations and I have been critical and gone beyond the
surface. For example, when I was faced with people who all shared similar viewpoints, I
tried to identify individuals in the group who seemed to have different viewpoints.

Researchers may use different methods to collect in-depth information about the
research topic and accumulate their data by interview, transcripts, recordings, Emails,
notes, feedback forms, photos, and videos (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). In the next section, I
will describe the methods that were used to collect data. When working on research
methods, Maxwell (1996) noted that researchers should review previous research, the
functions of the study, and then carefully shape the sample and think about the time,
setting, and the individuals selected to be observed and/or interviewed. When working on
data collection, a researcher should ask him/herself how to go about gathering the
information and think about how to later make sense of the data and connect it to the
research.

Case Study

Case study is an in-depth study of a particular single group, incident, community,
program, individual, event, or organization (Patton, 1990). A researcher might focus on a
single case that perhaps due to its unique or particular characteristics, is important to
study to understand or inform practice for similar situations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).
The qualitative research case study approach seeks a holistic description and details and it
is a design will primarily have an insight, discovery and explanation (Merriam, 1991).
As previously stated, the qualitative description approach was used to conduct this research. According to Merriam (1991), the descriptive product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study; it has been labeled “holistic,” “lifelike,” “grounded,” and “exploratory” (p.13). It provides thick description which means complete, exact description of the event or body being examined (Merriam, 1991). Therefore, case study permits researchers to undertake an in-depth study about an entity, to describe, explain, and investigate an entity. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) stated, “A case study may be especially suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation” (p. 149). The ASAA, their project and generally, their efforts, have never been studied. As stated in chapter one, groups such as the ASAA which are supporting educational development in their community of origin while living abroad have not been documented and are known as non-governmental organizations such as USAID or UNESCO. Therefore, the use of a case study qualitative approach is imperative for this project.

Using the case study approach made it possible for me to conduct an in-depth analysis of the ASAA structure, how they raise funds to support projects, the communication strategies utilized in the group to stay connected, and the criteria ASAA uses in deciding, monitoring, and evaluating the educational projects they support. This also assisted in studying details about what happens within the ASAA and why. In additions, studying ASAA as a case study permitted me to identify situations that existed and gathered thick descriptions of the organization and its activities.
Site Selection

I have selected the Awlælo Schools Alumni Association (ASAA) members to interview because ASAA is a nonprofit organization located in the United States. The ASAA mission is to directly support educational development in their community of origin, Kilte-Awlælo, a small county that consists of villages and small towns located in the Tigray region, in Northern Ethiopia. In additions, members try to support health facilities in the county. The leading goal of the organization is to help communities in building schools, provide a better education for citizens and create a comfortable learning environment for all the students of Kilte-Awlælo. Furthermore, the organization provides school materials such as books and computers and rewards high-achieving students for their outstanding accomplishments. The members of the organization come from the communities of Kilte-Awlælo and live all over the United States; however they still maintain their network with each other and the members of their community of origin so as to achieve their goal of supporting educational development in their community.

I sought permission from the ASAA and was granted permission the interview and observe. In the beginning of June, I went to Oakland, California and in July I went to Washington DC, as stated in chapter one, the majority of Ethiopians live in Washington DC and California area. The 2009 annual meeting of ASAA was held in Washington DC, therefore I attended their annual meeting from July 18, 2009 to July 21, 2009. At the annual gathering, I attended the meeting which enabled me to meet, observe and interview members. In Oakland California, I attended a meeting held by ASAA members, and interview ASAA members who live in Oakland and San Jose area.
Selection of Participants

Using a snowballing sample frame, I asked members of ASAA to voluntarily participate. Snowball, chain, or network sampling is one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling. Its approach engages in locating several key members who meet the criteria of the study (Merriam, 2009). As researchers interview the key participants, the researcher asks each one to refer him/her to other participants. When a researcher asks individuals who else he/she can talk with, the snowball becomes bigger and bigger as the researcher gathers new and more information (Patton, 2002). In order to get access to interview members, I contacted the ASAA president to ask for permission to interview and observe the members during their annual event which began in July 18, 2009.

First, I explained my objective and established relationships that enabled me to learn the things I needed to fully answer the research questions (Maxwell, 1996). Before going into the annual event in July 18, 2009, I contacted the members to conduct a pilot-study. I informed the ASAA members about my research project and also shared with the participants that I respected their confidentiality and if the participant did not want me to use his/her name, a photo and anything else that might put the participant in jeopardy, I would keep it confidential.

This research project required Institutional Review Board approval because this research involves interviewing individuals. I secured the approval.
Sources of Data

As stated above, sources of data were in-depth interview, participant observation, and focus group discussion. Also, phone calls and e-mail were used to do follow-up interviews. The methodologies that were utilized will be described.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews allow researchers to interact face-to-face with participants, providing open-ended questions and encouraging respondents to express their own views. Face-to-face interviews assist in utilizing rich, in-depth information and allow researchers to obtain thriving qualitative information by collecting useful stories that can effective. Furthermore, to be able to use the methods effectively, a researcher must carefully craft the sample and decide how he/she will gather the data from participants (Maxwell, 1991).

Utilizing in-depth interviews was essential for this research project because it permitted me to ask questions and list and record answers. I interviewed individuals who are ASAA members, currently supporting educational development in their community of origin. I interviewed individuals face-to-face, gathering in-depth information about what led to the formation of ASAA, the structure of the organization, what communication tools members use to foster community with each other, how the fund-raising is done and how they decide on, monitoring and evaluating the programs they chose.

I interviewed 15 individuals. Most of the interviews occurred during the annual meetings: ten members were interviewed during the annual meeting, and the interviews lasted about 45 minutes. This was not the end of the interview; follow-up questions were
sent using e-mail as well as follow-up phone interviews. Also, five members were interviewed in Oakland, California. They provided specific information about the full structure of the organization, and information about how they select a, monitor a, and evaluate the programs. They provided bits of information about each section, but I was not able to obtain detailed information. In fact, each of them said that such information would only be received from executive board members or from one of the board members who lives in Washington, DC I spoke with Haileselassie Belay, who some refer to as the “Godfather” of the organization because even though he is not an executive board member he knows the in and outs of the organization as he works closely with the executive board.

I attended the annual meeting in Washington DC hoping that when I interviewed more members I would gather more information from them, but it was the same information that I had received in Oakland. Out of the ten people I interviewed, only four people knew the details about the structure, monitoring, and program evaluation. Though the members talked about the receipts they get to confirm that the money is going to the program and that they have tangible evidence, such as the video and additional information, they did not offer specific information about what was done. Nevertheless, I was able to get rich information from them about the context that led to the formation of ASAA, how they conduct fund-raising and network with each other, and their community of origin.

I interviewed members on a Sunday, at the annual get-together held at a park. At times I was standing for about 30 minutes, for example, when one of the participants
preferred to stand the whole time I was recording him. This happened a few times and I was so tired. Also, I found it challenging to interview some individuals. For example, one of the individuals I asked to interview had a baby with her and I was not able to complete the interview. She said that although she did not know much about the organization, she expressed her desire to help out because her father was very involved. In contrast, another woman named Mitslal was full of information and was very helpful; I felt I could have received more information from her, but she was a little distracted looking after her son who was playing a distance away from us. However, we found someone to watch over her son and I continued with my questions and was able to get more information from her. Before I began the interview, I asked her if she could give her consent for me to use her picture. See Figure 1.
According to Patton (1990), an open-ended interview guide helps obtain in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, views, and feelings. This method allows researchers to use direct quotations from participants about their experiences and opinions. Interviewing allows the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the subject’s actions and to be able to attain useful information by talking about specific events and actions rather than by posing questions that extract only generalizations or abstract views. Generating an interpretation of someone’s perspective is inherently a matter of inference from descriptions of his/her behavior, including verbal behavior, whether the information is derived from observations, interviews, or written documents (Maxwell, 1991). According to Hoepfl (1997), an interview guide also permits
researchers to have a systematic and comprehensive way of keeping the interaction with participants focused. Furthermore, the author stated that “interview guides can be modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions the researcher has found to be unproductive for the goals of the research” (p. #5). Using this technique, I interviewed individual men and women to find out how they network to support the educational development process in Ethiopia while living abroad.

**Participant Observation**

Qualitative researchers usually observe from a phenomenological perspective; they submerge themselves in natural environments and observe a circumstance as a flow and allow themselves to be struck with certain interesting activities (Potter, 1996). According to Hoepfl (1997), observations can lead to profound understandings than interviews alone, because they make it possible to distinguish things that participants themselves might not be conscious of. According to Potter (1996), a researchers must decide to be an outsider or insider; this determines by how much the researcher knows about the environment and the topic being studied. There are two different types of observations: participant observation and nonparticipant observation. Participant observer attempts to engage in the activities of the investigation, and this allows a researcher to have a role and make his/her intentions known to the researched group. As a nonparticipant observer, the researcher does not participate, he/she only observes, takes notes, and detaches him/her self from participating. Some observers watch from outside the group being studied and don’t let the people in the group know that they are being
observed. However, in the case of participant observation, the observer is present on site, and participants are aware they are being watched (Potter, 1996).

Utilizing participant observation as an approach for this research was essential, because I was able to interact and engage in the 2009 ASAA annual conference. I was at their annual party, at times dancing with the participants and observing their celebration. I attended all their meetings, for example, before their major annual meeting, I was able to meet with members for breakfast where they talked about their plans for their meeting. I interacted with them and asked if there were things I could help with. I had intended to do presentation and during the meeting, but we had technical difficulties and were not able to work the projector. Therefore, I just briefly talked about my research project.

According to Patton (1990), participant observation permits the evaluating researcher to understand a program or treatment to a degree not entirely possible when using only interviews. An observation allows researchers to have fieldwork descriptions of activities, actions, dialogue, interpersonal interaction, and different aspects of observable activities. Observations consist of field notes and detailed descriptions of the context. In addition to interviewing the members of ASAA, I observed their interactions, took notes, and gathered comprehensive descriptions of their activities.

The participant observation technique allows a researcher to better understand the inner workings of the policy planning, collaboration, and implementation between institutions or socio-cultural phenomenon (Maanen, 1988). Therefore, this technique allowed me to better understand the inner workings of policy planning and methods employed by the ASAA to accomplish its goals. This was made possible by my
observation of meetings, attending their annual conference in July 2009, and information
sessions.

Through my observation of the ASAA annual conference on July 18, 2009, I
gathered information about the annual conference, such as how, when, and why the
ASAA holds this annual meeting. I spent time with members and worked to gain their
trust. Observation is usually understood to be useful for obtaining descriptions of
behavior and events, while interviewing is useful for obtaining the perspectives of actors.
Participant observation enabled me to draw more accurate assumptions about the
subjects’ meaning and perspectives than I would have had by relying solely on interview
data. See Figure 2 and 3.

Figure 2. ASAA Members at Annual Meeting in Washington DC.
At this meeting the president was giving a speech about forming a youth network and encouraging the younger generation to organize them, because the members hope that they younger generation can be active and take future leadership.

I observed the meetings and celebrations. The first observation was in Oakland at the board member’s house. I observed the meeting, which lasted two and half hours. The second observation was in Washington DC at the annual meeting, which lasted four hours. I also observed the celebration on Saturday night for about an hour. I took pictures of the members at the house of Desta, an Oakland board member (See Figure 4).
Through observing both the meeting at the annual meeting in Washington DC and the meeting at Desta house, I was able to gather valuable data about ASAA.

Focus Group Interviews

The significance of having a focus group objective is to understand the group context and issues that affect individuals’ perceptions, information processing, and decision making. The main reason for performing the research in a group rather than an individual setting is to conduct observations of how and why individuals believe or refuse others’ ideas. Motivating interaction participations are envisaged to generate more information than individual interviews would offer (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). According to Israel (1992), the focus group technique has become popular with evaluators as a means of assessing program implementation and results. In addition, this technique allows researchers to obtain rich qualitative information by collecting “success stories” that can be effective. Stewart (2007) explained that focus groups generate a rich
body of data expressed in the participants, own words and context. I conducted focus group interviews with the ASAA members. Using these methods, I gathered comprehensive information from the participants to find out how they network to support the community-level educational development process in Ethiopia while living abroad.

Two focus group discussions were held, one unintended focus group discussion and the second one in Washington DC. In this section, I will provide pictures of participants from both focus group discussions.

*Unintended Focus Group Discussion*

I went to the house of one of the board members in Oakland, Desta, to conduct a participant observation, a few days before the annual meeting in Washington DC I was told by Desta that the members would have a meeting before they went to the annual meeting. He said I was welcome to come and do my observation and told me the meeting was at 1:00pm. However, the meeting did not start until 3:00 pm, three hours of waiting for each person to arrive. Before everyone’s arrival, there was random conversation and the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Desta wife, Yirgalem, was serving Ethiopian food and Hambasha (Ethiopian pastry). It was as if they were having a dinner party (See Figures 5 and 6).
During the coffee ceremony, the members were having interesting conversations and I felt this was a great opportunity to have a discussion. Therefore, I asked the members if we could have a group discussion while waiting for the rest of the members to arrive and they agreed. Desta had told the members that I was coming to observe the meeting so almost all of them knew my purpose for being there. Even though they had an idea about what I was doing, I still felt I needed to explain what I was doing and also inform them on the issue of confidentiality. This was an interesting experience for me.
because every time a member arrived I had to explain about the research. One of the members who arrived toward the end questioned me for about 10 minutes. He was an older gentleman; he wanted to know who I was associated with, why I was conducting the research, and why I chose ASAA members. I was surprised because until that day, no one had asked me such questions; I thought all of the members knew that I was doing the research for my university studies. However, he had no idea so I had to explain my background and why I was doing the research. He still wanted to know more information about me until I told him about my internship and past research experience in Tigray with REST. Then he said, “Oh… ok, if you have worked with REST before, then it’s ok,” I still felt that I should have had clarified that I was not conducting the research for REST, as I did not want to create confusion. In the end, he was willing to be part of the discussion and observation which I did once we started the meeting. There were many interesting and unexpected discussions.

The second focus group discussion was in Washington, DC in a park area. On Sunday afternoon all the members gathered for lunch. During their annual meetings, Sunday is the day when the ASAA members get together at the park, eat, take pictures, and have conversations. Being aware of this event, I went to the park ready to conduct individual interviews and have a focus group discussion. The discussions went smoothly, (See Figure 7).
Figure 7. Focus Group Discussion in Washington, DC.

At the park, Ethiopian food was served, and there was the Ethiopian coffee ceremony (See Figure 8). Members were sitting in groups and some were talking with each other while standing. I went to one group sitting at a bench and was given permission to ask them some questions.
In addition to participant observation, focus group interviews were utilized as a method of collecting research data.

Document Analysis

Document analysis enables researchers to document and provide a significant avenue of voice, interpretation, and meaning (Manning & Stage, 2003). The amount and occurrence of documents have grown throughout history. The arrival of radio, television, video, floppy disk, and cyberspace has extended and increased the meaning of a document (Manning & Stage, 2003). Documents such as menus and receipts, are part of our lives. Templates, magazines, postcards, and contracts are no longer just techniques of communications or texts; documents are part of the structure of our world (Glesne &
Peshkin, 1992). In addition, Trochim (2006) illustrated that as opposed to transcripts of interview data which are collected from the field, documents are existing information such as annual reports, newspapers, journals, texts and websites. Furthermore, Manning and Stage (2003) stated that budget and financial records, manuals and handbooks, contracts, and annual reports fall into document category.

Utilizing document analysis was highly significant for this research because it allowed me to interpret the budget that ASAA used to build the library in their community of origin. Using the budget I was able to understand how much ASAA spent to build the library. Moreover, their documents also included how much ASAA awards to students and teachers; therefore, using document analysis was vital for this study.

According to Best & Kahn (1998), document analysis includes sources of data, records, reports, printed forms, letters, books, periodicals, bulletins or catalogues; furthermore, it includes syllabi, court decisions, pictures, films, and cartoons. I was able to examine video recording that came from the community of origin which explain about the projects ASAA supports. Moreover, using video I was able to watch and collect data from the interviews done about the teacher and students awards in the community.

According to Patton (1990), documents generate by or for a program such as financial, budget record, organizational rules, regulations, memoranda and charts. Such information cannot be conducted by just observing or interviewing, thus documents provide the evaluator with data about many things that cannot be observed. I was able to view written documents such as signatures of students and teachers who received the award; this illustrated how ASAA evaluated and monitored the programs that it supports.
documents which were significant to this research because they enabled research question five which sought to find out how ASAA monitors and evaluates the programs it supports.

Moreover, to be able to understand when and how ASAA advertize their annual events it was significant to gather information from the flyers that they distribute. Additionally, to show an example how ASAA publicizes their event, I was able to use the flyer they created for their upcoming 2010 annual party in chapter 4 to show how they advertise and promote their activities.

According to Best & Kahn (1998), when using document sources, researchers must consider that the data they get from documents might not necessarily be trustworthy, therefore researchers should be cautious and critical. The documents I used were informative and when something was not clear I made sure to ask questions about the data included. For example, at times I did not understand the budget which was in Ethiopian currency. Therefore, I called the participants to clarify and obtain the exact currency conversion into U.S. dollars. Moreover, Glesne & Peshkin (1992) illustrated that documents provide historical and contextual dimensions to observations and interviews; consequently it enriches the information gathered from observations and interviews.

Utilizing document analysis for this research was crucial because I was able to gather information from the ASAA budget, flyers and video tapes, which captured vital pieces of information. Document analysis assisted me in gathering data that I was not able to obtain through interviewing or observing the participants.
Appreciative Inquiry

According to Mohr and Watkins (2001), Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach of seeking, recognizing, and enhancing the positive performance systems which exist within an organizational system. The authors further explain the term “appreciative,” which comes from the design that when something amplifies value it “appreciates.” On the other hand, “inquiry” means the process of seeking to understand through asking questions. Therefore, Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the generative and uplifting forces in the organization, the things one want to enhance (Mohr & Watkins, 2001).

Different organizations have applied AI as an approach to improve their organization or agenda. According to Kinni (2003), Green Mountain Coffee Roasters (GMCR) using appreciative inquiry applied four AI processes, which are:

- Discovering the "best of what is", identifying where a company’s processes work perfectly
- Dreaming "what might be”, envisioning the processes that would work well at all times.
- Designing "what should be", defining and prioritizing the essentials of processes.
- Creating a destiny based on "what will be", participating in the formation of the design.

Kinn (2003) stated that “GMCR's success with AI supports one of the approach's guiding principles: A positive focus tends to deliver a positive effect” (p. 1). The
approach of AI which is to focus and employ positive approach enabled GMCR to be successful.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach that can be applied to different applications, for the GMCR the approach improved their company’s success. Moreover, according to Taylor (2008):

the momentum for change requires positive thinking and social bonding-qualities like hope, inspiration and joy in creating with one another. Positive questions guide organizational development and foster long-lasting and effective changes. People, businesses, organizations and communities move in the direction of their questions. (p. 83)

In the case of this research project, AI is a methodological approach that enables the researcher to ask a positive question about the work of ASAA. On the other hand, AI might lead a researcher to ask questions that can glorify productive work being done by people or an organization. Using AI as an approach I was able to document the educational development that ASAA is doing in their community of origin. As stated in chapter one of this research, there is a lack of research that focuses on the positive aspects of social issues on Ethiopia, relatively, most researchers tend to focus on Ethiopia’s ancient history, political turmoil, educational concerns, health crisis, and the contribution of external non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There is a lack of research on how people are networking to do community level educational development in their communities of origin while living abroad. Additionally, not many academics have researched Ethiopians living in the United States who are taking action in
contributing to educational developments in Ethiopia. Therefore, to explore the positive
work that ASAA is doing I ask the question, how are Ethiopians living in the United
States networking to conduct educational development in their community of origin
while living aboard.

The Researcher

The researcher’s experience and reflexivity is significant to the project, and
depending on the person’s research experience, it may play an important role in
conducting a study. According to Van Maanen (1988), some of the issues that researchers
need to include are access, intimacy, sharp ears and eyes, and good habits of recording. In
the next section, I will share my personal experience related to the research project.

As an Ethiopian American, I grew up between the two cultures and thus I am
comfortable in both worlds. I am fluent in Amharic, the most-widely spoken language in
Ethiopia, and in Tigrinya, the language spoken in the northern part of Ethiopia where
ASAA is supporting educational development. Based on my previous research and
experience with the Ethiopian community, I am aware of the cultural context of
Ethiopians. I believed that going into the research with my knowledge about the language
and culture would be an advantage in the successful completion of the proposed research.
Most of the people I interviewed spoke Tigrinya and even though they speak English as
well, it was natural for them to go back and forth from English to Tigrinya. Also, a few
members asked me if they could just speak Tigrinya, because they could articulate their
ideas better. Having the knowledge of the language was a great benefit.
As a person who speaks the language and is familiar with the culture, I might have been an insider; however, as a researcher I was an outsider. I interviewed people about their viewpoints and experiences. I did my best to make the participants comfortable. I informed each participant of the objective and guaranteed him or her of confidentiality, as my intention was not to deceive the participants. I tried to obtain as much information from the members that I interviewed as possible.

Moreover, I am personally connected to this organization. I am part of the ASAA e-mail listserv and I had been communicating with some of the members frequently. I worked on building a relationship with the group and I believe that I earned their trust. I started to communicate with some of the members using Facebook by creating a Facebook group with the hope that I would create connections and build relationships with the members. Using Facebook, I had e-mailed those who were part of the group to tell them about the research project and told them I would be attending the annual event in July. Many of them sent me e-mails to thank me for creating the Facebook group, because it was enabling us all to meet beforehand and communicate. This was a great tool, because when I went to the annual meeting, I knew what some of them looked like because I had seen their pictures on Facebook.

In addition, this allowed me to e-mail some of them and ask them for their personal e-mail addresses because I wanted to communicate with them individually. This way I was able to set up meetings to just meet people or interview them before I moved to Oakland. For example, my first interview was in Oakland, with a young man named Teddy. He was part of the Facebook group and I noticed that his profile said he lived in
Oakland. So I took the opportunity to e-mail him and said I was coming to the area in June and wanted to know if he was willing to be interviewed. He agreed, and he was the first person I interviewed there. Although the interview did not take long, I was able to ask him if he knew anyone from ASAA that I could interview. He knew everyone; he told me about who the key players within the community were and he said he would call some people, including his sister, who I later got to meet at the gathering and the unintended focus group discussion I had at Desta’s house.

I was cautious not to generalize and only collect viewpoints that I recognized as important or that I thought needed to be included. I challenged myself to go beyond my assumptions and gather information from different perspectives. Also, I challenged myself to be aware of my biases. For example, I knew that before beginning the research, I had a personal interest in the ASAA and my assumptions were that the organization was a very successful agency and the members were highly pleased with their organization.

Timeline

I started the research in the beginning of June 2009; I began contacting people in Oakland, who I had contact via phone previously. I was able to gather information in Oakland for the whole summer, because this made it possible to interview members of ASAA who live in Oakland and San Jose. The first interview only lasted about 45 minutes; however, the second interview was about three hours long. The average interview time was a little over an hour per participant.
In addition, in July 2009, I went to Washington, DC to the annual meeting. I arrived Thursday night and left Monday, and during this time I was able to interview the members face-to-face and conducted focus group discussions and participant observation.

Starting from June 1, 2009, to August 30, 2010, I interviewed people and engaged myself in follow-up interviews, face-to-face, as well as phone calls and e-mail. I transcribed and collected data during the entire time.
CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Three different research methods were used to conduct this study and gather information from participants: interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Fifteen members of ASAA were interviewed face-to-face, three different focus group discussions were held along with three different observations. Telephone calls and Email were used for follow-up interviews. The informants were interviewed about what led to the formation of ASAA, its general structure, and the communication strategies members use to communicate with each other and with their communities of origin. I also asked about fund-raising techniques and how and why the ASAA members chose to support the programs in their communities of origin.

The data were analyzed using the literature review and the theoretical frameworks, namely, social network theory and organizational theory. Social network theory was utilized to examine the networks members employ to form the group, to fundraise as well as to network with their community of origin. Organizational theory is applied to examine the structure of the organization.

The five main questions that guided the study were:

1. What contexts gave rise to the formation of ASAA in North America?
2. What are the basic operational structures of ASAA?
3. What communication strategies are utilized within the group to stay connected?
4. How does the ASAA raise funds to support projects in Ethiopia?
5. What criteria does the ASAA use in deciding, on monitoring, and evaluating the educational projects it supports?
This discussion will be organized under each of the five research questions. Within each question several themes become evident which demonstrate the context and overall structure and methods used by ASAA. Those are educational development, student/teacher encouragement, and community network and community development. This section will begin with the background information of selected participants and then each research question will be discussed separately.

Background of Participants

Education is central to the lives of the participants, and some of them did not stop going to school after coming to the United States, nor did not stop connecting to and contributing to their community of origin. The importance of community involvement was continually raised when I was trying to understand the participants’ backgrounds. Their experience and achievements is the central team of the background section.

The members have direct ties to Kilte-Awlælo (almost 99%). Ties include people who were born in Kilte-Awlælo, family members, and individuals who went to school in some areas of Kilte-Awlælo. Some of the members never went to school around the community, although their families may have some kind of attachment to Kilte-Awlælo. However, membership is open to everybody who wants to support the Awlælo schools and is willing to be governing by the bylaws of the Association. See ASAA Website http://www.awlælo.org/aboutus.

The 15 individuals I interviewed were all from or had lived in Kilte-Awlælo. All but one participant had at least high school degree, college, or some type of formal education. One of the participants never has had any form of formal education. Almost all
had been actively involved in their community before they moved to the United States. As a sample, I will provide concise background of seven participants,’ Desta Haileselassie, Mitsal Girmay, Samson Hailu, Kidane Assefa, Abraha Weldegebriel, Atsbha Gebr and Haileselassie Belay.

Desta, who is educated to the college level, is extremely involved in his community. He values community involvement, such as attending community affairs and taking leadership roles. He is currently a board member for ASAA, representing ASAA members in northern California. He is a father of five girls: two are in college, two are in high school, and one is in elementary school. Mitsal Girmay attended elementary school and Zeway High School in Wukro, both located in Kilte-Awlaelo. She earned her BSC degree from Addis Ababa University in Business Education. In the United States she got her Associate degree from Strayer University in Washington, DC. She is now married with two children. She said, “I am passionate about education” and that she wants to help students in Ethiopia. She has many personal goals and dreams for students in her home country.

Samson Hailu, who moved to the United States at the age of 16; previously he lived in Negash which is one of the small towns in Kilte-Awlaeo. He attended high school at Spring Valley High School in Las Vegas. Samson continued to higher education, attending the University of Nevada Las Vegas to earn an accounting degree. Samson shared about his experience in elementary and primary school in Ethiopia.

Kidane Assefa graduated from Wukro High School and received an associated degree in Banking and Finance from Addis Ababa University. Before coming to the
United States in 2003, he lived in Wukro Kilte-Awlaelo and worked for Saint Mary’s Vocational School of Commerce and Agriculture College in Kilte-Awlaelo. After his arrival in the United States, he enrolled at American University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Informational Technology. Currently, he works for John Morrell & Company in the production section.

The president, Abraha Weldegebriel is a tax auditor and is currently planning to apply to graduate school to study Public Health Administration. He has two children in college, one of whom is preparing to attend graduate school. Abraha explained that many ASAA members were involved in their communities before coming to the United States; some were involved in high school in Ethiopia. For example, many members were involved in the literacy campaign in the 1980s.

Atsbha Gebru, who is currently the secretary of ASAA, said that his interests in community affairs started at a young age and that he was influenced by his grandfather who was a leader of his community. He was strongly involved in community development work before coming to the United States and was a teacher and part of the literacy campaign. He said that:

fighting illiteracy, I taught the basic alphabets and numbers of our language in different village in Tigray for two months during my summer break months from school. I was also involved in the activities of the Ethiopian Youth Association of the city and held several positions, from Kebele chairman to a district chairman of the Ethiopian Youth Association. (Interview conducted, July 2009)
Most of his community activities occurred during the time he was involved with the Ethiopian Youth Association: “In general, I can tell you that I have never been away from community activities almost all my adult life.” Atsbha has held several other community positions: during the mid-nineties, in New York City. He was a vice chairman for the Union of Tigreans in North America (UTNA). In Nashville, Tennessee, where he currently resides, he had served as a secretary of the Tigrean Community Association. He is currently serving as a vice chairman of the Tigrai Development Association, Nashville Chapter.

The involvement of all the participants in their community did not begin with ASAA. Those who were not involved in the literacy campaign were involved in their community in other ways, for example, Haileselassie Belay, who Atsbha refers to as “the godfather of ASAA,” was extremely involved in the educational movement of Kilte-Awlaelo and also through his current occupation he works on development programs. The first high school in Kilte-Awlaelo was established in 1960, and Haileselassie was one of the first teachers of the school. While teaching he was selected by the community in Wukor to lead a youth and women’s organization. Although he loved the community and was working with them to make progress, he had to leave because the government at the time was persecuting individuals, especially those who were involved in community movements. He was one of the hundreds of individuals taken forcibly out of jail by the Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF); this was called the Agazi operation (Agazi was a TPLF fighter who helped free those who were being persecuted.). Those who were able
to escape from jail during the Agazi operation are referred to in Ethiopia as the Sons of Agazi.

Before coming to the United States, he lived in Sudan for six years, then worked for several NGOs as an interpreter, team leader, and senior coordinator. For example, he worked as interpreter for the International Rescue Committee and for the African Medical and Research Foundation as a Health Program Coordinator writing reports on Primary Healthcare.

Lending a hand or supporting a community is not something that the participants learned when they moved to America: it has been part of their existence, something they have learned from their families, communities, and professions. In the United States they have used their opportunities to change the lives of their people in their community of origin. They have the educational background, community involvement experiences, and the desire to make a difference. I want to end this section with a statement from Atsbha which captures the spirit of the association.

Now while Awlaelo is in my heart, Tigrai and Ethiopia, in general, are in my mind. Even though I may not say I have done so much for my people and my country, I would like to say I am trying to contribute whatever I can to the betterment of my people and my country. (Interview conducted July 19, 2009)

Having given the background of some selected participants and demonstrated their commitment to community work I now turn my attention to the discussion of the research questions.
What Contexts Gave Rise to the Formation of ASAA In North America?

The ASAA was formed by only two people. All participants affirmed that the idea to form an organization to assist students started with two people, Abraha, who is the current president, and Atsbha, the current secretary. Both Abraha and Atsbha said that they knew many members of their community (Kilte-Awlaelo) were interested in community. Many individuals were already helping their families, friends, and people they had personal attachments to. Atsbha explained that many Ethiopians send money to their families as well as to students and support people who are in need.

Many of the Kilte-Awlaelo friends Atsbha knew had strong feelings about helping their people. He said: “I told myself that if these people were organized, they could do something effective, help beyond their family members; they had the potential to make a difference, additionally, a few of my friends, such as Abraha, and I always talked about creating an organization to address the educational issues and support students.”

Therefore, when Abraha and Atsbaha talked about organizing a group, it was obvious that they would bring members of Kilte-Awlaelo together. Consequently, Abraha and Atsbha started to explore ideas to assist them in getting the attention of people. They asked friends who were going to the community of Kilte-Awlaelo to bring back information on conditions of students in Kilte-Awlaelo. Fortunately, one of their friends, Mahteme Tesfay, shared a video which showed the harsh conditions students were experiencing in Wukro High School in Kilte-Awlaelo. Mulugeta confirmed that Mahteme Tesfay presented the video to Abraha and Atsbaha. The video captured the poverty and lack of educational resources in Wukro. Afterwards, Abraha and Atsbaha used the video
to spread awareness of conditions there. As Atsbaha said that, “the video was a great tool because people could see the video, witness what was happening, and take action.” Abraha further explained that, “we just started brainstorming ideas, listing individuals that we know were in the United States, Canada, and Europe.” Abraha and Atsbaha started calling individuals asking for their E-mail addresses and began to communicate with them about establishing a nonprofit organization to support schools and help students in Kilte-Awlaelo.

Every time they contacted a family member, friend, or community member they asked them to tell their friends and family about the campaign. To inspire and inform people, they asked friends to use the video and to raise awareness about difficult situations students were facing. A participant Khasay stated:

Abraha and Atsbaha contacted some of us whom they knew well and shared the existing grim situation with us, and we agreed to campaign. The campaign was necessary to create awareness amongst those of us whose relatives and neighbors were the victims of such conditions. (Interview conducted, July 20, 2009)

He further explained that when individuals from different states within the United States became conscious of the situation, they started to mobilize and work towards creating ASAA. Another participant Mulugeta describes how he felt the first time he saw the video:

The video showed corrugated iron sheet blocks used as additional classrooms for senior high school students. There were three blocks and each block consisted of four classrooms. All of those blocks were built with shiny corrugated metal
sheets, usually used for roofs back home, and the walls, dividers, and the roofs were all built with it. Inside the classrooms were bare floors (just the ground soil itself with no gravel, cement concrete, or tiles), and plenty of pieces of rocks that has served as seats for the students. In addition to that, the video revealed more than eighty so students sitting in such a classroom and using their thighs as benches for keeping their books while reading and writing. Moreover, due to the transparency and echo of the voices, students could not learn without hearing the voice of a teacher in the next class. Besides, the classrooms were extremely cold while temperature dropped and oven-like hot when the heat rose. It was heartbreaking to hear one of the teachers expressing his frustration with how the students were subjected to those harsh conditions. In addition to that, there was the Principal’s plea for help in whatever we could to alleviate the situation, a cry for help! (Interview conducted July, 2009)

The moment Mulugeta a current board member, saw the video, he wanted to help in shaping the organization and has been part of the organization from the beginning. Distributing the video was a key element enabling Atsbha and Abraha to share information about the harsh conditions in the school. According to Boeder (2002), technology has enabled global distribution of information in real time and media has reshaped how people understand and think. Moreover, technology and media communication are major tools helping to facilitate organizations to spread information. According to Hershey (2005), it is critical to shape and use communication strategies that best suit the target audience. It is vital to use a communication approach that directly
attracts and induces the target audience. The author further stated “Video/audio news releases (VNRs) shot in the format of a news story can be effective tools for educating people and building awareness” (Hershey, 2005, p. 53). Moreover, numerous nonprofit organizations are tapping into video as an influential advertising and fundraising tool. Some organizations utilize video to reach the public, supporters, and possible donors (Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2009). Organizations can use videos to tell their stories, spread information to attract donors, or simply share information about their organizations. In the case of ASAA, Atsbha and Abraha use videos to spread information about the harsh conditions of students and to encourage their friends, family, and other individuals to help shape an organization and make a difference in the lives of students in Kilte-Awlaelo. The use of video was an effective method, because after people had viewed it, they came together to form ASAA.

Abraha explained that during his visit to Ethiopia, he witnessed high school students learning under a shed sitting on stones and writing and taking notes from a blackboard with a big hole at its center. Abraha was one of the many members who had attended one of the Kilte-Awlaelo high schools. He stated, “When I was a student at the high school, the number of students from grade 7-12 was not more than 1200; however in 2002 the high school had enrolled more than 5000 and most of the students were forced to learn under sheds and the school was forced to teach at three shifts.” Over the years, there were more students attending schools. One of the participants Assefa, noted that one of the reasons there are more students attending was due to the population increase in the community. According to Minas (2008), since the turn of the 20th century, the
Ethiopian population has been increasing drastically. He stated that in the 1960s, there were 23.6 million people and it took only 28 years for the population to double; by 1988, it has increased to 47.3 million. According to the 2009 Population and Vital Statistics Report, Ethiopia’s population has currently reached 79 million.

However, according to Assefa (2008), a considerable percentage of the school-age population in Ethiopia does not have access to education at all levels. He stated that although the enrollment of students has increased, educational resources are not available which leads to a decrease in the quality of education. He further stated that “some indicators of quality, such as student/teacher ratios, number of students per textbook and number of students per classroom have all increased due to increases in school age population with its resultant increase in the cost of education” (Assefa, 2008, p. 26).

According to Serbessa (2002), in most Ethiopian schools, overcrowded classes with about 80 to 100 students per single classroom are common and that makes it difficult for teachers to create active-learning educational environment. Kobel (2008) explained that Ethiopia's illiteracy rate is one of the highest in the world. According to CIA World Fact Book (2009), an estimated 42.7% of the Ethiopian population can read. Ethiopia's other problems are well known: armed conflicts, chronic drought, widespread poverty and high illiteracy are common.

According to Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1994), authors such as Heyenman and Jamison (1980) provide evidence that there is a relationship between student achievement and a shortage of school materials and school buildings. Furthermore; the authors conclude that students in these developing countries perform lower than those
living in developed countries due to inadequate school facilities and school materials. According to U.S. Department of education (2000), different studies have proven that overcrowded classes affect students, and a growing body of research illustrates that there is a link between student achievement and overcrowding in classrooms. In High-poverty areas with poor facilities and overcrowded classroom conditions, a study done by Corcoran (1988) showed that overcrowded classroom conditions make it difficult for students to concentrate. Another study by Lowe (1998) indicated that the availability and quality of classrooms affects learning quality and that teachers are not able to time provide quality time with each students because the have load of work and numbers of students in the classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In the case of ASAA members, they address the overcrowded classroom issue by contributing financially to help expand the classrooms. All participants were concerned about students and the physical learning environment, shortage of classrooms and class materials. Aware of the widespread challenges because, some of them have directly experienced them and others have witnessed them. ASAA members have come together to support students and ameliorate problems students face in the school environment. Beyond addressing the challenges, the members have a core belief that education would lead to the improvement of individuals and society. Therefore, networking to support their community was a key for them.

Community Network

Members used a form of social networking technique to organize the group. One major finding is that the Abraha and Atsbha, the founders of the organization,
purposefully chose to contact family, friends, and community connected with members of Kilte-Awlaelo and living in abroad because they knew that those individuals would be willing to help the students in their community of origin. These individuals are connected beyond friendships; they are allied as family and community members and therefore are linked by the fact that they or their family member came from the same geographical location. The cause than is personal to all of them. Their network approach was significant, because they reached out to family and friends. The friends and family who received the video kept sharing it with their family and friends. According to Atsbha, who is one of the main people keeps records of memberships, although the group was formed by him and Abraha, it did not take long for the group to grow. A few weeks later, it grew from two people into a group of 14, then to 30 and 40 people. Atsbha stated, “The whole idea started in February 2002 and the association was officially established on July 5, 2003.” At that time, there were 30 to 40 members. Atsbha further explained that in 2004, there were close to 50-65 members. In 2005, it grew to about 70 members. In 2006 there were, 70 to 75 members and in 2007, there were nearly 85 members. In 2008, there were about 90 to 95 members and in 2009 a little over 100 members. (see figure 9)
These members do not necessarily live in the United States; some live in Canada and Europe; but they are all committed members of the association. According to all of the informants, the first time they received the video from Abraha and Atsbha, they were saddened and felt the urge to help the students.

The organization is still growing and as the secretary in the section stated, the ASAA currently has over 100 members. The fact that there are no data of the specific number may be positive in the sense that the ASAA is constantly adding new names and e-mail addresses which makes the membership very fluid. Nevertheless, at the same time, for planning purposes knowing the exact number may be beneficial. For example, members indicated that they had a $60 membership fee and some members may donate
from $50 to $1000 toward the projects, assuming they have a target. Knowing the exact number of members could assist in calculation of what members contribute.

As described above, the first goal was to network with friends, family members, and those who come from Kilte-Awlaelo and create consciousness about the situation. Accordingly, Boeder (2002) claims that the Internet offers a valuable platform for communication and hence organizations share information that enables them to stay connected and reach numerous individuals and groups across geographical borders. According to Mills (2005), there is evidence that migrants perceive their communities of origin and their communities in abroad as one social field or network and transnational network provides critical support to the home community. Furthermore, according to Tebeje (2005), virtual linkages are a potential tool for Diaspora networks. Virtual linkages help generate networks that mobilize Diaspora members for the development process in their countries of origin. Such virtual linkages are nonpolitical, nonprofit networks, which aid in skill transfer and capacity building. Moreover, the author stated,

One potential solution to Africa’s brain drain is virtual participation. Virtual participation is participation in nation-building without physical relocation. It also shows promise as a means to engage the African Diaspora in development efforts.

(Tebeje, 2005)

ASAA, which sees itself as an apolitical nonprofit organization, made up of people who have left their communities in Ethiopia are using the Internet to network with each other and their community of origin and assisting their community of origin with educational development. This is way of “brain circulation”, because using the resources
they have they providing educational resources and contributing to the development of their community of origin. They do not have an office where they can all meet weekly or monthly; many of them do not live near each other and therefore use virtual network such as e-mail to communicate with each other.

According to Lim (2008) there is extensive research conducted regarding social networks and understanding types of social networks is vital. There are many aspects of social relationships, such as the strength, frequency and contents, which can vary at the level of influence. Lim (2008) asserted that scholars usually count the relationships such as family member, or neighbor to assess the strength tie. They also use direct or indirect link to describe strength tie. Furthermore, scholars such as Brady (1999), McAdam (1986), Passy and Giugni (2000), who have studied the relationship between tie strength and participation have recommended that strong ties are more useful than weak ones as channels of recruitment because they offer stronger social inducements for participation (Lim 2008). Although both Abraha and Atsbha believed that anyone concerned about humanitarian issues and development might be willing to help, it was significant for them to be networking with their friends, family, and those who came from Kilte-Awlaelo because those individuals are from the community and would be particularly willing to assist the students. They both knew most of members. Creating a strong connection was fundamental because they want to stay connected for an extensive period as a group and continue to assist their community of origin. According to Barry (2006), immigrants typically have strong ties to their home countries; they have a strong economic incentive and an active stance towards their homeland. They maintain their relationship with family
and support communities financially. Barry (2006) stated: “States have newly styled emigrants as heroic citizens, as they seek to encourage emigrants to direct financial resources homeward, in the form of remittances, direct contributions styled as taxes, and investment” (p. 11).

According to Haile (2008), Ethiopians living in the United States maintain strong ties to their families in Ethiopia. Most Ethiopians work and send money to their families, support the local community; and usually influence the political, social, and economic well-being of the nation. It is assumed that once people migrate they take with them their knowledge and finance which hurts their native land. Nonetheless, this idea is changing, and immigrants are finding ways to give back and circulate their knowledge and resources. According to Lucas (2001) current research shows that the “brain-drain” issue has led to the study of potential benefits of knowledge, technology transfers, and trade and investment flows. It is usually argued that the brain drain contributes to the social and economical challenges of a nation; however, recent research has illustrated that the brain drain has giveawway to an increased process of brain circulation (Lucas, 2001).

Ethiopia is one of the nations that has suffered from the phenomenon of the brain drain; many Ethiopians have left the country due to lack of work and because of social and political instability. According to the International Organization for Migration, between 1980 and 1991 Ethiopia lost 75% of its skilled workforce Yau & Assefa (2007). In the 1980s the country became one of the largest refugee-producing nations (Getahun, 2007). Though the brain drain has greatly affected the Ethiopian community, Ethiopians are finding ways to circulate supplies by sending money and supporting development
within their community of origin. In addition to maintaining their social and cultural values while living abroad, the Ethiopian community living in the United States has found ways to stay connected to their communities in their homeland. According to Haile (2008) many of the Ethiopians living in the United States have pooled their personal resources for relief to people in the war zone and refugee camps in Ethiopia. This dominant concern unites most Ethiopians living in the United States.

Educational Development

The principal reason for ASAA’s formation is to assist with educational resources and therefore play a role in the students’ educational development in the members’ community of origin, that is, Kilte-Awlaelo, located in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. According to all 15 members interviewed, the major force that gave rise to the formation of ASAA was the impetus to provide resources to students of Kilte-Awlaelo. All 15 participants said that by contributing to the educational development in their community of origin, they are contributing to the country’s educational development. Therefore, they chose to help six different high schools in Kilte-Awlaelo: Agulae Secondary School, Atsbi Comprehensive Secondary School, Tsaeda Emba Freweini High School, Negash High School, Tsigereda High School, and Wukro Secondary School, all located in Kilte-Awlaelo. See figure 10
The members of ASAA have assisted with several projects including the following:

- Building educational facilities (such as the Kiros Alemayoh Memorial Library) and providing educational materials (such as computers and book)
- Sponsoring the annual students and teachers award (which provides money)

To show how much ASAA has spent for each project in their community of origin, data were provided to me by board members. I will next describe demonstrate the financial activities involved with building educational facilities and the annual student and teacher award.

The members of ASAA as an organization assists with several projects, amongst others, the main projects they have assisted so far are:

Figure 10. Map of Ethiopia, Arrow Pointing to Kilte-Awlaelo.
• Building educational facilities (such as the Kiros Alemayoh Memorial Library) and providing educational materials (such as computers & book)

• Annual student and teacher excellence award (money)

  To exemplify how much ASAA has spent for each project in their community of origin, data was provided to me by board members, accordingly I will demonstrate the financial activities towards the educational facilities and annual student and teacher award.

  Educational Facilities

Thus far, the organization has helped to build the first public library in the history of Kilte-Awlaelo, which can accommodate 480 students. It consists of two blocks of classrooms that enable students who had been learning under a shed. It has two computers and a printer purchased for each of the six high schools. Also, they have established an annual student teacher excellence award.

• Construction of classrooms and computer training center in Wukro High School.

In the calendar year 2003-2004, Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association contributed 237, 000 birr ($28,000 U.SD) for the construction of 12 classrooms and one computer training center in Wukro High School.

• Construction of Kiros Alemayoh Memorial Library

Started in 2005 and completed in 2008, the library cost 977,000 birr ($108,500 U.SD).

• Purchase of computers and printers.
In 2006, computers and printers were bought and sent to three different schools in Kilte-Awlaelo. The cost was 34,000 birr ($4,000 U.SD). In 2008, ASAA bought two computers and two printers each for Agulae and Tsigreda Secondary Schools. The cost was 38,800 birr ($4,000 U.SD). ASSA was also prepared two computers and two printers for Negash High School. However, due to power connection problems, the purchase was delayed until electric power was connected to the school. To help connect electric power in Negash High School, ASSA contributed 50% of the money needed to connect the electric power to the high school.

The organization has done a tremendous job in high schools of Kilte-Awlaelo, especially in Wukro High School because Wukro is the major town in the Kilte-Awlaelo area. Though it is one of the smallest towns in Tigray, Wukro is the central town; historically; the first high school was located in Wukro. According to one of the participants, Haileselassie Belay, the first high school was started in 1969, with only the ninth grade bock, and classes were held in a building that was at one point a chicken barn. In 1971 with the help of the government and community, the first high school in Kilte-Awlaelo, in Wukro, was built. In 1972, those who started attending high school graduated, from the first high school class graduation from the area. Haileselassie was a young teacher in 1969, one of the first teachers in the area and an activist in Wukro. Consequently, he was able to provide more detailed information about the history of education of Kilte-Awlaelo. He said, “the community in Kilte-Awlaelo has always been passionate about having schools and working to better their community.” The community
has come a long way because currently there are six high schools which the ASAA is trying to help.

The community still wants to improve and develop its schools because schools are not well equipped. The community of Kilte-Awlaelo, particularly in Wukro, did not have a complete high school which includes a fence, bathroom, furnished classrooms and library. Therefore, as a community they requested and planned to have a well-equipped high school in the biggest town, Wukro, and they selected 10 community leaders to work the project to obtain all the items listed above. The community leaders wrote a proposal that included the financial budget and distributed it to the government, communities in Ethiopia and those leaving in the Diaspora, which includes the ASAA. ASAA informed the community leaders that it would take the responsibility for the library project. Haileselassie explained that the original plan was to build a library that would cost $400,000; however, it ended up costing 1.2 million dollars. ASSA informed the community that they were not able to pay the 1.2 million dollars; however, the community responded by saying that they would help through providing free labor for building construction.

There is a collaborative effort between the community of origin and ASAA. The ASAA members living abroad are in a better financial position and have a network to raise money than those who are living in the community of origin. Therefore, ASSA is able to fund the community, and the community contributes labor which helps the defray costs. The interest of the community and the ASAA members seems to meet and this makes it easy to have a clear goal and complete the project with a collaborative effort.
Figures 10 through 14 show the library and classrooms sponsored by ASAA. See figures 11, 12, 13, and 14.

Figure 11. Library Sketch.

Source: Created from ASAA website.

Figure 12. Complete Library.

Source: Created from ASAA website.
Figure 13. Classrooms.

Source: created from ASAA website.

Figure 14. Computers Ready to be Shipped.

Source: Created from ASAA website.
School materials are essential for a learning environment. In his 1997 book, *Jamaican Primary Education: A Review of Policy-Relevant Studies*, Miller, E. analyzes samples of 50 studies focused on educational policy and educational needs. He noted that it is important also to address the contexts of the home environment, attendance, nutrition and health, and school-community relations. His findings revealed that most of the 50 studies focused on input standards which illustrates that most researchers were concerned about the physical facilities and equipment aspects of education, such as having school buildings, furniture, textbooks, and instructional materials. The studies demonstrated that having school resources are fundamental, because they enable students to learn in a more comfortable learning environment. During focus group discussion and individual interviews, participants in my study expressed the significance of having school resources, and this was connected to their own experiences as students or community members in Ethiopia.

*Students and Teachers Award*

The high schools have a bank account only reserved for awarding best students and teachers. The director and teachers participate in selecting students for awards. Afterwards, ASAA receives the receipts via e-mail, with each student and teacher signature, from the schools. The ASAA members ask for names of students who have placed first, second, and third based on high achievement level. For the teacher award, teachers have to compete with their fellow teachers, but they are evaluated by students. The teacher who has done well teaching and assisting students wins. The members
believe that this encourages teachers to teach better and is a way to encourage teachers. The prize is money, for both student and teachers.

- First prize is 500 birr (equivalent to $60 U.S.)
- Second prize is 300 birr (equivalent to $50 U.S.)
- Third prize is 200 birr (equivalent to $20 U.S.)

A reward system for students motivates them to feel recognized, encourages them to compete with their peers, and challenges them work hard. Several studies have proved that a reward system motivates students to do better in the classroom and in the school culture. According to Renchler (1992),

There should be extensive use of recognition and rewards in the school setting. Goals should be established that will provide opportunities for all students to be recognized, recognize progress in goal attainment, and emphasize a broad array of learning activities. (p. 11)

It is important recognize students, achievement and reward them because when students are recognized and rewarded for their achievement it is showing them that their progress is significant and this might further motivate them to keep up the progress. For the ASAA members, awarding students for their achievement is ways of letting the students know that their effort is significant for the community and that they need to keep studying and be competitive. For example, Eden, one of the participants, explained that the students work very hard and deserve recognition. She also stated that a reward will motivate them to compete with each and be better students. Kahsay, another participant,
shared that the student award was created not only to recognize their achievement but also to encourage students to continue their progress.

In the case of teachers, according to Harvey-Beavis (2003), the teacher performance-based award has a long history in education, especially in the United States, and for the past 10 years many country have adopted "pay-for-performance strategies" to increase the conventional wage scales. The author further stated that:

The distinguishing feature of a performance-based scheme is that it rewards or sanctions teachers based upon some form of performance evaluation (Chamberlin, et al. 2002). Distinctions in performance-based reward programmes are found in the skills assessed and the rewards provided. Most individually-based programmes have used pecuniary rewards for high levels of performance, usually defined in terms of student outcomes or teacher skills and knowledge. (p. 63)

As stated above, a reward system for teachers is also a way to recognize a high level of performance; thus, the teacher award supports teachers and encourages them to teach well and create a positive environment for students. Participants in a group discussion noted that the teachers who win a prize are chosen by students. One of the participants, Solomon, stated that “the teachers who win have to be evaluated by the students and those have done well teaching are picked by students in the particular year win.” Also, providing the award also shows the teachers that their hard work is being recognized by others and therefore motivates them to remain productive.
Female Student Encouragement

Female students have two chances to win an award. First, the female student can compete with girls at the class level. For example, in the ninth grade level, if a female comes first among her female fellow students, she wins an award. Also, she has the opportunity to compete among the entire ninth grade, which includes both males and females. During all the group discussions and individual interviews, the members expressed that they chose to give a female student two chances to compete, because they want to encourage females to attend and do well in school.

Participants said that female students need more encouragement than male students. Mahteme Tesfay, one of the participants, noted that as a group the ASAA members chose to reward female students twice to encourage the female students and serve as examples to other female students. Abraha stated that it is important to work on closing the gender gap in education. Because of the number of females enrolled is low in the country, one of ASAA’s goals is to increase and encourage female students. In 1993, the minister in charge of women’s affairs, Tadelech reported that in 1993 “only about one-third of Ethiopian girls attended primary school” (Coeyman, 2001, p. 1). Nonetheless, that number has increased; by the year 2000 there were 48% girls attending primary school. According to Tadelech, the enrollment increased due to the 15% increase in the number of primary schools and providing accessibility in rural area (Coeyman, 2001). The current government has been working toward improving the role of women in education. For example, the government implemented the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing + 10) to address issues concerning Ethiopian women and
implemented programs that increase female enrollment in the country (Women's Affairs Sub Sector, 2004). Even though there have been improvements, women still face difficulties. According to Wondimu (2004), only 15% of women have enrolled in higher education. An affirmative action plan was enacted to increase female enrollment. As a result, the GPA requirement for female was lowered; they only have to have 2.8 GPA, while men must have 3.0 GPA to be considered for higher education. This action did increase enrollment rates; however, the rate is still low (Wondimu, 2004).

Formal education in Ethiopia is open to both men and women; however, the enrollment of women has not increased dramatically in recent years. Most women stay at home to take care of the children, work on farms, and in the household. Even though many women work on the farm and at home, a woman’s role is primarily to be a good wife and mother. In an effort to improve girls’ education, early marriage has been banned and there have been affirmative action programs to decrease the gender gap in Ethiopian education (UN World Food programme and partners ending child hunger by 2015). However, prohibiting early marriage did not stop young girls from getting married because of traditional values: to be a housewife and mother is more valued than other roles for women. This is one of the major reasons why there is a low rate of women’s enrollment in education. Additionally, some studies have shown that although education is open to girls, the social values encouraging women to not pursue an education are still reflected in the educational system. According to views expressed at a meeting of the Women Educationalist Association, textbooks are either discriminatory or gender
insensitive; and it is common to present material with a gender-biased attitude (Ruphael, 2000).

ASAA members recognize the gender gap in education for the statistics matches how participant’s beliefs about the challenges of female students. The general finding was that in Ethiopian society, the girl-child has more responsibility than that of males, young and old, especially in the household. Desta, who had five daughters of his own said, it is important to encourage female students. Socially, girls have more responsibility at home which limits them from studying as much. Atsbha said:

The girls have more responsibilities in the society, they are expected to help in the household and the boys can come out of school and study, but usually the girls would go home, cook and help out in the household, so we want to encourage the female students to study and do as well as the boys. (Interview conducted July, 2009)

The ASAA members are giving the female students two chances to win awards, which show that they are rewarding them twice as much as their male classmates, consequently encouraging them to strive for achievement. This also is a way of challenging the status quo because social and cultural reasons keep young girls out of school.

Prosperity of a Nation: Students

During their annual meeting and focus group discussion, ASAA members articulated that their current support would lead to long-term investment at local and national levels. Desta noted: “Students are the country wealth.” Students are at the center
of history, they are the ones who challenge the social, political, historical, and economical norms of nations. When individuals are educated, they are exposed to different perspectives and become critical thinkers who tend to challenge and work towards social change. For example, Natsis (2002) explained the role of the student movement:

The student movements of the 1960s, such as those in the United States and France did not look to overthrow the social order but rather to make change within it. These types of movements, although aimed at changing society, were reformative in nature. (p.12)

In the sixties, students in the United States and France fought within the system to challenge the government and to encourage educational reforms and initiate change. The fact that students spoke out and influenced political powers and educational systems speaks loudly of the power they could have within society. Thus, if through the intervention of ASAA, students are provided with space to thrive and find their voice, ASAA is ultimately empowering them.

In the case of African students, historically many have fought for independence in many African nations and those young students who were involved were able to turn schooling into lessons in power. Natsis (2002), in *Learning to Revolt: The Role of Students in the National Movement in Colonial Tunisia*, demonstrated that many African students were part of the movement to overthrow the colonial power:

The young North Africans who followed the curriculum of Western education and the Sadiki College began to question the inequalities inherent to the colonial
structure. The educational system, originally established to produce African administrators and “assimilated” Africans, led to disillusionment among African students who asked, “Why don’t the French practice the equality that they have taught us?” (p. 10)

Learning their lessons well, the students turned schooling to their favor and established a national movement. Even though those students were educated in colonial schools, they could interact with each other, identify the inequalities inherent in the colonial structure, and share their knowledge. This was key to why they were able to organize themselves to turn schooling into lessons in power.

In the case of Ethiopia, students were the central group that helped their community to overthrow the dictatorial Derg government run by Mengistu Halemariam. Many high school and college students left school to join the group (Joireman, 1997) in the rural parts of the communities. People were working from inside and outside of Ethiopia to prevent the government from staying in power. As stated above, during the “Red Terror,” the dictator killed mostly high school students, partly because he wanted to prevent students from joining the revolutionary groups. Even though the government was committing numerous atrocities, the people did not surrender (Joireman, 1997). Ethiopian students have been involved beyond the country’s political movement; they have also been at the center of educational development. For example, students also assisted in Ethiopia’s overall educational development. Ethiopia has had extensive challenges to increasing its literacy rate. Prior to 1974, the literacy rate in the country was under 10% (Ofcansky & Berry, 1991). Nevertheless, by 1975, there were
60,000 students and teachers who spread to urban and rural areas of the country to educate and increase the literacy rate, and an estimated 1.5 million people gave services freely as teachers. By 1980, their efforts led to 12 million passing literacy examinations and the 1980 award of the International Reading Association Literacy Prize by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Ofcansky & Berry, 1991). Consequently, students in Ethiopia have had a major influence in educational development.

In fact, participants shared that many of the ASAA members had been part of the project that increased the literacy rates in Ethiopia. Abraha shared that many of the members were active participants in their community before they moved to the Western world. He stated:

Many high school and junior high school students used to go to so many villages and urban cities to teach adults how to read and write. You may refer to history books to see how Ethiopia was successful in this regard. In addition, as young high school students we were actively participating in support of the mission of the Red Cross. I and many others gave first aid to people in need, distributed clothes to those who were in need, and brought first aid to many family members. Furthermore, the city in which I used to live was not lucky enough to have electric power. The people in the area gathered together, discussed the gravity of the problem, and decided to fund-raise and buy a huge generator at a cost of 70,000 birr. Many events to raise money took place. I and many youngsters sold framed picture of historical sites and many former Ethiopian heroes. In addition, we
participated in the selling of food and beverages during all events. Therefore, lending a hand, supporting a community, is not something that I and many others from Ethiopia have learned here in the United States. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

There is a saying that train the child the way he or she should go and when that child grows up he or she will not depart from it. Thus the commitment to ASAA is a resurgence of that voluntary spirit exhibited and put to use earlier in their lives. In chapter two I mentioned the literacy campaign in the 1980s (Ofcansky & Berry, 1991). As students, ASAA members were part of the social and educational movement within their community; however, now that they have moved abroad and are not in their community physically, they have found other ways to be a part of the social and educational development. The members want to help students within their community and provide basic facilities to students in the community. According to Atsbha, who is the facilitator of the group, many of the members have visited one of the high schools that the group is supporting. Some of them who might not have attended a school in the area have family members who have attended or are still attending in one of the high schools that ASAA supports. Furthermore, the members of the organization are personally connected to the people they are helping. From my observation at the annual meeting in Washington, DC, and also the focus group discussion, participants expressed the view that students are at the heart of the social, economical, political, and educational well-being of the country; therefore, investing in students is key to development and positive social change. However, if students are not able to learn in a comfortable setting and have little or no
access to school resources such as books, they are limited from being exposed to different perspectives that help them to become critical thinkers, and they are less likely to be active participants in academic settings.

Haileselassie explained that as a group ASAA is committed to investing in the Ethiopian student education, to make them competitive academically so that they may and be the best in academia and it is in their future careers. He shared that this concern is on everyone’s mind and it is in everyone’s interest to invest in the children who will change the nation for the better through science and technological advancement. The vision of the group is to create young citizens who will make the land a hub for emerging industries. Abraha stated, “We are dedicated more than before and more than others who waste their time and money supporting failed political organizations. Our money, time and materials are well spent on the young generation.” There is empirical evidence that Diaspora communities have been organizing themselves to support political powers in their community of origin and especially to support conflict between groups. Lyons (2004) describes different communities living away from their home country that have influence in their home country politically and play prime roles in stirring up conflict. Those living in the Diasporas support the conflict by presumably providing financial contributions to rebel organization (Lyons, 2004). For example, the Kosovo conflict is being supported by Kosovo immigrants in the United States, according to Sullivan, Stacy (2005) in the book, Be Not Afraid, for You Have Sons in America: How a Brooklyn Roofer Helped Lure the U.S. into the Kosovo War, which describes how a Brooklyn group organized and networked to support the Kosovo conflict, networking throughout
the United States to raise money to run illicit guns into Albania and Kosovo. Some members of the community were leaving school to fight in their homeland (Sullivan, 2005). Even though it might not be to the same degree as the group from Kosovo in Brooklyn, supporting conflict from abroad was also common in the Ethiopian and Eritrean community. Bernal (2006), notes in the past that Eritreans in the Diaspora mobilized through the web to amass funds for war and influenced the government of Eritrea. Many members from both communities living abroad raise money to support the conflict between them. ASAA’s agenda is different, for they do not want to support political conflict; in fact in their bylaws is stated that they are nonpolitical NGO.

Many communities living away from their home country do support and contribute to families or members of their community; this is not unique to people in the Diaspora, as illustrated in chapter two. Studies show that many families from Ethiopia, Ghana, and Sri Lanka send money to their families to support them with education or traditional rituals. By sending money they help the countries’ development, for such as through remittances sent back to the home country (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002). Nevertheless, these individuals are sending money directly to their family members or communities, whereas ASAA gone further and has organized itself and registered as a nonprofit organization within the United States to support projects in their community of origin.

ASAA’s focus is supporting education because education is an essential investment for national development and plays a role that goes beyond the individual benefits of schooling (Tarabini, 2010). Furthermore, a healthy society, prosperous economy, and community success are rooted in a people’s educational success. When
students receive an education, they are more likely to be employed and gain educational opportunities which leads to promising careers, economic competitiveness, and the community’s success (*Defining the New Urban Research University*, 2008). The formation and aim of ASAA was, therefore, comprehensible; it was to help and assist students in educational development at a local level, which also contributes to a long-term national educational development. To be able to support the student and schools, the members have created their own close network and the ASAA. The members also have their own personal reason as to why they want to help students.

**Personal Experiences**

ASAA participants shared their personal and community experience in Kilte-Awlaelo. Most participants said that their own past experiences relating to lack of educational resources was the driving force that led to the formation of ASAA. During the annual meeting, the dialogue was about the need to eliminate poverty in education and to provide educational resources to students in Ethiopia. One of the poorest nations in the world, Ethiopia's economy is based on agriculture, as 80% of the population makes a living mostly from grain-fed agriculture and an estimated 44% of the population lives below the poverty line (*World Bank*, 2005). Many of the participants gave details about how challenging it was to go to school in an environment that had limited resources. Abraha stated:

> When you see 80 to 100 students in one class congested, when you see high school students learning outside sitting on stones, when you see high school students learning by trying to take notes from a blackboard … usually the
blackboard does not take chalk as needed… this reminded us the situation we passed through when we were there. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

One of the participants Assefa explained that after the Derg regime was overthrown, the enrolment of students in creased, he said, “number of students attending school was overwhelming”. The Derg regime was in power from 1974 to 1991 and Ethiopia was controlled by General Mengistu Hailemariam for 17 years. In 1977, the government adopted a Stalinist policy and declared the “Red Terror” (mass execution), against revolutionary student organizations. In the spring of 1978, in one week, the government’s secret police and army security squads killed 5,000 high school and university students and jailed 30,000 (Rapoport, 1991). Countless students were executed and many people escaped to neighboring countries. However, after Mengistu was overthrown in 1991, primary and secondary enrollment increased. By 2004, the education system had increased from estimated 9.5 million students in primary school and secondary school to in excess of 700,000 (Assefa, 2008). As Assefa stated:

After the military government was overthrown, it was hard even to go to school.

There were not enough classrooms to accommodate the number of students because it was peaceful and everybody wanted to learn after many years of war.

(Email dialogue August, 2009)

In a more peaceful environment it was a great opportunity to go to school and consequently new classrooms were being built by tents; nevertheless many times the tents would collapse when students were in session. In Ethiopia even though students were going to school in peace and the enrollment of students increased after the Derg regime
was overthrown, the education system faced many challenges, such as poor learning environment, financial constraints and shortages of educational resources (Dufera, 2004).

Another participant, Kidane, in recalling his elementary and junior high school years said how the library and the availability of textbooks were very limited. He remembers students used to share one book for three or five depending on the availability of the book. Students did not have a library where they could study or borrow a book, and they had to rely on each other and share a book to study for exam. In addition, Mitslala said:

When I started my elementary education there were no desks and chairs in our school. We used to sit on the floor; now I can imagine how uncomfortable it was to sit on the floor for five to six hours a day. We did have a library, laboratory and other educational supports. Things were more or less the same for the next 20 years. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

Another participant, Samson, explained that one does not have to go through high school or to the university to recognize the shortage of resources in Ethiopia. Most students usually have only two or three notebooks and no more than two or three pens for a full school year. He said, “sharing a seat with three or four students, sharing class with more than 100 students in which the class is the same size if not smaller than a typical American bedroom” is common. When Samson was in the seventh grade, he used to share his textbooks with his two best friends. At his school, there was the morning shift (nayngho) and the night shift (naymshet), and he and his best friends had different shifts. Consequently, they planned to exchange the books with each other, though they only had
15 minutes in between the shifts. At the end of each shift, whoever had the book had to run to the “secret tree” so that the next friend could use the books. As they worried about the books being stolen, Samson further added, “The funny part about this was that in order to keep a book from getting stolen, we wrote on the cover of all of our textbooks: “Take it!! I can see you, you thief!” (Wseda Dyma!! Anta leba!). It is very difficult to go to school without having necessary materials. For example, if a student is assigned a book to read and told to write a paper and does not have the book, how can that student complete the assignment?

Solomon, one of the members who had completed college in Ethiopia, recalled how students who came from the same neighborhood or town usually helped each other. The college students who were from Kilte-Awlaelo would save the book they used so that they could give it to the next person from the area. For instance, those who completed their first year in college would save all the books they used and pass them on to the new student and once that student was finished, he/she would pass the book to the next new student; therefore, it becomes a cycle of support. The students have created a support system which helps them manage their school work and continue their studies. The experiences of the participant reveal the poverty and lack of educational resources. Nonetheless, the members of ASAA are determined to help change the current situations in the schools and provide educational resources in their community of origin.

Assefa, noted, “I believe in the core mission of ASAA which states that education has a big and positive impact on one’s society. Having an educated society builds a prosperous nation, healthy society.” Education provides an essential base to further
human development and it’s a foundation to a nation’s socioeconomic development. Education constitutes the foundation of human resources development (Dufera, 2004). He said he would like to see ASAA reach its targets and nurture the life of students and make schooling easier by combating the challenges these children face at school. He further added, “I am hopeful that doing so would help schools deliver quality education which is essential for the development of the country in general.” During group discussions most of the informants shared that it's important for them to help eradicate the challenges that face the students. Some explained that as individuals who are living abroad with better opportunities, it is their responsibility to give back to their community.

Members having their own personal connections to their hometowns is one of the major factors that led to the formation of ASAA and the group’s motivation to support students and teachers. All have a strong connection to their community; they have families and friends who still live there. Participants felt passionately about providing resources as one way of empowering students.

*Community Development*

Community development is one of the major reasons why the members are involved. During annual meetings and focus group discussions, participants expressed their concern about schools lacking resources such as blackboards, and having limited classrooms. Members often emphasized their goal to provide their community with educational resources so that the students can learn in a comfortable environment. Haileselassie stated that they want students to “grow up to be educated leaders that would work to help improve their community and country.” Moreover, the members noted the
need to provide schools with financial support to extend classrooms, to provide equipment such as computers, to connect electricity to the schools and supply books to the library they have just finish building. As stated throughout this study, the inadequate facilities and shortage of books and educational materials in Ethiopia underpins reasons that ASAA members are providing assistance. As noted earlier, the video which showed the poor condition of classroom and lack of educational resources was galvanizing. Local development has the power to assist the women and men at a local community level.

According to Esteva and Prakash (1998), local development is a powerful way to support communities; individuals can make a difference “thinking small,” such as buying foods daily from local businesses.

During a focus group discussion, one said, “The library includes everything, books on different subjects that students and people in the community can read.” Furthermore, Desta added, “This library would not just help the local community, but the whole country because the library is there to help the students and once they become successful, they will be the country’s wealth.” By contributing to the schools and building a library they are assisting the community and promoting educational progress for the country.

Development, freedom, and prosperity of a society can only be attained through efforts of a knowledgeable community to play an active role and exercise democratic rights. Progress of democracy depends on satisfactory education and unlimited access to awareness, consideration, culture and information (Byrne, 2004). According to the 1994 IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, “The public library, the local gateway to
knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups” (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2004, p.1). A public library is a powerful tool to have in a community; it has the influence to facilitate knowledge, it is a place where students can strengthen their reading habits and develop personal creativity.

During focus group discussions at the annual meeting, the members stressed the significance of assisting the community with resources that allow students to learn in a more comfortable atmosphere. For many Ethiopians, having electricity is a privilege, there is a shortage of electric power in the whole country; moreover, small towns and rural areas suffer more from having access to electricity. Lemma (2006) noted that about 98 % of Ethiopia's electricity supply depends on hydroelectricity; even though the nation has the potential to generate 160,000 GWh of hydropower, the present generating aptitude is about 2,000 GWh. The author further demonstrated that according to the 2001 World Bank's African Development Indicators, sub-Saharan African electric power consumption per capital was 431.3 KWH and Ethiopia power consumption was 22.1 KWH. Lemma (2006) further explained that currently only 17% of the population receives electricity. The majority of those who get electricity mainly live within the district of urban areas. The communities ASAA members are supporting are small towns and rural areas. Therefore, lack of electricity is very common. For example, during the annual meeting, the members talked about supplying electricity to one of the schools they assist, Negash high school, located in a very small town where electricity is limited. The ASAA members had sent computers to the high school with the hope that the students
would have the opportunity to use a computer, but the high school did not have electricity and students were not able to use the computers. The ASAA members were discussing the issues and as a group they agreed to assist with electricity installation in the school.

In the case of ASAA, they have created a way to link and support their community of origin. A group of people living in the Diaspora, they participate in a nonpolitical, nonprofit organization and are transferring resources and funding programs which lead to educational development of students and community. They have managed to do this through networking.

What are the Basic Operational Structures of the ASAA?

The basic operational structure of ASAA was set up to meet the legal constraints of a documented nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the United States. According to Mostashari (2005), the structures of NGOs differ significantly. However, a typical nonprofit organization has a mission statement, bylaws, organizational structure and sets of rules and regulations. The bylaws usually includes, the mission of the organization and rules that all members follow. To have an organized group, an organization should have a structure that enables it to focus and deliver its mission effectively. A nonprofit organization, ASAA follows its own structure and rules. This organization has a direct link to the programs it supports in the community (Kilte-Awlaelo, located in northern Ethiopia). The main purpose of the organization is to support those programs that exist in that particular community. One of the participants, Abraha stated,
ASAA is a registered non-profit organization under section 501© (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. We file taxes every year and report the financial donations and disbursements to the ASAA members. We also have bylaws. Even though the organization is registered and has bylaws it has its own structural form that differs from other organizations. For example, ASAA does not have a vice president.

There is no vice-president and the reason given by most participants was that they have an active group where everyone is a leader and having a vice president as a backup is not necessary for them. Atsbha explained they decided not to have a vice president because there is no need for one. The president and executive board members are extremely active, so there is no need for a backup.

The board consists of four executive board members which are the President Abraha Weldegebriel, Secretary Atsbha Gebru, Kiros Hagos Treasure, and Yemane Gebru Aditor. Moreover, currently there are 10 board members, Haileselassie Belay, Mulugeta Gebru, Semere Berhe, Abdelrahim Negash, Tewelde Girmay, Haileselassie Desta, Dr. Hagos Tsadik, Mulugeta Ataklti (Canada) Nigisti M. Singleton and Mitslal Girmay. See Figure 15.
Figure 15. Structure of the Organization.

Source: Created from Data

The chart shows the president on the top, then the three executive board members, and at the bottom are 10 board members. Each public relations person (board member) represents members who live in his/her state and the public relations person has a secretary who works with him or her. During my observation in Oakland’s meeting, Desta who is the public relations person in northern California, has a secretary who was collecting money and giving out receipts. The secretary was collecting annual fees from the members. The members who were giving money had to sign their names in the document for evidence. The secretary and Desta also had to sign it for confirmation. The members who made payments for their annual fees and for donating money received receipts, and the money and documents had to be taken to the annual meeting in Washington. This organization does not function without the link to the community of
origin because, as stated in its mission, its full commitment is to support students in the community.

Atsbha explained that committees in the community of origin are usually selected according to the project. For example, for their library project a group of individuals from the community were selected by ASAA members to keep in touch with and assist in completing ideas for the project. Everything is voluntary. Decisions about what to support and which project to select come from within the community.

While observing the annual meeting I found the election processes distinctive. This was unique because members stood and gave their viewpoints. All members who spoke said they wanted the existing board members and executive boards to continue serving. Members acknowledge the hard work of the executive members and did not wish to replace them. The executive board members have been serving since the beginning of the organization, for the last six years. The president and secretary expressed that it would be important for members to come on board to serve; nonetheless, the members were against this. It was interesting to observe because, as individuals stood up to share their reasoning, most of them used a slogan to begin their speech, which was, “why fix something that was not broken?” ASAA is an informal organization because it does not follow formal organizational structure.

Informal

The ASAA organizational structure seems to fit in the informal organizational structure. Everyone is involved in organizing and funding the annual event. They do not have a vice President. They network and communicate through the Internet, see each
other once a year as a group, and are very innovative about how they go about arranging their annual meeting. They do not fit into the traditional formal organizational structure because their work is personal; it’s not structured to meet the needs of corporations or NGOs with major budgets. Formal organizational structures have highly institutional frameworks and institutes are driven to include the practices and proceedings defined by general efficient concepts of managerial effort, whereas an informal organization is more flexible and ideas are evolving constantly (Meyer & Rowan 1977).

ASAA had not re-elected its members since it began, so the founders, such as the president, Abraha, and Atsbha, the secretary, are still serving in the same positions. As stated above, members did not want to re-elect anyone and felt strongly about keeping them to lead. Trust seems to be one of the key elements that keeps the group together; they seem to have faith and confidence on the leaders. This makes the organization distinct. Nevertheless, it might be rational to for the members to take more initiatives in leadership roles. Even though members are involved in much of the planning and discussions and made aware about the financial situations, my findings reveal that many of the members do not know about the detailed structure of the organization and exact communication link to the community of origin. Therefore, if more members were willing to take leadership initiatives, more would learn about the inner logistics of the organization.

Mission

Their mission is stated in ASAA Web Site as the following: “The purpose of the Association is to help our Schools in all the cities of Kilte-Awlaelo to provide a better
education and to create a comfortable learning environment to all students of Kilte-Awlaelo.” According to Royse (1992), having a clear mission statement is vital because it assists in monitoring the organization’s purpose. Monitoring is a way of explaining what the agency is all about by providing a common vision for the agency. In addition, it is also a point of reference for all major planning decisions and quality assurance (Royse, 1992).

ASAA’s mission statement goes with its agenda to assist the six high schools in Kilte-Awlaelo: to contribute to the physical aspects of educational development, such as building classrooms and a library, but the mission can be reformed in a way that changes with their agendas, because as stated in their mission, supporting schools can be understood in several ways, such as being involved in curriculum development or paying teacher salaries. It might also be that members want to leave it general for the purpose of further involvement in the future. Nevertheless, it might be useful to revise the mission statement for purpose of amplification for future donors or those who are unaware about the achievements and agendas. The organization also has bylaws which the members abide by.

**Bylaws**

The board members each serve two-year terms. Every two years the members hold a general assembly to elect or re-elect board members. According to Abraha, “ASAA is managed by its board members whose mandate is to uphold the bylaws of the organization and continue to compass its strategies.” ASAA is governed by its bylaws. A board member Mulugeta stated that “ASAA is a legal entity with its bylaws. Further, the
bylaws are accepted by the government of the United States.” The bylaws include the
democrats and responsibilities of members. As stated in ASAA’s Web Site member’s have the
right to:

- Run for office and vote for a candidate of his/her choice
- Vote on issues that require a majority decisions
- Know all information about the Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association
- Address or vote for a certain issue without being present in the meeting by
  sending a statement that includes name, signature, address, and phone number to
  the general assembly.

For more information about the ASAA bylaws please view their official Web Site

Membership is open to everyone; one does not have to be from Kilte-Awlaelo
though he/she must follow the bylaws of ASAA. The members pay a monthly fee of
$5.00 or an annual membership fee of $60.00 equivalence of the currency of the country
in which they live.

During group discussion the members shared the mission of the organization, and
it was clear that the main mission is to assist Kilte-Awlaelo schools and students with
educational resources and empower them to do well. The group objective of ASAA is
stated in their Web Site as the following:

The main objective of the association is to encourage students of Kilte-Awlaelo to
achieve their goals, to share academic and developmental information, and
discuss issues of common interest among members. Information exchange and
issues on Awlælo Schools Alumni Association shall include Social, Economical
and cultural topics relevant to members, schools, and students of Kilte-Awlælo
(ASAA Web Site).

Even though Figure 16 shows a great similarity to ordinary NGOs and ASAA is a
nonprofit organization within the United States and follows the regulations that apply to
NGOs within the nation, this organization is unique. This organization functions through
100% volunteerism. The members whom I interviewed as well as members I interacted
with said that no one is paid for anything. Solomon said, “no one is paid and the work
that is being done is substantial.” Abraha said:

As you may know, many non-for-profit associations pay salaries to their
management and board. Our association and many similar Ethiopian
organizations like ours never pay a dime to their elected leaders or members.
Every nickel and dime collected is sent to the projects in Ethiopia. (Interview
conducted in July, 2009)

The elected leaders of ASAA are volunteers. Mahteme stated that ASAA has an
Internet forum where its members discuss issues that matter. Members are free to express
their feelings, share their ideas, criticize their leaders, ask questions, and share
information at will. They also have a different e-mail forum for the board members
where they discuss issues pertaining to ASAA. At the board level they discuss every
issue: finance and its allocations, policies, strategies, and so forth. When needed, phones
are used as well.
The organization is structured as NGO under the rules of the United States laws, and files federal tax forms and bylaws. ASAA follows the rules that apply to other lawful organizations existing in the United States. However, its structure is different.

According to Rogers (2003), in the 1990s a new type of organization emerged, virtual organizations, and the people within virtual organizations are exclusively linked by the Internet. This is a network where people are geographically distant and people communicate across physical space to work and accomplish their objectives using the Internet. However, some studies have found that virtual organizations also have a downside because virtual communication is not as clear as would be in face-to-face settings (Rogers 2003). This appears to be somewhat a factor for ASAA, but Internet makes it possible for the organization to sustain itself, though they still face challenges.

For example, as stated by Haileselassie, when they were building the library, the first agreement between ASAA and the community of origin was that ASAA was going to build a library that costs $400,000. However, the members of the community of origin increased the plan without communicating with ASAA. They increased the budget to $1.2 million dollars without ASAA’s knowledge, and it was only when one of the members, Atsbha, went to visit that he found out that they had changed it. Abraha said, “We did not know they had changed the plan, but we worked it out. Atsbha talked to the community when he was there and he came back with information. We told them that we can afford to build a library worth $1.2, but we ended with a good agreement. The community members said they would help and provide free labor.”
According of the participants and to the document that ASAA provided, ASAA spent $108,500 toward the library and those in the community of origin contributed an estimated of 300,000 birr (an estimated of $60,000 USD) through free labor. This shows the challenges of being a virtual organization where individuals are not able to communicate about the agendas face-to-face. Nevertheless, the type of organization works for ASAA because it is able to network and also get information from those members who visit the community.

What Communication Strategies are Utilized Within the Group to Stay Connected?

There are several communication strategies that ASAA utilizes within their group and with individuals living in their community of origin. In the beginning, ASAA’s communication tools were telephones, letters, and personal visits. These were used for the first several years. Nonetheless, as technology developed, their communication technique changed. According to all participants, the organization has an Internet forum where members are able to discuss their concerns and contribute to ideas. ASAA members didn't always have an easy time communicating with each other and with individuals in their community of origin. Abraha said:

Communication facilities were not that great before and we had faced some difficulties before. Now we are doing better because Internet connection is becoming strong. We also call the designated principal of the high schools we support for relevant information. (Interview conducted July, 2009)

Before having access to the Internet, the group relied on conventional ways of communication. The challenge, however, was that they couldn’t communicate with each
other as often as they would like. In the case of their community of origin, one way they were able to receive in-depth information was by making personal visits. Such personal visits were voluntary; members go to Tigray to visit their family members and on their way they meet with school officials and communicate with the individuals who are supporters of the agenda. They gather information and when they come back to the United States, they share the information with their group. During a group discussion, the participants said that there is always someone, every year there is at least one member who makes a trip to Ethiopia.

Technology

Currently, the major communication tool that the members use is e-mail, listserv, telephone, and text messaging. The group moderator is Atsbha, who has been the moderator since the formation of the association. A participant stated that, “technology has allowed us to easily communicate and accomplish our objectives.” Using the Yahoo e-mail listserv, they are able to exchange information daily with each other and the individuals in their community of origin. Abraha stated:

We have created a discussion forum which is exclusive to members only. This is Awlaelo@yahoogroups.com. Every member with Internet and e-mail access is added to the e-mail listserv so that they can discuss projects and the prospects of the association. Our members also print important information and hand it over to those who have no Internet access. Phone and text messaging as well as our Web Site http://www.awlaelo.org/ are the best instrument we have for everybody to read about our projects and the activities we do. We also send letters and cards to
those who made contributions and brought new ideas and new supporters.

(Interview conducted July, 2009)

According to the Network for Technology Professionals (2010), listserv refers to a specific mailing list server. For example, when an e-mail address is added to a listserv mailing list, it is automatically broadcast to everyone who is part of the list. It is useful to groups or businesses that are trying to reach out to specific groups that are part of their system. ASAA members created an e-mail listserve to communicate with each other. I am part of their listserve; therefore, I have been getting all the e-mails they send to each other. Every time a person sends an e-mail, everyone in the group gets it and is able to reply. However, if a member wants to e-mail the president or another member he or she uses a personal e-mail which is also listed in the general e-mail listserv that everyone receives. The challenge using the e-mail listserv might be confidentiality. I wondered how a member would be able to express concerns he/she might have without using his/her e-mail address which everyone could see. On the other hand, most participants shared that the e-mail forum permits the members to share their thoughts without physically being there and allows them to express their opinions freely.

During focus group discussions, participants emphasized the significance of technology, such as the availability of the Internet, and said that the Internet is the tool that has permitted them to hold different forums and allowed them to connect. For example, if members want to discuss ideas confidentially, they are able to create a private forum to have a dialogue. A participant said, “We also have an e-mail forum that is members only, and we discuss issues, exchange ideas, and support each other in good and
bad times too. It is a strong connection.” Furthermore another member clarified that using the Internet forum, members are free to express their feelings, share their ideas, criticize their leaders, and ask questions.

The majority of the members have Internet access; nonetheless, the people who might not have access to the Internet are able to receive information from the members. In addition, a board member, Mulugeta stated:

We also have a different forum for the board members where they discuss issues pertaining to ASAA. At the board level we discuss every issue, finance and its allocations, policies, strategies, etc. When needed, phones are used as well.

(Interview conducted in July, 2009)

For administrative reasons the board members created a separate e-mail listserv so they can discuss board members’ agendas. Furthermore, the members also communicate with individuals living in their community of origin. Abraha said, “We also have individuals in there that delegate the tasks through. There is Awlaelo Development Association that provides us every kind of needed information and support for all the things we need to accomplish.” The individuals from the community of origin do assist in providing support with projects. I was interesting in knowing if they have created a branch within the community to accomplish their goals. Haileselassie replied:

We do not have a branch in Wukro. We only established a committee that can act on our behalf. We do not see the importance of establishing a branch in Wukro while there is a sister organization called “Awlaelo Development Association” in Wukro, Mekelle, and Addis Ababa. We work with that Association side-by-side.
The only difference is we concentrate on education sector only but Awlaelo Development Association is involved basically in everything. We established the committee in Wukro just before we started the construction of the library. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

One of the most interesting aspects of the organization is that it is using existing institutions and members of the community to collaborate and support educational development. Members did not see the need to create their own group within the community of origin; the community itself is their ally. They formed a committee to help facilitate their projects such as the library, and those who are part of the committee are committed to the ASAA educational development projects in the community. To be specific, the committee members include five people, the principal of Wukro high School, the chair and secretary of Awlaelo Development Association, the Mayor of Wukro, and one of the engineers of the library. Atsbha explained that:

These people have done good job as a committee but one person has done an extraordinary task, not only on the library project but in every aspect of Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association. We named him the Ambassador of Awlaelo Schools Alumni Association in Wukro. He is really our ambassador and he is our main contact and representative in Ethiopia. He used to be a principal of Wukro High School but was promoted to Awlaelo High School’s supervisor position about a year ago. He is still our main contact and representative in Wukro. His name is Memhir Dawit Aregay. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)
Board members and the members of ASAA communicate with the committee using telephone, e-mail, personal visits, and their Web Site. Communicating with each other and people in Ethiopia is what enables the group to exchange ideas, attain their goals, and contribute to the community-level educational development. Moreover, according to the participants, technology, especially the accessibility of the Internet, has been a powerful resource that has and still is enabling them to communicate with each other and those in their community of origin. Without the Internet, the group would not have been able to easily communicate with each other. The availability of the e-mail listserv allows the group to share ideas and be cost-effective. According to Rogers (2003), e-mail enables individuals or groups to exchange ideas, and send and receive a message effortlessly:

E-mail messages are like interpersonal communication in that they can be personalized to the individual. We know that the Internet can largely remove the cost of communicating across space. An e-mail message usually goes around the world in the same time and at the same cost as to someone next door. (p. 216)

ASAA has found a way to accomplish their agenda, using technology such as the e-mail listserv, to fit its organizational culture. Since members are not able physically to meet, they use the listserv whereby everyone can see each member’s communication and ideas and therefore share more ideas. In a way, they have created a personal space which allows interpersonal communication. This setup has been useful for the group because it has allowed members to exchange ideas easily and generate networks to accomplish their
goals. As stated above, e-mail listserves would not cost them anything, which also goes along well with their volunteerism spirit.

One can’t help wonder if all members feel comfortable communicating through the listserv. It might be useful for the organization to do a survey assessment to find out if all members truly feel free to express all their concerns when everyone can read them. According to Royse (1992), needs assessment do not necessarily have to be financially burdensome to human service agencies. The author discussed the various ways in which needs assessment information can are obtained, such through a community survey, clergy survey, client utilization study, key informant study, and community awareness survey. Furthermore, needs assessments have dual purposes in the sense that not only do they provide information about whether a program is needed but they also provide guidance once a program has started. In the next section the basic operational structure of ASAA will be shown.

How Does the ASAA Raise Funds to Support Projects in Ethiopia?

ASAA holds an annual fundraising event where it collects funds from members and supporters. All participants said that they raise funds mostly by hosting annual fundraising events, collecting contributions and membership fees from our members (as stated above, the membership fee is $60). Moreover, the annual party is their major financial source.
Abraha explained that ASAA raised the funds on an annual basis by gathering in one hosting state. During this time many of their members and supporters are entertained with Ethiopian cultural music. One of the participants, Desta, said:

The entrance fee is usually from $25 to $35 dollars. The people that come to support us also donate money for the cause. Sometimes we sell videos that we brought from Ethiopia [video recorded by the community of origin about the educational projects] and from the previous events that we had in the United States. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

Using whatever resources they have, such as the selling videos, they are able to raise funding. Because the annual party is crucial for the organization, they well plan ahead for the event.

According to all participants, the hosting state is chosen a year ahead; usually they select the hosting state during their annual meeting. For example, in 2008 the hosting state was Oakland, California and in the year 2009 it was held in Washington, DC The location is chosen at the previous annual meeting and this gives members a whole year to come up with ideas and plan the event.

Haileselassie shared that the members in the hosting state are responsible for arrangements; however, using e-mail and telephone, the board and members work together to advertise, manage, and chose entertainment. For example, members exchange ideas about which what type of flyer they should use to advertise and also which famous band they should bring to the event. Abraha explained that they usually post
advertisement flyers six months ahead. He stated that, “For the annual party ASAA sponsors famous Ethiopian singers. This helps attract different Ethiopian communities who come to the party to see the singer.” This helps ASAA raise more money, because it has to pay to come into the party, as well. At the party, they sell different drinks, alcoholic and nonalcoholic, which helps them generate money. This year’s annual meeting is going to be in Seattle, Washington. The 2010 flyer shows planned singers, the date, time, and the location. See Figure 16.

Figure 16. Flyer for Upcoming June 19, 2010, party.

The flyer was posted in several Ethiopian Web Sites to inform the Ethiopian community about the upcoming event and welcome them. During a group discussion, participants explained that at the annual event members and supporters who attend dance
to different Ethiopian cultural music and mingle with their fellow Ethiopians. Typically, there is a famous Ethiopian band that entertains the people throughout the night, which usually starts at 10:00 pm and ends at 2:00 am or 3:00 am. Women play major roles in organizing the fundraising event. One of the participants, Abraha, said, “our sisters do a lot to organize the annual event; they are involved in making the party enjoyable, making all the food and helping to arrange things needed for the major party.” From my observation, the women had prepared varieties of Ethiopian traditional cuisine, such as spicy thick meat stew and vegetable dishes, served with injera (traditional bread).

The social and cultural roles of men and women in Ethiopian society are reflected within the organization. In Ethiopia, women take the role of cooking and making coffee while men help with other things such as arranging things or working outside of the household. During the ASAA Sunday gathering, the women made traditional food and brought it to the park, and men were helping them with the setup. At the park several women sat next to each other and made coffee. Traditionally, Ethiopian men do not make the coffee ceremony. In my lifetime I have never seen a man conducting the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. This tradition has been preserved and transferred to the community in the Diaspora. At the general annual meeting there were only a few women and during the meeting those who were there did not talk much. As stated by Abraha, the women she referred to as “our sisters” prepared delicious Ethiopian cuisine for the annual party. Conventionally, most Ethiopian women cook within a household, though this differs from one house to another. Although, the traditional cuisines such as the spicy sauce (wet) are typically made by women, this role also depicts the Ethiopian tradition.
Organizing the annual fundraising is one of the major agendas for ASAA because over 90% of the money raised is generated at the event. Many of the members who live in different states and Canada plan well ahead to obtain the annual gathering. The annual fundraising event is crucial and is the most important tool that helps ASAA generates money. Atsbha explained that:

For fundraising, we usually we concentrate on our members and the Ethiopian Community. Every year on July 18, we host an event. Every year we gather in a different state and those in that particular state host members. They rent a hall for the party, get a liquor permit, and our sisters of the hosting state prepare food and local drinks for the event. Our members and community members buy tickets, usually $25 to $35. In addition, the board explains the need of the fund and the projects at hand to the audience. Usually people donate from $50 to $1,000 toward the project. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

The party is significant for ASAA so the organizers start planning about seven months ahead. All members communicate and share ideas about the upcoming event; however, the people who organize the event are the people who live in the area hosting the annual gathering. The way they organize and arrange the party is unique; they do not have a set budget because every year it changes. For example, for musicians Atsbha explained:

We pay every person $500.00 dollar each. Example, if we have three musicians, 3 x 500 = $1500.00. In addition, we pay for their air ticket and hotel room. But the cost varies from time to time depending on how many musicians we have on the
event. Having said that, last year’s DC event was different. We had three musicians who played free of charge, 1 only took $300 dollars and the other charged the usual $500. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

Another example is the Oakland Event. Haileselassie shared that in Oakland, ASAA did not have to pay for hall rental, because one of the members who lives in Oakland volunteered to pay for it. Therefore, they do not have a set year budget for their annual party. Moreover, one of the participants, Yirgalem, said that women in the community cook free of change and prepare other refreshments.

The volunteer spirit of the members decreases the costs that could have been very high. They do not have to hire a chef or caterer, and most activities are arranged to be affordable. For example, those living in the hosting state arrange the party, find a venue for the annual meeting where the members usually get together on Sunday. Some members would arrive on Thursday and leave on Monday; others would stay longer or come only for two days. Atsbha explained that:

Saturday is an important day because the annual meeting occurs in the morning and the fund-raising party happens at night. The people in the hosting state usually assemble in a place where members might stay; they make arrangements with different hotels where members and supporters are able to get a good hotel discount. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

Those who live in the hosting states have a great responsibility and make a major effort to host their members. For example, last year in Washington, DC, the hotels which normally charge over $100 were charging members only $65. This was possible because
the individuals in the hosting state had proposed and made an agreement with the hotels. Desta explained that some members stay with close friends in the area, though, most members stay at the hotels.

Kahsay, one of the participants, stated, “We all look forward to attend the annual party.” Participants said during a discussion that the event is also away for them to see their friends and families ones a year. Mahteme said, “This is a family gathering; it is nice to be with our brothers and sisters.” This organization is also a way for their children to meet one another. They view the event as a tool to accomplish multiple things. During the discussion, some participants also expressed that they hope to see more networking coming out of the annual event. One participant, Mulugeta, said, “In a few years our children or members who meet here might get to know each other further, so in a few years we hope to see marriages.” The members view the association as a system that enables them to unite once a year and they believe that it has the potential to bring people together to the point of marriage.

Those who cannot make it to the annual meeting usually send money, including the $60 membership fee. Before going to the annual event in Washington, DC, I attended a group meeting in Oakland. The members met at Desta’s home for a meeting that lasted about three hours. Those who were going to make to the annual meeting gave money to those who were attending the gathering. Desta and Kendya wrote a list of the names of those paying their fees as well as those giving additional money and had them sign receipts. Once the members know where the annual event will be taking place the following year, they make a great effort to inform their friends, families, and colleagues.
The goal is to have as many people attend the event because the entry fee is one way to generate money. Abraha stated:

People are made aware of the event via e-mails, Web Sites, phone calls, and text messaging. Our members are also advised to tell their colleagues at work and everywhere, then encourage them to participate and sponsor the events. We also auction some items such as airline tickets to Ethiopia and some souvenirs. At one point we had a penny jar collection and we make the little kids to compute. At another time we had an article that states $20 will sponsor one student for a full year to buy educational materials. This helped to raise some funds from different individuals outside our members. We also call and send letters to other sister associations to come to the events and support the cause, and most of them helped us in monetary terms and by mobilizing their members. (Interview conducted July, 2009)

Using technology such as e-mails and telephone, members are able to spread awareness and invite people to the event. Also, the organization encourages members and supporters to donate money, and one way is by having auctions. Furthermore, encouraging children to keep a penny jar for monetary aid and writing articles and letters to outside members asking for support are other methods the organization uses.

The sister organizations are associations doing educational development in Tigray. These groups also help each other; most members of these organizations usually attend each other’s events and donate money or school materials to each other. During the annual meetings, members shared the contribution that the Ethiopian Community
Development Council (ECDC) had made the previous year, ECDC donated computers and books to send to the students.

There is a range of supporters from different Ethiopian communities who attend the annual party and who have donated toward the library project; however, Atsbha explained that the main base is the Tigrean community and the sister organizations.

Atsbha said:

It is with this spirit dedicated and generous Tigreans attend our fundraising events, and we would have achieved much less than we did without them.

Therefore, whatever we do has the fullest participation of many Tigrean brothers and sisters in the Diaspora. (Interview conducted July, 2009)

The majority of the people who attend the annual party are from the Tigray community. In the Washington, DC annual event, I observed that the singers were from Tigray and most people who were there were from Tigray. It is fair to state that the party was focused on entertaining those who come from Tigray; therefore, those who will attend are more likely to be from Tigray area. However, considering the ASAA agenda of educational development, it is possible to attract more people even those who are not from Ethiopia. There are many foreigners are fascinated by Ethiopian dance, food, and culture and would be willing to attend a festival such as the ASAA annual party. If they attract more people, they will make more money; therefore, it would be in ASAA’s best interest to explore ideas that can draw in more people.
Networking for Fundraising

According to Kadushin (2004), social networking has the power to potentially influence attitudes and behaviors of people. Social connections between two or more individuals have the power to create a social network that can lead to more connection in other social entities (Burford & Hudson, 2000). Furthermore, social networks are viewed as determinant of the social support available to people as individuals. People within the networks have ties and relations with each other and more individuals (Either, 2009; Wade & Schneberger, 2005). There is always social networking when there is association and these networks contain a set of interconnections that can be mapped or used to explain relationships between objects and individuals (Kadushin, 2004).

According to Wade and Schneberger (2005), by focusing on exact links that tie people and groups together, the structured approach to social communication of network models could be identified. These networks present ways for companies to assemble information (Wade & Schneberger, 2005). One of the most successful fundraising events ASAA has had in northern California. The event took place in Oakland, and during their annual party ASAA raised about $45,000. I was interested in finding out how it was possible for the group to raise that amount of money in one night. Among the many of the ideas shared by participants, two major themes came up; using community leaders to inform and motivate their fellow friends and family to attend the annual party and ASAA members’ involvement in Ethiopian community affairs.
Community Leaders

Atsbha said that “connection always works.” However, he explained that initially it is imperative to explore ideas about how to go about creating those networks. For the annual party, the board members came up with the idea to convince elders and Ethiopian community leaders to give money in the host state, in this case Oakland, and the whole bay area. In the community where they hold their annual gathering, they ask those individuals who have great influence in their community groups to help, because according to another participant, Solomon, those people usually have to build trust within the community and could easily get people to attend the annual party. Since the money that was going to be raised was going toward the library project in Keltie-Awelao, some people might hesitate about helping; they might question why they would want to help the project. Therefore, the board members came up with a convincing story before they approached the leaders in the community. As one of the board members, Atsbha, explained, it was important to emphasize the fact that building the library was not going to benefit the community of Keltie-Alwealo but the all Ethiopian communities. It is a public library which anyone who is going to school around the area could use. Within Kelti-Alwealo there were different schools, and including college students from all over Ethiopia, who would be able to study at the library. The goal was to convince potential donors that the library project is in the interest of the country’s development. As Atsbha stated:

Even though the development is for the whole country, those leaders who were identified to spread awareness about the fundraising event were from Tigray,
because this project was close to home and these people had connections to
Ethiopian community leaders in their area. (Interview conducted July, 2009).

The key individuals they talked to were people from the same region because as
Atsbha said, it was important to select people who share common interests. They are
more likely to take the agenda personally and make an extra effort. The network method
that ASAA used to network are similar to what Rogers (1997) identified as an
interpersonal network; within such a network, he explains that there are two types,
Heterophily who are those individuals who interact without having to share a common
interest, and the Homophily, those individuals who interact because of shared meanings,
beliefs, and mutual understanding. The author said that communication between
Homophily is more likely to be effective because those individuals are more likely to have
the comfort of interacting with those who have similar experiences. For a visual
illustration of how ASAA selected the community leaders, see Figure 17.
According to Rogers (1997), opinion leaders are those who have influence on others, opinions and are involved in the spread of interpersonal influence. To be able to diffuse information, opinion leaders are key because they have a say in the community and also have the power to influence their community. In the case of ASAA, the opinion leaders are the community leaders that the board members identified and asked to convince their communities to contribute to the library project and attend the annual party.

Moreover, the ASAA board members used their own interpersonal network to spread the information, and those who they identified to disseminate information to the community in the hosting state are mostly people who come from their Tigray region. As stated by one of the participants, they identified those leaders because the cause is close
to home to them and they are more likely to help. Another important tool is to build trust within the community and be involved in the community affairs.

Community Involvement

Desta, one of participants who was strongly involved in organizing the fundraising in Oakland, said, “Some people were writing me checks with the amount of $500.” They were willing to write him a check and help in any way they could. He shared that he is always involved in the community and he attends almost all the traditional events. When there are weddings, funerals, and events that take in the community, he is there. Desta said, “It is very important to stay involved, help and share your ideas with the community. When people in the community know that one is willing to be involved, develop trust and states that he/she wants make a difference, the community is willing to help financially or by volunteering. Most importantly, it is important for a person to have desire to be involved, be concerned, and help.” In most Ethiopian communities, being involved in community affairs shows commitment and care for the community. When a person shows a commitment to the community, the people tend to trust him/her. In the case of the participant he believes one of the reasons why the people were willing to write him a check was because they know him well. He expressed that he strongly values the community’s tradition of attending events that concern the people.
What Criteria Does the ASAA use in Deciding, on Monitoring and Evaluating the Educational Projects it Supports?

**Criteria for Project Selection**

Given that the need for educational resources in the community is massive, how do ASAA members decide which project to support? The ASAA members who have mobilized themselves in the Diaspora are able to support community-level educational development in their community of origin; the question is how this group decides on the project it supports. During a focus group discussion, participants shared the challenges and needs of students in their community of origin. One of the participants indicated that during her visit to the community she observed that there was a lack of school facilities and school materials. Mulugeta stated: “The need is immense” and said that some students in Wukro do not have access to pen or papers because they cannot afford them. The participants articulated that it is significant to pick a project that will have an exceptional impact on students.

I was interested in understanding the steps they take in choosing, monitoring, and evaluating the projects they support from abroad. The majority of the participants suggested that I talk to the board members, because they would provide details and they stated that I would obtain in-depth information from the president and the secretary. Therefore, in this section the majority of the information was gathered from the president, secretary, and few of the board members who were part of individual interviews. Additionally, I observed the annual meetings where they discussed the projects; consequently, the information observed during the meeting will also be included.
In an individual interview, Abraha, the president of ASAA, said that the need is great. “The need is so enormous and it makes you wonder where to start. When our members went back home and saw students sitting outside in the hot weather learning, sitting on stones, then we say we have to build classrooms and put the students into class.” He further explained when the project to build a classroom was completed, they learned that there were no books and educational resources. Therefore, they continued to support different projects that needed assistance. Haileselassie said one that the schools send them a list of their needs. Then the board discusses the needed projects on the list, and whatever the board selects will be discussed by the general assembly. Then the projects are selected by the majority of voters.

All the participants said that there are a lot of projects and they were passionate about wanting to support them. When I asked how they decide on, monitor, and evaluate the programs, most of the participants only expressed that they choose a project that warrants more consideration. Atsbha, the secretary, explained that the members of the community, which includes the Awleao Development Organization, usually write a proposal in a letter amplifying which project needs more attention, and a proposal is sent to all ASAA board members. Then the board members discuss the project and members of ASAA discuss the projects. Then, at the annual meeting, members pick the project according to the budget they have. For a visual description the funding processes view Figure 19.
Figure 18. Transnational Methods of Networking and Funding.

Source: Created from Data

- ASAA sends an e-mail to the individuals in the community such as the Awlaeo Development Association, and individuals who have direct connection with ASAA, asking which program is needed.
- The community sends a proposal describing which projects need more attention.
- During the annual meeting, ASAA members make final decisions according to their budget.
- ASAA members send an e-mail to the community members to let them know which project they will fund.
They choose a project by exchanging information using email with the community leaders in their community of origin. For example, ASAA chose to build a library in the community because the community requested it. The president stated, “We asked the community what they needed most to make the learning process better and they stated a school that is fully equipped, that includes a library with books. All these ideas were brought to the assembly and discussed in detail.” ASAA received a proposal that explained the significance of and need for a library. The ideas about building a library develop from within the community of origin; nonetheless, they needed financial support to assemble it. As stated above by the president, such ideas were presented to the members of ASAA, and the members agreed to take the library as their first major project. The ideas, such as which projects need more support, come from the community; however, the final decision is made by the ASAA. Furthermore, once ASAA members choose the project they will support, then they move to monitoring and evaluating the project.

*Monitoring/Evaluating*

The organization uses the following mechanism to decide the projects, monitor and evaluate the projects they support. Abraha said, “When our members leave for vacation, we also give them assignments to do during their vacation time. This is how we stayed connected.”

To decide which project they will support, they have to first receive a proposal from the community and information from a member who goes to visit the area. For example, one of the proposals sent to ASAA asks for class material assistance for an
elementary school. This proposal included pictures which showed students sitting on the floor and on stones. See Figure 20.

![Figure 19. Students sitting on the floor.](image)

To monitor and evaluate, they use several strategies such as reviewing the videos sent from the community of origin, confirmation from the member who visits the location, and documents, including financial statements from committee members who are chosen to oversee the project within the community.

According to Abraha, when they began the library project they contacted individuals who had interests in the community of Kilte-Awlaelo and told them that they accepted the library project. Then the ASAA board members advised the individuals in Kilte-Awlaelo to choose five people to make up the committee that will oversee the project. Atsbha explained that ASAA as a group suggested names of people within the community who might be interested in becoming committee members. These individuals were known by the ASAA members as active in the community and would be willing to
serve voluntarily, such as the Awlaelo Development Association (ADA) chair who is very involved in the community (ADA is a community based organization which also does educational development in the community.)

The president explained that the five elected were people who work as administrators within the community, from the high schools, and from development associations, such as the Awlaelo Development Association. The individuals chosen have already been working in the community; they are highly interested in improving and working toward educational progress. As Abraha said, “We all work together for the project.” They also have engineers and architects who were formers students of the high schools who work on the design, verify the work, and approve the progress of the library project.

Halieselassie said, “We get reports, documents, and pieces of evidence from our local community through our representatives in our community.” They monitor and evaluate using the verification sent through e-mail by the community, a video recording which shows the progress report and confirmation from ASAA member who is able visit the project sites. Mulugeta stated, “We meet annually; the president and the secretary report about the overall accomplishments the organization had and deal with the ongoing projects by discussing further what should be done to facilitate the programs.” Throughout the year, the members discuss the ongoing projects, and during the annual meeting they confirm major decisions and do the evaluation together. They take one major project at a time. So far, building the library has been the major project they have taken on and completed. The student and teacher awards are offered annually.
As stated in the previous pages, on a yearly basis, there is usually a member who goes to Ethiopia to visit his/her family. This member is given the task by ASAA to observe the needs and meet with students and teachers to discuss the current event about the project they support. Moreover, the president stated, “In general, different people visited the schools and come with requests from the schools and we discuss them and prioritize them according to their importance.” ASAA seeks information from the community, and the members who had visited the location subsequently receive additional information about the outcomes of the projects.

The president stated that in this way “we monitor and evaluate the progress. Then our general assembly sends us a video, and receipts and payment acknowledgments which is presented to our audience.” The project is a collaboration effort between the individuals in the community of origin and those who are living abroad. They have a relationship which enables them to communicate and work as a team to accomplish their agenda. The president said:

We are so unique in this regard because we have a good relationship with the people that oversee the project and with the principals of the high school. We also send independent engineers to verify. The city administrator also verifies the work through city engineers. Our members who visit also go to the project site and check the work, inquire of people about the progress and what they feel. So we have a good way of verifying and evaluating the work. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)
Having a strong network within their community allows ASAA the opportunity to work with the community and include the community in the process. According to Freire (2005), “the means that are used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (p. 85). If the people are not included in the process, development programs or education might not convey social change and, again, if educational approaches do not reflect on the experiences and authenticity of the community’s existence, they will not benefit the people. There is a collaborative effort between ASAA and those in their community of origin. Those who live in the community also raised money to help build the library. Atsbha added that:

money was raised from the community in Wukro and Mekelle. This was done through a concert. We came up with the idea to contact artist Zafu Kiros [the daughter of Kiros Alemayohu] to help us raise funds by staging a concert in Wukro, Mekelle, as well as other parts of Tigrai. We communicated this idea to the committee who represent us in Wukro, and with their coordination Zafu had a concert in Wukro and Mekelle. About 120,000 birr was raised from those concerts. In addition, the city government of Wukro donated some materials and the community contributed some free labor. So, in general, including the money from Zafu's concert, about 300,000 birr was raised from the community back home in Ethiopia. (Interview conducted in July, 2009)

One of the reasons why the group is able to accomplish building a library or classrooms is because they include individuals in the community of origin and involve
them in the development process. To have effective social change, it is vital to create awareness, include the community in the process when making a decision that affect their lives, and empower local development (Freire, 2005). In the case of ASAA, the idea for a project comes from within the community and is presented to ASAA. Once ASAA members decide which program to support as shared by participants, usually they choose a program which they believe the community needs the most help with. At the time they decided to embark on the library project, they asked the community members to pick five individuals who live there to facilitate the project, are former engineering students living in Ethiopia were involved in designing and evaluating the program. ASAA, although a young organization, seems to have a strong support system from their members as well as their community of origin.

This chapter covered discussions organized under the five research questions. It addressed the context that led to the formation of ASAA, the overall structure and fundraising methods used by the organization. Additionally, it examined how members of ASAA monitor and evaluate the programs they support in their community of origin.

The following chapter will include an overall summary of each chapter, conclusions and suggestions.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The objective of this study was to examine and offer an understanding of how the Awlælo Schools Alumni Association (ASAA) was able to undertake educational development in their community of origin in Ethiopia while living abroad. The study utilized a qualitative case study approach. The objective of the research was to document ASAA, which no one has done in the past. Moreover, the research intends to identify best practices in the organization. I hope to provide suggestions to different development programs as this research is geared to assist in understanding how to approach development from abroad and provide alternatives to developmental work done by governmental or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Ethiopia. This chapter presents the summary, major findings, implications of this research, and suggestions for the ASAA and other NGOs, and suggestions for further study.

Summary

This study explored the contexts that led to the formation of the ASAA, its structure, and the networks used to organize, fund-raise, and communicate with members and the community of origin. Chapter one is comprised of a concise background of the research project, including the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation, and the definition of terms. On the basis of the nature of the study, this study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What contexts gave rise to the formation of ASAA in North America?
2. What are the basic operational structures of the ASAA?
3. How does the ASAA raise funds to support projects in Ethiopia?

4. What communication strategies are utilized within the group to stay connected?

5. What criteria does the ASAA use in deciding on, monitoring, and evaluating the educational projects they support?

Chapter two covered the relevant literature review such as a brief history of Ethiopia’s socioeconomics, politics, and history of education and the migration of Ethiopians to the United States. It also incorporates literature on ideas of community-level development, the significance of networking, social network theory, and organizational theory. Social network theory and organizational theory formed the theoretical framework for this study.

The main issues discussed were the experiences of Ethiopians in the United States and their response to the dilemma of widespread poverty and high illiteracy in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is one of the poorest nations in the world; therefore, it is well known that the country needs socioeconomic support. Generally, having access to education leads to more opportunities, such as better paying jobs. Furthermore, education increases literacy rates, which in turn allows people to learn skills that can help them express and better communicate their ideas within their community and the world at large.

Notably, I did not come across similar organizations that have been academically studied. There are a lot of studies that talk about NGOs, such as UNICEF that work in African countries and undertake an immense amount of work for the betterment of education in Ethiopia. However, none of the organizations, such as ASAA, that
organized by members from the community living abroad, and who directly work with the community of origin to also improve education, had been studied.

Chapter three details the settings, where the study is done, the methods utilized to conduct the research, and the challenges. Research questions and approaches taken to interview the members of ASAA were also included in this chapter. The research utilized a qualitative approach because this approach includes in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus group interviews and Appreciative Inquire (AI) approach. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), the qualitative research approach seeks to understand how people feel about a topic and the reasons why they feel the way they do. Qualitative research approaches are used to obtain insight into people’s cultures, lifestyles, attitudes, behaviors, motivations, value systems, and concerns. This approach enabled me to gather members’ personal viewpoints as to why they have chosen to support their community of origin and obtain insights into why this organization operates through 100% volunteerism.

A case study is an in-depth study of a particular group, incident, community, program, individual, event, or organization (Patton, 1990). A qualitative research case study approach seeks a holistic description and details and it is designed primarily to generate insights, discover and explain, rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1991). The case study approach assisted in conducting an in-depth analysis of the ASAA structure; how it raises funds to support projects; the communication strategies utilized in the group to stay connected; and the criteria ASAA uses in deciding on, monitoring, and
evaluating the educational projects it supports. This also assisted in studying details about what happens within ASAA, and why.

Furthermore, a qualitative approach helped me with categorizing emerging themes. Qualitative analysis assisted in themes and categories to emerge through identifying themes, interpretation, and coding (Carspecken, 1996). Using the five research questions, guided by the literature and the theories, I was able to identify themes and analyze them accordingly.

The use of interviews and observations in this research was used to highlight the context that led to organizing ASAA and to look at how members are able to network and fund-raise to support the programs in their community of origin while living abroad. The three methods used to conduct and gather information from participants were interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. I interviewed 15 participants, conducted two different focus group discussions, and observed two different meetings, one in Oakland, California, and another in Washington, DC. Telephone calls and e-mails were used for follow-up interviews. The participants were interviewed about what led to the formation of ASAA, its general structure, the communication strategies they use to communicate with each other and with their communities of origin. I also asked about techniques used to fund-raise and how and why the ASAA members chose to support the programs they sustain in their communities of origin. The participant observation technique enabled me to participate at their annual party and observe the meetings to better understand the inner workings of the planning, collaboration, and implementation within the ASAA (Maanen, 1988). Furthermore, AI was used as mythological approach.
AI as a methodological approach enabled me to ask a positive question about the work of ASAA and document the educational development that ASAA is doing in their community of origin. The work of ASAA directly related AI whereby the members of ASAA are doing positive work in their community of origin, building school facility and awarding students and teachers who are high achievers.

The influence of AI as an approach which seeks, recognizes, and enhances the positive performance systems within an organizational system or societies, has enable this research project to document the educational development that ASAA is doing in their community of origin and ask positive question about the work of ASAA (Mohr and Watkins, 2001). Though, AI might lead a researcher to ask questions that can glorify productive work being done by people or an organization. For this research project AI approach is appropriate because there lack of research that focus on the positive aspects of social issues accruing in Ethiopia, comparatively, most researchers tend to focus on Ethiopia’s ancient history, political turmoil, educational concerns, health crisis, and the contribution of external non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Not many academics have researched Ethiopians living in the United States who are taking action in contributing to educational developments in Ethiopia. Therefore, to explore the positive work that ASAA is necessary as an African, it is painful to always hear that throughout history, marginalization and dehumanization as being the “other” has often defined Africa and its people. We have a responsibility not only to work toward dressing issues of African but also to include positive work being done.
Hence, as a researcher I believe that change starts with the self. As an Ethiopian woman who has lived in the U.S. for almost half her lifetime, I am passionate about continuing my research in Ethiopia and working with rural communities. However in the past, whenever I am wrote about Africa, I tend to focus on FGC, HIV/AIDS and poverty issues affecting women. Correspondingly, in most of my classes, my classmates who were interested in African affairs focus on same issues as I did. This research is the first study which I focused on a topic that does not put the Ethiopian community in the role of “victim.” I believe that a huge task is needed on balancing the issues and positive contribution and works done by Africans. African nations and its people should not merely be represented by the ideology or notions of “Afro-pessimism.”

I have come to realize that it is just as important to focus on the problems facing African nations as it is to uncover the important and empowering roles that Ethiopians have played while contributing to their communities and countries. Most importantly, I learned that I can utilize Appreciative Inquiry to document or analyze issues of domination and reflect upon the positive social, economic and political contributions ASAA have made, which are rarely exemplified by more traditional scholars.

Chapter four, the data analysis section, incorporated the findings acquired from the field research. The findings are analyzed using literature review and the theoretical framework, namely, social network theory and organizational theory. Social network theory was utilized to examine the networks used by ASAA to form the group, fund-raise, and network with each other and their community of origin. Organizational theory is applied to examine the structure of the organization.
Major Findings

The Context That Led to the Formation of ASAA

The research participants indicated that poverty and lack of resources are some of the major pressing issues in Ethiopia. Both the literature and the research findings from participants show that Ethiopia is in need of educational development. Different studies done by scholars such as Assefa (2008) and Serbessa (2002) described Ethiopia’s educational system as plagued by overcrowded classrooms and lack of facilities and resources. ASAA members shared that the major reason they created the ASAA was because they were aware of the deplorable educational situation in their communities of origin and that they wanted to help students confined to trying to learn in overcrowded classrooms and assist them with resources that can help with their learning environment.

ASAA’s main goal is to support educational development in their community of origin; they are connected by the location and the community at large. The members are linked by ties to environment that they are trying to support. Relph (1976) illustrated that some scholars argue that there is something unique about the idea of place, whereby place appears to possess some “perceptual unity” that is given to it by our experiences with a distinctive and real place. All ASAA members come from the community of origin and support the schools in their physical location. In many ways, ASAA members are supporting place-based education by providing students and teachers the necessary resources so that the students would serve the community once they have completed the required skills and education.

Quinn (2007) stated:
Place-based education fosters students’ connection to place and creates vibrant partnerships between schools and communities. It boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic vitality. In short, place-based education helps students learn to take care of the world by understanding where they live and taking action in their own backyards and communities. (p. 2)

The members' concern for educational development in their community of origin is the context that led to the formation of ASAA. My observation confirmed that this gathering was beyond just helping their community of origin; it was also a way for the members who are family and friends to get together on a yearly basis and renew their own social ties. At the party there were no confrontations or awkwardness, and everyone seemed to be happy to be there and enjoying the company of each other and the music. At their annual party, accompanied with an Ethiopian band, most people were dressed in their Ethiopian traditional clothing, it was a celebration where people danced for several hours and conversed with each other. In a way they were reforming and affirming their own identity as Ethiopian Americans.

Also, I observed that the environment and one of the discussions that I came across that differed from the rest of the interviews was the dialogue that took place among the Ethiopian community concerning supporting NGOs, such as ASAA. In these conversations, people argued that they might not be in support of organizations such as ASAA. Their view being that by supporting educational development, one is supporting the government. My perspective to this and similar standpoints is that individuals are entitled to have their own view; however, resources to enhance educational development
from abroad should continue, regardless of the difference in political viewpoints. Although these issues were not part of my study, I was able to gain perspective on the political argument among the Ethiopian community regarding supporting organizations such as ASAA.

**Structure**

ASAA is a registered nonprofit organization under section 501© (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. ASAA files taxes every year and reports the financial donations and disbursements to their members. They have bylaws that members of the organization comply with. The findings reveal that ASAA is a virtual organization, where its members use the Internet, particularly an e-mail listserv, to communicate with each other and their community of origin. Virtual linkages are potential tools for those living abroad and aid in skill transfer and capacity building (Tebeje, 2005). The virtual linkage is assisting ASAA to generate networks and mobilize their members for the educational development process in their community of origin.

The organization’s structure comprises a president, secretary, treasurer, auditor, and 10 board members which the organization refers to as public relations persons. Those board members live in different states and also have a secretary or someone to assist in collecting membership fees, helping with documenting activities, and providing receipt to those who make payments.

Organizational theory is the methodical study of social organization behavior, attitudes and performances (Hillstrom & Hillstrom, 2002). According to Cunliffe (2008), the term “organization” entails that there is a kind of structure. Organizational theory
enabled me to study the effects of social organization and behavior and to gain an understanding of the structure, behavior, and proceedings of the ASAA. Organizations also entail some kind of structure and categories that influence the structure (Cunliffe, 2008). Moreover, the structure of ASAA does not fit into the traditional formal organizational structures, which are highly structured and follow fixed rules and regulations. ASAA is informal and flexible, and ideas, election processes, and activities are constantly evolving (Meyer & Rown, 1977). For example, the organization does not have a vice president; the members do not see the value of a vice president for their organization. The bylaws state that each board member will serve two-year terms and every two years the members will hold a general assembly to elect or re-elect board members. However, I found that the leaders who were the founders, such as Abraha, the president, and Atsbha, the secretary, have been managing the organization for six years consecutively.

During the annual meeting in Washington, DC, members held an election; although Abraha and Atsbha encouraged the members to run for office, the members refused, for, as many of them asked: “Why fix something that is not broken?” In one sense, this shows the strength of the organization in that there is strong trust in existing leaders and unity. However, the weakness is that other members do not want to take the responsibility of assuming leadership; they want to keep the leaders who have been there from the beginning. Though I did not ask why members were not willing to get involved, my assumption is that they do not want to change anything and want to keep the organization the same. When I asked the participants about how programs are monitored
and evaluated, only 4 out of the 15 participants were able to give me details. The others referred to me to Abraha, Atsbha, or Haileselassie. Therefore, this shows that many of them have not taken the trouble to ascertain the organizational details about the projects they support.

**Networking**

Abraha and Atsbah began the organization using their social networks as well as technology. They used videos to get their families’ and friends’ attention to join the organization. They used their own social network to interact and shape the organization. Their social networks are powerful because the social interactions were based on common interest and family and friend networks. Within the social network theory these ties are defined as strong ties which influence attitudes and behaviors.

Social network theory shows that social interactions have the power to potentially influence attitudes and behavior (Kadushin, 2004). According to Burford and Hudson (2000), social network is defined as a set of links between two or more people or other social entities. Social networks are viewed as determinant of the social support accessible to people as individuals or in a social unit. Social network theory understands social relationships as networks of individuals in a social system. Individual actors within the networks have ties and associations with other actors in networks. Moreover, associates develop for various reasons or take different forms; one form is a social network map of all the applicable ties between individuals being studied, and the network can be used to verify the social capital of these actors (Either, 2009; Wade & Schneberger, 2005). Social network theory applies to different level of networks, from small groups to a global-scale
network. These networks contain a set of interconnections that can be mapped or used to explain relationships between objects and individuals (Kadushin, 2004).

One of the major findings is that the ASAA members are using existing information and leveraging existing resources from within their group and community of origin to accomplish their goals. For instance, the major networks are their friends, family, and community members all of whom they use to raise funds, gather information from their community of origin, and make decisions. The ASAA members are each other’s support and capital; they are driven by their existing associations with each other. The way they have organized themselves can be viewed as an extended family social structure; they are a social group with common goals, they are family and friends network. Furthermore, rather than seeking findings from outside sources or integrating with people whose family is not linked to their district, they focus on their own community members. The members of the organization and those in their community of origin are their social capital. According to Widner and Mundt (1998), social capital refers to features of social associations that can improve the competence of society by facilitating coordinated actions. Moreover, Woldemariam (2009) asserts that:

Social capital is defined as a resource which comes about as a result of socialization and interactions among individuals and groups in a society…ways in which social capital is created and accumulated in the context of Africa differs from those of the advanced societies. Most of what we call trust and cooperation or generally, social capital is formed as
a sequence of informal institutions such as family, ethnicity, and religion.

(p. 46)

Their interactions with their community and socializing with each other and their community of origin are the characteristics of what Widner and Mundt (1998) and Worldemariam (2009) are referring to. For ASAA, each member is a resource. For example, whenever members go back to their home country, they are given an agenda to visit and bring back information regarding ongoing projects. Home-based affiliates of the organization, such as the Awlaelo Development Association, are sources of social capital and networking. Using existing institutions or persons with the same interests as the parent organization remains a powerful source of collaboration and a tool for development. This organization has the capacity building to aid their community of origin because they are united through a common cause and a personal and community association. ASAA is tangible in a sense that their group is transparent with the members and the community.

- The members are united by a personal cause. Even though all of them might not have grown up together, some of them attended school together or worked together in the past. Most importantly, all of them have ties to the community because their family lineage comes from the area.

- Members involve their community of origin in the processes and are able to receive from them documents and pictures. This reflects strong collaboration, common interests, and joint efforts with the community of origin.
• There are members in their community of origin who are supportive and are working to do the same work in the community; this enables people to use existing organizations such as Awleao Development Association within their communities of origin to exchange ideas and work on projects personally meaningful to all of them. By supporting their community, they are supporting their families and their core value of assisting students, which is a contribution to the educational development of the country as a whole.

• In addition to supporting educational development in their community of origin, the organization gives the members the chance to meet on a yearly basis. ASAA makes it possible for members to see their friends; meet new members from the community; and to experience the social, cultural, and educational activism while being away from their home country.

• ASAA members are innovative; they have organizing themselves for social change in Ethiopia and have created a strong network tie for their Diaspora community.

Education has an important role in the reduction of poverty, improvement of health, and limitation of harmful traditional practices, as well as the fostering of increasing knowledge among the local society Harber (2002). Therefore, supporting educational development is imperative. However, the major problems come from the lack of resources. Educational and economic programs that promote self-sufficiency are among the resources that many students in Ethiopia are lacking. The ASAA members
have taken a role to help and collaborate with their community of origin to enhance educational resources.

One of the most distinctive aspect of the organizational leadership are most of the members were born in the community they are assisting thus ASAA is not an outside organization. They are a Diaspora self-help organization because even though they are geographically separated from their homeland, they are still committed to their community of origin. Therefore, I still consider the members living in the U.S. as member of the community of origin.

It has yet to be seen, whether or not ASAA might still be called a self-help organization in the future because it is possible that within one or two generations the members might be first or second generation Ethiopian Americans. It is also possible that future leadership may continue to come from new immigrants or from a mix of generations.

The Impact of the Project on the People

The impact of the project on the people in the community of origin is significant aspect of this research. Although, not going to Ethiopian and conducting research to understand the community’s perspective is the limitation of this research project. However, I was able to gather information from document analysis, using videos that was sent from community origin as well as a phone interview with Memhir (teacher) Dawit Aregay who is currently the supervisor of all the schools in K'Ite-Awlaelo, I was able to gather a data which expresses the impact that the projects that ASAA supports had on the members of the community of origin.
Sada Muhamud Sacde is one of the students who received multiple awards. She received award all throughout 9th-11th grade, she came the 3rd in her class. She stated, “It is very nice to get an award, they care and give us hope and now it’s up to us to keep working hard. She explained that students becoming competitive and receiving the award has encouraged her to keep studying and get high point average. Another students Tesfalem Hagos said, “the money I was awarded was 300 birr, circa $50. It’s not only about the money that made me happy or weather the money is a lot or little, but it’s the hope they give me, it made me feel good, it encouraged me to even work harder.”

According to Renchler (1992), it is significant to recognize the achievement and reward them because when they are recognized and rewarded for their achievement it’s powerful a way of encouraging and motivating them to keep the progress. In the case of teach award, Memhir (teacher) Fasil Adane shared that he received 500 birr ($60 US dollars) from ASAA. He stated:

It encouraged me to work harder than last year, it’s motivating. Those who did not win this year are saying they will work harder and compete next year. For all teachers this is a motivation. The award he received Personally, I feel motivated and I know the teachers are optimistic. We will work to inspire our students and they will do well (observations, Video from community of origin January 2010).

According Harvey-Beavis (2003), studies have proven that teacher rewarding system is a way to recognize a high level of performance; therefore, by awarding it is one way of encouraging them to teach well and create a positive atmosphere for students.
Additionally, Memhir (teacher) Dawit Aregay is currently supervising all the schools in K'ilte-Awlaelo and he is one of the main individuals that ASAA contacts in Wukro. He works closely with the projects that ASAA supports. He said:

As you know, ASAA members award students, they have built the library and classrooms, they have done a lot for the development to school and country development. Also, any book that can be found in Ethiopia are in the library and this makes the students believe that they can compete with anyone in Ethiopia, this gives them an opportunity. We are so happy that the students believe this is because of ASAA. (Phone interview, from Ethiopia, April 2010)

Memhir Dawit further explained that it is important that ASAA keeps their support and exchanging knowledge that would be useful to the students and the community. He suggested that if ASAA members send foreign books it will be useful, he stated, “Sending more books that are from outside Ethiopia to expose the high school students with outside world, for example, if every person who comes to visit brings one book with them it will be useful”

During the library opening ceremony the Mayor of Kilte-awlaeo Wendmienah said:

Our brothers and sisters in the U.S. or in the west are helping not because they have money to throw, but because they believe educations is the foundation for our community and country. As a community we must keep working to improve the educations situation. Someone who is educated would stand on his/her own
and would not be ashamed, educations is a key to self and community
development observations. (Video from community of origin January, 2010)

The mayor explained in collaboration with existing institution in the community
such as Awlaelo Development Association, St. Mary's College and ASAA the
community has improved the educational condition. He further explained that there is
much more work to achieve and as a community the students, teachers, parents and
general community need to keep their motivations and dedication to keep improve the
educational situations.

Implications of the Research

It is my hope that more students who are interested in Africa’s future will choose
to study groups such as ASAA, which is doing educational development in the
community of origin, and pay attention to research that is formulating ideas in order to
support educational development. This research project was in some ways shaped out of
frustration with dominant gender to the study of challenges. I have been attending Ohio
University for the past six years. I earned my master’s degree in African Studies and took
three years of course work in Cultural Studies in education for my doctoral program. In
every class I attended, students, including myself, tended to focus on political, social, and
health issues such as HIV/AIDS, FGC and/or examining the development work done by
NGOs such as the UNDP, UNICEF or about USAID. My intention is not to undermine
the works of NGOs, but to advocate researcher that focuses on positive action that
undertaken within the African communities. Using the Appreciative Inquiry approach, we
can shift our research focus and expand academic work that discusses the positive aspects
of development. One arena of education development is to study individuals who might have emigrated to the U.S. but who still organize themselves to contribute to educational progress in their community of origin.

This research contributes to an understanding of some of the problems concerning the tension between local and international development work. According to Kari (2010), there are a lot of barriers for local NGOs receiving funding from U.S. government agencies. In most local NGOs in the event of the dealing with foreign donors, there are always difficulties dealing with conditionality that such requirements or contract that donors come with (Kari, 2010). While following the conditions may be seen by the donors as the best way to accomplish the work, local NGOs may have a useful alternative approaches based on their local expertise and knowledge.

Simmons (1998) stated:

Despite the demonstrated capacity of NGOs to do good, their growing power on the ground has exposed them to heightened criticism, some of it justified. As salutary as international attention has been to the recent turmoil in Chiapas, Mexico, for example, it is hard to believe that the arrival there of 4,500 foreigners from 276 different organizations necessarily represents an unalloyed good. (p. 82)

In the case of Ethiopia studies have shown that there is a lack of collaboration between international NGO’s and local traditional (self-help) institutions such Equb an organized neighborhood groups that utilizes a traditional banking system. Such institutions have been part of the social structure and important to social and economics of the Ethiopian communities (Gebre-Egziabher, 2002). In fact, Yimber (2008) reports
that many Ethiopians believe that the socio- economic and political development of the nation should be based on existing traditional institutions, however existing local intuitions are not considered as much as new ideas by government or international NGOs. Moreover, the author further illustrated, that some Ethiopians explain the underdevelopment of the country as due to the uncritical adaption of western ideas and practices without filtering them trough existing and time tested institutions (Yimber, 2008).

One way of improving or working through the tensions between local and international NGO’s is to consider educational development being done by groups such as ASAA who are directly working with their community. As participants explained, ASAA members have not created and do not plan to have a branch of ASAA in their community of origin. They have rather choose to work within existing local institutions. ASAA do not have to create a parallel organization. They use existing institutional forms as result they are implementing or accomplishing their agenda at a fast rate.

ASAA has its own autonomy as an organization; they operate independent of any political system and do not depend on outside organizations for approval and funding and they chose and executed the projects they support without any interference from non profit or governmental organizations because they do not depend on them for financial support. Therefore, they did not face the tensions that often exist between local and international NGOs.

This research shed-light on their value of local organizations and Diaspora international donors. This research raises questions about the value of facilitating a
greater degree of dialogue and collaboration between NGOs and local development organization such as what ASAA is doing. In the process, it will help illuminate donors’ understandings for how NGOs have been adapting to the challenges of educational development. Moreover, scholar interested should also consider shifting their focus or balancing researches done between the works of international NGOs and local NGOs.

Additionally, if more research is done about how people who have migrated out of their countries are organizing themselves to contribute to educational development in their community of origin, the findings could lead to part of the solution for the brain drain problem, which, as stated in chapter two, is one the major issues facing Ethiopia and many African countries. Another area to be explored is the identification of the tools used to circulate knowledge. For example, ASAA has used the resources it has to promote educational endeavors in the home community, and by so doing they are circulating resources and contributing to the development of their community of origin. They do not have an office where they can all meet weekly or monthly; however they are using technology and their personal networks—of family, friends, and community—to circulate resources and contribute to educational development in their community of origin.

Suggestions

I would like to offer some suggestions that might be useful to development organizations that are interested in conducting development work from abroad or to those who are simply interested in knowing about organizational groups such as ASAA.
Suggestions for ASAA

The organization should come up with an idea to convince members to take roles in the election process and run for offices. Even though the members ask why they should “fix something that’s not broken” and also have complete trust in the executive leaders who have been there from the beginning, I see this as a danger to the organization in the future. One approach taken by ASAA members during their annual meeting was to create a youth group and they eventually did. The goal is that the youth can take over the future leadership; however, the leaders of the organization should analyze the various social factors to explore how the youth could administer ASAA and if this approach would be as effective and practical as it sounds. My experience and observation of some members of the younger generation is that their needs and motivations are different from those of the people who are strongly connected to the community of origin or country. One of the strengths of the ASAA right now is that the members are united by a cause that is quite personal to them. Many of the members, particularly the board members, have direct personal stories or attachments to their community of origin. Therefore, I recommend that the ASAA members be cautious in their selection of leaders and come up with ideas that will also unite the youth and at the same time increase their motivation to be involved.

I recommend that students do exchange programs for students who are interested in educational development or in going to Ethiopia to teach English or do research. ASAA can be used as a way to link them with community and local organizations.
Suggestions for Organizations

As illustrated in chapter two, brain drain is a major problem for Ethiopia and many African nations. ASAA is an example of a group that that works against brain circulation. This organization has done a tremendous job in contributing to educational development in the members’ community of origin. Organizations interested in similar work can work to bridge the gap and can support or collaborate with organizations such as ASAA focusing on circulating knowledge and resources. Organizations with interest in brain circulation can study ASAA and learn more about how to network, fund-raise, evaluate, and monitor while living abroad.

Suggestions for Further Study

• The contexts of community of origin that ASAA members support.
• The parallel between ASAA’s support structure at home and abroad.
• The politics amongst the Ethiopian community in relations to ASAA and similar organizations.
• The politics of between organizations such as ASAA and international NGOs.
• The correlation between ASAA structure and the traditional self-help institutions which have existed in Ethiopia since the 1960.
• Documenting similar organizations which are supporting development work in their community of origin while living abroad.

Conclusion

In the beginning the study I told a story about Fana who was living in Agule, part of Kilde-Awalaeo region, and working in a bar while involved in local sex trade. Fana’s
story depicts the social, cultural, and economic challenges of Ethiopia. Issues related to poverty, as well as lack of access to adequate general healthcare and reproductive health services, are common in Ethiopia. Lack of educational resources, access to adequate school facilities, overcrowded classes, and a shortage of school materials are also problems found in Ethiopia (Serbessa 2002). But the innovative projects of ASAA are helping to change the dynamics.

I always wonder how Fana’s life would have been had she been given the opportunity to go school and use her education and experience to make a difference in her life and her community. Even with the challenges of not having educational resources available, would she have been facing her situation if she had the opportunity to attend school and use her education? I believe that if she had experienced the family, social, and economic support, she would have had a different life. As a girl-child, however, had she had the chance to go to school in Agule where I met her, she would not have had access to educational resources without the support of ASAA.

Fana in primary school would have been trying to read while sitting on a stone with no roof over her head. She would be facing the likelihood of dropping out of school because her parents could not afford to pay for her school fees. But today, she would have the possibility of winning money for her school achievement and would have access to books in the library. She may have also have been taught by a highly motivated teacher due to the incentive teacher awards that ASAA provides. The combination of all these would potentially change the trajectory of her life. The woes, struggles, and the contemplation of suicide would become a thing of the past. By the provision of better
educational facilities, such as classrooms, library, books, computers, scholarships for students, and teacher awards, ASAA is contributing in no small way to changing the landscape that I depicted at the beginning of the study.
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