

Engagement Discussion with Idir Leaders in Kebele 03/09

Two discussion sessions were conducted with community members including Idir leaders in December 2007 and January 2008. During these discussions the participants have advised the partnership organizers to conduct separate discussions with different groups. Accordingly we have conducted discussion with Car Washers Associations and Garbage Collectors Associations. The garbage collectors and the car washers have conducted separate discussions and elected their own representatives to the Partnership Core Committee and to take the ABCD Training. This discussion is a continuation of engagement discussion with the volunteer Idir leaders within the kebele 03/09. We invited the 18 Idirs within the kebele and the above participants from 7 (seven) Idirs came to the discussion.

The discussion was started by briefing the last two community, youth and children meetings about the strengths, gaps and strengths of the Gedam Sefer community, youth and children. The participants were also re-briefed about community-university partnership. As the continuation of the partnership engagement process, the participants were informed that this meeting is meant to include and work together with Idir leaders and the Idir members at large to bring a difference within the community. As the objective of the Community-University Partnership is to empower the community members by exploring their members' assets, strengths by filling the gaps with the community's own project (development) ideas. During the discussion focus was made on the difference of the partnership from the Non Government Organization practices.

The Idir leaders stressed that:

- Idir is a community based organization serving its members and is ready for the wellbeing of its members.
- Even though it is only 7 of the 18 Idirs leaders that are attending the meeting, the partnership could work even with one or three volunteer Idirs. Then after others will join by observing and realizing what the partnership may attempt.
- What might bother the participants is that this partnership may not keep its promise, since other NGOs have promised them many ideal objectives, but never come back.
- The ideas that came out from the past community meetings are also shared by them and will work to their realization, and the following engagement discussion may also come out with more ideas.
- We should not waste time in meetings, but go directly to tangible activities and trainings.
- What are the Partnership's programs, project ideas and detailed activities, so that they could mobilize their members with the tangible community benefits. (This question was raised in line with other NGOs practice, assuming that the Partnership is a donor or Aid agency)

After the participants raised these and other issues, the Project Coordinator assured the Idir leaders that:

- The Partnership is for real community and university business to benefit both the community and the university.
- The Partnership has no fixed project plan, activity plan or finance ear-marked for a specific funding; but it is the community members who are going to explore their strength first, and then look for alternatives.
- It is the community that should bring tangible project ideas.
- The core committee which will be strengthened by including volunteer Idir Leaders, youth who are engaged with different activities, women and men involved in garbage collection activities, children, community elders and kebele representatives will prepare their own rules and regulations on how to explore the community's strengths, gaps and project ideas.

- Researchers from Addis Ababa School of Social Works and the University of Illinois at Chicago will work together with the Gedam Sefer Community members.

The Idir leaders appreciated the principles of the Community-University Partnership, and pledged that they will work together for the wellbeing of their community. Accordingly, they agreed that the Chairpersons of these 7 Idirs be part of the Core Group and also attend the ABCD Training