



# Trip Report: Building Assets for Sustainable Recovery and Food Security

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**Ethiopia: 8-26 August, 2002**

**By A. Peter Castro**

## *Purpose*

This field study carried out by Mengistu Dessalegn Debela continued the qualitative research on the differential experience of drought and recovery among households in South Wello and Oromiya Zones of Amhara Region, Ethiopia, initiated by Priscilla Stone and Mengistu in May 2002. As with their original fieldwork, this round of interviews sought to: (1) complement the quantitative information already collected by the BASIS/IDR project household survey; (2) gather more detailed and diachronic data on the differential experience of drought and recovery; (3) better understand the nature and behavior of female headed households. They had interviewed 15 households at that time. We implemented these goals by carrying out qualitative interviews with 27 households in South Wello and Oromiya Zones, almost all (25) of them participants in the BASIS/IDR survey. We largely followed the sampling methods and interview guidelines developed by Stone and Mengistu. Travel to Ethiopia also gave me an opportunity to speak directly with US Consulate officers about the denial of a student visa to Mengistu, who was supposed to join me in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University to start our doctoral program in Anthropology. Syracuse had offered Mengistu a teaching assistantship and full tuition scholarship for the 2002-2003 academic year. It also gave me an opportunity to meet with Professor Ayalew Gebre, Chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Administration, regarding possible collaboration in research and training between Addis Ababa University and Syracuse University based on the relationships established through BASIS.

## *Summary of Activities and Accomplishments*

My itinerary is given at the end of this report. The main accomplishments of the trip were as follows:

- Mengistu and I conducted interviews with 27 households, including 13 headed by women, in Dessie Zuria and Legambo weredas of South Wello and in Bati wereda of Oromiya zones. These interviews were done at their homes, following the sampling and interview format set by Stone and Mengistu. Tables One and Two provide details about the field sites and key socioeconomic characteristics of the interviewed households.
- Mengistu and I have produced a report of approximately 80 typed pages with the detailed record of the interviews.
- I wrote an approximately 20 page synthesis report with the findings from our fieldwork.
- The meeting with US Consulate officials was helpful in providing me with an understanding of their decision-making regarding student visas.

## *Technical Observations*

The main conclusions to emerge from this field study are as follows:

1. Households under the managerial control of women are usually associated with one or more of the following characteristics: widows or divorcees who find remarriage undesirable or difficult because they have children from their previous marriage (or other liaison); they possess regular non-farm income from brewing or trading; and they live in a town or peri-urban settings (or a distant setting such as Djibouti).
2. As Stone observed in her June 2002 report, the status of female head of household tends to be an impermanent and variable one. Marital histories indicated that people's lives were often marked by a number of transitions and events: separations, divorces, spouse's deaths, remarriages, or extra-marital sexual relations. During one or more times in a woman's life, she may face situations where she exercises a high degree of independence and self-sufficiency, only to have these diminish as a husband, adult offspring, or other kinsmen assumes the role of household head.
3. In examining the marital histories, what is especially striking is how enormous variety in marriage and divorce patterns emerge from a nearly homogeneous starting point in terms of customary practice: marriages arranged by parents. Reasons for divorce are numerous: incompatibility (including in terms of household decision-making), lack of children, sickness, and marital infidelity were commonly cited.
4. Urban and peri-urban centers may possess important income generation opportunities for women through small business (beverage selling, shops), trading, wage labor, rentals, and other means. The growth of urban and peri-urban centers is a widespread trend in South Wello and Oromiya zones (see Castro 2001; Pankhurst 2001), and these sites may become focal points for the emergence or the attraction of female-headed households.
5. Overall, the interviews suggested that the assumption that these rural households consisted of centralized units under the control of a single individual might be too simplistic. While it may be true for some cases, other interviewees suggested that household decision-making might be based on more collaborative or consultative styles.
6. Regarding access to land, women usually obtain their access to it through marriage, whereas men tend to acquire at least some land from their parents. But significant variations occur: women can also inherit land from their parents (they usually cite their fathers as provider of property), their siblings, or through redistribution.
7. Female heads of households engage in a variety of plowing arrangements (family aid, sharecropping, rental) with males, including both kin and non-kin. Sharecropping is less desirable than directly cultivating one's own land. Renting or having a male relative who can do the plowing and cultivation without requiring a specific share in the harvest is seen as much more favorable to the interests of the woman landowner.
8. Experiences and memories concerning hunger and food insecurity are influenced by agro-ecological zone, by the availability of irrigation (particularly in Gerado and Tach-Akesta), and by the availability of food aid or other assistance. Although the lowlands are the most drought-prone area, its households do not universally share the experience of drought. This is because of economic differences among households within different locations. As one interviewee noted about the 1977 EC famine: "Everyone was not equally poor – some people were rich."
9. In most places, particularly the lowlands the drought of 1977 EC served as the reference point for the "worse experience" of hunger. Yet, it was evident that people sometimes cited it "in general

terms,” even when they themselves did not directly experience dire problems. Some informants, particularly in Temu, contended that other, perhaps more severe episodes of hunger and food insecurity have occurred in their area since 1977 EC, particularly the drought in 1991 EC and the current crop failure. The difference is that 1977 EC continues to receive publicity; it continues to be talked about by those interested in such subjects.

### **A. Peter Castro’s Itinerary, August 8 to August 26, 2002**

*August 7, 2002*

Took UA 7263 from Syracuse to Washington DC/Dulles  
Left at 2:50 PM and arrived at 4:20 PM

*August 7-8, 2002*

Took UA 918 from Washington DC/Dulles to London/Heathrow, UK  
Left at 6:05 PM and arrived on August 8 at 6:00 AM

*August 8-9, 2002*

Took BA 6711 from London/Heathrow, UK, to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Left at 2:00 PM and arrived on August 9 at 1:35 AM

*August 9-10, 2002*

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, stayed at the Ras Amba Hotel (2 nights – August 8-9)

*August 10-14, 2002*

Dessie, Ethiopia, on field trips to Gerado, South Wello Zone and Chachato & Kamme in Oromiya Zone; stayed at the Lailabela Hotel (4 nights – August 10-13)

*August 14-16, 2002*

Akesta, Ethiopia, on field trips to Tach-Akesta & Temu, South Wello Zone; stayed at Genet Hotel; (2 nights – August 14-15)

*August 16-17, 2002*

Stayed in Dessie, Ethiopia, on return trip to Addis Ababa; stayed at the Lailabela Hotel (1 night – August 16)

*August 17-25, 2002*

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; stayed at the Ras Amba Hotel (8 nights – August 17-24)

*August 25, 2002*

Took BA 6712 from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to London/Heathrow, UK  
Left at 7:05 and arrived at 2:50 PM

*August 25, 2002*

Took UA 952 from London/Heathrow, UK to Chicago/O’Hare  
Left at 4:50 PM and arrived at 7:20 PM

*August 25-26, 2002*

Took UA 7783 from Chicago/O'Hare to Syracuse, NY

Left at 9:10 PM on August 25 and arrived at 12:15 AM on August 26

## Appendix

### Table 1: Field Sites Visited August 11-16, 2002

Inter-View Nos.	Admin Zone	Wereda	Kebele	Community (or Sub-kebele)	Agro-Eco Zone	Access to Households
1	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Endod Ber	Midlands	Short walk
2	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Agala	Midlands	Roadside
3 & 5	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Goroch	Midlands	Roadside
4	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Werteya	Midlands	Roadside
6-7	Oromiya	Bati	Chachato	Qorma	Lowlands	Short walk
8-9	Oromiya	Bati	Chachato	Hinsesie	Lowlands	Roadside/short walk
10-13	Oromiya	Bati	Kamme	Lay Kamme	Lowlands	Short walk
14 & 16	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach-Akesta	Sirt	Midlands	Short walk
15	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach-Akesta	Sirt/Wurgo	Midlands	Roadside
17	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach-Akesta	Firge Ager (Akesta)	Midlands	Roadside
18-20	So. Wello	Legambo	Temu	Temu/Bulish	Highlands	Roadside/short walk
21	So. Wello	Legambo	Temu	Chiru	Highlands	Roadside
22-24	So. Wello	Legambo	Temu	Amora Agar	Highlands	Long walk
25 & 27	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach-Akesta	Akesta	Midlands	Short walk
26	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach-Akesta	Akesta (Watiya)	Midlands	Roadside

### Table 2: Key Socioeconomic Characteristics of Interviewed Households

Inter-view #	Place	HH #	Type HH*	Marital Status of HH Head	Marital History	Current Plowing Arrangement	Labor Migration & Livelihood
1	Gerado	08	FHH	Married	Married once, long separation	HU plows; borrows ox	HU in Jimma & Teppe for years
2	Gerado	52	FHH	Widow	Married once	Sharecrops w/ FA's kin; hopes GRSO will do it	HU traded
3	Gerado	05	MHH (WI, HU)	Married	WI married 2X (divorced); HU married once	HU plows w/ FA's oxen	WI in Addis as divorcee; HU in Dessie in drought
4	Gerado	06	MHH	Married	Married once	HU plows w/ own oxen; plow's MO land, sharecrops w/ WI's kin	HU works for non-governmental organization; equub member
5	Gerado	20	FHH	Divorced (former HU now dead)	No remarriage b/c children	GRSO plows, borrows ox	In Kombolcha as divorcee w/ FA's kin; BRs support; sold bread, tela
6	Chachato	02	FHH	Married	Widowed; remarried HU married once (1st HU's uncle's son)	HU plows using oxen of another (HU plows the person's land first)	As a widow, sold firewood, rented camel transport; SO in Djibouti
7	Chachato	06	MHH (WI)	Married	WI married 2X (divorced), HU married once	HU plows with own oxen	WI in Djibouti as divorcee
8	Chachato	39	MHH	Married	Married once	HU plows, borrows ox from neighbor	DA in Djibouti

9	Chachato	44	MHH	Married	WI married 2X (divorced), HU married once	HU plows with own oxen	1977 EC not too bad b/c traded grain; DA in Djibouti
10	Kamme	NA	MHH (WI)	Married	WI married 2X (divorced); HU?	HU plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	Sells firewood
11	Kamme	NA	FHH	Widow	She married 3X (divorced, widowed 2X)	Pays man w/ oxen two quintals to plow land	Sells firewood; SO in Djibouti has disappeared
12	Kamme	13	MHH	Married	HU married 2X (divorced); WI?	HU plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	HU worked in Dufti & Assaita, now irrigates land in Bati; met WI in Assaita; DA near Djibouti/Afar
13	Kamme	16	FHH	Widow	No remarriage b/c children	SO plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	In 1977 EC in food camp, then begged in Bati
14	Tach-Akesta	46	MHH (WI)	Married	Married once	HU plows, borrows BR ox (maqanajo)	HU does some grain trading
15	Tach-Akesta	49	MHH (HU)	Married	Married once	HU plows, borrows FA oxen	
16	Tach-Akesta	50	FHH	Married	WI married 3X (divorced, widowed); HU married 2X (widower)	HU plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	WI inherited land; as a widow, sharecropped out with 2 <sup>nd</sup> HU's kin
17	Tach-Akesta	23	FHH	Widow	No remarriage b/c children	SO plows her land	Sells tela; one SO supports family of BR who died in the war
18	Temu	09	FHH	Married (HU, WI)	Married once, HU migrated in 1991 EC	HU plows with horse, borrows another (maqanajo)	HU migrated to Borana in 1991 EC drought
19	Temu	06	MHH	Married (HU)	Married once	HU plows with own horse & cow	Oxen lost in 1991 EC drought
20	Temu	08	MHH	Married (HU)	HU married 2X (& child w/ unmarried woman), WI married 2X	HU plows w/ borrowed oxen	Oxen lost in 1991 EC drought
21	Temu	04	MHH	Married (HU, WI, HUs FA)	HU married 3X (divorced). WI married 2X (divorced)	HU plows w/ own horses or borrows FA's oxen	Lost livestock in 1991 EC drought
22	Temu	53	MHH	Married	Married once	HU plows w/ horse, borrows another (maqanajo)	Oxen lost in 1991 EC drought; served in military
23	Temu	20	FHH	Widow	WI married 2X (divorced, widow), no remarriage b/c children; HU?	Two SO plow for her	

24	Temu	54	MHH (WI)	Married	WI married 2X, HU married 2X	HU plows w/ horse, borrows another (maqanajo)	HU in kebeles militia
25	Tach-Akesta	51	FHH	Married	WI married 2X (divorced), HU 3X (divorced, polygynous), other wife in rural area where he resides	HU plows her land, brings the entire harvest to her; he has one ox, borrows other from her BR	WI sells tela & karibo. Both her mother and grandmother lived in the town
26	Tach-Akesta	20	FHH	Widow	Married twice (divorced & widow), plus a child with another man	Sharecrops out land with a distant relative, getting 50%	Sells tela; hosts equub meeting where she also sells beverages
27	Tach-Akesta	27	FHH	Divorced	Married twice (divorced, plus a child from a now deceased man). No remarriage b/c her child ("A husband is useless")	Sharecrops out land with a distant relative, getting 50%	Worked as a maid in Akesta as a divorcee. Now she trades in the market; borrows from big traders, resells it.

\*Parenthesis indicates interviewee if more than one person interviewed or if household-head not present.

EC: Ethiopian Calendar

HH: Household

HH#: Household number in the survey

FHH: Female head of household, MHH: Male head of household,

BR: Brother; DA: Daughter; FA: Father; GRSO: Grandson; HU: Husband; MO: Mother; SI: Sister;

SO: Son; WI: Wife

**Table 3: Experiences of Hunger, Food Insecurity, and Recovery**

Inter-view #	Place	HHN	Type HH*	Worst Experience w/ Hunger	Other Memories of 1977 EC (or recent drought/s)	Recovery
1	Gerado	08	FHH	January 2002, crop failure b/c/ frost	In '77EC dismantled house to sell wood; stayed on land	Missed season farming b/c no oxen; irrigated land in producer coop; three years to recover; husband away
2	Gerado	52	FHH	1977 EC drought	Children scrambled to find help; sold livestock; married daughter in food camp	HU borrowed ox from relatives; irrigated land; WI sold handicrafts in Dessie; food aid
3	Gerado	05	MHH (WI, HU)	1977 EC was the worse	In '77EC no food aid but resettlement; in '92-'93EC food aid	HU did construction day labor in Dessie; food for work
4	Gerado	06	MHH	1976-78 EC, no harvest, lost livestock	Sold their oxen and other livestock; people from rural areas came here	Traded in livestock; irrigated land in producer coop,

5	Gerado	20	FHH	[1977 EC?]	She was sick, as were a lot of people	In droughts she spun cloth, weaved, sold things to get income
6	Chachato	02	FHH	Always face a problem	'77EC went to the Bati food camp with her children; baby died, forced to leave camp	People were not equally poor – some were rich. She borrowed oxen from a relative from another area. Sold firewood
7	Chachato	06	MHH (WI)	1977 EC: nothing to eat; in recent years problems because drought and insects	Father died in '77EC; livestock died; family in Bati food camp for 7-8 months; BR went to Djibouti	BR sent money from Djibouti; shared oxen with uncle; food aid
8	Chachato	39	MHH	April 2002 to recent	'77EC survived through Red Cross food aid, selling firewood, charcoal	Food aid; he had oxen that survived 77EC; he helped others plow
9	Chachato	44	MHH	1977 EC in general terms, but his family did not much trouble	In '77EC others went to the food camps but his family managed to stay	He earned money by trading grain, providing for his family
10	Kamme	NA	MHH (WI)	This year they lost livestock and had no harvest	No difference between '77EC and this year; livestock died and people are next	Sells firewood in Bati; her children go to Afar areas to chop wood (Afar do not like them to do so); used hoes to farm in 78 EC; then shared harvest with person who lent oxen; bought livestock
11	Kamme	NA	FHH	1977 EC: her HU and 2 children died in food camps	Went to resettlement area but escaped; returned and reclaimed land from relative	Sharecropped with someone from another clan; sold firewood
12	Kamme	13	MHH	1977 EC: no rainfall, his family in the food camp	This year a problem was developing but it was curbed by July rains	His family went to the food camp in 77EC; had irrigated land; eventually got livestock for plowing
13	Kamme	16	FHH	1977 EC: nothing to eat; went to food camps; begged in Bati	Stayed away from home about a year in '77EC in the camps and begging; lost livestock	Sold firewood and got food aid. Resumed farming with horses, eventually got an ox and borrowed another
14	Tach-Akesta	46	MHH (WI)	1977 EC: no harvest	Lost a lot of livestock	Members of the producer coop, able to require sheep and other animals through livestock share-raising
15	Tach-Akesta	49	MHH (HU)	1977 EC: people & livestock died	One oxen died and he sold another;	Member of the producer coop, he also had a backyard plot for farming
16	Tach-Akesta	50	FHH	Very recently but also 1977 EC	She was able to support others at that time; now there is problem whenever a drought	Received food aid in the past but no longer

17	Tach-Akesta	23	FHH	1977 EC, also known as Liguas	It is difficult for me to say this year or that year is severe because I do not remember	Government assistance and help from her children in buying food and clothes have helped her survived
18	Temu	09	FHH	1977 EC: starved, ate weeds; two children stayed at the Akesta food camp	A fearful drought hit in 1991 EC. The HU went to Borana, seeking work as an agricultural day laborer	Food aid, combined with farming. First, they sharecropped out their land; then plowed with a horse, borrowing one from a neighbor.
19	Temu	06	MHH	1991-92 EC: crop failure, lost livestock	In the past they were able to sell livestock but this time their animals died	Plowing with a horse, borrowing one. They did food for work when available.
20	Temu	08	MHH	1991 EC: food shortage b/c drought, but 1977 EC most severe b/c no grain in market	In '77 EC, he lost a cow and calves. In '91 EC he sold his livestock, including two oxen	In '77 he traded grain, and plowed his fields with help from relatives; he got a calf through livestock share-raising, eventually selling it and buying two bulls; got food aid
21	Temu	04	MHH	1991 EC drought, little harvest, relied on food aid	Droughts in 1986 EC and 1977 EC resulted in livestock deaths	Managed to retain some livestock, which he sold, while keeping some to get offspring; plowing with horses or his FA's oxen
22	Temu	53	MHH	Since 1991 EC problems; last year livestock & people died	This year there is a poor barley crop due to late rains, frost and ice. There is no difference between 1977 EC and today, except that '77 is talked about a lot	Last year he tried to trade in coffee and salt. Others contributed money for the enterprise and he contributed the labor
23	Temu	20	FHH	1977 EC & 1991 EC were the same in severity		
24	Temu	54	MHH (WI)	Extreme case in 1991 EC, lost livestock	They are still under a food shortage.	They depended on food aid. They plow with a horse, borrowing one from a relative
25	Tach-Akesta	51	FHH	1991 EC: nothing to sell	She survived by asking people for help. Better to be in town during times of drought.	She did food for work in the countryside until she became weak. She borrowed grain from her brother, repaying him the next harvest. She sells tela and other beverages.

26	Tach-Akesta	20	FHH	Around 1991 EC: there was nothing to feed the children; she had no customers for her tela	She received 150 birr payment for relief from the government; they got food aid and food for work.	When food aid started, her customers began returning. She sharecrops out her land.
27	Tach-Akesta	27	FHH	Sometime since the EPRDF came to power. Things are better now	If there are problems, it is better to be in the town. When they get food aid, it is possible to sell it	For the past four years she has been selling spice, coffee and salt in Akesta market

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