

# Fulfilling the Responsibility to Protect: The Roles of Iddir on Supporting Orphan Children in Bahir Dar City, Ethiopia

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## ABSTRACT

Iddirs are traditional community-based organizations (CBOs) primarily established to facilitate burial ceremonies and comforting the bereaved. This study emphasized the additional roles and functions of Iddirs on supporting vulnerable groups of the community. The research has employed a qualitative research method, and it employs in-depth interviews, FGD and document analysis as data gathering instruments. Participants of the study were beneficiaries of Iddir (orphans and their caregivers), Iddir members and Iddir committees. The findings of this study showed that Iddir has significant contribution to improve the life of orphans and their caregivers. The types of care and support provided by Iddir include financial, material, medical, emotional, and psychosocial support. The study also shows that orphans in the area are vulnerable to a range of problems: food insecurity, lack of clothes and footwear, inadequate access to school and school materials, poor health, and physical and sexual abuse, in terms of their severity.

## KEYWORDS

Community-Based Organization, FGD, Iddir, Orphan

## INTRODUCTION

*Iddirs* are community-based burial associations established on the basis of neighborhood, ethnicity, sex, and/or work place for the primary purpose of providing funeral services to the members, financial and material support, and give condolences to the bereaved members and their families (Dejene, 2010). Dejene further noted that, *Iddirs* are non-profit-making organization founded on the bases of solidarity, friendship and mutual support among members. Different studies conducted on this indigenous institution had revealed that about 87% of Ethiopians in urban centers and

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close to 70% of Ethiopians living in rural areas belong to these *Iddirs*. This makes this particular traditional institution the most widely spread type of self-help group in the country (Mauri, 2006).

In Ethiopia, there is an old age tradition of caring of orphans, elderly, sick and persons with physical disabilities. Nuclear and extended family members, communities and faith-based organization are the main sources of care and support to those peoples (Tsegaye, 2001). UNAIDS (2010) estimated that of the 16.6 million children (aged 0–17) who have lost one or both parents to AIDS, 14.8 million are in sub-Saharan Africa. Within Ethiopia 5.5 million children, around 6% of the total population, are categorized as orphans or vulnerable children. Orphan and vulnerable children comprise almost 12% of Ethiopia's total child population. Over 83% of these orphans are living in rural settings of which 855,720 of them are orphaned children as a result of the death of one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS (Save the Children UK, 2008).

The Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) estimates that 72% of children in the country live with both parents, 14% with mothers only, 3% with fathers only and 11% live with neither of natural parents. The same survey indicated that 18% of Ethiopian households are caring for orphans while 0.6% or 11, 577 households were estimated to be child headed (CSA, 2011).

Ethiopia counts one of the largest populations of orphans in the world. It goes without saying that HIV/AIDS is one of the major factors for the escalation of the number of orphans. It is estimated that 13 percent of children in the country have lost one or both of their parents for various reasons (Zewdineh, 2008). For instance, it is estimated that there are about 867,525 orphans, from these 533,764 (paternal orphans), 208,943 (maternal orphans), and 124,818 dual orphan children in Amhara region (CSA, 2015). However, the estimation varies from organization to organization, about children in difficult circumstances in general and orphans in particular in Bahir Dar. According to (ANRS BOLSA, 2008), there are about 9085 orphans in Bahir Dar city in 2008 (ANRS BOLSA, 2008).

According to the report on poverty and children, published by UNICEF in 2010, households with orphans are more likely to become poorer because the low income earned by the few adults who are employed is now sustaining more dependents (UNICEF, 2010). The environment facing orphan children is extremely unfavorable. As indicated by Subbarao and Coury (2004), orphans often face economic hardship, lack of love, attention and affection, withdrawal from school, psychological distress, loss of inheritance, increased abused and risk of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and illness, stigma, discrimination and isolation. Their limited access to resource such as money for school purpose forces them to start work at a precocious age which ultimately jeopardizing their future. Besides their vulnerability, their number is increasing at an alarming rate due to HIV/AIDS epidemic especially in developing countries.

Compared to other children, the psycho-social and socio-economic situations of orphans are worse in Ethiopia. In this respect, studies conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, (MOLSA, 2009) indicated that orphans in Ethiopia face severe social, economic, legal and psychological problems. Many orphans take illegal

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