Discussion paper

The utility of ethical dialogue for marginalized voices in Africa

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Executive summary

It seems inevitable that humanity must either change the nature of our current growth oriented and profit driven modes of living and development, or the ecosystem of our earth and of which we are mere children will collapse. The Oromo and other African people have fostered belief systems and social norms that encouraged or even enforced limits to the exploitation of biological resources. Yet the tendency to idealize indigenous knowledge should be resisted - some practices and beliefs can be a hindrance to development and environmental protection. Poverty has compelled peasant farmers to avoid traditional conservation practices by cutting down trees and killing some wild animals beyond the limits or in violation of their indigenous ethical codes. Indigenous practice has been challenged by modernization, the market economy, transnational corporations, foreign religions, the government's acculturation and assimilation policies. Being influenced by these new values, people now use natural resources as objects for exploitation and profit making. Ethical dialogue is a necessary condition for authentic development among indigenous, poor, or otherwise marginalized groups. Yet ethical dialogue has not had enough influence to change structures of global power. Presently civil society is trying to push this kind of dialogue to come to the surface. This report makes a series of recommendations about how this might be supported.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore how currently marginalized voices in Africa might best use ethical dialogue to shape local, national and international development agendas on the basis of the Ethiopian experience. It examines the worldview of the Oromo, who constitute the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, and how they respond to internal and external influences. The Oromo belong to a Cushitic group in East Africa. The Oromo are also found in Kenya.

Before the establishment of the modern state of Ethiopia towards the end the 19th century, the Oromo had two types of social organization, namely a complicated class system, the famous *Gadaa* system and a moiety-clan-lineage structure. The Oromo culture is based on the *Gadaa* and the *Qaalluu* institutions. I will discuss the nature of the *Qaalluu* institution in section 2. The *Gadaa* system is a democratic egalitarian system that has its own leaders who conduct government (political, economic, social, judicial, legislative, ritual and military affairs) of the Oromo society for non-renewable eight-year terms.

We look first at Oromo ecotheology, and examine the Oromo ethics of forest. We focus on challenges to Oromo and African worldviews and examine how the marginalized people reacted to external influences. We discuss whether ethical dialogue is useful to address global problems, and promote development agendas in today's world. The last section gives concluding remarks.

The main sources of this study are the various available relevant documents, structured and unstructured interviews with key informants, elders, leaders of Peasant Association, scholars, and personal observation. Interviews were conducted in person. I conducted fieldwork in three selected areas of Oromia, itself part of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, - in Borena (Southern Ethiopia), Illuababora (Western Ethiopia) and North Shoa (Central Ethiopia). I studied the worldview of peasant farmers and pastoralists in the first two study sites 4 years ago. I do not supply the names of informants in this report for I presented them in my previous work (2001b). I conducted my research in Northern Shoa in December 2004. At the end of the study 15 informants (14 males and 1 female) were interviewed (see Appendix One.) Currently, I also interviewed 2 Ethiopian scholars (see Appendix TWO).

In order to understand the impact of private investment on the local people, and to substantiate my previous findings about Oromo worldview, I selected one Peasant Association in Berek-Aleltu district on the basis of its current development intensity, production systems and investment opportunities. Berek-Aleltu district is found in the southeastern part of North Shoa Zone of Oromia state. This district has 45 administrative rural Peasant Associations and 3 urban towns. Berek-Aleltu district has attracted the attention of various investors owing to its agro-climatic conditions, proximity to the national market center, geographical land settings and availability of resources. Because I could not visit or interview many peasant farmers, I can only assume that important information and perspectives are missing from this report. Also, the present work in part

draws on my previous works (1997 a and b, 2001 a and b and 2004). I, therefore, have employed empirical data to elicit the principles and beliefs of the Oromo people, some distinctive to Borena, others distinctive to Illuababorra and Shoa, with the objective of discovering an authentic Oromo worldview. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation for the contribution of everyone involved in this research, and organizations which facilitated my work cheerfully and competently. In particular, I would like to thank, my colleague and research assistant, Mr. Daniel Smith, who read the whole report and made valuable comments and suggestions.

2. Oromo Ecotheology

2.1 Background

Many African countries have developed an organic conception of nature that promotes an ecological balance or interdependency between human, plant, and animal life. Nature is an integral part of their day-to-day existence. In many African countries environmental knowledge relies on both the relationship between humans and nature, and the visible world and the invisible world. According to Opoku, African religion is " [a] way of life, [with] the purpose of … order[ing] our relationship with our fellow men and with our environment, both spiritual and physical. At the root of it is a quest for harmony between man, the spirit world, nature, and society" (1978, quoted in Darrell Posey, 2002:28). The popular epistemologies of Africa, far from subscribing to the rigid dichotomies of the dominant epistemological import from the West, teaches that the so-called natural and supernatural, physical and metaphysical, rational and irrational, objective and subjective, scientific and superstitious, visible and invisible, real and unreal, explainable and inexplicable are inseparable (see Francis B Nyamnjoh, 2004:166). The real is not only what is observable or what makes cognitive sense; it is also the invisible, the emotional, the sentimental or the inexplicable (Okri 1991). Thus spiritual being and material being have a complementary relationship. The Oromo of Ethiopia also share this belief.

This section aims to show that Oromo ecotheology that teaches a positive relationship between God, humanity and nonhuman creation has the capacity, which it already fulfils in part, to address environmental and development problems in Oromia, and could, if taken seriously, influence modern environmental ethicists and contemporary ecotheologians. Although I do acknowledge that some features of the newly emerging ecotheology of Europe are missing from the Oromo belief system, I consider it ecotheology for it has much in common with and is complementary to new worldviews that are combining ecological and theological beliefs and values in Europe. Oromo ecotheology is mainly concerned with the nature of God, spirits, beliefs and the relationship between God and humans, and between humans and the natural environment. Attempts are made to show whether indigenous religious beliefs can make a great deal of difference for the health of the environment. In what follows I will briefly examine how the Oromo people perceive the Supreme Being and creation.

2.2 Belief in the Supreme Being

An indigenous Oromo has a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being who is believed to be responsible for the whole of creation. The Oromo use the concept "*Waaqa"* to refer to the Supreme Being. There is only one *Waaqa* (God). The Oromo conception of the creator differs from modern religions, such as Christianity and Islam, for although *Waaqa* is conceived as one, His manifestations are many. The many aspects of *Waaqa* are considered as *Ayyaana.* I will discuss the meaning and role of this concept at a later stage in the argument. The Muslim Oromo and others also use the word "*Rabbi*" to refer to their Supreme Being. According to the Oromo traditional religion, *Waaqa* has multiple attributes. *Waaqa* is He who is before everything else. *Waaqa* is *Uumaa* (a creator of everything in the world). It should be noted that the word *Uumaa* also refers to the created physical world. *Waaqa* is *Hunda beekaa* (omniscient). He has knowledge of everything; He is all–wise, all–knowing, all–seeing and all–hearing. *Waaqa* is *hundaa tolaa* (omnibenevolent). *Waaqa* is kind. In Oromo culture "God is a kindly figure" (Asmarom Legesse, 1973:45). *Waaqa* is *hunda danda'aa* (omnipotent). Nothing is impossible with *Waaqa*. *Waaqa* is intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood. The Oromo never worshipped carved statues, trees, rivers, mountains or animals as substitutes (see Workineh Kelbessa, 2001b). The Oromo had the concept of the monotheistic supreme God from time immemorial.

The Oromo believe that *Waaqa* created all human beings, and the latter are members of one human race. For the Oromo human beings are part of nature. This contrasts with some Christian interpretations that "although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image" (Lynn White Jr, 1994:49). Different creatures depend for their whole being and operation upon God. Generally the Oromo view of the world supports the belief that we should see the universe as a single whole–as coherent because *Waaqa* creates everything in the universe.

Thus, the Oromo do not have a dualistic conception of reality. They believe that *Waaqa* and *Lafa* (Earth) are inseparable. The informants in the study sites hold that *Waaqa* created human beings to live amicably together on the Earth. The Oromo consider the Earth as their mother and their ultimate abode. The first 'landing space' of a new–born baby is the Earth, and when one grows old and dies, she or he is buried in the Earth. They underscore that they suck the breast of the Earth as the baby sucks its mother's breast. All things originate from the Earth and depend on the resources of the Earth for their survival. The Earth does not forbid anybody to live on it. The Earth thus keeps life going. Nothing can be outside the Earth. For the Oromo, *Waaqa* is like a father. He gives them rain and helps the Earth grow different plants. However, the Oromo do not say that the Earth is *Waaqa*'s wife. Though, it is clear is that *Waaqa* is considered as a male whereas the Earth is considered as a female, the Oromo are not really interested in gender. Rather, they are specifying the fertility and creativity of the Earth.

2.3 Moral codes and leadership

Gemetchu Megerssa (1993) also states that the Oromo believe that the world consists of three elements: *Ayyaana*, *Uumaa* and *saffuu* - which can be understood as moral codes according to which events take place. These elements are based in 'words', 'things', and the relations between them that hold the created universe together. *Ayyaana* is an ideal through which *Waaqa* expresses Himself and *Uumaa* has two meanings, creator and creation, referring to *Waaqa* and the entire physical world (*Waaqa*'s creation) respectively. *Saffuu* is basically an ethical principle by which human actions are judged as right or wrong. In what follows I show explain the nature of *Ayyaana* and *saffuu.*

In order to describe the Oromo conception of *Ayyaana*, one has to understand the nature of the *Qalluu* institution in Oromia. The concept "*Qaalluu*" refers to both an institution and leaders who represent the institution. The *Qaalluu* leaders are custodians for all the institutions of the Oromo.

The *Qaalluu* institution has been changing in different parts of Oromia in response to modern religions and other external influences. The practices of the *Qaalluu* institution in the present day Borena are in some respects different from the practices of the *Qaalluu* institution in other parts of Oromia.

The *Qaalluu* are the hereditary leaders of the kinship system in Borena. They are the most respected and senior persons who, in the past (from 1890s to 1980), were responsible for rituals and the organization of the election of *Gadaa* leaders. At present, the *Gadaa* Councils are elected at the *Gadaa* centres and the *Qaalluu* leaders are concerned with blessings and more explicitly 'religious' responsibilities. They also have a role in adjudicating between major conflicting clans.

According to the Borena tradition, the *Gadaa* leaders govern the Borena society as a whole for a limited period of time whereas the *Qaalluu* leaders are hereditary religious leaders of the Borena people. Accordingly, the *Qaalluu* is senior in the ritual sphere whereas the *Abbaa Gadaa* is senior in the secular realm (Legesse, 2000:120).

The *Qaalluu* ritual leaders unlike those in other parts of Oromia do not worship any spirits although their authority is of divine origin. Nor do divine beings and *Ayyaana* (spirits) possess them.

In other parts of Oromia, some practices of the *Qaalluu* institution are quite different from that of Borena. Oral information gathered from Ambo and Illuababorra shows that the *Qaalluu* is believed to be a spiritual leader who has *Ayyaana (spirit)*. The *Ayyaana* is attached to individual *Qaalluu* and speaks through his mouth during possession. Both are inseparable. The *Qaalluu* serves as an intermediary between the human and the *Ayyaana* (spirit). The Oromo identifies several *Ayyaana*s. Each lineage (*balbala*) has its own *Ayyaana*, and each clan (*lammii*) has its own *Ayyaana*. The *Qaalluu* is also known as the *Ayyaantuu* for s(he) has the *Ayyaana* of his/her lineage or clan.

Some of my informants suspected that the association of the *Qaalluu* and *Ayyaana* came with the Abyssinian Orthodox Christianity (see Workineh Kelbessa, 2001b). The followers of the *Qaalluu* institution imitate the Orthodox Church even when they build *Galma* (ritual house). They do not build it like the traditional Oromo *Galma*. The nonBorena Oromo *Qaalluu* live and worship in this place. The believers visit *Galma* and dance, sing and beat drums like Christian priests to perform a ritual called *dalaga* in order to achieve a state of ecstasy, which often culminates in possession. It is at the height of this that the possessing *Ayyaana* speaks through the *Qaalluu*'s mouth. This imitation has resulted in the distortion of Oromo concepts over time.

What must be noted here is that the evidence in Borena shows that the possession cult, which is practiced in other parts of Oromia, has nothing to do with the original Oromo conception of the *Qaalluu.* In fact, there is a very strong relationship between the *Qaalluu* institution in Borena and other parts of Oromia. The *Qaalluu* in both regions talk about *Ayyaana*. While it is true that the Oromo people in the respective regions differ in their interpretation of *Ayyaana*, they don't differ on the basic Oromo concept.

The Oromo hold the belief that each *Ayyaana* is a manifestation of the one *Waaqa*. All created things in the universe are believed to have their own *Ayyaana*. Thus there are numerous *Ayyaana*s. The spirits act as intermediaries between human beings and *Waaqa*. As *Waaqa* created all things in the world, so also did He bring into being *Ayyaana* as His functionary. Ayyaana has no existence apart from *Waaqa*, and cannot create, hurt or kill anything. *Ayyaana* can only communicate the problems of humans to *Waaqa*. But with the help of *Waaqa*, *Ayyaana* can be invoked to bring misfortune upon the person unwilling to comply with the traditions of the society.

What is interesting is that the *Qaalluu* institution has had a positive impact on the environment. The Oromo perform prayer ceremonies besides permanently flowing rivers, by the side of big mountains, hills, and trees. This is because of the fact that the Oromo believe that *Waaqa* likes these natural objects that are green and distinguished by their size or other impressive quality that has aesthetic appeal. According to the teachings of the Oromo religion, the land around the *Galma* and the natural resources on this land are viewed as sacred and are well protected. The Oromo believe that cutting sacred trees down is tantamount to the violation of the will of *Waaqa.* And, it is the recognition of the will of *Waaqa* that is the basis of moral values in the Oromo worldview.

Thus, *Waaqa* is a supreme being that unifies the whole of nature. Generally, the Oromo people believe that the present generation is under a moral obligation to preserve the land and hand it over to future generations. One of the bases of this obligation is the belief that a person should not endanger the prospects of future generations by destroying the land. One has to make sure that his or her lineage will continue to flourish in the future. The society condemns those who deprive their children and their children's children.

The other important basis of obligation is that *Waaqa* will punish those who disregard the cosmic order and unnecessarily exploit the land and its resources. The land is a blessing and the source of survival. *Waaqa* allows humans and other creatures to use the land.

Accordingly, the people should not ravage the actual purpose of *Waaqa* and the whole history and order of things. Thus, the Oromo people believe that if one does not look after the land, one is not only frustrating his own desire instrumentally to have good land in the future but one is also be undermining future generations and the cosmic purpose.

It has been stated that *Waaqa* is the creator of all things in the world. The Oromo believe that all things are united and have different roles and places in the universe. Human beings are not above other creatures and cannot despoil them as they wish. They are part of the natural world who are given a special place in the diversity of the cosmos; they are endowed with the intelligence that enables them to understand cosmic events. Thus, *Waaqa* expects them to care for other creatures and creation by acting in harmony with the cosmic whole. The use of various animals and plants for food is not contrary to the cosmic purpose. *Waaqa* allows humans to use various animals and plants, however the depletion of a species to the point of extinction is strictly forbidden. The violation of *Waaqa*'s expectation concerning human being's special position in the cosmological order will lead to divine punishment (Workineh, 2001b).

The Oromo conception of *saffuu* or *ceeraa fokko* is another interesting component of Oromo worldview. *Saffuu* is a moral concept that serves as the ethical basis for regulating practices in order to ensure a high standard of conduct appropriate to different situations. It helps individuals to avoid morally wrong actions. Thus, *Saffuu* is what makes humans different from other animals. While the activities of animals are regulated by instinct, *saffuu* regulates the activities of human beings. *Saffuu* helps individuals relate natural laws to divine laws and to base their activities on these laws. The Oromo believe that *saffuu* involves avoiding embarrassment, bad conversations, lying, stealing, working on holidays, and so forth. *Saffuu* is respecting one another and respecting one's own *Ayyaana* and that of others. According to the Oromo, *saffuu* is *ulfina* (respect). We need to show respect to our father, mother, aunt, uncle and our mother Earth. Knowing *saffuu* helps us to maintain our culture and revere *Waaqa*. *Saffuu* can also refer to expression of astonishment, fear, pain, pity, shame, etc. (see Tilahun Gamta, 1989:511).

Saffuu is a mediating category between different things. There is *saffuu* between the mother and the daughter, between the father and the son, between generations, between humans and nature, between God and Earth. Thus, *saffuu* regulates people's activities. The exploitation of natural resources is governed by *saffuu*. One cannot unnecessarily overexploit these resources.

Saffuu also refers to the existence of an attitude compounded of both distance and respect between all things. As Lambert Bartels rightly noted, *saffuu*

> implies that all things have a place of their own in the cosmic and social order, and that they should keep this place. Their place is conditioned by the specific *Ayyaana* each of them has received from *Waaqa* ... *Saffuu* implies both rights and duties (Lambert Bartels, 1983:170).

Accordingly, one cannot understand the concepts *Ayyaana*, *Uuma*, and *saffuu* in isolation. *Ayyaana* is a refraction of *Waaqa*. *Uuma* is the physical thing. *Saffuu* mediates between the *Ayyaana*, which is the ideal, and *uuma*, which is the physical that needs to be regulated. The three should be understood together.

Therefore, the main ethical principle that can be derived from the concept of *saffuu* is that human beings should live in harmony with all other creatures in the natural environment. The Oromo pay due attention to the moral status of both humans and nonhuman creatures. Violation of *saffuu* will affect the positive relation between individuals, humans and the natural environment.

The concepts '*Waaqa*', '*Ayyaana*', '*uuma*', and '*saffuu*' provide the metaphysical underpinning of an environmental ethic. They underlie environmental attitudes to nature and society. As has been stated earlier, belief in *Waaqa* requires belief in the intrinsic value of all creatures. The key thing is that the source of basic Oromo values is *Waaqa*, although there are also secular values that are not directly related to *Waaqa*. The valuing of *Waaqa* underpins belief in the value of trees, animals and so on.

2.4 Implications for environmental ethics

In short, in this section I have shown how the Oromo perceive the Supreme Being, the Earth, and how they lead their life in accordance with their religious beliefs. I have also described the importance of the *Qaalluu* institution in mediating the relation between the religious and secular aspects of Oromo society. The Oromo regard *Waaqa* as father and the Earth as the caring mother of all. As I have argued at several points above, the values expressed in religious and *Gadaa* rituals shape their attitudes towards various species and the Earth. *Waaqa* is one and at the same time has different manifestations. *Ayyaana* mediates the relationship between *Waaqa* and human beings. There is a positive relationship between God and the Earth, humans and the natural environment. All creatures are essentially effected and affected by the harmonious relationship between *Waaqa* and the Earth. *Waaqa* is the creator of various creatures and responsible for their existence. He requires humans to responsibly cohabit the Earth with other creatures. As His own creations, He loves the diversity of species.

For the Oromo the land is not simply a property that is there to be exploited by humans without due respect and care. It is intrinsically valuable and requires respect and protection on the part of its inhabitants. If humans continuously despoil the land by breaking traditional rules and the cosmic purpose, it may not support all creatures indefinitely. The Oromo believe that the present generation has responsibility to pass on natural resources in good order to a future generation. That is why the Oromo are concerned with the health and peace of the environment and its inhabitants. They are aware that the environment in which they live affects their health. They depend on environmental resources to heal themselves. Some places are considered to be salubrious and sacred. The Oromo always try to maintain a peaceful and healthy environment, and avoid evil things.

The Oromo traditional rules, which govern their relationship with the natural environment, are environmentally friendly. They involve practices that promote an ecological balance. Thus Oromo ecotheology has ethical implications for environmental issues. It fosters ethical responsibility to the Earth and its inhabitants. Generally, it has had a positive effect on the environmental practices of the Oromo people. This study further suggests that it can be a possible source of ecological wisdom and provide longstanding practical strategies for ecologists and environmental ethicists. Oromo environmental values are encapsulated and encoded in beliefs about the Supreme Being, sacred trees and the *Qaalluu* institution. Thus, both environmental ethics and contemporary ecotheology may consider Oromo ecotheology as a possible ally. The next section shows how Oromo ecotheology contributes to the protection of forests in Oromia.

3. The ethics of forests

3.1 Utilitarian values

The Oromo protect trees for various reasons. Trees have economic value, because they serve as sources of genetic diversity, food, materials for construction, medicine, honey, sapwood for a honey collector's barrel-hive, charcoal, firewood, incense, ritual objects and of forage for livestock. Trees also protect soil erosion, influence climate and provide shade for humans and animals. Thus, in terms of ethics, we can say that the preservation of forests is extremely important to the Oromo for almost an endless number of utilitarian reasons.

Similarly, different cultural groups in other African countries have developed knowledge of trees for utilitarian reasons. For instance, in Southern Africa out of 211 plant varieties collected, individuals queried from !Kung hunter-gatherers by a plant taxonomist supplied names for 206 plants (Biodiversity Support Program, 1993:59). Calestous Juma (1991) also reported that 47% of households among Kenya's Bukusu attested that they gathered fruits and vegetation from the wild. Some 12% reported tending plants in the wild and 32% brought wild plants into the homestead for purposes of domestication. Clearly, the utilitarian value of plants and animals in their natural environment and thus the need to preserve and care for their natural environment is demonstrated by such data.

Moreover, local people have developed the knowledge of an indigenous pharmacopoeia. Their knowledge has been improved through continuous non-formal experiments and gradual accretion of naturalistic observations of the physiological effects and medicinal properties of bioactive plants over time. Accordingly, they plant new tree and crop species and monitor their growth and development. They also collect, grow, and test the power of various herbs to control new diseases. Therefore we should recognize that the study and understanding of 'traditional' pharmacological knowledge might help 'modern' pharmacologists to discover new chemical compounds of different species. (We should also recognize that we are talking about real people living in the 21st century. The terms 'traditional' and 'modern' tend to distort this fact and reinforce some of the problematic aspects of the concept of 'development'. However for convenience, in this report I will

for the most part set such problems aside and use this language in the manner that it is 'normally' used.)

3.2 Additional values

The Oromo do not offer purely economic reasons and utilitarian justifications in relation to the preservation of trees. They also admire forests and trees aesthetically, and protect some trees on the grounds of their majestic size, and their aesthetic appeal. Trees are the providers of recreational enjoyment and of aesthetic pleasure.

Moreover, in relation to our concern for the ecotheological nature of the Oromo worldview, we need to understand that the Oromo recognize some trees as sacred trees based on what are essentially *spiritual* values. Certain trees are believed to have a special association with *Waaqa* and as G W Burnett and wa Kang'ethe Kamuyu state concerning some African ethnic groups, to outsiders "why one individual [tree] would be mundane and another sacred remains mysterious, beyond the observation that social agreement and experience favoured some trees over others" (1994:158). In fact, the informants report that some trees are called sacred because of their physical appearance, size, colour, shade, function and location (for instance around religious institutions where worship is conducted, sacrifice is offered, where libation of water and traditional beer is poured, and where springs are found). *Qoloo* or *Abdaarii* trees are held to be sacred and are believed to be inhabited by some powerful spirit. However, people can cut the trees which are not selected as *qoloo*. The Borena people also identify "*korma korbessaa*" or *jiila* (celebration) trees under which they sacrifice a bull and a male goat in different parts of Borena. The point is that the metaphysical and ontological foundations, and thus the ethical consequences, of such practices are obviously highly developed and quite complex.

The Borena people worship *Waaqa* under *korma korbessa* trees. Each tree is known as the *qaallichaa* of so and so. This tree is considered to be holy and a place of blessing, peace and celebration. The Borena Oromo perform the ceremonies of *dhibaayyuu gadamoojjii* (the libation of *gadamoojjii*) under this tree (for details see Workineh, 2001b).

In general, libation can take place under holy trees, at the wells, at the grave, in the house and in other places. It is interesting to note that it is wrong to bring spears and quarrel with one another under such tree. These trees cannot be felled unless special rites are performed (for instance religious and naming ceremonies and the transfer of one age grade to another). If enemies cut sacred trees, the Borena anoint them with butter and the trees produce fresh sprouts. If the trees fail to sprout, the Borena Oromo think that something bad will happen to them. Thus, while the Oromo ecotheological worldview is complex it is clear that there are some basic ethical principles, e.g. cutting down sacred trees violates the will of *Waaqa*.

The Oromo also revere big trees that are used for shade for both animals and human beings. It would be wrong to cut down these trees. In particular, red *Qilxuu* (Sycamore) is

symbolised as *Waaqa*'s tree. The sound of big trees that are shattered violently when one chops them down is believed to be bad for those who cut them.

What follows from the above is that the Oromo ecotheological attitude towards trees is distinctive from many strands of western ecotheology. For the Oromo, trees around the *Qaalluu* institution, wells, springs and other places of worship are respected. Cutting sacred trees is believed to result in annoying the spirits and may cause death. It is wrong to use even the dead branches of these trees.

Christianity has historically been in conflict with such traditions:

> [t]he whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature (Lynn White Jr, 1994:50; see also John Passmore, 1974:9).

The desacralisation of nature has left man free to exploit it without any restriction. Western traditions of progress linked to taming of wilderness date to the Greeks:

> [f]or the Graeco-Roman tradition enjoyable 'scenery' meant the olive grove, the cultivated field, the orchard, the carefully disposed villa or temple. Mountains and wildernesses were crude, unformed, inhuman, unperfected, not worth the attention of a cultivated man (Passmore, 1974:107).

Similarly, until recent times, the Americans had negative attitudes towards their forests. According to Joseph R Des Jardins,

> [f]or much of American history, the forests and wilderness areas of this country represented a threat to be overcome, an enemy to be conquered. The images are common throughout the first four hundred years of European settlement of North America. Man against nature (2001:42).

Yet Western ethicists and environmentalists such as John Muir have recently developed different attitudes towards wilderness and mountains, providing at last some common ground with traditional Oromo views. Some Oromo clans and individuals in Borena have been so inspired by nature that they have named their clan and their children after trees. These trees have symbolic value for the individuals and groups concerned, and are respected by the people.

Thus, the Oromo do not consider trees as mere resources that can be used without limit. *Saffuu* regulates the relationship between humans and trees. One just cannot just be greedy and take up an axe - or a chainsaw, go out and starting chopping down trees because one gets the opportunity. In Oromia, one has to follow certain accepted laws based in a highly developed set of ethical principles in order to cut trees down. *Saffuu* rids individuals of the greed for overexploitation of trees through ensuring that proper

laws of using trees are upheld. Accordingly, one can only exploit nature provided that the use is reasonable and respectful. Generally, one cannot endlessly exploit family members, individuals or groups within society, or nature. Thus, religious beliefs and indigenous moral laws indirectly impose a system of ecological checks and balances. The lesson here is that we need to avoid needless exploitation of the Earth and its resources.

Environmental ethicists have different attitudes towards forests. Some argue that forests have intrinsic value while others defend the position that they can only have instrumental value. Another group contends that although trees have moral standing, they do not have much moral significance.

3.3 The Oromo holistic forest ethic

Unlike some purely utilitarian theories in environmental ethics, the Oromo's ecotheological worldview can be understood in relation to the principles of what Holmes Rolston and James Coufal have dubbed as 'a holistic forest ethic'. These professional Western environmental ethicists argue that resource use that exploits the natural productivity of forests and redirects it to benefit human society should recognize how the commodity is related to the larger biotic community. “A holistic forest ethic affirms the forest as resource, but denies that it is only a resource” (Rolston and Coufal, 1991:36-37). Rolston and Coufal have pointed out that while *multiple use* is a commodity model, treating forests as resource, *multiple value* is a community model, respecting both human and forest communities and seeking an integrated appreciation and development of values provided by forests. The central questions of multiple use are: 'What is it good for?' and 'What use does it have?'. On the other hand, the central questions of multiple value are: 'What values are intrinsically (in the forests regardless of humans) as well as instrumentally (in forests used as human resources) present?', and 'How can this richness be optimized?' (Rolston and Coufal, 1991:38). Both purely utilitarian human values for recreation, timber, and watershed and non-utilitarian values of beauty, integrity, and stability in the biotic community are sought to be optimized by the community model.

In relation to this report it should be noted that Rolston and Coufal have quite specifically advised, and in my view correctly advised, that present codes of conduct within the forest industry such as that of the Society of American Foresters (SAF) which emphasizes loyalty to other persons, to an agency, and to a company, should embrace loyalty to the land, its residents, and the nation, i.e. the human community entwined with the biotic community.

To conclude this section of the report, it should be noted that the metaphysical and ontological foundations of the Oromo worldview result in and/or reflect a distinctive attitude and relationship to what in the West would be referred to as the 'natural' world as opposed to the 'human' world. What we can refer to as the Oromo "ethics of the forest" is not only consistent with what has been conceptualized as an "ecotheological" understanding of environmental ethics but also other more secular approaches. In relation to the reports concern for developing concrete and effective strategies for the sustainable

empowerment of marginalized and endangered forest communities a deep understanding of the worldviews of such people as the Oromo of Ethiopia is absolutely fundamental.

4. Challenges to indigenous world views

The discussion so far has been largely devoted to showing the significance of Oromo beliefs and practices relating to the natural environment and its inhabitants. Yet there is an evident gap between the ideals of Oromo culture and the observable environmental reality involving widespread deforestation and land degradation. In this section I explore factors that have had debilitating impacts on the transmission and development of indigenous environmental knowledge. I examine the impacts of modernization, the market economy, education and other related factors on indigenous environmental knowledge. In relation to the specific concerns of this report, I will suggest that the failure to use the tried and tested methods of indigenous environmental protection is bound to exact an enormous price at least in Ethiopia.

4.1 Exposure to western education

As I have noted elsewhere, (Workineh 2001a and b), not all Western or Western-trained academics have accepted the value of accumulated indigenous knowledge. They have argued that the African must in the name of ‘development’, ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ simply dissolve and become Western. The irony is that many of these 'scholars' did not take the time to critically study indigenous environmental knowledge. Historically, it is clear that early European adventurers, missionaries and anthropologists formulated their narratives about Africans “in terms of the conceptual schemes of their own [European] upbringing” (Kwasi Wiredu, 1996:162). The consequences of this history and the current attitudes of such Western and western trained intellectuals are extremely significant for this report's concern for empowering marginalized forest and other communities.

In Africa, young people have been alienated from their culture through the influences of missionaries, modern schooling and the mass media. “Education in Africa has been and mostly remains a journey fuelled by an exogenously induced and internalized sense of inadequacy in Africans, and endowed with the mission of devaluation or annihilation of African creativity, agency and value systems” (Francis B. Nyamnjoh, 2004:168). Consequently, the great majority of Africans now active in conservation were trained in the traditional Western methods of wildlife management and have hindered the growth of an African conservation ethic by promoting European management systems (Jonathan S Adams and Thomas O McShane, 1992:xvii). In addition, community members who move to cities and other places tend to forget the principles and rules of the cultural practices of their original indigenous and rural ways of being.

There are many negative factors at play in 'developing' countries like Ethiopia that severely threaten the maintenance and further development of indigenous knowledge. Because of the negative attitudes of educated persons towards indigenous knowledge,

elders pass away without transferring their knowledge. Also, the neglect of indigenous knowledge, and governments' linguistic acculturation and assimilation policies have led to the disappearance of various indigenous languages that have had a crucial function in developing, creating, encoding, sustaining and transmitting indigenous knowledge and patterns of behaviour in different parts of the world. The demise of native languages will lead to the disappearance of people's indigenous knowledge of their natural environment. Such historical trends constitute a grave threat to the empowerment of marginalized peoples.

4.2 The influence of major religions

Another serious threat to the maintenance, empowerment and further development of indigenous knowledge has been the introduction of religions like Christianity and Islam which have challenged the very existence of African indigenous belief systems (C K Omari, 1990:172). In general, African religious beliefs have been regarded as primitive and useless, and the people have been considered as pagans without 'real' religion. In the name of 'civilization' missionaries have sought to eradicate all vestiges of indigenous African metaphysical beliefs and religions.

As they did elsewhere, Christianity and Islam looked down upon traditional religion in Oromo lands. As I have documented elsewhere (Workineh, 2001 a and b), the number of Christians and Muslims increased in the various regions of Oromia by leaps and bounds within a short period of time, particularly in Illuababorra. They divided the people into two camps–the converts who looked down upon the old traditional religion, and the devotees of traditional religion. The acceptance of modern religions was conceived as the acceptance of civilization.

In particular, the influence of Christianity has become serious in Oromo lands since the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Abyssinians conquered the Oromo and other Southern ethnic groups of the present day Ethiopia. The Abyssinian rulers regarded the Oromo religion not as true but as superstition and the Oromo were expected to accept the new religion. In Borena the new rulers tried to force the *Gadaa* leaders and the people to be converted to Christianity. They went to the extent of shaving the heads of the *Gadaa* leaders (Workineh, 2001b).

In spite of these harsh measures most people opposed the new religion. However, many *Qaalluu* leaders became Christians due to the fact that the Abyssinian rulers offered them valuable feudal titles in return for their cooperation. They were given a semi-equal position with the Abyssinians and used to establish their rule over the Oromo people. The Abyssinians cut down *Dakkii* trees, burned *Galma,* (ceremonial hall) and they threw ritual beads into the river. They cut down trees from traditional graves. In short,

> [b]orrowing their faith from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Abyssinians came to revere a White God [sic] and reduced the Oromo Belief in *Waaqa Guraacha* to a form of devil worship (Gemetchu Megerssa, 1996:97).

Daniel Ayanna (1984) has also argued that the systematic approach of the Swedish-trained Ethiopian Protestants enabled them to win the confidence of the local chiefs in Welega. They translated religious books into the Oromo language. Village schools were established by Protestants to propagate their religion. These schools were open to all children of local chiefs and peasant farmers. They also provided medical facilities to the local people. This attracted a large number of followers.

On the other hand, the Northern Oromo, such as the Raya, Azebo, Yeju and Wollo were converted to Islam during the eighteenth century and the Gibe states embraced Islam - owing to the influence of Muslim merchants, in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition, the Turko-Egyptian colonial powers forced the Oromo in Harergie, Eastern Ethiopia, to accept Islam between 1875 and 1885 (see Asafa Jalata, 1993:25). Another factor in the growth of Islam among the Oromo was that many most Oromo turned *en masse* to Islam in order to avoid the domination of Christian Abyssinians (Asma Giorgis, 1987).

Although the government has not backed Islam, it has had damaging impacts on Oromo religion especially in Illuababorra. Traditional religion was uprooted from its foundations. Muslims have subverted many aspects of Oromo traditional religion. For this reason, in Illuababorra, it is hardly possible to argue that Islam and Oromo traditional religion coexist together although some individuals have followed both the traditional religion and the modern religion. The informants claim that the gradual disappearance of the Oromo traditional religion and the *Gadaa* system led to the proliferation of diseases, drought, barrenness, and the migration of people to other places.

Thus, in trying to understand the potential for indigenous knowledge to play an effective role in the empowerment of marginalized peoples we need to take into account how historical and exogenous forces undermine indigenous worldviews. In the case of the Oromo we have seen that various groups have been distorting the Oromo worldview and social and religious institutions for various political, economic, and other motivations. As a result even the Oromo themselves tend to forget their own Oromo worldview and sense of identity.

4.3 The influence of the market economy

In Africa, the indigenous belief systems are in severe danger of being completely destroyed by the introduction of a money economy with its capitalist mode of production and by the introduction of the state control of natural resources (C K Omari, 1990:172). Tough-minded and courageous scholars such as Jerry Mander go so far as to argue that the so-called, "'market economy' is really only a public-relations term to conceal the larger global picture: the forced abandonment of local controls on development, trade, prices, or lifestyle in favor of the new *centrally planned economy*, supervised by banks and corporations and enforced by the U.S. military" (1991:379, emphasis in original).

In his article "Traditional African Land Ethics", Omari emphasizes that Western value systems have had extremely negative and devastating effects on traditional African land

ethics. Being influenced by the new values, people now use natural resources as objects for exploitation and profit making.

> Value systems which used to help keep balance between humans and the environment are no longer in place; instead, we have value systems controlled and motivated by the greedy accumulation of capital on an individual basis. As a result, even ethical decisions regarding the management of land and natural resources are guided by a production principle and the social principles that emerge from it (Omari, 1990:171).

It was in relation to the historical forces identified by such scholars Mander and Omari that led the Ugandan scholar and sage, Okot p'Bitek, to counsel his brother and sister Africans that the ways of their ancestors may be good and solid with roots that reach deep into the soil, their customs neither hollow, nor thin, nor easily breakable or blown away by the winds; but this does not deter the epistemology of Western scientists and development experts and its disciples from inviting you to despise these ancestral customs and world view, in favour of foreign customs you may not even understand or admire (1989:19).

In order to understand the current historically constituted challenges to the survival of alternative and indigenous ways of being it is necessary to understand the continuity of the past and the present in Africa. For example, in the past, colonial authorities in Africa alienated land for national parks, forest reserves, and hunting reserves and thereby restructured African land-use traditions. Hunting reserves primarily served the interests of European sport hunters, with little regard for the subsistence needs of local people. In addition, they also set aside land for protection of endangered species and habitats following the development of conservation ethic in the north. The result has been that, "for Africans, the creation of national parks has often meant that rural people are excluded from traditional grazing and farm lands, in the interest of protecting wildlife and natural habitats. Thus, efforts to protect the natural environment in Africa have often sacrificed the interests of Africans for foreign interests" (Biodiversity Support Program, 1993:xiii). Moreover, colonial forestry and agriculture officers forced local people to grow exotic species for export to Europe and the United States using cultivation methods inappropriate to local ecosystems. These foreign officers were ignorant about the ecological bases of African horticultural practices, and thus encouraged destructive cultivation and forest management practices in their stead (David Anderson and Richard Grove 1987).

Africa has also been incapacitated by the debt crisis, the declining competitiveness of its raw materials in the international market, poor management, corruption, poverty, lack of political will on the part of the leaders, and the like. The list of challenges facing Africa is so endless and oft repeated that in contemporary scholarship there is a tendency to try to somehow escape any real responsibility for effectively addressing such problems. I might note here without dwelling on the facts or attempting to prove the obvious that Africa is not a major player in the globalized and supposedly 'competitive' 'free market' economy, and that, quite simply, the global economic system is not fair or based on any remotely

viable form of justice. However, the real point is to try to understand the reality of our current situation and devise effective strategies and tactics for defending, nurturing, and further developing alternative ways of being within the inevitable and ongoing processes of globalization. This is what I take to be the spirit of this report.

The proponents of the 'free market' encourage poor countries to super-exploit, one could say 'rape', their own natural environments and further marginalize their native rural populations. Many scholars have noted, though without much effect, that what is generally referred to as the 'neo-liberal' development model has further aggravated the condition of poor. No one really seriously denies that this model, which has now been practiced in many countries for decades, has led to the concentration of power and wealth in increasingly fewer and fewer transnational 'hands' or institutions.

In Africa, in most cases development goals have been designed from the top and/or from outside. Therefore, they are irrelevant and unworkable. When the people try to translate them at the lower level of the locality they do not make sense. Then the people realize that after years of having spent huge resources they are not compatible with the African reality. This incompatibility is a failure of policy making. In the following section, I will mention some examples to substantiate these general problems.

Like many African and other developing countries, Ethiopian governments have favoured modern technologies, export-oriented plantation agriculture and large-scale commercial farming at the expense of the peasant smallholder sub-sector. A case in point is the third Year Plan of the Haile Selassie I government (1968-73) (see John M Cohen, 1975:348; P Koehn, 1982:255-56). The imperial government encouraged the large commercial plantations to use fertile lands for the production of luxury crops or inedible commodities destined for export abroad. This led to the eviction of Nomadic Afars from their traditional pastureland in the Awash valley. Their struggle for survival in the fragile uplands degraded the ecosystem and led to the starvation of cattle and the people (see Koehn, 1982:253-89).

In the same way, the information I have gathered from informants reveals that hundreds of Oromo small peasant farmers were evicted from their traditional homes in Gumaro Abo area, in Illuababorra, by the government to establish Gumaro tea plantation. The informants have stressed that the establishment of Gumaro Tea Plantation in Illuababorra in 1960s has contributed to forest depletion. It began when *Kegnazmach* Mejid Abboud, a Lebanese expatriate, started the first commercial tea farm within Gumaro in 1957. At that time the tea plantation covered 25 hectares. In 1964, *Kegnazmach* Mejid made a lease to 12 associated individuals, and to Mr. J B Hissette who later established a private limited company in 1966. Eventually, the Agricultural and Industrial Development of Ethiopia and the British Common Wealth Corporation formed the Gumaro Tea Plantation Share Company in 1969 to succeed the Private Limited Company. In 1976 the new proprietors only planted 13 hectares of tea and 25 hectares of eucalyptus. However, the military government nationalized the plantation and handed it over to the Coffee and Tea Development and Marketing Authority (CTDMA) within the Ministry of Agriculture (see ECTDME, nd). At present, the Gumaro Tea Plantation has covered a total of 2423

hectares (860 hectares of tea; 735 hectares of eucalyptus; 4.5 hectares of coffee, 2.5 hectares of peasant farmers' tea plantation, and 822.3 hectares of land occupied by buildings, natural forests, water or is unused land). The tea plantation has no significant value to peasant farmers.

In the final ten years of imperial rule, attempts were made to enhance the cultivation of food crops for domestic consumption rather than export. However, the government promoted mechanized farming schemes. This mechanized farming resulted in tenant insecurity, exploitation, eviction, and soil erosion and deforestation (see Michael Ståhl, 1974:75-7, 103-5, 126-67; Cohen, 1975: 349; Koehn, 1982: 256-57). In addition, it severely undermined indigenous land management practices. Such example clearly demonstrate how perhaps well intentioned but ill-conceived modern development programmes of primarily foreign design have negated or directly destroyed ecologically sound traditional land use and occupational structures in the name of scientific progress.

The thing worthy of note is not that mechanized farming and modern technologies are not needed and, indeed, they are necessary for modern development. The problem is not the technology itself. The point is the context in which one develops and uses the technology. The point is that it ought not to be promoted at the expense of environmentally sound practices. Subsistence based economic systems alone may not enable the people to produce surplus products and satisfy their needs. They also need to improve the quality of their life. Certainly, Ethiopia needs some mechanized farming and modern technologies to feed its people and solve other related problems. Nonetheless, any attempt to promote mechanized farming should take into account the interests of the rural poor.

4.4 The privatization of knowledge and power of trans-national companies

Another serious challenge to indigenous environmental knowledge is the expansion of transnational corporations. A related threat to indigenous and local ways of life is the commercialization and privatization of knowledge. Large transnational corporations are gaining an increasing level of control over the production and distribution of knowledge, and thus life itself. For example, developments in genetics have literally placed the power of God and/or Darwinian evolution in the hands of profit oriented corporate executive officers (CEOs). More specifically, in many 'developing' countries, transnational corporations have undermined the diversity of traditional crops by breeding new crop varieties through genetic engineering (Darrell A Posey and Graham Dutfield, 1996:15).

In the 'developing' world nation-states have also contributed to this situation by allowing TNCs to collect different species of life for exploitive development in their laboratories. The local people are powerless to challenge their governments who are increasingly dependent on and thus friendlier to transnational corporations and foreign powers than their own people. In spite of the indigenous origins and cumulative nature of the knowledge and value of such species, peasant farmers and pastoralists receive no payment or appropriate economic reward in return, and thus there is no economic incentive to reflect on and further develop their own indigenous sources of knowledge.

Although transnational corporations (TNCs) have a low profile in Ethiopia, there are good reasons to conclude that heretofore they have had a negative impact on the country's peasantry. But, first we need to explain why Ethiopia has not attracted TNCs. One of the reasons is that despite what was reported earlier about the expansion of large plantations and the introduction of mechanized agriculture, compared to other African countries, the traditional farming system in Ethiopia is less penetrable by foreign influences, and thus does not allow easy expansion of TNCs. Peasant farmers, pastoralists and forest dwellers would rather stick to their diversity than adapt anything new. Peasant farmers are even resistant to pseudo development agents. They don't want to use alien seeds. They still depend on their own resources. Every farmer saves his or her own seeds for planting next season. It is almost as if they are content to have a little of everything. However, other African countries were forced to abandon their own field crops except for a few garden crops because of colonization and thus are now more dependent on foreign companies that are determined to produce cash crops.

Another major reason that the big international companies don't see Ethiopia as an attractive country is because it cannot provide them a market. The people are so poor that they cannot buy their products. So it is small companies based in Asia (India, China, Malaysia and the like) that are coming to Ethiopia.

In the past, Wondji Sugar was controlled by the Dutch. There are also petroleum companies, such as Shell and Mobil that have a market here. Regarding forests, there are no visible companies that are interested in forests in Ethiopia. At present, there is a Pioneer Hi-Bred Seeds Ethiopia P.L. C., a big seed company in Ethiopia. It began operations in Ethiopia in December 1990. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. Pioneer is the world's leading agricultural genetics company.

Private companies, and foreign and Ethiopian intellectuals freely derive knowledge and resources from peasant farmers, and demand copyright and other forms of legal protection for this knowledge without acknowledging the Ethiopian peasant farmers, religious leaders, and community within which the knowledge originally developed. This phenomenon, which is generalized throughout the world, can be used to illustrate the earlier point about the overall fairness of the global economic system. In a fair global economic system, obviously, such communities would be recognized in a manner similar to how research teams, corporate research and development laboratories, and universities are acknowledged and economically rewarded in the 'developed' world for the knowledge that they produce.

One specific example of this problem in Ethiopia can be found in research related to the *endod* (soapberry) plant. This plant serves as a shampoo and detergent in Africa. It also kills snails. This plant serves as a shampoo and detergent in Africa. It also kills snails. However, rather than the indigenous communities and local researchers being acknowledged and rewarded for this new knowledge, it is being patented by the University of Toledo (RAFI, 1994a:7).

Another example concerns agribusiness in the United States of America which is using farmer-derived Ethiopian barley in the US to reap approximately 150 million dollars a year (Jack Ralph Kloppenburg, 1988:168). One gene from a single barley plant taken from Ethiopian peasant farmers by the farmers of USA is resistant to the yellow dwarf virus (Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher and Getachew Mengiste, 1993:7). But none of this money is used to support peasant farmers who originally selected, developed, maintained and improved such indigenous crop varieties.

Not only do they not receive and economic compensation for their research, they do not even know that this theft of indigenous knowledge is widespread. US growers have also used sorghum from Ethiopia that is worth 12 million dollars a year (Kloppenburg, 1988:168). Denmark has also used resistant germplasm which came from farmers in North Africa, Ethiopia, and South Asia (Seedling, 1984: 2). "Danish breeders developed barley varieties resistant to powdery mildew in the late sixties thus preventing crop losses amounting to $200 million in the period 1967-1974" (RAFI, 1994a: 6). *Teff*, the indigenous Ethiopian plant, was taken from Desse area [Northern Ethiopia] and grown for one season in the US. It is being patented by the *Teff* Company of the America in USA (Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher, 1999). Moreover, some scientists from the University of Western Australia have managed to collect a large number of samples of legumes covering peas, faba beans, lathyrus and lentils as well as root nodules from some of the most acid soil sites in Ethiopia (see CLIMA, 1998).

In addition to all of this, currently private investors have been evicting many peasant farmers and pastoralists in Ethiopia. The federal government formulated various laws to attract private investors since 1991. The Ethiopian Investment authority (EIA) has been established to provide a one-stop shop to facilitate entry of foreign investors. Among others the investment code granted the following major incentives:

- 100% exemption from the payment of import duties and other taxes levied on imports of all capital goods such as plant, machinery, equipment as well as spare parts worth up to 15% of the value of the imported investment goods.
- Exemptions from customs duty or other taxes levied on imports of raw materials necessary for the production of export goods.
- Ethiopian products (except coffee) and services destined for export are exempted from the payment of export tax and any other taxes levied on exports.
- Projects that are located in Addis Ababa, Nazareth (Adama) and within the radius of 15 kms from the main high way connecting both cities, a tax holiday of three years for pioneer investment and one year for promoted investment is granted. In other areas of the region, a tax holiday of four and two years is granted to pioneer and promoted investment projects, respectively.

In addition to these, the regional government of Oromia made the following measures to facilitate investment in the region:

- Investors who want to promote forestry will be given the right to use the land free of charge,

- Investors who want to engage themselves in the development of social services, such as health and education can use land with minimal charge,
- A rent holiday of up to 4 years is granted for cash crops and plantations such as coffee, tea, cotton, sugarcane and other perennial crops investment on more than 100 hectares of land,
- Investors who are interested in fertilizers, manufacturing, agro-chemicals, agro-processing, agricultural equipment manufacturing and the like will be granted land with reasonable payment, and
- Investors in rural areas are given the right to transfer their holding to others. They can also secure loans by mortgaging or pledging their holding and properties using land as collateral (Investment Bureau of Oromia, 2001).

4.5 Alienation of people from land and production through 'development'

While clearly investment is needed in the area that was studied for this report, the problem is that *according to the people themselves* the kind of investment that has actually developed has had many negative impacts on the local people. Peasant farmers I interviewed in Gawassa, Dale Dambal Peasant Association said that they are against the expansion of investment on their lands, for it poses threats to their survival by evicting them from their ancestral lands. Many informants believed that government policy was intended to support investors rather than the poor. They fear the loss of a vital source of survival. Accordingly, they don't want to sell their land to the government or investors. They reported that the money they receive or are offered for their land doesn't enable them to feed their children, to send them to school, and lead a sustainable life. Once they are evicted from their land, they cannot get any other land, because the redistribution of land has been outlawed since 1991. Moreover, they have nothing to leave behind for the next generation. It is only the land that can be transferred from one generation to another. According to informants, the land would not say, "I won't give you anything this year, because I gave you something in the past."

Thus, they don't want to sell their land, because of the value of the land for the present and future generations. The informants have stressed that it is better to earn ten birr by working the land rather than to get one million birr by selling the land. In fact, some peasant farmers want to lease their land on contractual basis for some years so that they will get it back.

According to the informants, some peasant farmers who sold their land failed to support their family and left their locality for good in search of other jobs. There are very few peasant farmers who managed to survive and support their families. Some of them bought a vehicle and live on its service. The elders have reported that "while young peasant farmers can be labourers and soldiers, old people have no visible alternative other than waiting for death because of hunger." When the informants were asked whether they could buy domestic animals and support themselves, they said that there is no grazing

land. Also, to engage in business, they said, they don't have formal education, which is useful in successful business management.

Peasant farmers acknowledge that the establishment of factories is a good sign of development. But if it is at the expense of the poor it is really underdevelopment. Those who are rich should not establish their factory by evicting the poor without providing alternative means of life.

Informants also complained that the government gave a modest amount of money for peasant farmers who were forced to sell their land in 2001. However, it reduced the price of a particular plot of land considerably in 2003, and it is very difficult to live on it for three years let alone to maintain the well being of one's family for a long period of time. According to the informants, the value of crops produced by peasant farmers during one harvest season is much better than the new prices set by the government. When peasant farmers and their leaders requested government officials to give them an explanation as to why the government reduced the amount of payment, they were not given a satisfactory answer. Those who are supposed to pay the money said they do not know the reason. Some peasant farmers expressed their frustration by suggesting that the government should take the land without any payment rather than pretending that it gives them money in return for their land.

Even worse, illiterate peasant farmers are not allowed to work in the newly established factories, for the owners believe that they lack the required skill. Very few school dropouts were able to work there. What is very sad is that when some of the investors wanted to settle on their land they promised to allow the surrounding peasant farmers to work in their factories. However, once they settled on the land, they bring labourers from other parts of the country and ignore the needs of the local people. This is why the local people have developed negative attitudes towards investors. The local people want the government to build hospitals, schools and the like rather than factories. The leaders of peasant farmers also attested that some investors have tried to procure peasant farmers' land by deceiving them. They bypassed the administration and negotiated with individuals. Other investors have not done anything with the land they were given by the government (Investment Bureau of Oromia, 2001).

Some informants have suggested that training could help some peasant farmers to improve their situations; if the investors are willing to do this, the people will consider the new factories as their own properties. They mentioned that Hayat, house construction organization in Addis Ababa, used this method. The government should have created the environment where the local people can benefit from the new factories in their locality. The people have already asked government officials to solve this problem.

Similarly, in Afar region, northern Ethiopia, the people tried to stop a number of investors from taking their land along the Awash valley creating a great deal of tension and unrest. Consequently, a number of investors had to abandon their investments.

Perhaps the problems that my informants have experienced and identified with government policies of investment in Oromia can be understood in reference to Amartya Sen's (2000) theses concerning 'freedom' and 'development'. Sen argues, that ‘unfreedoms’ or deprivations can result when people are denied the economic opportunities and favourable conditions that markets offer and support. While supporting government regulation to enable markets to work more effectively, Sen states that a system of ethics is required to build vision and trust for the successful use of the market mechanism. He urges policy-makers to base these values on social justice as the foundation and objective of public policy.

Regarding the problems related to investment peasant farmers in the study site, Barak Alaltu District, have already submitted their grievances to district administration. They have asked for a clarification on why the government changed its previous payment policy. They underlined that discrimination among peasant farmers is unethical and unjustifiable. They demanded reasonable payment. They hoped that the government would consider their complaints. However, heretofore the government has not given any official response to their queries. It remains to be seen how this issue will be handled.

Given the numerous challenges and threats to autonomous development in Ethiopia outlined in this section of the report it should be noted that, in general, the people of Ethiopia are not effectively responding to these external forces. This is primarily due to apprehension, fear and insecurity. A study conducted by Forum for Social Studies (FSS) three years ago among the workers in Addis Ababa shows that the workers expressed that they were afraid to react to international pressure, because what they are producing in Ethiopia cannot compete with the products that are flooding the market; they were aware of the uncompetitive nature of what they were producing and therefore fearful that if they were to try to improve their own position that would further reduce the competitiveness of their products and drive their employer out of business (Informant (hereafter Inf(s): Dessalegn Rahmato).

Ethiopian coffee producers are also acutely aware of the international system and the impact of fluctuations of coffee prices on their products. Millions of rural people, particularly peasant coffee farmers, will suffer if there is a collapse in coffee prices. Many peasants will be forced to remove their coffee trees to convert the land to crop farms. Already, their situation is such that many families cannot afford to send their children to schools. Instead they take their children out of school and have them work in the neighborhoods. Besides peasant farmers, pastoralists are also aware of the precariousness of their position within a globalized market. Thus, the global system is having an increasingly powerful impact on the rural people in Ethiopia.

Thus, to conclude this section of the report, the evidence is quite clear that, in general, peasant farmers and pastoralists in Ethiopia have not benefited from the increasingly global nature of economic activity and their knowledge has been undermined, if not out rightly stolen, due to the current form that globalization - in all of its cultural, political, and economic aspects, is taking. At the end of this report some general conclusions will

be drawn concerning these challenges and problems and some specific recommendations will be offered.

4.6 The pervasive effects of poverty

The other major challenge to indigenous knowledge is that on the one hand the people want to maintain a healthy and safe environment, and on the other hand they want to satisfy their basic needs. Some peasant farmers and pastoralists may even desire to have Western style of life. Few people chose to confine themselves to a small-scale economy. However, maintaining a sustainable balance between the two without destroying the resource base is a very difficult task because of poverty and environmental degradation. If the local people do not have alternatives during times of crisis, they may be forced to stop respecting their religious practices. Poverty has compelled peasant farmers to avoid traditional conservation practices by cutting down trees and killing some wild animals beyond the limits or in violation of their indigenous ethical codes. They do this unwillingly in order to meet their immediate survival needs. Put differently, unless peasant farmers and pastoralists have alternatives, they may not fully maintain environmentally friendly practices. Hence, famine, war, external interventions or other environmental crises may lead to the displacement or death of the people and thereby to the breakdown of indigenous knowledge (Workineh, 2001b).

It is important to distinguish various responses to such environmental crises. Rather than focusing exclusively on saving forests and animal populations at the expense of impoverished rural and indigenous peoples, the Ethiopian and African experience in general reveals that such responses are both ethically unacceptable and pragmatically ineffective.

In the study sites on which this report focuses peasant farmers and pastoralists have not been given alternatives, sufficient advice and room for participation. For example, they are asked to stop charcoal making, firewood collection and cutting down trees without being offered alternative sources of income. Similarly, government policy does not give attention to urban inhabitants and individuals who burn coal or firewood in their bakeries to prepare food and to provide bread for the market. They are too poor to use electricity that would increase the price of bread, and in turn negatively impact the lives of the urban poor. Whereas, countries that have the capacity for providing cheap electricity can avoid the destruction of trees and the pollution of their air through the burning of coal a country like Ethiopia is unable to do so.

Another aspect of how poverty effects indigenous knowledge concerns the practice of high placed officials compelling extension workers and lower-level government officials to collect taxes, organize peasant farmers, collect different types of fees - mostly by force, and to serve as police, cadres, leaders and health officers. These high-level authorities also encourage the imposition of huge projects on the communities that in turn breaks down established styles of life and introduces profound confusions into their world. Individuals are, effectively, forced to become unskilled labourers. Accordingly, this endangers their livelihood and it is for this reason, peasant farmers and pastoralists

consider development agents the staunch servants of politicians rather than of peasant farmers and pastoralists themselves. This fact implies that the government itself is inadvertently undermining indigenous environmental knowledge in the pursuit of shortsighted development and economic goals. Thus, the disappearance of trees and palatable grasses, the appearance of new weeds, human and animal diseases, the appropriation of peasant farmers' forests by the government have further threatened indigenous environmental knowledge.

4.7 Shortcomings in indigenous knowledge

Careful study of indigenous knowledge indicates that not all knowledge and activities of local people are valid and environmentally sound. Some of their practices have had undesirable local environmental effects. Unnecessary dependence on traditional beliefs may undermine objective observations and the real causes of changes. The fact of the matter is that many peasant farmers and pastoralists do not give scientific explanation for their beliefs and practices when the context is one of "superstition". There is also a tendency to consider the neglect of culture and religious practices by some peasant farmers and pastoralists rather than practical activities as the major causes of environmental degradation.

The other limitation of indigenous knowledge is that indigenous technology and practice are not universally applicable, but are locally grounded. Because of the localization of indigenous knowledge systems, the local people do not have the intellectual resources to engage with global issues created by capitalism. Their attempt to deal with new problems can only depend on the local pool of techniques, materials and genetic resources and other borrowed knowledge.

A further significant issue involves negative attitudes towards women have discouraged women from protecting their environment in Oromia. In Oromo culture, women do not have equal status with men; they are excluded from political participation, judicial activities of the people and leadership. Women have never participated in development and environmental decisions. Men have forced women to implement their decision. Women can only informally participate in political life through songs by praising the character of political and military leaders. I submit that this attitude has destructive effects on the natural environment.

In this section I have made such observations as the following: that a wide range of factors have threatened the indigenous environmental ethic of various peoples; that Oromo culture is being challenged and killed, and with it a value system that has sustained a community and an ecosystem for generations; that indigenous environmental knowledge has visible and invisible weaknesses; that the uncritical romanticisation of indigenous environmental knowledge does not help either the people or the natural environment; and that indigenous knowledge needs to be complemented by modern knowledge in order to be more efficient. These observations and others related to them suggest the critical investigation of various practices and thoughts of peasant farmers, pastoralists and indigenous communities throughout the world, and that negative features

of each indigenous environmental ethic should be changed in order to help us meet the challenges and problems of today.

5. Tactics to improve the position of the poor

In Recent years, indigenous people and peasant farmers around the world have begun challenging their own governments and the processes of globalization that are currently being driven by the interests of transnational corporations and the countries of the so-called 'developed' world. They are trying to protect their resources and knowledge from such foreign interests. In Africa, ordinary peasant farmers have considered the government the main obstacle to development. They have tried to find alternative strategies of survival by ignoring the government and avoiding the state. Many peasant farmers have begun to avoid export crops and produce food crops for local consumption (Fantu Cheru, 1996).

5.1 Resistance to cash cropping and other inappropriate projects

Peasant farmers in Kenya, for instance, have almost totally abandoned coffee production, and tea and sugar growers have demonstrated their anger at the perceived hostility of the official buyers toward them by neglecting their crops (Kimenyi cited in Fantu, 1996:157). Ernest T Mallya also states that peasant farmers in Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania, have been affected by government policies. Between mid-1970s and early 1980s peasant farmers began to chop down coffee trees in response to the low prices they were getting from coffee sales. They were interested in producing food crops for the local market and local subsistence rather than producing cash crops for the international market. The main reasons for this move involve the government's pricing policy, which was designed to maximise the surplus produced from the peasantry and the existence of favourable local markets for food crops (see Mallya, 1996).

In Uganda, Zie Gariyo (1996) reports that local people have started to challenge the logic of external forces such as the World Bank/IMF and their market-oriented development agenda by creating local institutions and organizations that are useful to the people.

Another promising example of such resistance beyond the continent of Africa can be found in Brazil. In 1989, indigenous people, rubber tappers, environmentalists and other activists from around the world met in Altamira, Brazil, and forced the World Bank to delay funding of massive hydroelectric dams. The Kayapó, an indigenous nation of the Brazilian rainforest, initiated this meeting (Craig Benjamin and Rebecca Tiessen, 1993:253), and it is in such early gatherings that we can see the origins of the emergence of what today is called the World Social Forum. Thus, as Benjamin and Tiessen observed back in 1993:

> Not only at Altamira, but also in the struggle against oil exploitation in the Ecuadorian Amazon; in the struggle of the James Bay Cree against massive hydroelectric development on their land, and in the 1994

> Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, indigenous peoples are forging multiethnic, transnational alliances to combat some of the largest concentrations of power and capital on the planet (Benjamin and Tiessen, 1993:253).

Furthermore, since the Earth Summit, indigenous people around the world have tried to oppose the dominant intellectual property rights regime. Among others, Indigenous-Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests have demanded in their Charter guaranteed rights to their intellectual property (see Darrell A Posey *et al*, 1995:894).

Concerning this issue of intellectual property rights, indigenous peoples from Ecuador and Colombia have successfully opposed the patenting of *ayahuasca*, a sacred, dream-inducing medicinal drink. Their efforts and worldwide pressure forced the United States Patent and Trademark Office to revoke the *ayahuasca* patent in November 1999 (Posey, 2002:33).

Indigenous peoples have also emphasized the importance of gaining their prior informed consent and the disclosure to the community of information on all phases of research, database preparation and management, and the publication of data. “Some indigenous groups have even declared a moratorium on all research with commercial application until appropriate protection measures are in place” (Posey, 2002:34). The 1994 UNDP Consultation on the Protection and Conservation of Indigenous Knowledge, organized by Coordinating Body for the Indigenous People’s Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), and the 1993 Mataatua Declaration, signed in New Zealand by indigenous groups from many parts of the world are two examples of such action (Posey, 2002:34).

Other examples of successful resistance can be found in India. The Chipko (Hug the tree) movement opposed deforestation in the Himalayan foothills and peasant farmers protested against the unsustainable actions of urban centres and industry (Ramachandra Guha, 1989:81). There is also the example of the Joint Forum of Indian People Against Globalization protests against what has been referred to as the “recolonisation” of India by TNCs (J Martinez-Alier, 1997). Indian farmers also burned genetically modified crops that were planted in Indian farmland (K Inez-Ainger, 1999). And, in 1997, some people in a remote part of Kerala, India, declared their local biodiversity as a community-owned resource, and decided to protect it from TNCs or other groups who want to patent it (Vandana Shiva, 1999:65).

Jerry Mander, referred to above, has taken the time to reflect deeply on the fact that within the last few centuries ugly destructive forces have brutally assaulted tens of millions of people around the world.

> Some native societies have been obliterated. Some people have suffered separation from the source of their survival, wisdom, power, and identity: their lands. Some have fallen from the pressure, compromised, moved to urban landscape, and disappeared (1991:393).

In this context Mander has stressed that indigenous people in the United States strongly fought and continue to fight such brutal historical forces in order to maintain their values. “Their strength is fed by the knowledge that what they are doing is rooted in the earth and deserves to succeed. But aside from that, they fight their battles without real thought of failure” (Mander, 1991:393).

In Ethiopia, Oromo peasant farmers and pastoralists have also protested and are resisting the incursion of foreign interests and the expanding power of trans- national corporations in their economic lives. According to my informants, peasant farmers have had the experience of forcing the government and multinational corporations to stop the eviction of the poor from their land in order to build new industry. It is on such experiences that effective strategies and tactics for defending, empowering, nurturing and further developing the knowledge and ways of being of indigenous and other marginalized peoples must be based.

5.2 Breaking free of dependency

African leaders believed that Africa’s development problems will be solved through the assistance of wealthy nations in the form of a greater flow of technical assistance, more loans on better terms, more foreign investments, accelerated transfer of technology, better prices for primary commodities, greater access to Western markets. NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development) endorsed this trend. However, this tendency underestimates the attempt to promote autonomous development. It has also further worsened, in many ways, socio-economic conditions over the years (John Olushola Magbadelo, 2003:86). Thus, African governments have to find the way to effectively promote endogenous development.

African development can be influenced but should not be dominated by alien ideas. Thus, what B Hetten called indigenization should be given attention. According to Hetten, indigenization refers to “the process in which transplanted ideas and institutions are more or less radically modified by the receivers to suit their own specific situation” (1995:74). Indigenous people, peasant farmers and pastoralists will need to cooperate and force their respective governments to allow them to decide on what happens to their environment, to their resources and to their own activities. People must empower themselves by raising their own consciousness, by recognising their real situation, the existing structures of power, and the possibility of alternatives. They cannot sit down and wait for other groups to empower them.

Although the present situation looks grim, it should be noted that African peasant farmers could empower themselves slowly and gently. They have to raise their voice. This means that they have to say no and resist whenever there is a decision that is against their interest. One obvious observation that needs to be emphasized is that such resistance is almost impossible as isolated individuals. Traditional institutions can be reconstituted to empower communities to formulate, articulate, and defend their modern interests. In countries like Ethiopia this type of resistance is not common. But it is one of the

conclusions of this report that such forms of resistance are needed as necessary conditions for defending the real interests of the people.

Peasant farmers, pastoralists, indigenous people, labour, urban, environmental, and other social movements, and those intellectuals and other groups who support the causes of peasant farmers, pastoralists and indigenous people have to network and exchange ideas about strategies and policies. Through networking, strengthening their numbers, and developing key alliances with helpful organizations, they can empower themselves. They may establish organizations that can lobby in global forums such as in UN, in WIPO, in WTO and the like. Professionally trained scholars have an important role to play in these struggles. They must be encouraged and even required by the people and their institutions to work with and for them by helping the people build up a body of knowledge that can effectively find a place and gain real influence within Western knowledge production systems, in Universities, and in research institutions.

In fact, it is an important conclusion of this report that local people should be the principal beneficiaries of development and environmental protection efforts. Efforts to involve local people in the conservation of biodiversity in Africa will not succeed in the long-term unless local people perceive those efforts as serving their economic and cultural interests (Michael Brown and Babara Wyckoff-Baird, 1992). For example, a community seed bank to which all peasant farmers have access to locally adapted seeds could be established. Farmers should have the freedom to choose what to eat, what to plant and what to sell. Peasant farmers thus should have a collection of materials from which they can choose and develop further to enhance productivity. This helps farmers produce more without losing their resource base upon which production itself is developed. Indigenous materials have the broad genetic base that allows them to survive over changing circumstances and environment. It is possible to raise its productivity without destroying it. So peasant farmers can produce more while maintaining the resource base.

One of my informants, Dr. Meleku Worede, has reported an interesting development in this context. In our interview he talked about how he and his team attempted to transfer an indigenously developed agricultural technology to Italy two years ago. He and his colleague were invited by the Italian government to visit Italy in order to teach them about the technology assess its appropriateness. Subsequently, the Italians funded an Ethiopian project here in Ethiopia, and began to develop an ongoing dialogue with Oromia regional government to expand this research.

In this regard it is also important to recognize that the government has an important role to play in insuring that powerful external forces such as Transnational Corporations (TNCs) don’t interfere and overwhelm in the internal affairs of peasant farmers themselves. For example, the government should give them a revolving fund to allow them develop a credit system where they can have access to seed, grow it, give back a certain amount and sell the rest. The government should also assist in the formation of both formal and informal markets. Once such markets generate money, they can use the money to build on their activities which empower them to buy more things so as to

manage their own affairs rather than relying on handouts from NGOs and other foreign entities.

In addition government and indigenous intuitions can work together in introducing such modern technologies as biogas, solar energy, and communication facilities that would enhance their self-determined innovations in response to the pressures of their new position within a global market.

5.3 Consolidating and using indigenous knowledge

Peasant farmers, pastoralists and other indigenous people could also benefit from the study of their knowledge by intellectuals and other agents. Experience has shown that indigenous peoples have facilitated productive dialogue between their leaders and the scientific community. Posey (2002) has reported that the Dene, the Saami, various Aboriginal Land Councils, numerous Maori groups and organizations, as well as the Zuni, Kuna, Masaai, and Cree, to name but a few, effected significant collaborative projects. “Indigenous organizations, such as the Indigenous Peoples’ Biodiversity Network, International Alliance of Indigenous-Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, and Keepers of the Treasures have led to initiatives that encourage dialogue with non-indigenous peoples involved in research, business, development, and planning” (Posey, 2002:34). However, in relation to such cooperative schemes it is extremely important to stress that in undertaking such projects the informed consent of all peoples and their communities must be obtained prior to the initiation of any such research and the methodologies, relevant observation, conclusions and specific recommendation fully discussed and understood by all the effected individuals and groups. As Posey (2002) suggested dialogue and partnership with indigenous peoples, rather than observation and distant analysis, are instrumental in recording and understanding their own knowledge.

Concerns such as these, thus, bring us to the question of the WTO. Will the WTO recognize the sovereignty of 'developing' nations and respect their domestic laws and will the rightful power of ‘developing’ countries as the representative of the vast majority of humanity be acknowledged in the negotiation and enforcement of trade regulations. Currently, the governments of so-called 'developed' nations, that tend to defend the interests of TNCs as the presumed motors of 'development', advise 'developing' countries that if they are really interested in development they have to be 'pragmatic' and accept the models they proffer. However that model does not always 'work', at least for the interests of the majority of people of truly developing nations whether 'developed' or 'developing'. This is because the model is designed in relation to an economic analysis that is only capable of recognising the interests of international capital and 'development' as driven by profit motives. Currently what is happening is that, in effect, the arms of many developing countries are being twisted to accept WTO trade regulation, in spite of the fact that many of them are contrary to the real interests of their people. One consequence is the maintenance of a kind of neo-colonial economic order in which the natural resources of the formerly colonized regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America are taken by the former colonial and imperial nations converted into marketable commodities and then sold back to the former colonies thus, in reality, further under developing them.

On the other hand, if ‘developing’ countries do not join WTO, or at least play by it's rules their own trade position in the global market will further collapse. Thus governments must be held accountable *to* their people and the local interests of their various constituencies *by* their people and local constituencies if they are to at least survive and minimize the negative pressures that the current globalised economic order are bringing to bare on the interests of the majority of the human population. Networks of international solidarity weaved from relations between self-empowered and mutually self-empowering localities must be developed to effectively challenge and change the fundamental orientations of current profit driven processes of globalization.

6. Can ethical dialogue enable currently marginalized voices in Africa to influence development agendas?

6.1 Potential and limitations

It can be argued that ethical dialogue can help the poor to realize their needs and ambitions, indeed it is the conclusion of this report that ethical dialogue is a necessary condition for such real authentic development among indigenous, poor, or otherwise marginalized groups. Such dialogue can be constituted as a real political force – if there is the will to make it happen.

However, there are some obvious limitations that need to be taken into account. Many scholars and professionals in the environmental and developmental issues have argued that to rely on ethics is idealistic and unrealistic (see Barnabas Dickson, 2000). Although I share the view held by Dower (1998) that ethical reasoning can make a difference, the empirical evidence is clear that despite the fact that wonderful ethical principles formulated by ethicists and countries during international conferences on various subjects, the world is not yet on a path toward just and environmentally sound development.

Transnational corporations and various countries have continued to promote their interests at the expense of the natural environment and poor countries. Ethical dialogue has not had enough influence or power to adequately limit and ultimately end transnational corporations' and powerful countries' *unjust* and destructive exploitation of the environment and weaker countries and peoples. What is needed are fundamental changes in the structures of global power such that the 'weaker' countries who represent the vast majority of humanity are no longer *weak* and the 'powerful' countries that represent a tiny minority of humanity and perhaps no one’s real long term interests are no longer *powerful*.

It should be recognized that not even the governments of so-called ‘developed’ nations do have the power to control TNCs. Such corporations clearly have upper hand. Governments in the ‘developed’ world cannot protect the interests of their people let alone the interests of the ‘developing’ world. International organizations including United Nations and the people have not yet forced transnational corporations and capitalism to be environmentally friendly, and respect international treaties.

One problem is that the public at large in the ‘developed’ world who have, at least formally, a good deal of democratic control over their governments, are not sufficiently informed and far-sighted enough to understand what is going on in other parts of the world or their real interests in defending the global environment and marginalized people from the ravages of corporate driven development. Organizations such as the one that commissioned this report need to facilitate information flows and dialogues between indigenous and marginalized groups in the 'developing' world and majority populations in the 'developed' world. Dr. Gail Presbey, an American philosopher, is a good example of what can be done in this regard. Since she returned to the US after spending a few years in Kenya on a Fulbright scholarship she has been bringing representative of the Massai of south-eastern Kenya and northern Tanzania to Michigan to share their cultural, political, and economic perspectives with those of the people of Michigan. Thus the people of Michigan are learning about the Massai and the Massai are learning about the US and the history of the auto industry.

The question in relation to ethical dialogue is therefore, what is the way out? On one hand, one can reasonably argue that capitalism is here to stay, and multiple values need to be figured in when we talk about profit in the capitalist system. Profit can be a good thing. But it is not good if factories are unsafe and pollute the environment. So we need to bring a number of values to bear on the profit motive. We must interfere with the capitalist system in order to modify its behaviour. Capitalism has to meet some minimum environmental standards to keep it going.

In this regard we need to remember that international capital still passes through the hands of real living human beings - or at lest orders are given to punch the appropriate buttons to initiate the electronic computerized transfers. Accordingly, in terms of long term survival, personal fear might cause those in power to forgo some of their profits. These reality based fears can be enhanced by ethicists, health professionals and utilitarian arguments addressed specifically to their interests.

In can be argued that this is one reason that there are laws regulating pollution in all the major capitalist countries. However, there will always be a struggle between the fear of the individual and the dynamics of the system. The fear of the individual will force him/her to take steps to curb the excesses of the dynamics of the system, but the systemically induced greed of having more power and wealth is also very strong. In developing tactics concerning any particular issue within the current world order such dynamics must be kept in mind. Just as the fear of slave and/or worker revolts have contributed to the development of labour laws limiting the exploitation of workers, so fear of an environmental crisis can be used to apply pressure to the development of environmental laws which limit the devastation of the profit driven global economy.

It is becoming clear to increasing numbers of people that unlimited growth for indefinite time is not viable. Growth in consumption and pollution cannot continue indefinitely. The Earth has limited natural resources. We are already facing global ecological problems including rising sea levels, the melting of the polar icecaps, shortage of fresh water,

ozone layer depletion and so on. The reality is that they will only be able to continue their current exploitive practices for a relatively short period of time. One day, their exploitation of global resources will collapse.

To put matters another way, it is not physically possible for powerful self-interested states and transnational corporations to continue to grow indefinitely without global consequences. There is growing evidence that some form of collapse is inevitable. Global environmental crises are being multiplied. As such crisis comes into view there is reason to expect that the knowledge of indigenous people, hunter-gatherers, peasant farmers and the pastoralists will be rediscovered. I am hopeful that the industrial mind set will discover the value of indigenous knowledge. Organizations such as the one that commissioned this report should be prepared to facilitate such rediscovery.

What is absolutely undeniable to any rational and informed human being is that humanity as a whole must develop alternative attitudes towards nature. This imperative, in the context of the concerns of this report suggests that even if only within the framework of a minimal utilitarian justificatory scheme, the global community has ethical obligation to assist the marginalized people to get rid of oppressive and exploitative global structures, because the very resources these people have been sustaining for themselves also benefit the whole world. Thus, instead of looking only for immediate gratification, TNCs and other powerful players in the current world order should respect the knowledge, needs, and aspirations of the communities that mange resources.

6.2 Using self interest of powerful parties as an entry point for dialogue

In relation to this report's concern for the efficacy of ethical dialogue - the above considerations support the notion that powerful countries, corporations and others do have some self-interested reasons for developing a dialogue. What they are resistant to are regulations that might develop as a result of such dialogues - especially if it means they have to spend more money to reduce and/or clean up pollution. Self-interested dialogue can have some positive effects, but dialogues based on pure self interest are not likely to be sufficient to move us towards a transition to a sustainable and peaceful world.

Nevertheless, the key is to get some starting point for communication. Only then will there develop opportunities for real mutual respect and curiosity like “how wonderful that you are different from me, then we can learn from each other and maybe develop something new!” As Johan Galtung says, “A major step forward for a multicultural society is with the parts seeing each other as sources of mutual enrichment” (2003:29). This is the direction we ought to be tying to move with the development of a *global* society. In this regard, ethical dialogue with intellectuals in the advanced countries is essential to address global problems. There are quite considerable numbers of intellectuals in academia, in research institutions and in policy-making agencies that are willing to listen.

For example during the Rio Conference on environment and development intellectuals from all parts of the world came to some kind of agreement because of prior dialogue

they had between them. The newly established World Social Forum is another important platform for this kind of dialogue.

6.3 Using alliances and publicity to expose illegitimate dialogue positions

There is evidence that ethical dialogue can influence TNCs and other powerful players in the global economy. Among others ETC Group (Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration, formerly known as Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), has influenced the movements of TNCs by exposing their unlimited expansion and appropriation of resources in the world. Public awareness combined with candid dialogue can help contribute to solutions. When all stakeholders know there is an open honest and persistent dialogue developing they won't be able to capitalize on ignorance as many multinationals do who reside in the 'developing' world precisely because of lack of awareness.

As has been stated earlier on, there are some very grave imbalances in the current global system that must be addressed, and a necessary condition for addressing them is ethical clarification and rectification. Ethical clarification is just the first step. The ethical element must be included in our understanding of development because we frame our ultimate developmental goals from the point of view of some ideals or visions of the future and of how our world *ought* to be. This point has been stressed by Daniel Smith. In discussing *Pragmatic vs. Ideological Development in Africa*, he observes that, "one cannot advocate development without advocating change. And, if one is advocating change then one must have some idea of what ought to be, in relation to what is" (2002:258). However, the fact is that ethics has not been at the centre of development discourse in Ethiopia and the rest of Africa.

6.4 Building the capacity of local groups to articulate alternative development visions

Ethical dialogue *within* local communities is a starting point that should also be institutionally enhanced. Ethical dialogue can be effectively used to enhance the participation and empowerment of local people on their own development. Obviously, indigenous ethics should form the foundation of such dialogues. The process can have multiple impacts in terms of raising awareness, self-empowerment, and drawing attention and putting pressure on decision makers. For example, ethical dialogue might:

- consolidate local positions and strengthen their coordinated action;
- strengthen the view of local peoples as dynamic credible partners;
- reduce the ignorance about local aspirations in powerful groups;
- expose powerful groups positions to ethical critique;
- introduce an opportunity to showcase those weak positions to influential people or institutions who might press for change; and
- introduce rules to discussions to force adequate recognition of local peoples opinions - e.g. equity of opportunity to speak, what would you think if this was done to you, preferential rights to the most vulnerable etc.

However, it should be kept in mind that people do not experience indigenous ethics in terms of an idea, as something written. It is internalized, and very often it is not easily verbalized. Participatory methods and facilitation may be needed to draw out the key narratives within local ethics and development aspirations.

From the perspective of the author of this report it indeed seems inevitable that humanity must either change the nature of our current growth oriented and profit driven modes of living and development, or the ecosystem of our earth and of which we are mere children will collapse. Finally, changes will come whether we like it or not.

7. Concluding remarks and ways forward

The Oromo and other African people have fostered belief systems and social norms that encouraged or even enforced limits to the exploitation of biological resources. Oromo ecotheology has some powerful beliefs, values and practices that push humans to live in harmony with nature. The Oromo do not simply consider justice, integrity and respect as human virtues applicable to human beings but also they extend them to nonhuman species and mother Earth.

I have also shown that indigenous knowledge has been challenged by modernization, the market economy, transnational corporations, foreign religions, the government's acculturation and assimilation policies. The imminent loss of cultural knowledge with the passing of the elders, environmental losses caused by resource extraction and other human activities, and the attempt to integrate indigenous knowledge into scientific frameworks also constitute real challenges to its preservation and further development. For example, the market economy further marginalizes the African poor who lack the capabilities and assets to take advantage of opportunities opened by trade liberalization and are unable to cope with its effects. Such marginalisation profoundly affects the poor's indigenous knowledge. It also leads to the promotion of agricultural systems oriented toward export with the side effect of neglecting domestic food production.

The report also discussed how not all aspects of indigenous knowledge are useful. Some practices and beliefs can be a hindrance to development and environmental protection.

The report documents how peasant farmers, pastoralists, indigenous people, and various social movements are working to establish and develop networks to challenge their own states, the giant corporations that straddle the globe, the undemocratic rules and structures of the WTO and other global forces.

Peasant farmers are reluctant to accept newly introduced crops, chemical fertilizers and policies until they see the significance of these things. According to the informants, when the people face new problems, they will choose elders who will contact government officials or other external forces so as to solve the problem through dialogue. A case in point is that, in the 1980s when government officials instructed about 1000 people to establish and move to two villages, they sent their representatives to government officials

to reverse the decision and allow them to establish four villages. The dialogue between the two groups persuaded government officials to accept the demands of the people.

It is also worth noting that during the first years of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, the people had the power to recommend their leaders to the government. There were cases where the people removed some leaders from office, and assigned new leaders and approached the government to endorse their decision. During these years local peasant associations were independent and efficient. Peasant farmers showed a genuine commitment and dedication to their own development. They were also supported by students. However, the military government gradually established complete economic and political control by abolishing peasant farmers' self-determination and local democracy.

Another important example is that the Oromo in Borena agreed to ban local alcoholic drinks in 2003, because they thought that these drinks have been aggravating the spread of HIV/AIDS and poverty in rural areas. The representatives of the Borena Oromo persuaded the government to support their decision. Consequently, the government endorsed their decision and conveyed this information to the Ethiopian people through local media.

The report also observes that compared to other regions, ethical dialogue between the poor and their rulers is not common in Ethiopia. Presently civil society is trying to push this kind of dialogue to come to the surface. There are some rights based advocacy organizations that are using the human rights approach to dialogue. Through such dialogue with the people they will be able to gradually engage in ethical dialogue and there by address various development issues. But, at the moment they are at the very primitive stage.

This report suggests that the promotion of Western development models at the expense of indigenous knowledge and practice has long term negative consequences for the former. International institutions of development assistance such as the World Bank, and the IMF along with trade regimes such as that being 'negotiated' within the WTO tend to promote large projects that pose serious limitations on farmers' abilities to develop/produce their own seeds and exchange them with other farmers, including protection of farmer-bred varieties that are competitive in the market.

We need to stress that development is not only economic growth. It should include the well-being of the people. As Lansana Keita has noted:

> [c]ritical analysis of the idea of development reveals that development entails not just economic ministrations about 'alleviating poverty' but also psycho-sociological analysis in the form of the examination of mental structures, beliefs, and attitudes conditioned by the colonial experience, sociological analysis in the form of examining the role that religion plays in facilitating or retarding development, and historical analysis in the form of evaluating the historical

> contingency of economic, political, and sociological ideas of Western provenance that are now viewed as universal and necessary for development (2004:5).

The unlimited exploitation of natural resources - condemned by many indigenous ecotheological worldviews such as the Oromo's, must be restricted. If we continue to push every thing we touch to extinction, we will destroy ourselves. One ironic, yet tragic, aspect of this situation is that the poor, who are often the guardians of such potentially redemptive worldviews as the Oromo's, are the very people who are being evicted, deprived of their land and livelihood. Under such conditions we cannot expect them to continue to protect forests.

To this end, ethical dialogue among traditions helps us to rethink about our place and future on the planet Earth. It helps us to understand diversity as constitutive of reality. A creative cross cultural dialogue can help us recognize and reveal the importance of difference, and enable us to hear and benefit from important voices which would otherwise be unrepresented or underrepresented. Ethical dialogue will enable us to cultivate understanding of each other's point of view, to be more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of others, to better appreciate our differences and embrace our diversity, to look beyond differences and to work together on matters that are crucial for the survival of all beings and thereby recognize that we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

At a global level, ethical dialogue of cultural traditions will help us to build a more civilized and a more just world for human and nonhuman beings – for example through approaches such as that of the Earth Charter. It is a tool of betterment and growth, and should be a basis for meaningful action and enrichment. It would help different traditions to gain new insights about their own principles of life and that of others. Thus, we need to participate effectively, efficiently, and appropriately in the dialogue of cultural traditions. What is required is shared responsibility in finding global and local solutions to global and local problems.

8. Recommendations

This report suggests the following major recommendations:

- Indigenous intellectual property rights ought to be protected and economic incentives established to encourage the discovery, maintenance, and further development of the indigenous knowledge of peasant farmers, pastoralists and other marginalized peoples.

- Progressive ecotheological worldviews ought to be respected and integrated into the various global forums of dialogue and debate concerning developmental agendas.

- Professionally trained scholars must be encouraged and even required - by the people and their institutions, to work with and for them by helping the people build up a

body of knowledge that can effectively find a place and gain real influence within Western knowledge production systems, in Universities, and in research institutions.

- Peasant farmers, pastoralists, and other indigenous and/or marginalized people must gradually form powerful networks of alliance and solidarity as a basis for creating an effective lobby in global forums.

- *Local people* should be explicitly identified and conceptualized as the principal beneficiaries of all policies concerned with development and environmental protection rather than abstract national or regional 'developmental' goals. They should have their own representatives at various levels, and should develop and maintain a national organization that would serve as the grassroots voice of the local people.

- The value of traditional conservation practices and indigenous ethical orientations must be acknowledged and rewarded in order to avoid the situation in which indigenous peoples' abandon such practices and ethical principles due to the pressures of poverty.

- Successful experiences of resistance to negative policies and practices of government, multinational corporations, and other powerful external forces must be documented and widely communicated as a basis for developing effective strategies and tactics for defending, empowering, nurturing and further developing the knowledge and ways of being of indigenous and other marginalized peoples.

- Indigenous people themselves must overcome negative tendencies within indigenous communities such as the resistance to transmitting and freely distributing knowledge, the marginalization of women and their knowledge, etc. The tendency to idealize indigenous knowledge and ways of life must be resisted.

- Concerned governmental and nongovernmental groups need to facilitate information flows and dialogues between indigenous and marginalized groups in the 'developing' world and majority populations in the 'developed' world.

- Ethical dialogue, especially indigenous ethical dialogue, *within* local communities should also be institutionally enhanced and used to strengthen the participation and empowerment of local people in their own development.

- Finally, long term strategies must be developed that will lead to the restructuring of the geopolitical order. Rather than the current situation in which tiny privileged minorities are powerful and the vast majority of humanity occupies a relatively weak position, in the future real power ought to reside in the hands of the majority.

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Appendix 1: list of informants

PEASANT FARMERS

NO.	INFORMANT'S NAME	SEX	AGE	OCCUPATION	POSITION	DATE OF INTERVIEW	PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1	*Obboo** Begesha Abdi	M	65	Peasant Farmer		2004	Gawasa/Dale Danbal
2	*Obboo* Bejjiga Rorisa	M	73	"		2004	"
3	*Obboo* Beka Lidete	M	48	"		2004	"
4	*Obboo* Bekele Buli	M	70	"		2004	"
5	*Obboo* Bekele Aredo	M	75	"		2004	"
6	*Addee#* Debritu Dinegde	F	46	"		2004	"
7	*Obboo* Eshetu Hailu	M	43	"	Chairman	2004	"
8	*Obboo* Getachew Negash	M	34	"	Head of Public Organization	2004	"
9	*Obboo* Girma Ayanu	M	40	"		2004	"
10	*Obboo* Girma Kebede	M	50	"		2004	"
11	*Obboo* Kassa Kamisie	M	52	"		2004	"
12	*Obboo* Magra Bedhadha	M	50	"		2004	"
13	*Obboo* Mengesha Fayissa	M	84	"		2004	"
14	*Obboo* Tadesse Abdi	M	75	"		2004	"
15	*Obboo* Tesema Worku	M	31	"	Head of Militia	2004	"

* *Obbo*= Mr.
\# *Addee*=Ms.

Appendix 2. Ethiopian scholars

NO	INFORMANT'S NAME	SEX	AGE	ORGANISATION	POSITION	PROFESSION/ SPECIALISATION	CITIZENSHIP	DATE OF INTERVIEW	PLACE OF INTERVIEW
1	Mr. Dessalegn Rahmato	M	64	Addis Ababa University, Department of Philosophy (1983-1998). Forum for Social Studies (NGO)	Lecturer Manager	Political Scientist /Philosopher	Ethiopia	2004	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
2	Dr. Melaku Worede	M	68	Biodiversity Institute (1979-1993) FAO	Director International Scientific Advisor, Seeds of Survival/ International Member of FAO Panel of Eminent Experts on Ethics in Food and Agriculture	Geneticist and Plant Breeder	Ethiopian	2004	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia