B A S I S

Broadening Access and Strengthening Input Market Systems

BASIS/IDR

Report of a Research Trip: South Wello and Oromiya Zones of Amhara Region, Ethiopia May 27-June 4, 2001

by

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Introduction

This report presents findings from research carried out from May 27-June 4, 2001, in South Wello and Oromiya Zones of Amhara Region, Ethiopia. The fieldwork was carried out as part of the collaborative and multi-disciplinary BASIS/IDR research project titled, "From Household to Region: Factor Market Constraints to Income and Food Security in a Highly Diverse Environment, South Wello, Ethiopia." The project seeks to address theoretical and policy debates about the causes and consequences of food insecurity at the regional to intra-household level by examining the role of such key variables as livelihood strategies, income entitlement, market linkages, agro-ecological zonation, and drought.

The specific purpose of this field research was to: (1) collect rapid ethnographic information at the South Wello Household Survey sites on the social relationships used to cope with drought/famine and to rebuild assets after drought; (2) collaborate with Alula Pankhurst and colleagues in the analysis of their case studies on resource management institutions in South Wello; (3) provide a preliminary summary and analysis of this information, including its implications for next phase of BASIS research;. Given this agenda, fieldwork was carried out in two distinct phases:

> May 28-June 1, 2001: Yigremew Adal and I conducted key informant interviews in the eight kebeles (local administrative units) in South Wello and Oromiya where the household surveys are taking place. We focused on historical and contemporary aspects of people have cope with, and attempted to recover from, famines and severe food crises. In addition, we carried out informal interviews at food distributions that happened to be occuring at two sites in South Wello. All the interviews were exploratory, probing issues and themes, rather than providing definitive 'answers.'
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> June 2-June 3, 2001: I accompanied Alula Pankhurst, Mengistu Dessalegn, and Idris Seid to their case study sites at Maybar in Dessie Zuria and at Gimba in Legambo. We conducted key informant and informal interviews focusing on access to and management of irrigation, pasture, and forestry resources.

The organization of this report reflects these different objectives and field experiences. This opening section gives a summary of the research questions, methods, and findings from each phase of the fieldwork. It is followed by sections providing detailed observations and notes from the interviews. Although this report is the outcome of collaborative research, I alone assume responsibility for any errors in the presentation.

Key Informant Interviews: May 28-June 1, 2001

Research Questions and Methods

The first two rounds of the household survey have generated a wealth of information on South Wello households, their livelihoods, and their connections to the wider political

economy. Ironically, the richness of this data has underscored the need for additional information on the local environment, the history, and the contemporary socioeconomic milieu in which the survey is taking place. For example, what has been the historical experience of the households and their communities with severe droughts and famine? Has it been similar or different in the various kebeles? How have people in the past tried to recover from severe shocks, and how long has it taken them to do so? Have the social relations that people rely on to gain access to resources and labor changed over time? Answering such questions will assist in the interpretation of the quantitative data generated by the survey. Published studies and gray literature on South Wello furnish crucial insights and background, but additional research is often needed to understand the local situation and its connection to wider events and processes.

The first phase of the field trip was essentially exploratory: seeing what historical and social data could be collected on each kebele through a series of one-time key informant interviews. We felt that it was especially important to obtain a local historical perspective on how people cope with, and recover from, famine and hunger. The topics probed through open-ended questioning included the history of local land tenure, historical periods of famine and hunger, processes of recovery from times of food crises, social capital, and other agrarian and social change. For us an integral part of the research process was learning what topics and questions resonated with the interviewees. We tried to be flexible, learning from unexpected information and questioning our assumptions.

Arrangements for interviews were carried out through local development agents (agricultural extension officers), who helped identify and locate informants.[1] We sought out informants who were especially knowledgeable of local history. Due to time and logistical constraints, we conducted only one interview per kebele. Most interviews took place with a single person. In three kebeles, however, two people were jointly interviewed. Sometimes spectators joined in the discussion. A detailed description of the setting for each interview is included in Part I. As is shown in Table 1, all the key informants were middle-aged or elderly males. It also bears repeating that the interviews were not aimed at collecting a definitive, uncontested "local perspective," as if such a thing existed. Instead, the key informant interviews were exploratory learning exercises, providing some sense of events, trends, and connections. *If further, more systematic, key informant interviewing occurs – and I believe strongly that it should – then a deliberate effort should be made to interview women as well as men from a range of backgrounds.*

Part I contains the notes taken by Castro of the English translations of the interviews done by Yigremew. Although the notes provide a detail account of each interview, they are by no means full transcriptions. Yigremew has reviewed the notes and made corrections to an earlier draft. It should be noted that most of the interviews were conducted in Amharigna, with the exception of those in Bati, where Oromigna was used. The local development agents in Bati helped with the translations.

[1] Yigremew also needed to speak with the development agents about the initiation of the third round of the household surveys. Therefore, contacting the agents served a dual purpose.

Two food distributions were observed while in the field. We took advantage of the event to informally interview local officials and members of the crowd.

Findings

Highlights from the key informant interviews are summarized in Table 1. Several patterns can be discerned from the interviews and field observations – "findings" that might also serve as issues for follow-up in further ethnographic research:

1. There is a wide range in historical experience and cultural memory concerning famine and hunger among the different agro-ecological zones and farming systems. Dessalegn Rahmato has noted that, "When famine occurs in the northeast, it is rarely the case that all areas are affected equally and at the same time."[2] What emerged from the interviews is that the historical experience and memory of famine and hunger are highly differentiated among the kebeles due to their diverse environments and farming systems. The experience and memory of hunger appears deepest and most closely defined in the lowlands (Chachato and Kamme), where famines and severe droughts are remembered with distinct names. In contrast, some midland and highland kebeles have been spared famines, at least until recently. In Gerado, for example, the presence of extensive irrigation helped villagers overcome severe droughts. Jamma's reputation as a grain-surplus area is reflected in the claim by a Yeddo elder that: "We don't really know hunger."

2. The vulnerability of some kebele and households to shocks such as drought and crop failure has changed through time. Population growth and conservation policies have resulted in the conversion of grain fields and grazing grounds into homesteads and eucalyptus stands in Gerado. During the time of the Derg the production cooperative took over much of the irrigated land, marginalizing many Gerado households. The interviews in Legambo suggested that the wereda had been either surplus producing or at least largely self-sufficient until recently. In Temmu, for example, the two elderly informants suggested that people have suffered a series of poor harvests – and thus chronic hunger – in the past decade due to bad rains, lack of effective fertilizer, and a general unresponsiveness of the soil. The key informant in Kamme cited land redistribution as the turning point in the kebele's agricultural decline, with droughts, pests, plant disease, and other misfortunes constantly undermining local farming. He noted: "People developed hunger." However, observations and interviews in Kamme and Bati suggested that the area now experiences a relatively high degree of labor migration, with remittances received from kin folk as far away as Saudi Arabia. Trading also seemed a very important activity. It might be worthwhile to see whether these off-farm income sources have actually increased through time in Bati, and their implications for responding to, and recovering from, shocks such as severe drought.

[2] Dessalegn Rahmato, Famine and Survival Strategies. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1991, p. 68.

3. Recovery from shocks such as famine or severe droughts can take several years and depends on a number of variables. Key factors influencing the length and effectiveness of the recovery process include: the severity of the shock, the buffers (stored grain, livestock, other assets) people can draw upon, their ability to use kin and other social networks to acquire access to livestock and other assets, the amount of government and other assistance, harvests and market conditions in the immediate post-shock period, and a household's own efforts applied towards recovery.

4. Increasing poverty has made recovery from shocks more difficult for households in many kebeles. Several informants reported that the incidence of poverty has grown due to land scarcity, declining soil productivity, reduced grazing, lack of alternative income sources, and other factors. This situation reduces the assets that households possess to buffer shocks and to recover with. It also means that people have less to share with needy kinfolk and friends. The key informant in Tach-Akesta succinctly observed: "Mutual assistance is diminishing sometimes because of poverty."

5. In some places competition, conflict, and cultural change have eroded the social relations that people have relied on for accessing resources and assistance. Once again, increased poverty, including land scarcity and declining income opportunities provide the setting for this situation. In Tebasit, people used to allow needy relatives to borrow plots for cultivation. Nowadays, however, they are reluctant to do so because the borrowers may claim ownership. Although people still try to help their kin and neighbors, there seems to be less sympathy. The key informant in Gerado emphasized that jealousy, driven by poverty and intense competition over food aid, that increasingly overwhelms social relations. The Kamme elder observed that "some conflict" has emerged in the community due to land scarcity and decreasing production. He added: "We pray now because we have conflict." The erosion of social relations is by no means a universal feature in South Wello. The interviews in Jamma did not mention any change in mutual assistance or social relations. In Chachato, the elders even claimed that people were more supportive than in the past. We recorded: "Now everybody helps, they give to anyone who has suffered. People now devalue money. They know men are worth more."

Recommendation for Follow-Up

Once again, the preliminary nature of these "findings" must be emphasized. Hopefully, the interviews show the importance of obtaining further ethnographic information in the household survey areas. Such information can be collected quickly, though greater thought and care will need to be given to the issue of selecting key informants to overcome possible bias (for example, to avoid interviewing only males, the prosperous, those who live near main roads, and so on).

Table 1

Summary of Key Findings from Key Informant Interviews, South Wello and Oromiya Zones, May 28-June 1, 2001

Location, *Agro-Eco Setting*, Key informant	**Recall of Famine/Hunger Periods and Long Term Changes in Agriculture**	**Post-Famine/Crop Failure Recovery, Including Food Aid**	**Changes in Local Socio-Economic Relationships**
Tebasit, Dessie Zuria Wereda, *Dega*, 47 years old male	-1965 (EC): drought, no help -1977 (EC):drought over a wide area, not as severe as 1965, food aid but many still starved -1990 (EC) severe crop failure in belg area, food aid (still delivered) -Population-driven land scarcity, scarcity of oxen, and lack of fertilizer hurt agriculture	Depends on (1) drought severity; (2) government and kinfolk assistance; (3) a family's effort applied towards recovery. Takes 3-4 or 4-5 years (according to younger men) for recovery. People now experiment with meher farming but frost and rains are constraints.	Help from kin declined due to poverty, land pressure (borrowers now try to claim plot ownership), and less sympathy. But kin still often try to help when they can..
Gerado, Dessie Zuria Wereda *Woina-dega*, 81 year old male	-Irrigation in the village always mitigated the impact of drought -In the past people came seeking assistance during droughts -1977 (EC) drought accompanied by cholera outbreak in temporary settlements -Production cooperative during the Derg took the best land, marginalizing many households -Conversion of land for settlements, grazing restrictions, eucalyptus planting have reduced farming resource and incomes	Current food aid procedures drive people to poverty. To be eligible one cannot have an ox or other small assets. If you sell your ox results in permanent poverty. There is much jealousy and quarreling about	Economic conditions were better in the past. Today there is mass poverty, lack of income sources, grazing restrictions, dependence on food aid. People are jealous. The cause of poverty through time is population increase and land scarcity.
Chachato, Bati Wereda, *Kola*, 70 year old male, 65 year old male	Distinct names for famines: -'Took away everything': killed people & livestock, -One who has no tail to catch': 7 years later, killed livestock -'Faithless': people died without rites -'Impoverishes those who were not aware': the wise saw famine coming & sold cattle 'Feeding tree leave to animals': in the 1970s, only livestock died -'1977' (EC): 2 year disaster, killed people & livestock -1999: drought but not as bad as the above years, some migration to Chaffa	Takes about 3 years, people sell grain, wood fuel, and gradually buy animals. They also engage in labor migration as far as Djibouti . Those with capital will engage in trading.	In the past people shared but today the social support system has improved. Now everybody helps, give to all who suffers. People now devalue money. They know that men are worth more.
Kamme, Bati Wereda, *Kola*, 80 year old male	Distinct name for famines: -'Faithless': before the Italian times, livestock devastated, some people died, migration to Chaffa and Kalu -Droughts (mild or severe) every 7 years since -1983-84: very severe, people & animals died, 2 years continuous food, Bati a food aid center -Since land redistribution the harvests decreased due to drought, pests, plant disease	Takes 3-5 years. Off-farm income and remittances (including from overseas), selling crops, and exchanging an ox for two heifers or calves are strategies used for recovery.	Since redistribution occurred farm production has fallen due to drought, pests, disease. People developed hunger. There is some conflict. We now pray because we have conflict.

Summary of Key Findings from Key Informant Interviews, South Wello and Oromiya Zones, May 28-June 1, 2001 (Continued)

Location, *Agro-Eco Setting*, Key informant	**Recall of Famine/Hunger Periods and Long Term Changes in Agriculture**	**Post-Famine/Crop Failure Recovery, Including Food Aid**	**Changes in Local Socio-Economic Relationships**
Tullu-mojo, Jamma Wereda, *Woina-dega*, 48 year old male	-1984: drought killed animals, people died of diarrhea, some food aid, market revived later on -1990-91 (EC): frost, mild	Took two-plus years to recover from 1984 crop failure. Arranged co-ownership of calves, kept animals in others' herds, bought livestock	Not much change in labor exchange and other forms of sharing.
Yeddo, Jamma Wereda, *Woina-dega*, 55 year old male, 60 year old male	-Not much drought & hunger: 'We don't really know hunger -1984: severe drought, some livestock deaths, people fled to this area seeking food and work	If crop failure, people (especially the rich) rely on stored crops; ask the rich to help; grain borrowing but it must be repaid promptly.	Reciprocity continues during harvests, weddings, house building.
Temmu, Legambo Wereda, *Dega* 78 year old male, 67 year old male	-Italian period: 1 year crop failure -1974: mild drought (heard about devastation elsewhere) -1983-84: drought but this area was better off than elsewhere; many came here seeking help -Since 1990 (EC): several years of poor harvests due to bad rains, non-response to fertilizer	They used to have large farm surpluses and engage in trading livestock. Now deepening poverty, it is hard to recover. Insufficient land for surpluses. After a good season livestock prices increase, so it is costly to obtain them. Food aid is not received on time.	Sharecropping and land rentals but no borrowing due to land shortage. Friends help one another when there is an emergency, such as a house burning or a death.
Tach-Akesta, Legambo Wereda, *Dega*, 57 year old male	-No severe food shortages when he was young -1984: drought, people came here seeking relief, some of them died. Some people here also died. -During the Derg the establishment of the production cooperation displaces some households from the fertile valley -1990 (EC): drought, hunger, people traveled in search of help. About half the population still gets food aid. -Productivity of the land has generally declined in recent years	Takes two year to recover, if the next harvests are good. If bad harvest follows a time of shock, then it is not possible to recover (response by his daughter). People are increasingly adopting meher production and the use of fertilizer.	Increasingly switching from belg to meher production. Mutual assistance is diminishing due to poverty. Kire operates but offers less assistance than in the past. On rare occasions people seek aid from the *zawuya* (Muslim prayer community).

Field Visits on Resource Management Institutions: June 2-June 3, 2001

Research Questions and Methods

The case studies by Alula Pankhurst, Mengistu Dessalegn, and Indris Seid focus on natural resource management institutions and their relationships with the state and market influences. Their research is complementary to the ongoing household surveys, which furnish information on household and intra-household level access and use of resources. The studies deal with informal and formal institutions at the local, regional, national, and global levels that regulate access to and management of natural resources in South Wello. Their fieldwork has examined the nature and historical dynamism of management institutions for particular resources (forests, pasture, and water supplies for irrigation), including the roles of policy, of governmental transitions, and of markets. Investigating these issues helps illuminate the multiple and complex linkages between the micro- and macro-levels regarding resource access, management, and use. My task was to assist in the analysis of the cases.

Our research methodology during the fieldwork on June 2-3 consisted of visiting the resource sites – the Lake Maybar area (including nearby irrigation canals and pasture) in Dessie Zuria Wereda and Gimba pasture and Tullu-Awolia town in Legambo Wereda. These visits permitted first-hand observation of local resource use. We also carried out informal interviews with men and women, including some who had been interviewed before by the research team. On both dates we ended up carrying out extensive interviews with two individuals: a sheik at Maybar and a businessman in Tullu-Awolia. Alula, Mengistu, and Indris kindly translated the various discussions for me, which were conducted in Amharigna.

Findings and Recommendations for Follow-Up

Part II of this report contains my detailed notes from the field visits, including my notes from interviews. I will not try to duplicate the detailed findings from their specific case studies, whose drafts are in various stages of preparation. Instead, I will present a few general findings based on the field visits and my limited knowledge of their cases. I also discuss the implications of these findings for the next phase of the BASIS research:

1. Competition over common property resources (water, pasture, forest) is intensifying among diverse stakeholders, sometimes resulting in conflict. For example, Lake Maybar is called on to supply an even greater number of irrigation users, while people in a communal pasture downstream worry about their water supply. The communal pasture at Gimba is giving way to farms and a rapidly developing peri-urban center. Open grazing, especially on hillsides, is being supplanted by privately managed eucalyptus stands. This competition is driven by a number of forces: demographic change (population growth, urbanization), policy (privatization, development initiatives, conservation measures), and market pressures. Divergent interests in the access, use, and management of resources have led to tensions and sometimes open conflict among peasants, entrepreneurs, peri-urban residents, and state agents. It should be noted that natural resource conflicts in South Wello have long existed,

though one could argue that the scope and magnitude of competing pressures on resources have reached an unprecedented level. Some key informant interviews should be carried out in the other household survey kebeles to determine whether similar processes are at work affecting local access, use, and management of natural resources.

2. Formal and informal natural resource management institutions differ in their response to these competing pressures. Water management at Maybar has become formalized through a committee composed of local officials and elected representatives from the irrigation users. Management of state and community forests has remained in official hands, despite pronouncements through the years that local communities would assume a greater management role. Instead, communal pasture on hillsides has been converted in some areas by officials into individually managed woodlots. Local populations, usually through groups of elders, often still retain some managerial control over pasture, though state agents also exert authority. The controllers of pasture have often found it difficult, however, to resist the slow encroachment of farming on the margins of grazing commons, as well as the more sudden seizures of land by livestock entrepreneurs and urban pioneers. Wereda and kebele officials through their connections to the state yet their membership in local communities play key roles in both formal and informal natural resource management institutions. Further research is needed to examine their influence on these institutions. The gender, class, and other socio-economic dimensions of natural resource management institutions also require further clarification.

3. The management of conflicts is a central aspect of formal and informal natural resource management institutions. The wereda and kebele have crucial roles in conflict management, yet many aspects of it remain unclear. For example, how do they respond to divergent state and local interests in conflicts? What role do they play in mediating conflicts? Traditional religious leaders have been used to some extent in trying to resolve conflicts over natural resources. However, there is a danger of co-opting and undermining their authority.[3] What requires further investigation is how the changes in social relationships discussed earlier in this report impinges on the incidence, scope, and magnitude of natural resource conflicts and their management.

Both Parts I & II of this report also contain some general descriptions of the landscape and the people of the research sites visited.

[3] See, Alula Pankhurst, "Conflict Management over Contested Natural Resource: A Case Study of Pasture, Forest and Irrigation in South Wello, Ethiopia," in A. Peter Castro and Erik Nielsen, eds. Natural Resource Conflict Management Case Studies. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, forthcoming.

Part I:

Interviews in South Wello and Oromiya Zones, Amhara Region, Ethiopia, May 28-June 1, 2001

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Tebasit in Dessie Zuria Wereda, South Wello
Interviews: 28 May 2001

Tebasit is the name of both a kebele and of a small settlement that serves as its headquarters. The interview occurred in the settlement, which is located on a broad ridge along the Dessie-Wereilu all-weather road. Most of its houses are bunched together along or near a branch road leading to the local administrative offices. The village has an peri-urban appearance, with its houses and business located along the settlement's main paths. The surrounding hills held green fields of mature barley and brown patches of pasture or newly planted land.

Upon entering the settlement we went to the home of a local businessman who had helped the research project on its previous visits. Castro brought along photographs that he had taken in the community in March 1999, and the businessman had been included in a group photograph at that time (we had lunch together after the interviewing for the community assessment field test had taken place). He agreed to be interviewed. We went to a large building that serves as a local drinking and eating establishment, with a rectangular room with benches. Several men (including a kebele official) entered the room as the interview took place.

First interview: a local businessman and a farmer

His background: He was born there, he is about 47 years old, very active in business, including owning a grain mill.

The current situation: People have hope. People are repairing their houses. You can see the good condition on the people - they are good looking.

Local administrative history: In the early days Tebasit was part of Warileu, but even since the days of the Empire it belong to Dessie Zuria. Given the distance to Wereilu, nearly 60 km, compared to 30 km for Dessie, therefore the people were happy when the change occurred. His father and other elderly people were happy for the change, as they had been asking for it.

Land tenure history: In the past there were two types of landholding: Galla land and Gebbar land. Galla land was allocated to new settlers and people who had not been incorporated into the local governance system (or who lacked access to land elsewhere?). These people were tenants. The governor controlled the land - Wello was under Haile Selasse's son. Gebbar land - the people paid tax but the land belonged to them. These were the principal landholders, and they were in the majority. The tenants paid a tax and tribute - one-third of their harvest to royalty. Land reform abolished the system in 1975. The abolishment of the old landholding system was one of the achievements of the revolution.

Local history: Tebasit was along a long-standing trade route. The name derives from a kosso tree hit by lightening. Traders used that tree as a landmark for meetings. Grain merchants

with mules and horses would meet. Tebasit emerged as a roadside settlement. The Italians built a road from Dessie and Warileu that bypassed the village, but during the Derge time the road once again was rerouted to go through the edge of the village. Recently a school was added to the community. Prior to its construction the children had to walk about an hour to a distant school.

The traders brought grain from Wereilu and Jamma. They took from Dessie salt, coffee, clothes and manufactured products. Some even came as far as Assab.

Cropping change: Barley has been the predominant crop. Through time they have also adopted lentils, beans and peas. The weather changed, becoming hotter than before and allowing people to grow different crops. The adoption of these crops occurred by trials undertaken by local people, who saw them growing nearby.

Hunger and famine: He has witnessed three times of hunger:

1965 (EC): Drought. We received no help. It was devastating because of no help. The lowland people were better off. Some people went there. The meher rains were hit.

1977 (EC): Not as severe as 1965, but many people starved in this area. There was tremendous food aid. It was a prolonged drought covering a wide area. Meher rains failed.

1990 (EC) Belg area affected - it was a severe crop failure. There was enough food aid but late food aid supply. Even today food aid is given. It was widespread.

Recovery period: Recovery depends on: (1) the severity of the drought, (2) the assistance provided by government, relatives, (3) a family's efforts applied towards recovery. For example, in 1965 (EC) there was not much assistance, people had to move to Addis Ababa, Dessie and other places. Some people never returned. Assistance from family, relatives, government helps one recover. You seek help from family members in nearby places - it is a tradition, going to relatives to ask for assistance. When threshing is taking place, one can ask anyone, even if the person is not a relative. If you are threshing you can be asked. Sometimes when people go seeking help from distant relatives, you take along children, and they might remain in that area. In 1990 (EC) people did not have to migrate because we got sustained food aid. For a normal family it takes 3 to 4 years to reestablish oneself with cattle and other assets. [A young man speaks up saying that it takes 4 to 5 years for families to recover]. Recovery also depends on the effort of the head of family. So if one is lazy, recovery is more difficult.

Social capital: There are different forms of assistance among relatives and neighbors. In the past it was possible to take your family to relatives who lived where there was no drought. You could borrow land for farming, and they would assist you until recovery occurred. Some people might give cattle, heifers, sheep, and goats - hosting you until the situation improved. The elderly or children might stay with them for a long time.

Today people do not help one another as much. A few do it, but generally they are not generous with relatives. This is because of: (1) Poverty - people cannot assist one another due to lack of ability to do so. (2) Land tenure system - if someone stays with you, they now can try to claim the land, so there is a fear of hosting relatives, that they will starting asking for the land permanently. (3) Behavioral change - people nowadays are cruel, not sympathetic. This change occurred because of land scarcity and population pressure. People do not have many surpluses. Otherwise, relatives still love one another, and they want to help.

Local social institutions: There is kire, Zawuya, and maheber. This area is predominantly Muslim - there are very few Orthodox Christians. In the older days people who were troubled would ask the mosque community for assistance. The leader would request that help be given. In the Zawuya people pray together during drought and other troubled times. Kire is the principal social institution. It is a burial society, carrying out funerals, and assistance for religious ceremonies. Its internal regulation and bylaws are informal, depending on its members' agreement. To varying extent kire may provide extended help during loss of a family member or loss of property. For example, if the husband dies, kire members may plow the land or help with household activities for one season. If an ox dies accidentally, for example, the meat might be divided among kire members, who will pay money to the family, or the family might take it on credit. But in a widespread drought, kire cannot do much because everyone is affected.

Agrarian relations:
Sharecropping: The harvest is divided in half by the landholder and the sharecropper. All inputs are borne by the sharecropper except for the land.

Farm labor: There are two types. Hired workers received Birr 3-5 per day. Reciprocal labor occurs during harvesting, house construction and other times.

Labor and oxen rental: One day of labor is considered equivalent to one day of one ox traction power. Those with land but without oxen will work two days for someone to use the latter' pair of oxen for one day.

These days the above arrangements have become difficult as a result of scarcity of oxen. You have to have a close relationship with someone to do it.

[A kebele official entered the room. The respondent and other men in the room stated that no land rental exists, but there was clearly reluctance to discuss the issue]

Second interview: a kebele officer - who asked that his remarks be treated as "unofficial"

The current situation: Although there has been some improvement in the rains, the land still does not provide a good yield because they cannot keep it fallow. The land here requires two

years of fallow, but no longer can we do that. So we plow it continuously. The land is not responding to chemical fertilizer, and as a result it is not a much better situation after the rains. Now people are experimenting with meher rains, taking up about half the land. The last time we had good fields but heavy rains and frost occurred at harvest. The meher experiment doesn't seem to work. The situation does not seem hopeful, so if the situation continues, out-migration will occur because things are not on the correct track.

Other problems: There are serious health problems - typhus and waterborne diseases. Last December through April there was a typhus (typhoid?) and diarrhea - about 30 people died because of these sicknesses. There is a clinic nearby, which gets assistance from the government, but the epidemic overwhelmed its capacity.

Other men in the room add:
Unemployment is a problem. There is also little food for work.

Gerado in Dessie Zuria Wereda, South Wello
Interview on May 28

Gerado is located only a few kilometers to the west of Dessie. Part of the kebele consists of a broad valley used for grazing (its wetlands) and cultivation through irrigation and rainfed production. Other sections are located on hills and mountain ridges. The road that runs through the kebele carries traffic heading not only to Dessie but also to locations to the west, northwest, and southwest of South Wello.

The interview: an elderly man

With the help of local people (including perhaps someone who had served as an enumerator in the household survey) we located an elderly man for interviewing. He resided along a road that branched off the main road. The interview took place in the shade of eucalyptus trees across the road from his house. Several young men, children, and another elderly man watched the interview.

His background: He is 81 years old, born in Gerado.

Local administrative history: In the past Gerado used to belong to Kalu administrative area.

Land tenure history: There used to be both Galla (state) and Gerbar (rist) tenure. Most of the land was Galla land, some of it belonging to the wife of the emperor. Before the Italians one-third of the produce from Galla land went to the landlords, two-thirds to the cultivators. The Italian made it a 50-50 split. After the Italians left the government reallocated Galla to the local gentry. There was no uniform tribute - the local lords levied different amounts. The people were not happy about these practices, but there was no resistance. They responded by engaging in nonfarm activities.

In the past there was land sales. Even the prince sold land. Sharecropping existed but it was not common after the 1930s. Instead, it was replaced by one-year lease arrangements for the crop season - a contract. This contract emerged as farming became more commercial.

Labor: People received about Birr 72-100 per year as hired workers.

Hunger and famine: Hunger was not unknown. It was not uncommon for drought to occur. But this village was not affected because of irrigation. The first serious drought for the village occurred in 1977 (EC), even though irrigation existed at that time. This drought was accompanied by cholera caused by the temporary settlement of people across the stream.

In previous droughts people came to Gerado, and the people would share what they had. There was not much reciprocity from those seeking assistance. Those who lived in Gerado were better off. Many of those who came worked in farm labor, getting food. Some people like women and old people were given food at harvest time without having to work.

Current food aid and cultural change: The interviewee complained that people with one ox or other small assets are excluded from food aid. Because of population increase and poverty people are becoming more jealous and cruel. Some neighbors talk about someone having one calf, saying that the person should be excluded from food aid. Even people with goats and chickens encounter problems.

Social capital: Kire is present. In the past it provided extended support for the family of the deceased, plowing fields, helping with other activities, and giving grain until the children were grown. Now kire is limited. You pay Birr 1 and one tine cup of grain as dues.

Economic change: There is general poverty and population growth. It is difficult to obtain different means of getting income. He pointed to some young men who were watching the interview and noted that they would have made income, working and trading somewhere else, in the past rather than sitting idle as what happens at present. Even educated people now sit within the parents' home, dependent on food aid.

Land redistribution: This minimized the holdings. The production cooperative took all the fertile area. A lot of people ended up marginalized. There was plenty of grain harvested by the production cooperative but people went hungry because they could not access it - even grain was spoiled for not being utilized timely and kept properly.

Local cultural and socioeconomic change: In the old days there was plenty of wealth, there was different income sources, good cattle, grazing areas, and cheap grain. When I was young I used to eat meat. I was strong when I was young. [Referring to children who were watching] Now these boys must wear second hand clothes and go hungry. Restrictions on grazing make it difficult to have livestock. During my time boys were never idle, they were busy looking after cattle, goats, or sheep. Today there is mass poverty.

Food aid, poverty and social change: The cause of poverty through time is population increase. Now there is many people and land scarcity. We are driven to poverty because of food aid procedures. If you have an ox that means you are ineligible for food aid. You have to sell the ox – and selling that ox will lead us to permanent poverty. Food aid requirements make us quarrel with each other. Jealousy is prevalent, so that we cannot keep our values. We could not pray together. People in Wello and elsewhere used to pray together. Now we cannot do that mainly because of food aid.

What can be done? The government should have the capacity and the judgment to help people. Now they made us compete for food aid. In part he pointed out that where the nearby houses and eucalyptus stand used to be fields. He also asks why do you ask these questions? The Americans already have asked these questions and have this information!

Irrigation Scheme near Bati Township in Bati Wereda, Oromiya
Interview May 29, 2001

Bati is a bustling market town in the lowlands (kola) of Oromiya Zone. Oromos comprise its main ethnic group. Trucks and buses move constantly the road that connects Bati with Kombolcha to the west and the Afar areas eventually Djibouti to the east and northeast. The town contains a range of small businesses and several government buildings, as it is the wereda headquarters. The buildings range from structures made of corrugated metal to ones of cement blocks and rock. There is a very strong military presence in the town, with permanent and temporary camps located nearby.

We drove to a reservoir for a nearby irrigation scheme. Local herders were bringing their cattle and goats for water. An agricultural extension agent happened to be in the area, and he came over to us. We interviewed him along the bank of the reservoir.

Interview with an extension agent near an irrigation scheme situated near the town

Irrigation background and structure: This irrigation scheme started in 1987 (EC). It has 144 farmers. The land was originally peasant holdings growing sorghum, now it produces maize, vegetables (such as cabbage), and fruit. There are experiments going on with coffee, tomato, sugar cane and banana. The plots were redistributed after irrigation was set up. Water is allocated through an elected water committee. They have their own bylaws and regulatory powers, including the ability to punish. Agricultural officers facilitate the election, as well as providing technical information about water management and farming. Credit is available to all and provided to those who demand it. They receive improved seeds, fertilizer, and technical advice. Depending on their circumstances some farmers will receive 100% of the loan without any down payment, while others pay 25% of the loan at the beginning. About 80% of the farmers take loans.

According to the agricultural extension agent, maize is grown because people are not used to working hard. For example, fruits and vegetables require more labor than maize. Another issue is that Bati is a trading area - people are more oriented to trade with the Afar, Djibouti, and other places. They are geared to that. Some families have labor shortage, but it is mainly the lack of oxen that causes problems. If you don't have oxen you need to look for alternative arrangement. There is no credit available for buying oxen, only for fattening livestock.

The maize is grown for local consumption. Some of it is sold. They mainly use improved varieties but some grow local varieties. It is possible to get three maize crops a years, as it has only a three-month growing season. There is some local reluctance to take loans for maize production. The farmers are concerned about the economic returns from maize. They do not feel happy selling it because of the market price. It drops drastically at harvest. To get the improved seeds you must get two types of fertilizer, and you need money to get these. Farmers feel worried about having to pay these back. If you accept the technical package,

you also have to follow the extension guidelines, which imply more work. About 20% of the farmers decided not to use the credit and technical package.

The scheme farmers have plots elsewhere. Whenever there is a good harvest off the scheme, the farmers will devote their attention to the distant plots. They do not care about the irrigated plots. But when there is a poor harvest or drought the farmers care about the plot.

The extension agent and a local man discussed some local livestock issues (additional information was later provided by other agricultural officers)

In the area there are two types of cattle; long horn and bigger in size (kola cattle) and short horn and smaller in size (the dega cattle). The informants said that people in the Bati area prefer long horn cattle. These are the cattle of the kolla zone. They are more productive in supplying milk and able to withstand the heat, as well as more resistant to external and internal parasites than short-horned cattle. The long horn cattle are more expensive. A disadvantage of the big horn cattle is that they require more fodder than short horn cattle, and they eat day and night. so the short horn cattle – which are called highland cattle – are less expensive to keep and sometimes better able to withstand times of shortage of animal feed.

[Observations at the reservoir for the irrigation plot, where local herders brought their livestock for watering, indicated that most herds consisted of both short and long horn cattle though the latter type is more predominant. Questioning did not reveal any deliberate strategy for mixing them. One local man said it was by chance that the different cattle intermingle. We did not probe further. However, this issue is worth pursuing in terms of asset mix and risk diversification strategies].

Chachato in Bati Wereda, Oromiya
Interview: May 29, 2001

Chachato kebele is located several kilometers off the road that leads eastward from Bati to the Afar lowlands and Djibouti. It is kola - lowlands that receive less rain than the highlands. Accompanied by the local development agents, we traveled along an unpaved track to a settlement called Qoraman. Along the way we passed a military encampment scattered among the bushland. Qoraman consists of household compounds scattered along a ridge. Upon entering the village the local extension agent located two elderly men for us to interview. We sat on some rocks in the shade of the tree and conducted the interview, watched by children, men, a local militia member (who brought along his rifle), and the agricultural officers. The interview took place in Amharic, with local residents occasionally speaking up as well.

Interview with two elderly men

Their ages: 70 years old and 65 years old.

Village history: This village has existed for a long time.

Land tenure history: There were both tenants and rist holders in this area. Before the Italians arrived they paid tribute to the king and the royal family, including the prince. They used to pay tribute in money: the tenants paid up to Birr 60 a year, and the rist holders paid Birr 30-40 annually. During the Italian occupation people paid tribute in kind, 8 kilos of grain each. After the Italians left tenancy was abolished. All became taxpayers. It was paid in money and increased. During land reform everyone became a land possessor, the landless got land, a kind of fair distribution. [When asked who were the landless, one replied: The tenants were the landless].

Famine and hunger: One of the men said that the people have distinct names for exceptional periods of hunger. He recalled the following in chronological order (some of the names of the disasters are in Afar language others are in Afan Oromo):

1. Sitet-guede -"Took away everything": this severe drought occurred when he was a young boy. It devastated livestock and people died. They migrated to Dawa Chaffa and other places.

2. Guirelli - "One who has no tail to catch": this drought occurred about seven years later. Mainly animals died.

3. Kuremille- "Faithless": many people died from this drought without benefit of a religious ceremony.

4. Durbailli - "The one that impoverished those who were not aware": Those who were clever could see the food shortage coming and sold their cattle ahead of time. One is wise, one is not, and those who were loss were foolish.

5. God melli- "Feeding leaves of the trees to animals for them to survive": this occurred in the 1970s after Haile Sellassie fell from power. Only animals died. It was mild.

6. "The 1977 (EC) drought": this was a two-year disaster, killing both animals and people. It was bad because it was so prolonged, so devastating. Many people died. [The militia member spoke up]: Even the rich lost lots of livestock during this time because they owned more. They could not resist.

The interviewees said that 1999 was a bad year due to drought, but it was not as bad as the ones above. Some people migrated to Chaffa, but there was not the same trouble.

Recovery from severe drought: [The extension agent who lives locally spoke up]: It takes three years. [The interviewees continued]: People recover by selling grain, buying animals. It is a gradual process, buying goats, little by little. They also sell charcoal and firewood. Some people go to Djibouti for trade and employment. Those who have capital can engage in trade. If you do not have capital, then you cannot go into business.

Social capital: Kire exists locally strictly for burial. There is mutual assistance but it is not organized but mainly around family and friends. At the local Zawuya people pray together.

In the past people shared, but today the support system is improved. Previously only kin and relatives helped each other, but now everybody helps one another. Now everybody helps, they give to anyone who has suffered. People now devalue money. They know men are worth more.

Any questions or additional information: We pray to Allah for good governance, wealth, prosperity, and peace. The environment is vulnerable these days. We need government assistance if possible. We are scared about environmental conditions.

Food Distribution in Guguftu in Dessie Zuria, South Wello
Interview: May 30, 2001

Guguftu is located in the wurch (upper zone), characterized by agricultural fields on sloping land and grazing lands with afro-alpine vegetation. The settlement of Guguftu is near the crossroads for three all-weather roads that run to Dessie, Wereilu, Tenta, and other areas to the west, southwest, and northwest of South Wello. Guguftu has several building with generally new corrugated roofs. The area is well known for being near the last major battlefield between the Derg and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) before the latter entered Addis Ababa in May 1991.

There is a feeder road that goes to a flat area where a food distribution warehouse is located. As we drove to Jamma we noticed a food distribution, taking place and decided to stop. Surrounded by a large crowd, we spoke to officials from two kebeles, who gave us the following account:

Last year the belg rains failed, and the meher growing experiment with barley and maize also failed due to frost. Only the straw could be fed to animals. There are about 6,500 people in each kebele, and about 4,400 in each receive food aid. They get 12.5 kg of grain per head per month up to five members. They used to get wheat but now maize is being distributed. Members of the crowd complained about maize. They said that wheat is a staple for them and that it is more economical to use. In contrast, maize is strange, and it causes constipation. Both kebeles reported that they received no food aid during January. The officials were told that no aid was available. Initially responsibility for food aid was split between the government and an NGO called Concern, but now it is all the latter's. There is a work requirement for the food, doing road maintenance and terracing. People in the crowd complained that cooking oil no longer gets distributed. The people also reported that they planted barley late but they are still hoping for rains through the end of June.

Tullu-mojo in Jamma Wereda, South Wello
Interviews: May 30, 2001

Tullu-mojo is characterized by generally flat terrain with dark soils. It contains many two-story stone houses, along with wattle and mud houses. Trees are largely absent from its extensive plowed fields. Instead, they are concentrated around homestead - a pattern increasingly typical in South Wello, but especially pronounced in this very broad plateau.

We stopped in Jamma town to pick up an agricultural officer to take us to the research site. As we traveled along the all-weather road and then along a dirt track (which often disappeared) we obtained information about the locality:

Interview with agricultural officer

There was a good teff harvest, cutting prices in half from their level a year ago. Livestock prices are increasing, nearly double over a year ago. One good indicator of increased prosperity is that a lot of weddings are taking place. The large number of weddings also drives up livestock prices. Cattle traders also come as far away from Addis Ababa, driving up the prices.

There are about 2,000 people in the kebele, and only about 360 receive food aid. Those who receive it are not that much starved.

In this area people plant their own variety of teff. They plant it in April and harvest it in October, during the lean season.

Communal grazing exists but the wereda officials are thinking of opening more of it for agriculture. They also want to take cultivated steep hillsides and use it for planting trees.

For a long time this area grew pulses, but the yield declined so they switched to teff and wheat. They are also growing horse beans, which get intercropped with peas.

Families mark their fields in the broad plateau with stones. The boundaries are generally respected as people plow. Quarrels seldom emerge.

No belg production takes place in the area. Instead, that is the time for grazing and preparing fields.

Interview with a middle-aged man

We walked to the agricultural agent's office. Along the way he called over to a man, who agreed to be interviewed. Our discussion took place in the office.

Background: He is 48 years old. He serves as the chairman of the local kire.

Land tenure history: There was some tenancy, but it was predominantly rist lands. The tenants paid one-third of their harvest to landlords, members of the high class, whereas the rist holders paid tax to the government. Tenancy was long ago. You will not find anyone alive from those times.

Land sales occurred long ago. It was an informal market. Rist holders who needed more land could obtain it.

Settlement history: This community was settled a long time ago, before my father's and my grandfather's times.

Famine and Hunger: There have been two times of hunger, 1984 and about last year. In 1984 there was drought that killed animals. People here died of diarrhea. There was some aid, and the market revived later on. People coped by borrowing from those who had.

The crop failure that occurred from 1990-91 (EC) was caused by frost. It was mild, and people have already recovered from it.

Recovery: It took about two and a half years to recover from crop failure in 1984. They did so by borrowing and buying cattle. There is a Shawan tradition [the area used to belong to Shawa administrative unit], an arrangement in keeping cattle, say a cow, and sharing its calves on an equal basis. You can keep in your herd another person's cattle, such as a woman's. You could also buy or borrow cattle from the well to do, paying one-third interest on what you borrowed.

Social capital: Kire exists. Its main function is burial support, ensuring the religious ceremony. There is no regular contribution. They give whenever someone dies, usually 10 cents a member and some grain. Kire members also do reconciliation and mediation when conflicts arise among members. Elderly people are elected to serve in this role.

Maheber also exists. It can assist those families who suffered a death, who have a sick member or someone in prison, by collecting money and assisting them in tasks. It does reconciliation among its membership through the chairman.

Labor sharing takes places during planting, harvesting, and building of houses [as will be discussed below, some house construction labor is also hired]. There has not been much change in the extent to which people share.

Sharecropping: The harvest is split in half by the landowner and farmer. If the landholder provides the fertilizer, then he can also take crop residues. Women and elderly people who do not have much energy lend out land. Those who do not have enough land are the ones who sharecrop.

Farm labor: A hardworking man can earn Birr 200 a year. The day rate is Birr 2.50-3 during harvest time.

Labor migration: A few local people migrated to the south. They returned after 1-2 years. Even now some people are migrating.

House construction costs: [There are many stone houses in the area]. Local masons work on the houses, earning about Birr 100 for wall construction. The roofer will be paid Birr 60. Putting a corrugated metal roof costs as high as Birr 150 for the labor. People regard the metal roofs as very prestigious - a great family.

Yeddo in Jamma Wereda, South Wello
Interview: May 31, 2001

Yeddo is located close to Jamma town. The area included very flat countryside with black soils, as well as some gently rolling hills. The previous day we had arranged for the agricultural officer to find two elderly men for us to interview. We conducted the interviews inside the local agricultural office in a cluster of houses on a small hilltop. The officer wandered in and out of the building during the interview.

Interview with two elderly men

Background: One is 55 years old, the second is 60 years old. Both identified themselves as Muslims rather than as Amharas (which they associate with Orthodox Christianity).

Village background: This settlement is called Karra. It is an old village. The area used to be part of Shawa until 1994.

Agricultural history: In the old days they did not use fertilizer but production was high. In the 1980s a plant pest, a rust, appeared, mainly attaching wheat. Now we use fertilizer and yields have increased. The farmers associate fertilizer use with the disappearance of this rust.
Tenure relations: There were tenants and landlords, as well as rist holders. A large part belonged to the aristocracy. Other people held land through Gebbar (rist) rights. The tenants retained only one-third of the harvest. Sometimes they received half the harvest if they contributed labor for the landlord, including doing construction, fetching firewood, fencing and any other labor requirements. The tenant decided what to grow; the landlord had no decision making over the produce. He only collected the produce.

Those with Gebbar rights paid Birr 60-80 per gasha, depending on its fertility, with the highest rate for the best land. If someone had many gashas of land, they paid a lot of tax. Some rist holders within the landlord's administered area, then you paid him.

Famine and hunger: When they were young there was not much drought and hunger.

There was some severe drought in 1984, and some livestock died. But the area did not suffered from severe hunger. We had food, animals. We were affected because people fled to this place. We had to share. They would come to our homes, begging food and eating, then leaving. We were hosting them for a short time. They did not become permanent guests. Sometimes they asked for food when we were in the threshing fields, or they asked for shelter. They might pass the night, then move on.

[When asked whether there has been a famine in the area, they replied]: We really do not know famine, only mild problems.

Recovery: If crop failures occurred they used several means to survive. Many people had enough stored crops, especially the rich. When severe times occurred, people gathered together, asking the rich to share. According to tradition, they were expected to give food. People borrowed the grain, and they repaid it when they were able. They were expected to repay it immediately, repaying it in kind. Their reserves acted as a kind of community grain reserve, a kind of depository. You had to repay, even having someone act as your guarantor, who would cover your repayment, if you failed to do so. Even if you had to go to the market to repay, you had to restore that grain.

Sharecropping: Those who sharecrop-in are better off, whereas it is the women and the poor who lend out land. Fertilizer is necessary for farming in the area. Those who cannot pay for it sharecrop-out their land. The share is 50-50, but only if the landowner pays equally for fertilizer. If he cannot pay, then the sharecropper pays and the amount is deducted at harvest. Generally they do not share the crop residues, as it goes to the farmer. But if the landlord contributes some labor, then he will get half the crop residues.

Land rentals: There is land rental, ranging in price from Birr 200-300 per year per timad. There is not much land borrowing because of land scarcity. Sometimes family members will be allowed.

Hired labor: The day rate is Birr 2-3 per day.

Social capital: Local reciprocity occurs during weddings and harvests. Kire exists for burials and related religious ceremonies. They can also exist in case of the death of animals, such as when an ox falls down a ravine. The people will buy its meat from the family. If a husband dies, people will help with labor at critical times, such as plowing and planting. There is maheber for Christians. Most people here are Muslims.

Relatives and friends also support one another during weddings (happy days) and during deaths. They also contribute food, drink, and labor during housing construction.

Land distribution: Radical reform occurred, with the landless getting land. They took land fertility into account when doing so. The communal grazing land in the area is very small. People now enclose areas on their holdings for eucalyptus. That is part of having the trees.

What else should we know about the community? They need fertilizer. If they use more, they will get better yields. But the price is increasing for it. [When asked what should be done, they replied]: You know what to do.

There is growing poverty. There are many people who cannot get food on time. They wished that more food-for-work were available. [The agricultural officer reported that out of roughly 7,000 households in the kebele, normally 700 families received assistance in the form of food-for-work. At the period of the interview, 564 families were receiving food-for-work].

Food Distribution in Tullu-Awolia in Legambo Wereda, South Wello
Interview: May 31, 2001

On the way to Temmu in Legambo we encountered food distribution taking place in the crossroads peri-urban community of Tullu-Awolia along the frontier of Legambo and Tenta weredas. We stopped and talked to some local authorities involved in the distribution.

Families from three kebeles were receiving food, mainly European Union common wheat with some USAID-issued wheat, along with some maize in brown sacks. The officials reported that nearly every household in the three kebeles was receiving food aid. They were being issued 12.5 kg of grain per person per month, with a five-person limit as a maximum number in a household entitled for food aid. The food is issued as part of an employment generation scheme operated by Save the Children UK, carrying out terracing and road maintenance. The food aid is coordinated with the Amhara Relief and Development Agency.

The officials reported that the food situation appears to be getting better. Last year the belg rains largely failed. This year looks okay. However, now some worry exists that the rains will be insufficient. Screening is done at the kebele level to determine eligibility. Generally they target the poorest of the poor. The criteria also shift depending on the amount of aid available. Officials at Tullu Awolia noted that there is a shortage of aid.

Food distribution follows a set of procedures. First the kebele administration takes the food from the storehouse. Then it is issued according to family size at specific sites on the open-air grounds. Kebele leaders turn the food over to team representatives, who in turn issued it to sub-team representatives, who issue it to the families.

Temmu in Legambo Wereda, South Wello
Interview: May 31, 2000

A few kilometers from Tullu-Awolia we encountered an agricultural officer along the roadside, who helped us in identifying two elderly men for interviewing. One of them had been herding his cow in the pasture near the road. The other man apparently lived nearby. We sat in the middle of a field, watched from a distance by the agricultural officer and others. As a cool wind blew on the overcast day, we carried out the interview.

Interview with two elderly men

Background: Ages 78 and 67.

Land tenure history: Landholdings were defined through Gabber (or rist) rights. Before the Italian invasion people paid an in-kind tax, a tithe, about one-tenth of the crop. The Italians introduced the monetary tax of Birr 20 per gasha tax. When the Italians left the king doubled the tax to Birr 40 per gasha, which the chief, the government's representative, collected.

Land redistribution: There were some tenants who received land, though no one had been really landless before. Farm sizes were adjusted. Only land under cultivation was distributed. No allowances were made for land quality - all land was treated the same. Grazing areas were kept separately. Family size served as the main criterion. Many new people received land.

Famine and Hunger: During the Italian period there was one year of crop failure. It was mild because the next harvest was good.

In 1974 there was a mild drought due to late rains. They heard stories about devastating drought elsewhere. The people who suffered from the drought did not come here. They went to Dessie and people who lived along the main road.

In 1983-84 a real drought occurred. Many areas were hurt. Some people came here, and we hosted them. What happened was that their livestock had died. No one from this area had died. We were better off than others, comparatively. Although we had late rains, the next belg season was fine. But we buried many people among those who had migrated here.

Farm production in the kebele has not been favorable in recent years. The men observed that since the new government came into power the local agricultural productivity has been declining. The land does not give good yields. It was dry in 1990 (EC) but that year's events need to be seen in a continuum. There were late rains, with the yields continually declining. Since then there has been a kind of famine. This year is the first time that they have had hope of a good harvest. Fertilizer does not seem to help increase yields, and they are experimenting with not using it.

Recovery from food crises: There is a deepening poverty. In the old days they had big landholdings with surplus production. They used to sell and buy animals to rear and trade. These days it is hard to recover. There is not enough land for surpluses, and after a good season then livestock prices increase.

Sharecropping: Yes, it is practiced. Those who do it are the ones with better lab or and oxen. The harvest is split 50-50. If the landowner contributes some labor, then the crop residues are split in half.

Land rentals: Some arrangements occur. It costs Birr 100 for one year. There is no land borrowing or sharing because of land shortage.

Social capital: There is kire for burials and other ceremonies. There is no maheber because this is a Muslim community. Friends help one another when there is an emergency, such as a house burning or a death.

Any other information or questions? Since 1990 (EC) we have had government assistance with food aid. It is not a lasting solution. We suggest that the government give us assets like horses, donkeys, and other animals. A nearby Christian Church has done it for people - buying horses. It seems good to have these assets for recovery.

Food aid is not received on time. There are delays after it gets here. The rationing procedure is not good [they imply that some sort of discrimination occurs in the allocation]. We wish it could be improved.

Tach-Akesta in Legambo Wereda, South Wello
Interview: May 31, 2001

A local official helped us locate an elderly man to interview near the southern edge of Akesta town. We sat on a steep ridge, overlooking a narrow valley and the tall hillside across the way. Mountains with jagged peaks loomed to the south. As evening approached and rain threatened, we carried out the interview, accompanied by the man's daughter, another elder, and several young men and boys.

Interview with an elderly man

Background: He is 57 years old.

Agricultural history: They used to be belg producers before, but they have increasingly adopted meher production. The land used to be so productive before. Now its productivity has decreased - there is no good yield. When we get belg rains, then good harvests occur. We are experimenting with fertilizer, but it produces more in the meher.

Land tenure history: This used to be rist lands. People paid Birr 40-45 per gasha in taxes. They paid it to the local representative of government, the chief. There were a few tenants. Sometimes they plowed the lands, giving two-thirds of the harvest to the landlord and one-third for themselves.

Land redistribution: Land was taken from those with big holdings. Those with no land got some. There was a fair distribution in the first land reform. There were some significant changes because the agricultural production cooperative [set up by the state for collective farming] got the most fertile land at the valley bottom. Those who refused to join were displaced. The cooperative produced a lot. However, administratively it was bad. [A young man spoke up]: Many people who were politically involved, such as the cadres and elected officials, were members. They were not actually working. The rest of the membership had to support them. This was a bad dimension. The members were not happy.

Famine and hunger: The elder recalled the 1984 drought. People came from other places seeking relief. They were dying. Here some people died, too. We supported some of those who came, although we were hit by the drought as well.

In 1990 (EC) there was also a drought season. People also traveled in seek of help. There was hunger.

When he was a young man there was no such hunger.

Recovery: [The man's daughter spoke up]: It takes two years to recover, if the next harvests are good. If a bad harvest follows, then it is not possible.

Social Capital: Kire exists as a burial society. Mutual assistance is diminishing sometimes because of poverty. Before kire was helpful, it used to help plow plots, now it does not offer such assistance. There is some assistance by people during construction times. The Zawuya is for praying. Sometimes hungry people will go there, but it is not common.

Food assistance: [The young man whom works for the wereda replied]: About half of the population is still getting food aid.

Any questions or other information: The improvement of life is up to Allah. He is the one who changes things.

Kamme in Bati Wereda, Oromiya
Interview: June 1, 2001

Kamme is located only a few kilometers from Bati town. Along the all-weather track to the village are areas of thick bush set aside as protected areas. The village of Kamme is located along the edge of a ridge. On its main path, near the highest part of the slope, one sees several clusters of stones. These are underground storage of grain, usually sorghum. The development agent located an elderly man, and we interviewed him on the side of the extension office. A large group of children and several men watched the interview take place.

Interview with an elderly man

Background: He is 80 years old.

Village history: Kamme was founded long ago, and the kebele is named after it. Kamme refers to the fact that the village and area is near the river Kamme. There are 150 households in the village, which has a long history. The ancestor of a person named Kolba founded it. There were seven brothers who came from the southern part of the country, and they settled here and at Werebabo (which is also named after one of the brothers). He expressed a willingness to discuss local lineage histories, but we declined due to time constraints.

Administration history: Before this area belonged to Awsa District. Later on it was part of Kalu.

Land tenure history: This was generally rist area, and you could buy and sell land. The land tax was Birr 60. The Italians changed the tax to a grain payment – we contributed one-tenth of our harvest. After they left we paid Birr 60 for the tax. There was tenancy as well. They used to plow the land of the rist holders, paying half of the produce.

Land redistribution: Land was redistributed, so the tenants and landless became landholders. Those with large plots gave up some of it. Holdings became smaller and uniform. Production fell, and there were some fairly rough rains associated with redistribution. There were many distributions under the Derge, about seven. The plots became smaller and smaller.

Agricultural change: Since redistribution occurred production has fallen. [A man spoke up]: There is drought, pests, plant disease - all contribute. [The elderly man continues]: We used to hear about pests in the kola area, but not here. But now the fall in production is associated with redistribution. People developed hunger. There is some conflict. We pray now because we have conflict.

Hunger and famine: Kurenmeli [translated as 'Faithless' during our interview in Chachato] occurred before the Italian times. It was devastating for livestock and some people died. The Afars were worst hit. People migrated to Chaffa and Kalu areas. The government provided

some sorghum as food aid. After that happened drought has been reoccurring every seven years, whether it is mild or severe.

1983-84 was severe. People and animals died. The Red Cross provided food aid. Bati became an important international food aid center. Many people from other areas came here. Many of them died in Bati. In the first year of the drought we were given food aid within the distribution center. The next year we received the food in our houses. We had two years continuous food aid.

There has not been any severe drought - when people died - since that time. After 1984 we had three years of good rains. The very first rains we did not use because we had no livestock to plow.

Since 1980 (EC) the harvests have not been good.

Recovery: It takes three years, sometimes lingering longer. Assuming normal seasons it may take five years. People use off-farm income and remittances. They may sell crops if any. [Another elderly man speaks up]: If you had one ox, you had to sell it, buying two heifers or calves. After rearing them, you sell one and buy another.

Social capital: There is kire, and no other formal institutions. This is a Muslim area. During crises relatives who live abroad in cities do remit money. If a death occurs in a family, people help with plowing. We used to have some deposits for kire, but we stopped because we could not keep up with the contribution.

Sharecropping: There is not much [there seemed to be reluctance to discuss this issue]. Other information: There has not been much food aid lately. We still have problems, troubling local officials for food aid. [A young man spoke up]: A dam and irrigation would help our society. [The elder added]: If you want to learn more about our history, you need to spend several days with us. Then I will tell you more. [In parting he told us that remittances are sent from as far away as Saudi Arabia].

Part II:

Field Notes from South Wello Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia, June 1-2, 2001

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Maybar Area in Dessie Zuria Wereda, South Wello
Field Notes: June 2, 2001

Maybar Irrigation Canals

Maybar is a crater lake located southwest of Dessie in Kebele 33. A narrow, gently rolling plain surrounds much of the lake, giving way to steep hillsides. When visited the plain was covered with fields of barley, maize, and teff. The crops seemed in good condition, owing to the ample belg rain. A old man near the roadside, however, complained about the lack of irrigation for the land immediately around the lake. He said that people had been promised a pump but nothing had happened. The often steep hillsides circling Lake Maybar contained copses of eucalyptus, terraces (some with cultivation), and grassland used for grazing.

Along the shoreline women were washing clothes and other tasks. The still waters of the lake, with its water lilies and reeds, belied the increased competition over its waters. The lake now serves as the headwaters for three irrigation canals: one founded a long time ago by local residents, a second one established during the Derg, and a recent canal dug since the EPRDF came to power. The original canal drops down a ravine, while the two other canals branch away from the lake by hugging the side of hills. Irrigation provides water for diverse crops including coffee, fruits, vegetables, and other crops. The use of irrigation apparently extends far from the original source, with local springs further down the slopes feeding the canals.

The lake's water has been sustained at a high level this year by ample belg rains. Sometimes by June the water level is quite low, but not this season. A local man said that when the level is low, the canals will rotate receiving water. The management of such irrigation issues is nowadays handled by a special committee consisting of kebele officials and water judges, who are elected by the irrigation users. The water judges are responsible for maintaining the irrigation timetable, and they also handle disputes among the users. Their role reportedly emerged after the Derg set up the second canal. The original canal users claimed that too much water was being diverted to it. Thus. The regulation and management of irrigation water has become formalized.

Later in the day we ventured to a communal pasture – Beni – located in a stream-fed valley near Maybar. A wetland forms the heart of this grazing ground. One of the herders reported that the wetland has suffered occasionally due to the diversion of water upstream for irrigation. He observed that no problem exists with water flow during the wet seasons. In fact, the pasture suffers from waterlogging. When it is dry and hot, however, then the water diversion takes it toll on the stream and wetland. The herder recalled that the flow of water actually stopped during the mid-1980s drought and famine, when Derg officials had the water diverted to their newly established irrigation works. The people who kept livestock in the valley were upset by this action. The chairmen from the two peasant associations (the local administrative unit under the Derge, since replaced by the kebele) met to discuss the

situation. They ended up negotiating an agreement permitting the release of water to the valley. The diversion of water for irrigation at this time is not having any impact on the pasture.

The Sheik and Local Conflict Management

We were invited to visit the homestead of a sheik on a hilltop near Maybar Lake. Conflict management was among the topics we discussed with him. Most of the people in the kebele are Muslims, and local religious leaders are often asked to assume important roles in addressing conflict, including reconciliation of conflicting parties. If there is a dispute, the local elders usually try to settle it through negotiation and mediation. However, if it proves difficult to resolve, they sometimes come to him or other religious leaders. If one of the parties admits guilt or agrees to settle the conflict, then the sheik attempts to foster reconciliation among the principals. If the parties cannot agree, then the sheik may hold an oathing ritual, called a *bele*. The ceremony takes place at a site called a *kabela*, which may be under a particular tree or some other site. A person may be asked to hold or to step over a special object (prayer beads, an old weapon, or other item) while swearing to innocence. Telling a lie can result in severe sanction, including death. Once a person admits fault, or the parties reach agreement, then reconciliation takes place. At that point none of the involved parties are supposed to have any further grievance against the others.

The sheik reported that he is not involved in conflicts about Maybar's irrigation. The water users try to settle such disputes among themselves, or they are dealt with by kebele officials. On occasions people do come to him, however, in cases that involve hidden things, such as thefts, where who is responsible is unknown. In such cases the bele is used. This practice is covered in detail by Pankhurst (2001), who notes the problems of legitimization that have arisen when kebele officials attempt to co-opt such oathing and ceremonies.

Valley and Hillside Communal Pasture under Pressure

The research team drove a short distance to a small valley used as a communal pasture. Although it contained a sizable number of livestock, very few herders were present, most of them children. We walked out into the field and started talking with a young man who was herding animals. Other people gradually came by to watch.

He stated that anyone could bring their cattle and other animals to the site. No one is allowed to plow within the pasture. It is a place of refuge for cattle. If someone tries to cultivate the pasture, he would get into trouble with the local elders and officials. He pointed out that the pasture has boundaries. It is clearly set about on one side by the stream, and another section contained waterlogged ground. But one side of the boundary is not clearly defined by physical features. Through time people gradually converted some of this land into cultivated plots. The farmers pushed slowly. During the Derg officials legitimized this encroachment by measuring and redistributing the land.

The pasture always stays green. People from all parts of Wello bring their livestock to this commons. In the 1984 drought it was one of the only green places around the area. People from a wide distance brought their cattle, mainly for watering, since there was very little left to graze on. The local people worried about the increased number of animals, but the other people had little choice. There was no expectation that these newcomers would reciprocate. There was no context for that.

Every individual household looks after its own cattle. People bring their animals in the morning and return for them in the afternoon or evening once plowing is done. There is no communal supervision of livestock.

The pasture becomes waterlogged in the wet season, especially in July or so. Only horses and mules can graze here at that time. People will take their cattle to graze on the mountainsides. But animals cannot be herded into the state or community forests, which have been taken over by individuals. Cattle must be kept out. Violators can be taken to the kebele committee to answer for this offense. The upper slopes of the ridges used to be community forests, but these were cut down during the transition from the Derg to the EPRDF. Now this land has been divided up among individuals, who are responsible for planting trees on it. One interviewee reported that he was allocated such land. “It was not much land.” Restrictions on grazing on that land started during the Derg. Nowadays not even the new landholder can take cattle to graze on the land,. But the landholder can cut grass for fodder. The eastern southern, and lower western slopes of the hills surrounding the valley contained some individually held plots. The northern slopes still mainly contain state forest land.

One of the hills had a single large tree at its summit, and this pattern can be seen elsewhere as well in the surrounding countryside. These sites are maintained by local Muslim households for ceremonies. An interviewee emphasize that it is not the religious leaders but the peasants themselves who get together at that side. Such locales are by tradition on distant hilltops, under a prominent tree. People go in May when there has been no rain, and at other specific times, for sacrifices.

Family Planning

On the way back to Dessie we stopped to see some old friends of Alula. One of the family members – a young woman in her mid-20s –ended up going with us into town to obtain some goiter medicine. The woman pointed out proudly that she was the mother of two children – and only two children. Her last child was born four years ago. She revealed her adherence to family planning. Adopting it proved controversial in her family. Her husband wanted more than two children. Unable to agree on the issue, she left home for four months, staying in town. It was a difficult period being away from her family, particularly the young children. Finally, the husband relented, and she returned.

Gimba Area in Legambo Wereda, South Wello
Field Notes: June 3, 2001

Gimba communal grazing grounds runs along the heart of a long, gently sloping valley near the border of Legambo and Tenta weredas. The pasture now mainly consists of the wetlands at the center and lowest points of the valley. However, the grazing ground once extended further up the sides of the valley but has given way to barley fields set apart by low stone walls. In early June the barley crop looked thick and lush, due to the ample belg rains. Men and women with sickles were already starting to harvest. An all-weather road skirts the valley. The peri-urban center of Tullu-Awolia, located on the main road, is also expanding at the expense of the communal pasture. Near the town a portion of the pasture has been placed under the private control of an investor with a sheep-raising enterprise. The conversion of Gimba grazing commons to other uses has been a source of local conflict.

Interview at a Homestead

A short distance Tullu-Awolia we stopped at the small homestead of a middle-aged woman who had served as a key informant for Alula and Mengistu. Her house was conical shaped and covered in thatch, very typical for the area. We spoke to her, another elderly woman, and two men who were present. Several children were also present.

Famine and hunger

The head of household told us she had attended the recent food distribution in Tullu-Awolia. Because she has a small family, she received only a small ration, which she carried on her back. At this point the two men entered the conversation. They said that the current barley crop suffers from a weed called *zirnt*. The plant has limited uses: the seeds can be used for oiling, and it is poor fodder for livestock.

We asked about the times of hunger experienced by the people in the area, and the men replied. They recalled 1977 (EC) and 1991 (EC). In 1977 (EC) people relied on wild foods, eating nettles. They also ate plants normally used only as fodder: *amermandoo*, *gettin*, and *samma*. The government provided assistance, as did World Vision, mainly in Tenta. A few people resettled, and some went as labor migrants to other areas. People died here during the 1977 (EC). People did not come from other places seeking help. The rich people provided very little assistance, but close relatives helped one another. The recovery from 1977 (EC) took several years. The situation started in 1976 (EC), when livestock died. In 1978 (EC) we received rain, and we got crops in 1979 (EC). Overall, it took three years to recover.

When asked whether 1991 (EC) was as severe, the men replied that 1977 (EC) was worse. A lot more people and livestock died during the famine, and it was difficult for poor people to recover. Now they regularly receive food-for-work. Those who have livestock have recovered from 1991 (EC), as the animals are fatter now. But many people are without animals. Those who have no livestock have nothing now. But sometimes there is share-

breeding with prosperous people who have livestock. Even now this system has collapsed because of the drought. The men added that last year an NGO operating in the area gave 100 horses to local families. Out of 6,000 people, only 100 got horses.

We specifically asked the women about times of hunger. The elderly woman recalled a time of hunger when the Italians occupied the country. It lasted one year, due to lack of rainfall. The rains returned and people soon recovered.

The situation of female-headed households

The head of household was asked to respond to the following: Life is a struggle for all people, but some people say it is especially so for women, particularly female heads of household. Her reply: In difficult times such as drought, when they get something to eat, women first give the food to their husband and children. Women must tighten their belts. The problem for those who are widows, for women head of households, is that if you are two people, you can divide the worry. The husband and wife help each other. He can go look for work and bring back money. If you are alone, this is not possible. With relief there is no discrimination against female heads of household. Food is distributed based on family size.

She has land and engages a sharecropper, who provides the ox, seed, and labor. She gets half the crop. How does she know that she receives half? During the harvest she is called to the field, and the amount is divided in her presence. She helps with the weeding, so she has a sense ahead of time of what the harvest is likely to be. If she contributes labor she also gets a share of the crop residues. Sharecropping is usually arranged with someone who has a nearby field. She makes arrangements with her brother, who has always sharecropped for her.

The commons

With the men now joining in the conversation, we briefly discussed Gimba. An investor with a sheep-raising enterprise has permission to close part of the commons. His guards will fine people Birr 5 to Birr 10 for grazing their animals on his holding. There is a disagreement among the speakers about whether the farmland near the present-day road used to be part of the commons. The men insisted that it has always been cultivated but it appears that others do not necessarily agree.

There are mixed feelings about the expansion of the township. Urbanization reduces the land available for grazing, but this impact is mainly felt by those with large numbers of animals. For women and the poor the township offers opportunity for petty trading and employment.

Tullu-Awolia

We visited the rapidly growing and controversial peri-urban center of Tullu-Awolia. Small metal-roofed shops and tea houses are bunched along the main road, where buses and trucks stop to add or let off people and their bundles. A substantial number of houses, most of them

rectangular with metal roofs, radiate in all directions from the commercial center. Some of the dwellings are two storied. An evangelical Christian mission, set apart by low walls, is located next to a small hill. This hill used to be a ceremonial site, where local Muslims would sacrifice. Apparently it is no longer used for that purpose since a pole with weather-recording instruments were located on it. Nearby is a food aid warehouse, which Yigremew and I had visited. In another part of town, among the heights of some gently rolling ground, is an Orthodox Christian church. But the main landmark in the town is a large mosque that is still under construction. A Muslim man from Addis Ababa who obtained funding from abroad is supposedly its patron.

People who reside in the town earn a living in the small shops and tea houses, or they engage in petty trading. A woman in the town stated that people live through trade but that everyone is hungry, so they must depend on food aid. Besides the buying and selling of goods that takes place daily, the town has a weekly market where local people bring food, firewood, and other items for sale. It is still considered a small market, as it lacks a cattle and other livestock market.

Tullu-Awolia started rapidly expanding only a few years ago. It started with the building of a few houses and then the Christian mission near the crossroads site. Local herders opposed this construction, recognizing its threat to the communal pasture. Their resistance included damaging and uprooting structures, for which people were arrested. Social ostracism was also used. For example, a tea shop owner was dismissed from the local burial association because of his business. The conflicting parties took their concerns to officials, which resulted in a boundary dispute between Tenta and Legambo weredas. Tenta claimed the territory but Legambo's claim has been upheld. There is a rumor that Tully-Awolia may end up as the capital for a new wereda, but this claim is unsubstantiated and may be the wishful thinking of some town folk. What is clear is the triumph of peri-urbanization – the mushrooming houses, the shops, the churches, the new mosque – over the grazing commons.

The Original Urbanite

We interviewed the man who built the first house in Tullu-Awolia. He and his family invited us into their dwelling. The man arrived in the area in 1973 (EC), when the all-weather road was built. He thought that building the house at the site would be a good thing. Local herders destroyed it, saying that they kept cattle on the land. You will be an example, and others will follow, they told him. In April 1974 (EC) he rebuilt the house. Around that time the area. From 1975 (EC) onwards others came to build, including the mission. The local herders again destroyed the structures. The interviewee went to Tenta wereda officials to complain, but without much luck. He fared better with awarja officials (the next highest step in the administrative hierarchy), who got the police involved.

His wife's father's brother was against their building the sheep. Her uncle owned a lot of sheep. The interviewee said that the uncle was "uneducated." The uncle complained to his niece: others will see what you are doing and take land away from the pasture. But they

would not move away. The local people came by darkness, to close the houses. They were unable to do so because of the police from the awarja. The opponents of urbanization offered the house owners money to move, but they refused. The interviewee emphasized again that the opponents were “uneducated” folk.

According to the interviewee, when the EPRDF came into power, many people came from Legambo and Tenta to build houses on the commons. The opposition continued, as some marched against the new construction, while others tried to destroy the buildings. People said that it was illegal to build on the commons. Government officials decided that the town should be allowed to develop, and a plan was drawn up. The interviewee was imprisoned for a short time because one of his dwellings did not follow the plans. Other structures were also moved to fit into the plan.

The interviewee reported that the dispute about the township’s expansion seems to have stopped. But there still is conflict about the sheep investor who has taken a portion of the commons. In one incidence some shooting (in the air) occurred when the armed guards tried to stop local people from grazing. The interviewee stated that it will not be possible for the local herders to stop the investor.

In closing, the interviewee said that some people feel that he deserves a prize for having started the town. He wanted to share development with others, but others, the uneducated, opposed him. Now the town offers them opportunity, to bring wood and other items for sale, to obtain employment.