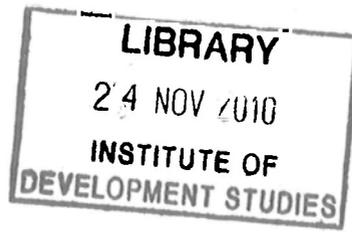


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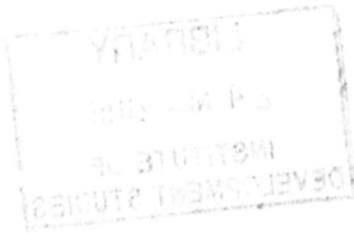


FSS Discussion Paper No. 9

**RURAL POVERTY IN ETHIOPIA:
Household Case Studies from North Shewa**

*Yared Amare
Institute of Development Research
Addis Ababa University*

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Glossary

- Arake* Local liquor distilled from fermented wheat.
- Belg* The short rains occurring anywhere from January to May which allow an additional cropping season.
- Birokrasi* The term used by local officials to refer to those who were thought to have served in the local administration of the former government and who were therefore penalized in the 1997 Amhara regions land redistribution by reducing their landholdings to one hectare.
- Birr* Ethiopian currency. 1 USD = 8.8 Birr.
- Chinet* A local measurement unit for grain that amounts to about half a quintal.
- Dega* A commonly used term for altitudes of 2400 meters and above.
- Ekub* Local rotating savings groups.
- Feg* Material consisting of ashes from the household hearth and household waste that is used to maintain the fertility of arable land.
- Gemed* A local unit for land that amounts to 2500 sq. meters or a quarter of a hectare.
- Gulema* The land that young men receive from their parents in preparation for marriage.
- Injera* The staple flat bread that is made from a mixture of ground cereals and pulses.

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Kebele</i> | The local administrative unit of government. |
| <i>Kolla</i> | A commonly used term for altitudes 1800 meters and below. |
| <i>Kollo</i> | Roasted cereals and pulses usually mixed. |
| <i>Meher</i> | The long rains occurring in the period from June to September which constitutes the main cropping season. |
| <i>Mekenajo</i> | An oxen sharing arrangement in which two household with one ox each pair them to plough their land in turns. |
| <i>Netela</i> | A shawl made from spun cotton. |
| <i>Rebi</i> | A local arrangement in which a household maintains the reproductive animal(s) of another household for a share of the offspring. |
| <i>Senbete</i> | A local religious association which celebrates a particular saint's day with a feast which the members prepare in turns. |
| <i>Shigsheg</i> | Local land redistribution, here mainly referring to the one that occurred in the Amhara region in 1997. |
| <i>Timad</i> | A local measurement unit for land that amounts to the size of land that can be ploughed by a pair of oxen in a single day. It is often assumed to amount to a quarter of a hectare. |
| <i>Tella</i> | A local beer made from barley that fermented with hops. |
| <i>Woina dega</i> | A commonly used term for altitudes between 1800 and 2400 meters. |
| <i>Woreda</i> | The district-level government. |

RURAL POVERTY IN ETHIOPIA: Household Case Studies from North Shewa

Yared Amare

Abstract

The paper utilizes qualitative data to expand our understanding of the nature and dynamics of rural poverty. It is based on data from key informant interviews, focus group discussions and household case studies collected in two kebele administrations in Tarmaber wereda of North Shewa, one in the woina dega agro-ecological zone and the other in the dega zone.

The qualitative approach undertaken in this study goes beyond measurements of incomes and expenditures in assessing poverty to characterize the significance of varying levels of access to key production assets for household economic status, the nature of poverty in a specific context, and the attributes of locally relevant economic categories of households. The process-oriented approach to poverty provides a fuller and more accurate assessment of the factors explaining why households fall into poverty. It also shows how consideration of the 'active' and subjective aspects of various peasant livelihood strategies brings out the potential of and constraints on each of them. Furthermore, it demonstrates that social phenomena such as networks of mutual assistance, resource exchanges, the social development and adaptive changes in the structure of households, which are best studied through qualitative methods, have significant implications for household economic prospects and patterns of rural poverty. Finally, peasant perceptions and experiences of various government development interventions and institutions are considered in assessing their potential and shortcomings in terms of poverty reduction.

1. Introduction

This paper uses qualitative data to contribute to better understanding of the nature and determinants of rural poverty in the context of two localities in the highlands of North Shewa. The study goes beyond measurements of outcome variables such as income and consumption which often tend to be unreliable and unstable due to variations in annual production, seasonality, prices and calorie requirements (Abdulhamid 1999; Dercon and Krishnan 1996; Kakwani and Subarro 1991), to focus on assets which are more sustainable bases of household capabilities and welfare (Carney 1998; Dessalegn 1992). The localized and in-depth perspective permits us to comprehend the relative significance of different types of assets as well as of different levels of each asset for household economic status and productivity (Yared 1999). This, together with community designations of different socio-economic groups (Bevan and Joireman 1997; Aklilu and Dessalegn 2000), enables us to define types of households which will have different potentials, needs and constraints in a way that has implications for their status with regard to vulnerability (Swift 1989), severity of poverty (Ellis 2000: 78), chronic versus short term poverty, and ability to diversify, accumulate or invest. This provides a stronger basis for designing rural development policy as well as interventions that meet the needs of different groups of households.

The qualitative approach to poverty adopted by the paper also throws light on the more dynamic and processual aspects of rural poverty. The description of the processes by which households fall into poverty lead to a more complete understanding of the nature of poverty, the factors that condition it and the interventions that are most effective in bringing about its reduction. The paper also considers the active role of peasants in implementing strategies that affect their status in relation to poverty (Dessalegn 1991; Yared 2001). Peasant assessments of different strategies illuminate the potential and constraints on these strategies in specific contexts and therefore their possibilities of remaining in or escaping from poverty and the types of interventions that are likely to promote the latter.

The study attempts to address the limited attention given to the social aspects of poverty by discussing the social capital available to households in the form of various social networks and institutions that have enormous impact on their economic prospects and patterns of poverty. In this regard, the significant role of resource-sharing and exchange arrangements and mutual assistance mechanisms is discussed (Aspen 1993; Dessalegn 1992). In addition, the paper highlights the implications of events and phases in the social development of households for the distribution of wealth and poverty (Yared 1994).

Finally, the paper presents peasant perceptions and experiences of government interventions and institutions. Their impact on rural households and the criteria and constraints influencing their success is portrayed in a way that substantially improves our ability to assess their potential and to suggest improved interventions aimed at reducing rural poverty.

2. The Research Area and Methods

The research sites selected for the household case studies were two localities in Tarmaber *wereda* of North Shewa, both more than 180 kilometers northeast of Addis Ababa. One of them was Shola meda, one of the sub-administrations of the *kebele* (local administrative unit) of Dokakit, which was located in the *woina dega* agro-ecological zone about 5 kilometers north from the town of Debre Sina. Dokakit had 550 households, 440 of which were taxpayer households who had received land from the *kebele*. The other locality was Yezaba, one of the sub-administrations of Yezaba Weyen *kebele*. It had 750 households, 558 of which were taxpayers. Yezaba lay in the *dega* agro-ecological zone, several kilometers from the town of Tarmaber on the road to Menz.

The qualitative research methods that were utilized to collect data for the study are naturalistic, inductive and non-quantitative forms of inquiry that aim to achieve textual description of individual perspectives and experiences, as well as social relations and processes. Fieldwork was carried out in the month of November, 2000. In each research site, the study started out with a key informant interview with a group that

consisted of a number of local officials of the *kebele* administration and the sub-administration in which the study was to be conducted. This interview dealt with various contextual aspects of household livelihoods such as the nature of the cropping system, facets of local land redistributions and their impact, the occurrence and impact of natural hazards, the availability of infrastructure and social services, the extent of government development interventions and peasant perceptions regarding the major problems confronting the community and interventions that are likely to be most effective.

Subsequently, one focus group interview with participants from different gender, age and economic categories was conducted in each site. The focus group interviews sought to characterize the diversity of livelihood activities, conditions of access to assets, the nature of strategies that peasants used to cope with crises and the degree of peasant participation in government interventions and local institutions in each locality. The discussions also dwelt on the impact of each of these factors on peasant livelihoods, differentiation in access to them and any changes that are occurring over time. The types and characteristics of economic categories and the processes by which households moved in and out of poverty were also discussed.

Then, household case study interviews were carried out with 7 household heads in Shola Meda and 9 household heads in Yezaba (see Table 1 in annex). Household heads were interviewed regarding trends in the socio-economic conditions of the household and the timing and impact of various events on such trends; the strategies that they used to enhance, diversify or maintain their economic status; the impact of formal institutions on their strategies; extent of their participation in community resource exchanges, mutual assistance and social activities; and their opinions on the critical problems and prospects of their households and the interventions that would be most likely to improve their economic status.

3. The Context

3.1 Livelihood Activities

Shola Meda has a mixed crop/livestock farming system. As a *woina dega kebele*, it had two cropping seasons, the *meher* or the long summer rains and the *belg*, the short spring rains. Households grew teff, beans, wheat and sorghum in the *meher* and barley and wheat in the *belg*. Agricultural production was relatively low in Shola meda due to soil infertility and waterlogging however. In the years since 1998, the area had even sustained crop failure due to lack of or untimely rain, flooding, waterlogging and pests. The average number of livestock per household was also limited because of lack of grazing space. The income that households derived from agriculture was inadequate therefore and many of them had to regularly supplement it with such activities as the sale of wood and grass to cover their perpetual food and cash deficits. Their income from these sources was restricted due to the low prices they received because of the substantial supply of these products and the limited demand for them in the market. Some female-headed households also engaged in petty trading and weaving, but they were also constrained by the lack of capital and low demand.

As a result of such conditions, a large proportion of households had been highly food-insecure in the last several years and had therefore become relief recipients in the year 2000. Households also coped with food shortages by selling animals and wood, renting out some of their land, migrating for work and purchasing maize that traders brought from other regions.

Yezaba, the other study site, was in the *dega* zone and the *belg* was the most important agricultural season. Although farmers planted crops in the *meher* season as well, production was less successful due to frost and waterlogging. Farmers planted barley, wheat, maize and peas in the *belg* season, and barley and beans in the *meher*. Some households who have access to running water are able to plant hops and onions. Crop performance, even in the *belg*, has been low since the mid-nineties due to

inadequate rainfall, frost, hailstorms, pests and crop disease. The available land was not as productive as it used to be since land scarcity forced farmers to abandon fallowing to plough it year after year. Their use of fertilizers has also not been very successful recently. Livestock raising in the area was also restricted due to limited land available for grazing and production of hay. It was further restricted by a state forestry project in the locality from which livestock were prohibited. The number of sheep maintained by households was also quite limited.

To make ends meet, some farmers worked as wage laborers in the town of Debre Sina, but there seemed to be few other sources of income. To cope with the last few years of substantially lower crop performance, they have also been selling livestock, renting out or mortgaging their land, and accepting relief and assistance from relatives elsewhere.

3.2 Land and Draft Power

There was a severe shortage of land in the Shola Meda, the average landholding amounting to 2 *timad* or half a hectare, according to key informants. Households received land through land redistribution, inheritance, endowments from parents and from the land market. The last land redistribution in the area was the one that took place in 1997, and which reduced the landholdings of people who were identified as local officials during the last regime, the 'birokrasi', feudal remnants and the wealthy farmers with more than 3 hectares of land. Those who were designated to be poor and land deficient received land amounting to a maximum of 1.5 *timad* for a single eligible person and 3 *timad* for a married couple regardless of family size. About one hundred people received land in this manner, but at least 50 eligible households were not able to get land because the amount of land available to give was inadequate. Most of the land that was given was not very productive although a mixture of fertile and less fertile land was allocated to recipients.

The land market, consisting of sharecropping and cash rentals, was the other source of land for households. Households which lacked oxen, seed and labor to cultivate their own land, were sources of land for other households. The terms for the land transactions ranged from a fourth to a third of production in sharecropping arrangements depending on whether the land was under fallow which required more labor to put it under cultivation, and about 100 *birr* per *timad* per year in the case of cash rentals. The amount of land on the market was quite limited and declining due to the lack of productive land in the area that was worth renting.

The means of access to land in Yezaba were similar to those in Shola Meda. There was severe land shortage in Yezaba as well. Average landholdings amounted to 4 *timad* or 1 hectare, and about 30% of households had less than 2 *timad* or .5 hectare, according to informants. The same land redistribution in 1997 brought about the reduction of 1 to 2 *timad* from about 85 'birokrasi' and reallocation to about 200 households who were considered short of land or landless. Many of these were young couples and female-headed households. Only a maximum of 1 *timad* was given to each recipient with the aim of increasing their holdings to a total of only 2 *timad*. The additions to their holdings merely allowed them to experience limited gains in their productivity, and did not allow them to maintain more livestock for instance. Informants did not think there was any more land available for redistribution.

The youth were the least likely to have access to sufficient amounts of land. Some of them were able to receive about 1 *timad* of land from their parent's and supplemented this with land from the market. Those whose family sizes were large were also thought to be severely short of land.

There was a limited amount of land on the market, mostly of the sharecropping type. Both contract and mortgages were available however. The terms of sharecropping arrangements varied between a half, a third and a fourth of production paid to the landlord, depending on the presence of wild animals, stoniness and the amount of labor required to bring the land under cultivation. The rent on contract land averaged to about 100 *birr* per *timad*. Although land transactions were increasing, the

total availability of land on the market was said to be very limited even if one had the money to arrange land contracts. The scope for supplementing one's landholdings with land from the market was therefore quite restricted.

Overall access to draft power in Shola Meda was declining recently due to repeated crop failure which forced households to sell-off their oxen to purchase food or to make payments on the loans which they used to buy fertilizer. According to key informants, as much as 50% of households had only one ox, a quarter had a pair and a quarter had none. Many households are therefore now renting out or fallowing at least some of their landholdings.

Access to oxen in Yezaba, although declining due to adverse crop conditions recently, was better than in Shola Meda. Informants estimated that 50% of households had a pair of oxen, 40% had one ox and 10% had none. Oxen ownership was not always strongly associated with higher productivity and economic status in a highland *kebele* such as Yezaba however. It was limited land availability and productivity rather than access to draft power that was a constraint on the food security and income of households. Thus, households which had a pair of oxen were not necessarily food or income-secure. Given the extent of land shortages, a pair of oxen was not always necessary for adequate cultivation of one's land, and households maintained a pair as much for buffering themselves from vulnerability to crop failure as for draft power. Many households which did not have a pair of oxen were able to engage in oxen-sharing or in exchanges of labor for oxen to gain sufficient access to draft power.

3.3 *Markets and Government Interventions*

As an area close to an urban center, Shola meda has a fair level of access to markets and social services. Debre Sina which has a grain and cattle market is only about 45 minutes walk away, whereas the town of Armanya is 4 km or 1 hour's walk north. The main highway to the north and south of the country runs along Shola meda but peasants do not seem to make much use of vehicles for transport. There is a primary school in

the vicinity and a high school about 5 km away. Almost all school age children were now attending primary school. The closest health station was in Debre Sina.

Yezaba is more removed from market centers and social services even though it straddles a gravel road that connects with the highway about 10 kilometers away. Major markets such as Debre Sina, Mezezo and Armanya are up to 2 to 3 hours away on foot. The closest primary school and health station are about 2 hours away as well which makes them less accessible to residents of Yezaba. Indeed, informant identified the lack of schools, health centers and clean drinking water as some of the most important problems they faced in addition to conditions unfavorable for crops.

Some development efforts have been implemented in Shola Meda in recent years. The extension package was initiated in the mid-nineties. A substantial portion of households had adopted fertilizer because the land is generally unproductive otherwise, but the number of participating farmers had declined to 164 in 2001 because of crop failure and resultant indebtedness. On average, farmers used 84 *birr* worth of fertilizer on a quarter of a hectare per year. The need to make payments on their loan during harvest when the grain they harvested and sold was cheapest was a source of complaints by farmers.

In the past three years, credit amounting to 500 *birr* was given to about 20 farmers per year in Shola Meda for the purpose of buying and fattening cattle for sale. The credit was given on a group basis after each recipient was evaluated by a committee to see if she or he had enough collateral and was needy enough. The loan was to be paid in 8 months at 7 percent interest. This loan was generally thought be quite beneficial and there was a high level of demand for it. Credit was also given for buying seed and engaging in petty trading. Although these were also appreciated by peasants, the monthly payment required for the latter was less desirable because of the varying profit that could be attained from such an activity.

The other very beneficial intervention from the farmer's standpoint has been the provision of tree seedlings from the tree nursery located in the Shola Meda. At least half of the households have avidly accepted and

planted tree seedlings with the prospects of reaping benefits from the income to be derived from the sale of trees and the wood they can use for various purposes. The constraints on the planting of trees are the low quality of the land available for planting them, competition with crops for land and wild animals.

Development efforts have been even more limited in Yezaba. The extension package has not made much progress because ecological conditions are not conducive to the application of fertilizer. Only 30 farmers were using fertilizer in the year of the study, applying it on an average of 1 *timad* of land each. Many more farmers – 350 – used herbicides however, spending an average of 25 *birr* per year.

The provision of credit for the purchase of animals and seed is being seen as beneficial in Yezaba as well, although only a limited number of farmers have received it. The dissemination of tree seedlings has been quite limited, although some farmers have planted a substantial number either by traveling to distant nurseries to get them or purchasing them on the market.

After a number of years of crop failure, about 80 of the households in Shola Meda which were designated as most food-insecure by local officials received relief in the year 2000. Assistance was given at a rate of 50 kgs of grain for a family size of 4 and 62 kgs for a family size of 5. Although the lack of animals was the criteria used to select recipients, there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the selection process because some who did not have any animals failed to receive any assistance since the available grain was insufficient and also because others thought they deserved to get some assistance even though they owned some animals. Because of the drastic fall in *belg* production, relief provision has been much more substantial in Yezaba, especially in the last two years. More than 400 farmers in 2000 and 334 in 1999 received grain for several months.

In response to queries regarding interventions that were most likely to be successful, informants in Shola Meda pointed out that the area was not very amenable to substantial increases in crop production. They instead called for expanded provision of employment opportunities and

support for tree planting on individual plots. Respondents in Yezaba on the other hand called for the expanded availability of credit for improved animal breeds and oxen purchases, and steps to address the low infra-structural conditions in their localities such as the construction of schools, health centers and a feeder road to areas further down the escarpment.

4. Peasant Perspectives on Economic Stratification and Poverty

Peasants have highly relevant and insightful perspectives on the nature of rural economic stratification and poverty. These may include the characteristics of different categories of peasants and the causes and processes of how households fall into, remain in or emerge from poverty. Peasant perceptions regarding some of these issues were collected from focus group discussions held in the two *kebeles* in which different age, gender and economic categories of peasants participated.

Peasants identified three main economic categories of households. The top economic category of households were referred to as '*rasun yechale*' or self reliant. They were likely to have a total of about 5 to 6 heads of cattle, including a pair of oxen. They were thought to have good landholdings, amounting to 7 to 12 *timad*, partly because they had been able to claim land in the initial land redistributions of the seventies and eighties. Geographical location could also affect one's landholdings, as in Yezaba, where households who had plots on the escarpment were thought to have more productive plots as compared to those who had plots on the plateau. This group may have substantial horticultural plots where they may grow cash crops such as *gesho*, and may also have bee hives as well. The peasants heading such households were thought to be parsimonious and skillful in marketing and household management. This category was thought to make up 10% of all households in both of the study sites.

The second category of households was referred to as '*mekakelegna*' or middle status, '*tatari gebere*' or hard working farmer, '*tagelo k' eje wede afu*' or one who struggles for a hand to mouth existence. They were likely to have only one ox, a cow, a donkey and several sheep. Their landholdings may amount to about 4 *timad* or 1 hectare and were

moderately productive. Such farmers often pursued off-farm employment opportunities as well. They were sometimes food-insecure, partly because they had very few animals to sell for food. This group of households was thought to make up 25% of households in Shola Meda, whereas 40% or more of households were thought to belong to this category in Yezaba.

The third group consisted of the '*deha*' or the poor, and were also described as '*muyategna*', '*begulebetu yeminor*' or wage laborer. This group of households may not even have an ox, but may have a cow or a calf and one or two sheep. Their landholdings were unproductive due to erosion or waterlogging and may amount to only .5 *timad*. Some of them worked for others as wage laborers. Typical characteristics of such households also included large family sizes, lack of oxen which prevented them from planting on time, lack of grazing plots which prohibited them from maintaining livestock, and landholdings which were located on higher altitudes. According to focus group participants, the '*deha*' amounted to 50% of households in Shola Meda and 30% of households in Yezaba. Differences in perceptions of proportions of farmers falling into this and other economic categories may arise from variations in subjective evaluations of what the attributes of certain categories should be and estimates of the number of farmers which fall into them. The relative preponderance of households designated as poor in Shola Meda may also arise from poor quality of the land in the *kebele* which created conditions unfavorable for crop production and livestock raising, a fact which was noted by the vice chairman of the *wereda* as well.

Respondents in Shola Meda mentioned a fourth category of households which were at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. These were referred to as '*bet yewale; yemaysera*' or home-bound and unemployed. They included those who were unemployed because of lack of land, the elderly and the handicapped. Fifteen percent of households were thought to belong to this category in Shola meda.

Peasant perspectives on the characteristics of the different economic strata appear to indicate that level of access to adequate and productive pieces of land was a critical stratifying factor in such highland *kebeles* where land was scarce and generally less productive. In addition, personal

characteristics such as the ability to work hard and management skills were important in gaining upward mobility and avoiding poverty. Such attributes were then reflected in the most important form of wealth, livestock and especially oxen, at least one of which was necessary for adequate access to and cultivation of land.

The factors behind why households fell into and escaped from poverty were also a subject of discussion in the focus groups. Households became poor due to such reasons as repeated crop failure, death of the male household head, death of livestock and loss of land due to land redistributions. There were a particular category of households who were poor on a long term basis as a result of large family sizes and failure to perform their agricultural activities adequately due to laziness and a tendency to be attracted to town life, and those who were chronically sick. People in Shola meda stated that the continuously adverse climatic conditions and the low quality of the soil in their area kept many households in an extended state of poverty.

It was notable that informants felt that the surest ways of avoiding poverty were agriculture-based such as working hard and skillfully on the land and gaining or retaining access to productive pieces of land. On the other hand, views regarding the means by which to escape poverty emphasized diversification by migrating for work and engaging in trading, accepting credit from formal sources to purchase oxen or sheep and investing in the education of children who may then support one in attaining upward mobility.

5. Assets: Role and Access

It is apparent that in the subsistence-oriented rural economy of much of Northern Ethiopia, access to assets that are the basis of agricultural production to a great extent determines households' economic status and livelihood security. Control of assets like land, draft power and other livestock, and labor is vital because agriculture is still the mainstay of rural livelihoods, whereas non-agricultural income mainly serves as a means of fulfilling deficits in the agricultural sector.

There has been a fair degree of debate concerning the relative importance of such productive assets for rural livelihoods, various researchers emphasizing the importance of one over others (McCann 1995; Teferi 1993; Yared 1995; Dessalegn 1997). Such varied perspectives have been useful in highlighting the role of different assets in household production. What is even more important is the elucidation of the implications of different levels and processes of access to these resources for household livelihoods.

Access to an adequate amount of land is probably the most critical prerequisite for the formation of a fully viable household. Sufficient landholdings are the sources of a household's food supply, animal feed and the resources needed for investing in assets such as livestock. Households who lack direct (non-market) control of a fair amount of land find it extremely difficult to attain food security or to escape poverty. The determinant and multi-faceted significance of acquiring sufficient and direct control of land is demonstrated by the experiences of Negash who stated:

I came back [from the military] to my own kebele in 1990 and gained employment as a guard at the local school. I soon got married even though I did not have any land or other assets.My stepfather allowed me to build a house on some of his land. I received one timad of land that was meant for ex-soldiers, in addition to an ox, some fertilizer and farm equipment.I ploughed the land I was given in addition to another timad that I rented in, using my ox in a mekenajo (oxen sharing) arrangement.I subsequently quarreled with my stepfather over land and his demands that I work for him. Although he told me to leave, I was given 2 timad of his land in the land shigsheg (redistribution) of 1997.Although we did not receive land proportional to our family size, I am happy with the shigsheg. Without it I would still have been begging my stepfather for land and

doing wage labor. We can build a house and escape depending on others. It has also given us roots in the area and mebet (rights). As taxpayers, we can receive assistance from the government. I also now have something to sell in the market and I dress equally with others....

Negash's statements show that it was after he received land from the local administration that he was able to produce food, to achieve independence and to gain access to the market. He also articulated the highly valued attainment of social and legal rights in a certain locality that came with a being a landholder and taxpayer and which entitled one to participation in government assistance and development initiatives.

Local land redistributions have certainly been some of the most important means of gaining access to land. In this regard, the timing of household formation in relation to the occurrence of land redistributions, the family size that served as a basis for land allocation, the strength of one's relationship to local officials and the relative availability of land in the local area have all been important in influencing households' access to land (Yared 1995). In addition to official sources of land, land given by parents in the form of marriage endowments or inheritance has also been important to newly established households. The land market is also a source of limited amounts of land for households who engage in various types of transactions including sharecropping, cash rentals and mortgages. Commonly however, none of these mechanisms of gaining access to land by themselves are sufficient to fulfill all the needs of households for land, and peasants often strive to tap all these sources in order to satisfy their requirements. Kidanemariam described how he was able to access land from various sources –endowments from parents, land redistribution, the land market - in a process that took place over a substantial period of time. The difficulties he faced such as the poor quality of the land given to him and the variable availability of land on the market are problems commonly faced by peasants.

I was raised by my mother and stepfather. I was given 1 timad of land as gulema before I got married in 1980..... The land we had was inadequate. We produced only 1 to 2 quintals, so we sharecropped-in 2 timad of land from an elderly couple after giving them gifts to get their favor. Our living condition was not good but manageable because of the small size of our family.....[After I divorced my first wife] I married a woman who had been a servant and only had one timad of land..... In the 1997 land redistribution, I was given only 1 timad. Our landholdings therefore came to 3 timad including the 1 timad that my second wife had brought. Two of the 3 timad were prone to waterlogging and were only good for barley production, whereas one was fairly good allowing us to grow peas as well. Our output was only enough for home use not for sales. I have not been able to sharecrop-in land after the shigsheg because land is no longer available on the market. The land we have is somewhat adequate for our needs, although it is fragmented. The last shigsheg has helped me, enlarging my holdings from 2 to 3 timad and allowing me to breed animals.

In the past decade, the market in land has been a growing source of land mainly for households who already have access to some land through other means. Not many totally landless households have the resources to rent and make use of land on the market (Yohannes 1994). The land market is a source of only limited amounts of land for the households who resort to it, and transactions are often limited in duration. Access to the land market is conditioned by the resource capacity of households. Poorer farmers often experience greater difficulties because they do not have the cash to pay the rent on contract land. Their lack or shortage of oxen also restricts their chances of gaining much land on the market.

For the same reason that the processes of consolidating land over time allow peasants to form viable households, there are various events that bring about loss of some of their land and their impoverishment as a result. One instance of this outcome is related to the 1997 *shigsheg* (land redistribution) in Amhara region which resulted in the alienation of land from people who were designated – *birokrasi* – those who served as local officials during the past regime. Their landholdings were reduced to 4 *timad* or about 1 hectare. These individuals bitterly complain about their treatment and many of them seem to have sustained decline in their productivity and standard of living. Bckele's perspectives and experiences are typical.

In 1989, I was labeled a birokrasi, and much of my land given to four other households, leaving me with only 4 gemed. I complained that my family is being punished. It is the guilty who should be punished. Why should the birokrasi be punished? Why were we separated? Why should some be punished and others let go? They told me that you have eaten during the derg period, so you cannot continue in the same conditions now. They also took 1.5 timad which had 1000 trees. They would not allow me to give up the plot in my backyard instead as I would have preferred. I sent an intermediary to the recipient of the land to ask for some compensation for the trees. He responded by saying 'it is what government has decided, go and ask the government'. He subsequently gave the land to his father in-law who had lost his plot due to a landslide. Land recipients are being allowed to do what they want with the land that they have received. The 4 gemed I was given did not provide me with enough grazing space and grain since my family was growing as well. I was no longer able to support my family on what I produced which amounted to three and a half quintals. I tried using fertilizer but was not successful....

Such complaints about the unfairness of penalizing every former official without reviewing their past behavior as well as members of their families who also had a share in the land that was taken away and the authoritarian manner in which it was done, were quite common. Not all *birokrasi* experienced impoverishment as some were able to use their assets and skills to rent land or invest in other endeavors.

Loss of landholdings can also occur in association with events in the household developmental cycle such as the granting of plots to children in preparation for their marriage or as a result of divorce which may result in division of landholdings. Abebayehu lost land due to some of these reasons and also because, as an older female household head, she found it harder to fight-off claims on some of her land. Such reductions have probably had a deleterious impact on the productivity and economic status of the household she is heading.

My husband and I used to live well in the eighties, except in 1984-85 when our belg crops failed..... My husband and my son, who was in the military, died in 1991. I therefore started leading a family of six by myself.... We are now paying 90 Birr in taxes on 6 timad of land that is shared by my household and those of my two married sons. I now have only 3 timad after 3 timad was given to my two sons. I gave them one timad each, but the kebele officials took one more timad from us and gave it to them. We now have only 3 timad for the remaining five of the family. I am now appealing to the officials to have this land returned to me, arguing that they have taken the land that belongs to the rest of my children. My sons are also pushing into my land. Since I am poor however, nobody listens to me. Because they are young, they are listened to.

Whereas a minimum amount of land is critical if a household is to form a viable livelihood, it needs to be supplemented with control of

animal draft power if the household is to make full use of its land. This is why peasants put a good deal of effort into acquiring at least one if not two head of oxen which represent the greatest capital assets of the household. The sale of oxen is often also the only substantial source of cash and food during times of hardship. Alenew, the landless farmer, who nevertheless managed to rear two oxen expressed the value of oxen as such:

I worked as a servant in several households for six years receiving food but mainly without an additional salary. In some of the households, I was paid up to 1 quintal of grain per year which I used to buy 2 calves... . I later sold one of my oxen to build a house because I needed to feed builders. The ox I had left allowed me to gain income by plowing for others. It also serves as a source of security in case of illness or death, and as a guarantee in case I need a loan.... Since we do not know what will happen in the future, I acquire and maintain calves....

It is important however to characterize the implications of access to variable levels of draft power. The assumption that a pair of oxen is necessary to meet a household's needs for draft power is not always warranted. If a household's landholdings are limited for instance, one ox can be used in an oxen-sharing arrangement to meet its draft power needs in a more or less adequate manner. Some households, as in the case of Gebrehana, may find that ownership of only a single ox may limit their productivity or ability to enhance it, thereby making it difficult to achieve upward economic mobility.

I was raised by my mother and stepfather. I got married in 1971, having 1 ox and 4 quintals of grain. I was given 3 timad by the kebele officials that I am still farming... I was given an additional 1.5 timad of moderately fertile

land during the shigsheg, but our productivity remained constrained by weather conditions. I have not been able to rent in additional land because I only have one ox.... We did get belg rains 2 years ago, but we were only able to plant a certain amount of land because we only have one ox.... Presently, I have only one ox which is preventing us from planting on time...

Although households may find that a single ox may prevent timely cultivation and limit their capacity to increase production by renting-in more land, it is the absolute lack of even a single ox that debilitates their productive activities, virtually relegating them to poverty. Belaynesh, a middle-aged woman who had five children, talked about the impact of the death of their two oxen.

I sold the ox two years ago because I got sick and also to help cover expenses. We used to produce 8 quintals a year before the ox was sold. We have had to rent out our 4 timad of land to sharecroppers for two-fifths of the produce after we sold our ox. We have been facing severe food shortages since then. Last year, we only received 1 quintal of grain, partly as result of drought....

Her case demonstrates how the lack of any oxen can severely reduce households' production by forcing them to rent out their land, in addition to the untimely and inadequate cultivation that is also likely to result as well. The lack of oxen is also highly undesirable for the two person-days of labor required in exchange for a pair of oxen. This arrangement is not only highly exploitative but such oxen-less households have low priority in getting draft power, which has an adverse impact on productivity.

Nevertheless, households that have adequate amounts of labor are able to maintain some productivity in this manner, whereas many female-headed and elderly-headed households with no male labor are often forced to rent out their land. Households lacking oxen and who may or may not

have adequate labor to exchange for draft power may sometimes be able to get the assistance of relatives and neighbors who may provide them with draft power with little or no compensation. This is an important illustration of the role of social capital or social networks in preserving the livelihoods of the rural poor. Abcbayehu, the elderly female household head mentioned earlier, talked about how she made use of several mechanisms – renting out land, requesting assistance and exchanging labor - to acquire draft power. Many others use such strategies as well, but as she also indicated, it becomes increasingly hard for oxen-less households to get draft power in times when the overall availability of oxen in the community declines due to repeated crop failure.

Since my husband died, I have been renting out land because two of our oxen and one cow died partly for lack of care. We have been requesting the help of others to have our land ploughed and also sharecropping-out the land for six elevenths of the output. My sons help out by working for others in exchange for oxen and collecting leaves from government land for sale..... This year I intend to beg other farmers to plough my land, who will each plough a portion. But it is getting to be more difficult to get help because many people have been left with only one ox after selling their second one.

For the reasons mentioned, peasants have a strong desire to own at least one ox and if possible two. This is more probable if one or both marriage partners have been able to rear an ox or receive it from their parents in preparation for marriage. Alternatively, many households mobilize funds from various sources such as the sale of smaller animals or other income-earning activities to invest in an ox, or breed/rear it at home as well. However, ownership of oxen should not be taken as the only and even most important index of economic status, as is often done in academic and practitioner circles. Indeed, the data in this study shows the critical reproductive role of cows. This is a common means of

accumulating assets. The sale of offspring and butter is also an important source of income. Although not the case in Northern Shewa, cows also provide draft power in other parts of the Ethiopian highlands such as Northern Wello and Gojam. Households may therefore often prefer to maintain a cow in addition to an ox as a more advantageous strategy. Small ruminants are also valued as a critical and ready source of cash as well. Therefore, characterization of the economic status of household should include a summation of all the livestock available to a household and not simply its control of oxen (Ege 1999; Yared 1999).

Labor is the other indispensable basis of household production and livelihood security. It is therefore important to assess the implications of varying amounts and types of labor. Because of the sexual division of labor in the plow-based highland agricultural system, the availability of at least one adult male and one adult female laborer is vital for the normal functioning of the household. In fact, because of their irreplaceable role in domestic activities, households are non-functional without women. While there are many female-headed households who lack male labor, this deficiency proves to be a major handicap in a farming system in which only men plow. Such households are therefore forced to rent out their land or hire male labor, both of which reduce from the possible grain or cash supplies available to them. Men also have an important role in the management and transaction of animals and in diversification into non-agricultural activities, which can be severely hampered in their absence. For households who lack oxen, the exchange of male labor for oxen is a vital source of draft power.

While the labor of at least one adult male and one adult female is a minimum requirement, the availability of adult labor additional to that of the couple can be important in allowing the household to increase its production and income by enhancing its ability to engage in land improvement and conservation activities as well as to diversify its income earning activities. For example, Negash, whose children are aged 10 years and younger, said "Since I do not have much land, I am not short of labor, although I am not able to work as a carpenter as I want to." The extent of how much such additional labor contributes to the household is

of course dependent on the availability of land and non-agricultural opportunities that can absorb it.

Furthermore, children or other assistants provide critical labor input into such tasks as animal herding and certain agricultural and domestic activities. This means that recent initiatives directed at increasing the school enrollment of children can increase the incidence of labor shortages faced by households, although this is somewhat mitigated by school attendance in shifts which allows siblings to take care of their domestic responsibilities in turns. Even in cases when this is not possible, many parents seem quite willing to tolerate the extra hardship involved in taking over the tasks normally conducted by their children in the interest of the latter's education.

The foregoing section has shown how different levels of each of the essential assets – land, oxen and labor – affects the economic status of households. While these factors of production are useful only in combination with each other and to a great extent exchangeable for each other, the level of control of each asset by households has qualitatively different implications for their economic status. A review of the 16 households that serve as cases in this study shows that most of them can be considered poor in terms of their control of assets and food security. Although all of them are currently food-insecure, to a great extent because of the repeated crop failures in recent years, there are also qualitative differences in the duration and acuteness of their poverty.

It seems apparent that it is those households that have seriously inadequate landholdings in terms of quantity and quality, especially in combination with a larger family size, that remain in severe and long term poverty. The scarcity of land, its relative unavailability on the land market and its indispensable role in production and animal breeding give it a critical role in determining the economic prospects of households. Furthermore, female and elderly-headed households who lack male labor are also fated to chronic poverty. The possibilities of escaping poverty in the case of households who have at least one male laborer are strong, although dependent on their landholdings and the availability of non-farm income earning opportunities.

Although the lack of oxen represents a severe handicap on the productivity and economic mobility of households, households can cope with their lack of draft power by exchanging their labor for it or by relying on assistance from their community. Moreover, if they have adequate landholdings, they can gradually acquire oxen. The lack of oxen therefore is a serious problem but not an insurmountable one in the *Dega* and *Woina dega* areas of the region, whereas it appears to be much more of a bottleneck in the lowlands where the relatively low number of oxen relative to land areas appears to make their role much more indispensable (McCann, 1987).

Control of a single ox is more important in signifying a limited or moderate productivity and investment capacity, as well as a greater vulnerability to shocks that may reduce the household to severe poverty. The possibility of avoiding poverty for those who only have a single ox is associated with the adequacy of their landholdings which determines their productivity and surplus.

6. Poverty as Process

6.1 Processes of impoverishment

A number of households in the study experienced impoverishment, i.e. loss of assets and deteriorating living conditions, over time. Various factors caused impoverishment of households including repeated crop failure, loss of draft and other livestock due to disease, absence of male labor and ill-health, limited and declining amounts productivity of land sometimes associated with reallocation of landholdings by officials as well as increasing family size. These factors did not automatically lead to the impoverishment of households however. Households actively took steps to avoid poverty, and a combination of events was often necessary to impoverish them. Such events were also likely to have variable impact on different households. Priest Wubishet's experiences are an illustrative example:

I married in 1990 with two oxen that my wife and I each brought and 2 timad of land that I received from my family. Both oxen died from disease in 1992. We therefore became poor and subsequently divorced. I began to keep a rebi horse, which gave birth to a mule that I sold to buy a cow. This cow died soon after. My wife returned and began to make and sell basketwork and I started working as a wage laborer. We gradually began to buy and breed some sheep and chicken with which we accumulated some funds to buy a cow that later gave us a calf. We ploughed our land by working for the oxen that we got from others. We were given 1.25 timad of moderate quality land during the 1997 shigsheg. Our crops have been failing since so I have been working as a wage laborer in construction for the last 4 years.I have not been able to rent-in land because I do not have an ox. This year, we are planning to sell a cow to buy seed and to pay-off our taxes and loans. I will plough my land by exchanging two days labor for a pair of oxen. I will have to leave some land fallow due to lack of seed as I have done in the past few years. We had produced only 1 quintal last year. We are now in a state of poverty due to loss of our animals and crop failure. We were not really poor when our oxen died in 1992 because we managed to produce sufficient grain by working for others in exchange for draft power. It is only after our crops failed since 1997 that we have become poor.

The processes of impoverishment experienced by Priest Wubishet which took place over an extended period of time occurred due to the combined impact of loss of draft power and other animals and repeated crop failure which also forced them to leave some land fallow. Despite such powerful pressures, he had been able to undertake various strategies including engaging in income diversification, *rebi* arrangements and

labor-draft power exchanges which mitigated but did not stop his slide into poverty. In fact, they had also received a plot of land from the local administration which is likely to have had a slowing effect on this trend.

The case of Tewabech, a 24 year old female-head of household who experienced divorce and the death of a second husband, presents a somewhat different trend towards impoverishment.

Since 1998, our crop output has declined to 1 to 2 quintals a year due to damage brought about by pests We were not able to build up our animal stocks because of the shortages we were continually facing. In fact, I had to exchange a cow for a heifer in order to buy food, school materials and clothes with the difference in value. I also had to sell all our sheep for expenses when my husband died. I sold my cow about two months ago when we needed money to cover school expenses. We hire laborers who use our ox to plough our land, while my niece and I do the weeding and ploughing. I have been renting out one timad of our land for three years after my father died, because we are not able to plough all of it. We have one and a half timad of the land ploughed for us, and leave half a timad for grazing and growing hay....

Again, we see that repeated crop failure has led to steady loss of assets and in Tewabech's household. But it is the absence of male labor due to her husband's death, despite the availability of an ox, that has weakened their ability to avoid poverty by forcing them to hire laborers and to rent out some of their land, which have meant a continued loss of income and inability to invest.

Similarly, it is the role of additional factors such as loss of land as a result of being labeled a *birokrasi*, ill-health or a large family size in addition to the impact of crop failure that often leads to impoverishment.

6.2. Escaping Poverty

The ability to build assets and escape poverty, to a large extent, appears to require access to a fair amount of land in addition to labor. This observation is supported by histories of households that have managed to emerge from poverty. Abate's case is an illustrative example:

I came to this area from Wello in 1975. I worked as a household servant for 3 years. I then married a woman who headed her own household. I only had 100 Birr and she had a cow. My wife also had 4 timad of fairly productive land. She was also a very good potter. We lived well, producing about 25 quintals our first year, and our animal holdings grew to 3 oxen and 3 cows....

We can see that the fair amount of land available to the couple - 4 *timad* of productive land - in addition to their labor, has allowed them to accumulate assets in the form of cattle by providing them with surplus for investment and preventing the need to sell-off animals for various needs. His wife's abilities as a potter were of course an important source of supplementary income. They were therefore able to escape poverty starting with almost nothing but a cow.

In some rare cases however, virtually landless households may also manage to build assets and emerge from poverty. Alenew, 41, who lived by himself, was the only one among the cases in the study who managed to build assets despite being landless.

I was a 10th grade student when I joined the military in 1980. I was part of the airborne division for 4 years. In 1991 (when the previous army collapsed), I returned to my village without receiving any reintegration assistance. I worked as a servant in several households for six years receiving food but mainly without an additional salary. In some of the households, I was paid up to 1 quintal of

grain per year which I used to buy 2 calves.... During the 1997 land shigsheg, I was given 1.5 timad of land on the basis of a one-person family. It was not productive, only good for growing hay. I later sold one of my oxen to build a house because I needed to feed people who worked on its construction. The ox I had left allowed me to gain income ploughing for others. It also serves as a source of security in case of illness or death, and as a guarantee in case I need a loan. I have recently received money to buy a calf from a rebi arrangement in which I maintained a cow for its owner. I also bought another calf by saving money, eating only one time a day. Since we do not know what will come in the future, I acquire and maintain calves not because I have extra money but by avoiding buying clothes and shoes, even though I want these.....

Remarkably, Alenew started out by acquiring two calves while working as a landless servant. The calves then grew into oxen to become a source of income, security and collateral, and therefore the basis of a sustainable livelihood despite the fact that he had access to an amount of land that was only sufficient for producing hay. His uses of a rebi arrangement and his frugality have also allowed him to continue accumulating animals. An unusual farsightedness and ability to save were critical in fighting-off poverty in the context of very limited landholdings.

7. Livelihood Strategies

In addition to their access to assets, the economic prospects of households to a great extent depend on the types and effectiveness of strategies that they use to enhance their productivity, assets and income. A commonly encountered inclination among peasants is an adherence to mainly agricultural strategies as the only reliable basis of household viability and economic advancement. This mainly stems from the limited

scope for earning non-agricultural income earning. An almost exclusive and sustainable reliance on agriculture requires a reasonable degree of access to factors of production however. This type of orientation was articulated quite well by Tsegaye who is a middle-income farmer who has 4 *timad* of land, rents-in two more, and owns two bulls and a cow.

We will continue to struggle as long as we have the energy. I can describe my status as an industrious farmer. We have been impoverished by weather conditions. I try to avoid further impoverishment by ploughing adequately, avoiding conflict with neighbors, buying and raising small animals to raise, and saving money. Only agriculture is the source of sustenance for us.

Such an agricultural-based strategy involves considerable investment in the land available to households. This includes efforts directed at preventing land degradation, enhancement of fertility and adequate cultivation. Bekele stated,

In order to conserve my land and maintain production, I am planting trees on the land, building drainage channels and terraces. I put feg (ashes from the hearth) on the land two times a year. I work on terracing the land every year whenever I get the time.

The production strategies of farmers also include their attempts at building up their animal stocks. In addition to their reliance on natural breeding of their own animals, they utilize *rebi*, or shared breeding of animals as well as formal sources of credit in order to engage in animal fattening or breeding. The former is an extremely important means by which poor farmers and others are able to build up their stock if they lack any start-up capital but have the labor and animal feed required to maintain the animals. It is an informal and flexible arrangement in which households maintain cattle or small ruminants for others depending on the

availability of resources. Formal sources of credit are becoming a growing source of resources for investing in livestock as well. Abate's case presents an illustrative example.

I plan to take in a cow in a ribi arrangement in order to rebuild my stock, because I do not have the ability to buy animals currently. I also intend to borrow more money from the Amhara Credit and Savings Institute in order to buy an ox for fattening which will mean that I will need to work for others in exchange for additional draft power. I have planted 1200 trees seedlings recently, which are doing quite well. I planted them on arable land when production failed. I did not plant trees previously because we were doing well and we had livestock as sources of income. It is because of the difficulties that we are facing today that I decided to grow trees.

As his case also demonstrates, tree planting is also becoming a highly desirable and beneficial form of investment that continues to yield results in the face of declining agricultural productivity. There is a therefore a growing tendency to convert farm land into small tree plantations.

Agricultural wage labor is an important source of income for many poor households who are often landless or land-short. Alenew, who is a landless peasant but who has been able to build up an animal stock amounting to several cattle is an illustrative example:

I now survive by working as a wage laborer. This year for instance, I ploughed for others in July, weeded and cut gesho in September, and will work harvesting crops in December and January. I am paid 3-5 Birr a day for ploughing, 3-4 Birr for weeding and 3 Birr for digging. When I use my ox to plough for others, I am paid 2-4 Birr for the ox and 3 Birr for my labor. I also cut hay for

others, getting half of the produce as payment which I use to feed my ox or to sell to acquire food.

The level of production that households are able to maintain on their own farms is limited and variable, and many of them therefore diversify their sources of income in order to enhance their livelihood security (Matlon 1979; Ellis 2000). Diversification in the highland agriculture of Ethiopia plays a greater role in affording households access to basic items from the market without further eroding their asset base, rather than as a basis for investing in building up their assets. Peasants commonly diversify their livelihoods by engaging in non-agricultural employment. This is especially important in areas closer to larger towns where some employment in the construction and service sectors is available. These towns offered a surprisingly substantial amount of employment for peasants in their hinterlands, and hold great promise as significant employers of surplus rural labor in the future. Formal sources of employment, such as government or NGO sponsored projects are also important means of earning income, albeit only in areas in which such projects are available. Tewabech, a female household head, works in a government-run tree nursery which has provided continual employment to a substantial number of peasants for an extended period of time. Regarding the benefit she derived from it, she said "The tree nursery project paid us one and a half quintals in August for work we had done in March and April. We used half of it to repay our debt and the rest for food. I had borrowed 100 *Birr* from a merchant earlier which I had to repay with 100 kilo of grain (100 percent interest)." The wages that she received in food were not only a critical supplement to their household food supplies but also allowed her to borrow grain although she had to repay her loan at a usurious rate when she got paid.

For most peasants however, diversification means regularly taking various products to the market for sale. These are often activities that they use to cope with annual and seasonal food shortages and do not yield income that would allow investment in assets. They include the sale of wood and hay mostly, but also handicrafts as well, all of which are

characterized by low prices. Abate's involvement in such activities is a typical example of how peasants make use of them as coping mechanisms in times of crop failure.

We have sustained crop failure and indebtedness in the last three years. Our living conditions are very poor since our production has been failing. Since the crises started, we have been coping by selling animals, pottery, hay and wood. We are continually taking out wood and hay to the market unless it is planting time. We buy hay and wood from the kebele administration and other farmers for sale in the market.

Not all peasant attempts at diversification succeed in yielding a sustainable amount of income, forcing peasants to abandon them. Women's attempts at producing value-added products such as liquor often fall victim to the low and variable demand that exists for them, as well as the high prices of the grain inputs required (Tewabech). Trading activities often fail due to low demand and profit margins, lack of capital or labor, and restrictions by authorities. Alenew, the landless farmer mentioned above, described his experiences as such:

I tried trading in teff once. I had received 50 Birr for 6 months of work as a servant, which I put together with 90 Birr I received for onions that I had planted as well. I thought about what I wanted to do with the 140 Birr I had and decided to engage in some trading. I bought 60 kilos of teff for 117 Birr. After I spent money for lunch and transportation, I realized that I did not make any profit, so I abandoned trading. I spent the money I had left on trousers.

Generally however, most peasants overwhelmingly depend on agricultural production as the basis of their livelihoods. Too often, local

economies are characterized by the lack of non-agricultural activities that restricts the possibilities for diversification on the part of rural households.

The success of peasant strategies in improving their economic conditions is also strongly related to personal qualities such as industriousness, enterprising nature, education, saving and management skills. Such qualities can bring about economic success even for peasants who are relatively poorly endowed with economic resources. The example of Alenew presented in section 6.2 above has shown how he was able to rise from the status of a servant who lacked any access to arable land and other assets to form a viable livelihood and build up a fair level of animal stock, by working assiduously, exercising extreme parsimony and managing his resources well.

Others strengthen their livelihood security by exploring as many opportunities for gaining income as possible. Such peasants are more enterprising and sometimes have had access to formal education which endows them with some of the skills and broader outlook that enables them to take advantage of whatever opportunities that may be available. Negatu is one such person:

I got married in 1980. We started out with my ox, my wife's bull and 3 timad of land which was of moderate quality. We used to produce 5 to 10 quintals. It was better then. I later sold the bull to buy a cow. I took in rebi sheep, and also traded in grain using my donkey.... I have been selling the 7 to 8 offspring that the cow has had to cope with the unsatisfactory crop production we have had since 1984-1985. I also began to rent in about 3 timad of land for 200 Birr, selling some sheep to come up with the money.To cover our deficits, I have also been selling stones to people from Debre Sina who want them for tombstones. I have also been using fertilizer on my own land and the land I rent since the time the D.A. was assigned to our area. I have planted trees by buying the 1200 seedlings in 1991 and 2500

seedlings in 1998 from the Mezezo project. I have been making use of the wood by selling it every year to pay my taxes and to buy clothes, as well as for fuel and house construction. I received credit amounting to 380 Birr to buy 6 sheep in 1999. I feel that my education has made me a better household manager – planting trees, communicating with D.A.'s, writing letters for fees and trading, as opposed to some farmers who lose money on the market.

8. Participation in Social Activities and Social Support

Relationships of mutual social support are a critical component of peasant livelihood security. Such mechanisms of social support help them meet resource deficits and enhance their capacity of accumulating assets, and include resource exchanges, labor and draft power donations, grain and cash loans, shared animal breeding, rotating credit groups, as well as emotional support. They are based on social networks consisting of kinship and community relations. Peasants reinforce these networks through various social activities and associations which take the form of social visits, feasts and religious and burial associations, although such activities decline in times of hardship like droughts. Poorer households especially find it difficult to maintain participation in religious associations and credit groups. Nevertheless, everyone participates in the burial associations, although contributions for a funeral vary with annual variations in food stocks and income. Gebrchiwot described the variety of social activities and their variable intensity in relation to the general economic conditions facing the community.

Social activities in our kebele have declined since 1996 when our crops began to fail. I used to be involved in an equb group, but it has now disappeared. But we have recently started one in which we pay 2 birr a week. We also have only two senbetes (religious associations)

functioning now, where we used to have four to five previously. We are however attempting to build a church in the area, for which committees have been established in Debre Sina and Addis Ababa as well. Feasts for wedding celebrations have also declined substantially, often limited to signing ceremonies. We used to have large feasts for Easter, slaughtering sheep and preparing 3 to 5 pots of tella. We also visited relatives and stayed with them for up to a week, bringing them vino, sugar and coffee. Last Easter, we remained at home and just visited my wife's parents. The way it was previously now sounds like a myth.

Such social events are the basis of various types of economic and social support among peasants that are to a great extent reciprocal or collaborative in nature. Such arrangements allow households to acquire resources that they lack in return for those they have, to combine similar resources for mutually beneficial ends and to contribute to common funds that they may use to meet their needs for cash in turn. Thus, they may engage in exchanges of labor for oxen, sharecropping and reciprocal labor exchanges.

While many of these exchanges occur in a reciprocal fashion, many poor households receive critical assistance in the form of draft power and labor donations, employment and grain or cash loans or gifts, which such households try to compensate by whatever means is available to them. Alenew's experiences, as a poor and landless farmer, are a case in point:

I help out with preparations for funerals, carrying patients to the health station, making contributions when animals die and helping households that are facing emergencies with agricultural tasks. They in turn employ me as a daily wage laborer. I also attend social activities such as feasts, funerals, baptism ceremonies. I try not to be outside of society.

Alenew has been able to donate his labor for free to households that are in need of his labor, who in turn assure him of employment opportunities that are critical to him in view of his landless status. He is also careful to maintain active participation in social activities as a way of securing access to opportunities that may be available from other members of his community.

Other poor farmers such as Kidanemariam find other ways of compensating their supporters.

Some friends helped me out by loaning me a pair of oxen in order to cultivate our land and I helped them with harvesting their crops in return. Our crops this year have been damaged by frost. Since September, we have received about 60 kilos of food aid on the basis of a 5-person family. We were to receive the same amount last year, but we opted to divide our share among 5 families, which left us with 30 kilos each time.

In addition to exchanging his labor for the assistance he got in terms of draft power, he opted to share his badly needed portion of food aid with others in the community, doubtlessly in order to maintain sustainability of his social network which are an important component of his future livelihood security. Sharing of relief allocations originally meant for the poorest households has thus become a common practice in many localities as a result of a desire by such households to maintain long-term ties with their neighbors and potential supporters. As one informant stated, some of them justified this by saying “you are the ones who will bury us and bury us [when we die].”

Although they may not be expected to reciprocate in the future, many poor households who happen to be facing crises often do rely on their close relatives for their very survival. The following are two examples: Tewabech, a female household head who has been facing food insecurity due to labor shortages, and Estifo, a young man who was experiencing divorce and severe food insecurity, illustrate how close family

become a source of insurance and survival for poor households. Tewabech stated:

My godmother supports me by giving me grain for seed and food. She also advises me about things and comforts me. My cousin also helps me with herding, taking care of children and harvesting crops. Nobody else helps me.

Similarly, Estefo reported:

I recently borrowed 50 birr from my father to buy clothes. This year has been the most difficult since we only produced 50 kilos from the belg season. I plan to borrow seed from my father to plant in the belg season. I have also been eating at his house since my divorce.

Relationships of mutual support among households do not only serve to help meet their resource deficits, but also play a significant role in allowing them to enhance their asset base through such mechanisms as the *equb*, the revolving credit group, and *rebi* - the sharing of animal breeding. These are often the only means by which many households achieve economic progress generally or regain their livestock assets after losing them due to a drought for instance. For example, Bekele explained how he was able to start out in life by acquiring draft animals using funds from an *equb*.

My mother was from Menze, which she left to escape from the Italians. She came to this area and worked in a household as a servant. I was conceived in that house, and my father who was her employer supported her for one year. He then took me in and I was subsequently raised by my stepmother. Later, when I asked my father for land, he told me to ask a rich person for land. Instead, I began to rent land from my father. I then

bought two bulls after saving some money in an equb. I also got married after building a house.

Similarly, Gebrehiwot, who sustained repeated crop failure and the death of two oxen explained how the *rebi* arrangement is allowing him to regain some of his assets, probably the only way he could do so in a context in which production failure and the need to rent out some of his land was denying him the resources that he could invest in draft power.

*Our living conditions had deteriorated since our production began to decline in 1993. In 1996, our pair of oxen died and our crops have been failing even more drastically since. Friends have been helping me by loaning me oxen. I have rented out 1 timad of land for a third of the crop output. I am ploughing the rest of the land myself but our production has been limited by waterlogging and untimely rain. We were left with one cow which was later sold for food and clothes. A cow I have maintained as *rebi* from relatives has had 3 calves which I will share with the owners.*

In the same way, other peasants mentioned how they either relied on or expected to use *rebi* animals to build up their animal stock. Some of them also found both *equb* and *rebi* as an important source of funds that they could use to cover their regular expenditures. Other poor households may not find it possible to engage in either, for lack of cash and livestock feed, respectively.

9. The Social Development of the Household

The importance of social phenomena for the economic prospects of households is also manifested in the impact of social development of the household, including the conditions of household formation, its adaptive structural changes and the impact of various events such as divorce or

death of a spouse. The emphasis given to purely production and economic factors by previous thinking on household poverty or livelihood security has underestimated the substantial implications of household social dynamics for the viability of households. The following discussion attempts to highlight facets of this relationship in order to bring forth a more complete understanding of the factors influencing household economic status.

The conditions surrounding household formation in peasant communities of North Shewa, in terms of the economic resources such as marriage endowments or inheritance it starts out, can greatly affect its economic prospects. A couple's initial access to or control over land, draft oxen and other livestock can determine whether they can form a viable household. Teferi's experiences demonstrate some of the long-term implications of meager land and livestock resources at the point of household formation.

I started school early and reached 8th grade before I had to quit due to problems at home. I got married in 1984, after receiving one timad of land, two sheep and a cow. I sharecropped 3 timads of my mother's land. I never received land from the kebele even in the recent shigsheg because I was considered part of my mother's household. I used to get oxen from relatives, sometime for free but mostly in exchange for straw and labor. I got divorced in 1980 and began living with my mother. We had to sell the cow in 1991 for seed and food, from which we had gotten a calf that has now grown to be an ox. I have not remarried because of the shortages we have been facing. I may do so if our crops perform better in the future. The lack of oxen so far has also reduced our production levels because we are unable to plant on time. Our crop output is only enough for six months of the year. The rest of the year, we survive by receiving help from my sister who works in Addis Ababa, selling straw and sheep.

I have not been able to rent-in land due to lack of oxen. One ox is enough only to plough my own land. I have sharecropped out and mortgaged 1.5 timad of our land to cover our food needs. I would have been able to regain the land if our output had been good.

His inadequate landholdings and his prolonged lack of access to oxen has led to sustained low production, inability to rent-in land and has finally forced him to rent out some of his mother's land. This outcome has also prevented him from remarrying and forming an independent household. Failure to receive land from parents or *kebele* officials makes it especially difficult for households to attain any economic progress. This is why the time of marriage formation in relation to the occurrence of land allocations by local officials was also important in conditioning the economic status of households. We have seen how Alenew, an ex-soldier and a migrant, was relegated to eking out a living as a wage laborer for a long period of time, mainly because he lacked access to land. In comparison, Abate was able to build up assets and form a viable household because he was at least able to gain access to a fair amount of land although he started out with almost nothing.

I came to this area from Wello in 1975. I worked as a household servant for 3 years. I then married a woman who headed her own household. I only had 100 Birr and she had a cow. My wife also had 4 timad of fairly productive land. She was also a very good potter. We lived well, producing about 25 quintals our first year, and our animal holdings grew to 3 oxen and 3 cows.

Although Abate has been fortunate in being able to marry a landed woman, one of the disadvantages of starting out poor is the strong likelihood of marrying an equally poor person because marriageable persons or their parents are very likely to pay attention to the assets available to a potential marital partner when making a decision over the

union. The economic prospects of such individuals are likely to be that much more dismal. Alenew talked about the difficulties he experienced in marrying even divorcees as a landless farmer.

I had been living by myself for two years, when somebody advised me to marry a poor woman. I then asked two to three divorcees for marriage, but they all refused because they were looking for a wealthier man. My ox and house was not enough, and they wanted grain enough for a year, as well as sheep and money for clothes. Women are afraid of hard times and want a man who will satisfy all their needs. Since I don't have assets, I am giving up on marriage. I cannot marry my former fiancée because I would need twelve months worth of grain stocks and money for her shoes and netela (a shawl made from spun cotton).

Aspects of the social development of the household following its formation can have variable effects on its economic status. With the birth and growth of children, the household attains an addition to its labor supply which has a positive impact on its capacity to rear livestock, enhance agricultural productivity and diversify its income sources. Family size used to be the basis for land allocations in the previous regime, and its growing size therefore could have been the means of attaining larger landholdings and associated economic progress. Such an association no longer holds however.

Furthermore, peasants recognize that growth in family size can be a liability for the household as well. As the household grows, its food needs and expenditures on clothes, education and health care grow proportionally. Negatu expressed his awareness of how this could be one of the factors impoverishing households. His attempt to deal with this by allowing relatives to raise and educate his children and relying on birth control methods were variably successful.

I have been impoverished by weather conditions, crop failure, the growth in the size of my family and our limited land resources. My sister and sister in-law are each educating one of my children. I don't want to have more children. We had the last two without wanting to because my wife has been discouraged from using pills by her relatives and the experiences of other women who have become sick from using them, especially because she has asthma.

Other events in addition to the gradual development of the household can be sources of enhanced vulnerability. Divorce is one such event that can destabilize and impoverish households by bringing about the division and loss of resources including labor. It can also lead to the re-division of the households' landholdings, or more commonly the loss of land for women who often leave the area of their marriage to go to their natal localities. Although divorcees may re-establish themselves through remarriage, many, especially women wind up poorer as a result of the breakup of their marriage. Kidanemariam's experiences illustrate this outcome.

I was raised by my mother and stepfather. I was given 1 timad of land as gulema before I got married in 1980. My wife and I both brought one heifer each to the marriage in addition to 1 quintal of grain that I had. Our living condition was not good but manageable because of the small size of our family. Our cows had given birth to two bulls which grew into oxen. Altogether we had 2 oxen and 2 cows. A few years later, I had to sell one ox to buy food and clothes when our crops failed. My wife subsequently said 'we are not doing well, so you should go to your mother and serve her'. She left taking one cow and we sold our last ox to share its value between us. I was left with two children because my wife

took one child and because I had given one son to a priest to train as a deacon and another one to a female relative who needed a herder. I then married a woman who had been a servant and only had one timad of land and one sheep. The cow gave birth however and my wife's sheep had 5 more offspring which I sold to buy clothes.

The above shows how the combined and interacting effect of crop failure and marital dissolution impoverished Kidanemariam's household. His divorce which arose out of the difficulties they were facing due to repeated crop failure led to the re-division and diminution of his animal assets and his remarriage to a woman who only had a minimum in assets and land. Although the new household appeared to be reviving with the reproduction of the animals they had left, there is no doubt that his divorce had brought about decline in his living conditions.

Similarly, the absence of a male household-head due to death or some other reason can prove to be a severe liability to the resultant female-headed household. Tewabech's case described above has shown how the lack of male labor due to the death of her husband has forced them to hire laborers and to rent out some of their land, which was also partly responsible for preventing them from building up their animal stock. Abestayehu's case demonstrates some of the multiple ill-effects of spousal death.

My husband and I used to live well in the eighties, except in 1984-85 when our belg crops failed.My husband, and my son who was in the military, also died in 1991. I therefore started leading a family of six by myself. At the time, I had 2 oxen and 1 cow..... Since my husband died, I have been renting out land because two of our oxen and one cow died partly for lack of care. We have been requesting the help of others to have our land ploughed and also sharecropping-out the land for six elevenths of the output.Crop conditions have been

poor from 1996 to the present. I have been impoverished as a result, although I have been hurt by the death of my cattle as well.This year I intend to beg other farmers to plough my land, who will each plough a portion. But it is getting to be more difficult to get help because many people have been left with only one ox after selling their second one.

Her case shows that the death of the male household head can bring about the death of livestock because of lack of care, inability to plough their own land, and the need to rent out some of their land. Their general impoverishment has also been exacerbated by loss of some of their land due to her weaker ability to influence local officials as an old woman. A lowered capacity to manage the household properly and to construct strategies for the future is indeed one of the outcomes of the loss of a spouse. Mulatua, a middle-aged woman who has been forced to lead her household by herself because of her husband's absence due to military service, stated: "I do not have plans for the future since my husband is absent. It is only when a couple support each other that they make plans for the future....". Her statement indicates that such households may find it difficult to attain economic progress even if they were able to avoid impoverishment.

On the other hand, shifts in household structure and control of resources within it can be an important way in which peasants adapt to resource deficits and to maintain the viability of their households. In this respect, fusion of households can be a way of combining resources as response to production shortfalls, resource deficits or divorce. This seem to have been the outcome in the case of Tewabech who rejoined her mother's household after her divorce.

I was in school till I reached the 4th grade. I got married in 1983. I had been given a heifer by my parents and my husband brought an ox to the marriage. But we soon got divorced in 1985.... I started living with my

mother after my parents also divorced. I remarried in 1986, but my new husband had to go and live in Debre Sina to escape the military draft. He managed to return only in 1991. We were ploughing 3 timad of land that belonged to my mother, producing up to 3 quintals a year. My husband did not have an ox, so we used my mother's ox to plough the land. We also both worked in the tree nursery. We had two children, while another one died of illness. My husband also became sick and died soon after.

Relatively intense resource sharing can occur between closely related people even as they maintain separate households. We saw earlier in this paper, how Estifo, a young farmer who was facing production failure, the loss of his ox as well as divorce, was able to borrow seed and cash from his father, and even share meals with him regularly. This was a temporary arrangement and he hoped to form a fully independent household in the future.

Thus, the fusion of households and their resources can vary in degree depending on the needs of both households. Teferi, for instance, was able to meet his need for land and his mother's need for male labor by sharecropping land from her, but then actually joined her household when he subsequently got divorced. His mother benefited from this outcome as well when he sold his cow to purchase food and seed for the joint household. The flexibility of strategies related to resource allocation between closely related households is demonstrated by the way in which Teferi's brother who used to sharecrop their mother's land gave up his use of the land to meet Teferi's needs when he received land during the 1997 land redistribution.

Overall, the above discussion has attempted to show that various phases in the social development household have significant implications for the economic prospects of the household. Thus, the impact of the conditions associated with household formation, growth in family size and events such as divorce or death of a spouse has been discussed. However,

peasants do not simply respond to such events but also actively restructure their households and alter the control and flow of resource within and between households in order to overcome resource shortfalls and to secure their viability.

10. The Impact of Development Interventions

Rural development activities conducted by government can have an important impact on poverty. Currently, there are a number of government- implemented activities directed at improving the productivity, economic status and well-being of households in rural Ethiopia, as well as in the research area. These include credit provision for the purchase of agricultural inputs, animal fattening and sheep breeding, provision of tree seedlings, relief and employment projects, as well as health care and educational institutions. The interviews revealed that peasants had mixed experiences with different interventions.

One of the more successful interventions consisted of the credit provided by the Amhara Credit and Savings Association (ACSI) through the *Wereda* Agricultural Bureau to enable peasants to acquire oxen and sheep for fattening and breeding, as well as to help them purchase seed. The typical loan is sufficient to allow the purchase of an ox, several sheep or an amount of seed enough to plant a plot of land. Although, this effort is quite limited in terms of the amount of credit available as well as the number of peasants covered, the infusion of badly needed additional capital has succeeded in enhancing the productivity and income of quite a few participants. Even poor households have been able to take advantage of these loans. For example, Negash, who sold his only ox to pay his fertilizer loan and who is short of food and cash due to repeated crop failure said:

I took credit just this year to buy an ox. I avoided taking a loan for two years, fearing indebtedness. I decided to accept a loan after I saw how others used their loans and benefited. The ox I bought is doing well and I

will be able to sell it for a profit. The loan I received to buy seed has been beneficial especially because it does not have interest. I bought 45 Birr worth of seed including teff, wheat, barley and onions.

Similarly, others were able to gain a regular source of income from the sheep they were now able to breed. Such initiatives therefore helped fill the deficits some households were experiencing or allowed them to improve their economic status. Peasants were not always totally successful in their attempts to take advantage of these loans as they sometimes experienced the loss of their animals due to disease and accidents. Nevertheless, the loans often offered the only means of investing in assets as well as recuperating their losses. Abate's experiences demonstrate the ups and downs that peasants face in such endeavors.

I first sold an ox four years ago when we produced only 2 quintals then, an amount that was only enough for 4 to 5 months. I sold it in June for 600 birr which kept us going until October. Since our crops were not that much better the next year, I sold a calf in October for 300 birr to pay taxes and to buy grain. Our grain supplies lasted till June when I sold another ox for 450 Birr. I then got a loan of 400 Birr through ACSI to buy an ox I could fatten and sell. I sold it 8 months later for 700 Birr and bought some sheep with the profit. I subsequently borrowed 800 birr and bought an ox for 700 Birr, but had to sell it for 600 Birr because cattle prices had gone down. I then borrowed 1000 Birr, bought an ox for 700 Birr and used the rest to buy food. The ox subsequently fell down a cliff and died. I plan to sell an ox and a calf to pay the debt, which would mean we would only have one cow left.

What is especially interesting about this program is the extent to which even poor households have been able to benefit from it, being able to breed sheep if not to engage in livestock fattening. Some continue to be denied credit by local officials who do not think they have the resources to maintain the animals and the capacity to repay the loan. In addition to the limited amount of credit available through formal channels, lack of grazing land and fears of being unable to repay the loan also prevent many farmers from participating in the credit schemes. Commonly, peasants were reluctant to be involved in such novel schemes, and many ventured to participate only after they saw others benefit from their involvement. Peasant use of fertilizer on the basis of credit was often unsuccessful due to frequent crop failure especially in recent years. A substantial number of peasants were therefore no longer willing to continue using fertilizer, while others intended to continue applying it if only for the enhanced straw supplies that they attained from its use.

The provision of tree seedlings to peasants for planting on individual plots has become the other highly successful intervention. The grown trees are a valued marketable asset as well as a source of wood for construction. Peasants are enthusiastically planting trees that they get from government nurseries, although they are often constrained by land shortages. Some are even devoting arable land to tree planting, especially after sustaining repeated low crop performance.

Government employment projects, in the form of food/cash for work schemes, have come to play an important role in allowing many households to meet the severe cash and food shortages they are facing and thereby to avoid impoverishment or destitution. In the study area, a long-standing tree nursery in the *kebele* of Dokakit, has been a continuous source of employment to several dozen poor farmers. Their payment, which can amount to 90 kilograms of wheat per month, has been critical in helping them deal with the high level of food insecurity that they often face. However, the long delays in payment lasting up to several months, which are common in such employment projects, present serious difficulties for poor households who desperately need the food supplies. The labor demands in these projects also compete with other productive

and income earning activities and force some farmers to neglect the latter. Some of the poorest farmers such as Alencw are not able to be involved in such projects because they cannot afford to forego their other daily income earning activities and to wait for the occasional payment.

Generally, such employment projects hold promise in reducing poverty and building up local resources and infrastructure. Relief assistance has complemented employment projects in helping vulnerable households meet their food deficits. Relief has become a widespread and critical source of support for households facing severe food shortages due to crop failure. Although the most vulnerable households are supposed to be targeted for relief assistance through a variable combination of involvement by local officials and the community, many peasants complain that the targeting procedures are flawed. The common subjects of complaints are the use of lack of ownership of assets such as oxen as a proxy for food-insecurity and targeting criteria, the nepotism displayed by local officials as well as the limited amount of assistance available. For example, Tewabcch said:

I did not receive any relief this year because I have an ox, although there were some who had an ox or other animals but who still received aid because they knew kebele officials. The officials do know who lacks food regardless of who has an ox or not. It would be preferable if the agency which provides the grain is present when grain is distributed to listen to appeals about the unfairness [of local officials].

Despite such flaws, relief succeeds in preventing many households from liquidating their assets and sliding into destitution. This however raises questions about the wisdom and sustainability of continuing to rely on large amounts of food aid to support a large proportion of the population which is becoming more and more dependent and vulnerable. More attention obviously needs to be given to enhancing the capacity of the local economy to generate employment.

Government efforts to significantly expand primary school enrollment has certain short and long-term implications for rural poverty and livelihoods. It is apparent that there is now a great deal of interest in educating children on the part of parents, although many are also being forced to enroll their children under a great deal of pressure by local officials. Tewabech and Gebrehana articulated the hopes and motivations that parents had in educating their children and the lengths to which they went to accomplish this.

I regret that I married early without finishing school....I expect that the children that we educate would not suffer like us and would be able to help their parents even though their salary is often not enough. . . . I had to exchange a cow for a heifer in order to buy food, school materials and clothes with the difference in their values. ...Currently, my child takes care of the animals until she goes to school, after which we keep them in the stable. I sold the heifer about two months ago when we needed money to cover our school expenses.

I want to educate my children although I have found the expenses involved difficult to meet. My wife and I will herd the animals while my wife sends the children to school. I don't want them to be like me.

Indeed, many households experience enormous difficulty in meeting the expenses associated with sending children to school including the need to provide them with clothing, educational materials and sufficient nutrition. Poorer households may find these expenses quite prohibitive and may not be able to enroll children. They may also find it difficult to deal with the withdrawal of their children's labor. Nevertheless, many parents are willing to make sacrifices by sending their children to school in the hope of giving them a better future. While formal education may be a drain and even a source of impoverishment for rural households in the

short term, it can improve the future prospects of the children as well as that of the parental households who may receive assistance from the former. Even household heads who have had some education may be better able to improve their economic conditions because they are better household managers. Negatu's statements presented earlier in the paper show how he felt he was able to pursue different income earning opportunities as a result of his education.

Illness experienced by household members is a liability on the economic status of households because of its adverse impact on productivity and the costs of treatment. We have seen how Belaynesh was actually impoverished due to her illness which led her to sell their ox in order to pay for the costs of treatment, which in turn led to the need to rent out their land and a severe reduction in their food supply. Health care can therefore represent both a buffer against impoverishment by preventing and treating people's illnesses as well as a drain on household resources in the form of the growing expenditures required for treatment and drugs.

Informants had varying experiences with health care institutions. While some talked about their positive experiences with the prompt and adequate attention they received from health care personnel, others expressed their dissatisfaction with the latter and the high costs of treatment and drugs. The following statements by Abate and Tewabech, both of whom live in the same *kebele*, convey the differences as well as similarities in their experiences of the health care they have been receiving.

The health center is close-by in Debre Sina. The staff however are not very motivated, often ignoring us and making us wait long hours for treatment. The treatment and drugs have also become quite expensive in the last two years, requiring 10 Birr for diagnosis and up to 80 Birr for drugs.

I have faced much difficulty because my child has been sick. He had diarrhea and had been coughing. I have

been satisfied with the treatment that he has been receiving at the health center in Debre Sina. The staff received us well and gave me drugs which were priced moderately – 15 Birr. But the costs are much higher now, ranging from 20 to 50 Birr. They also send us to the pharmacy now because they do not have the drugs anymore.

The impact of the restructuring of health care which has brought about greater coverage of health costs by beneficiaries is made apparent in their statements. The effect of such developments on utilization of health care as well as on the health and economic status of households calls for more research.

11. Conclusion

The paper has discussed the relationship between poverty and productive assets, which in contrast to measurements of income, are a more realistic portrayal of the current and sustained economic status of peasant households. The paper has shown that in the study area, as in much of the Ethiopian highlands, that sufficient control of land is a prerequisite for a viable livelihood. We have seen that land has multiple functions in peasant livelihoods including as a source of food, animal feed, surplus for investment in assets, and the basis of household independence, access to markets, social legitimacy and entitlement to various interventions by the state.

While households are practically non-functional without a single woman, the presence of male labor is critical for ploughing, adequate management of household production and market transactions and livelihood diversification, without which households experience undesirable outcomes such as renting out land, hiring laborers and sustaining animal fatality. Child labor is not decisive but is still very critical in freeing up and complementing adult labor in the various economic activities of the household. The availability of additional

amounts of labor can allow households to improve their economic conditions by engaging in land improvement and conservation and diversification of their income sources. The availability of land and non-agricultural opportunities determines the extent to which greater access to labor can make a difference in the economic prospects of households.

The other critical production asset is draft power, which is necessary if the household is to make full use of the land that it controls or if it is to have access to market sources of land. Close investigation of the role of factor sharing and exchange arrangements in household production shows that a single ox is often sufficient to meet the needs of many households. Those who lack access to any draft power on the other hand are likely to be incapacitated when they are forced to cultivate their land in an untimely and inadequate fashion, to rent out land especially in the case of female headed households or to sustain severe labor exploitation in the case of those who exchange male labor for draft power. Free donations of draft power from the community can mitigate the dire conditions such households face, of course depending on the possibilities offered by their social networks and on the overall availability of draft power in the community.

The above discussion of the significance of varying levels of asset control for household livelihoods throws some light on the nature of rural poverty in the Ethiopian highlands. While various events such as repeated crop failure and animal deaths can impoverish households, a large proportion of households that fall into severe and long term poverty are those that have no or a minimum amount of land and those who lack fully functional male labor. The lack of any oxen is also correlated with severe and chronic poverty, in the lowlands, but households who have sufficient labor to exchange for draft power can struggle to maintain their productivity and avoid poverty. The presence of a single ox implies that the household is less poor but signifies limited productivity and surplus available for investing in assets as well as a greater degree of vulnerability in the face of shocks to the household. Given the substantial variability in the economic conditions of those households who have a single ox or even no oxen that arises from differences in access to landholdings, labor

and other animals among them, indices that sum up the total number of animals they control, e.g. TTLU, rather than oxen ownership alone, are a better indicator of household economic status.

The study has highlighted the processual aspects of rural poverty that affords a fuller and more accurate picture of the factors that determine why households fall into or emerge from poverty. We have seen that not only are there a variety of factors that impoverish households but that a combination of them is necessary to push them into poverty.

Also discussed were peasant strategies directed at maintaining and advancing their economic status, including peasant assessments of such strategies, as well as their role and effectiveness. In this regard, we have seen that peasant strategies have a strongly agrarian orientation, both in terms of prevalence and what they see as most effective. In contrast, household attempts at diversifying their livelihoods are directed mainly at coping with or making up for deficits in their agricultural endeavors. They are therefore rarely a sufficient basis for rural livelihoods, although peasants value them as critical supplements to household food supply and income. Activities which are especially likely to be valued include agricultural wage labor, urban wage employment, project employment, marketing of various products and petty trading.

Social processes and institutions play a critical role in conditioning patterns of rural poverty. This consists of the ways in which relationships of exchange and support between households and events in their developmental cycle affect the economic status of households, especially whether they fall into or out of poverty. Resource exchanges and mutual social support mechanisms, which are reciprocal or collaborative in nature, are critical in enabling households to meet their resource deficits and accumulating assets. Poor households are often beneficiaries of such mechanisms, which are a source of insurance in the event of crises and a means of building their asset base in order to escape poverty.

Aspects of the social development of households such as the resource endowments at the point of their formation, growth in family size, divorce, spousal death, and deliberate restructuring of households

and resource transfers between them have been shown to have strong ramifications for their economic prospects.

Development interventions by government and other agencies including formal credit, tree planting, and various employment schemes have had some impact on rural poverty, although weakened by problems related to implementation, access, the limited funds available and risks associated with involvement in them. Social services, which consist of primary school education and health care can play a positive role in poverty reduction through their impact on human resources, although substantial and growing expenses and other factors constrain their accessibility.

12. Implications for Poverty Reduction

1. Stabilizing and enhancing agricultural production

Shortfalls in household agricultural resources and performance are an important source of household vulnerability. For the large proportion of poor households in North-east Ethiopia, this calls for a greater emphasis on interventions that stabilize crop yields such as pest management and control, with special attention to indigenous methods, and the promotion of drought resistant and early maturing crop varieties. Yield-enhancing technologies have not always been beneficial for such households and should be targeted to households who have adequate resources and to micro-ecologies that are appropriate for them. Careful and well-planned and executed water harvesting and irrigation schemes will also play an important role in enabling households to withstand fluctuations in rainfall and to increase production. The important role that tree planting has played as a source of income and security should be supported, which will also have a positive impact on the alarming decline of fuel supplies as well.

2. Strengthening tenure security and access to land

It is apparent that secure access to an adequate amount and quality of land is a critical basis of livelihood security. One of the ways of ensuring

this is to implement urgent measures to address the prevalent sense of tenure-insecurity, which is critical if farmers are to undertake the effort required to prevent land degradation in a sustainable manner and to facilitate the efficient exchange of land and other production factors between households. Tenure security can be enhanced with the expanded use of land registration and titles or a move towards a long term leasehold system. However, a measured move towards private ownership of land in combination with arrangements for community administration of land and restrictions on land sales in the short term may be necessary to assure the attainment of such features of an optimum landholding system. Greater tenure security can allow the diversion of the tremendous resources allocated for group soil conservation efforts towards activities directed at enhancing production and income listed in section 4 below.

3. *Increased attention to the livestock sector*

Livestock are both critical production factors and assets that represent a household's productivity and economic status. Poverty reduction strategies should therefore pay more attention to enhancing and improving livestock holdings in regions and poor households whose resource shortfalls may limit their crop production potential. These involve the expansion of veterinary services and credit schemes to enable poor households to acquire livestock of types that suit their needs, institutional cattle purchase and resale schemes to mitigate asset loss during droughts, and strengthening restocking programs that support post-drought recovery.

4. *Expanding Employment*

The significant expansion of employment opportunities is a critical area of policy concern if the rural poor are to attain a sustainable livelihood. Because of the low demand for peasant labor and products engendered by weak markets and diversification of the economy, the expansion and improvement of public employment schemes remains indispensable in enhancing the incomes and asset base of the poor. Greater attention to the quality of projects, payments high enough to allow

investment in assets and the imparting of marketable skills will maximize the impact of such projects. For a more sustainable promotion of rural employment, priority has to be given to the expansion of markets and urban centers by directing public works and state resources towards the construction of micro-dams and irrigation schemes, roads and market and urban infrastructure, and improving the investment climate in urban centers and in such areas as the service sector and tourism. Opportunities for self and wage employment should also be promoted by enhancing the numbers and capacity of skill training centers which should offer a variety of skills that are informed by market demand on a continual basis and integrated with programs that provide start-up capital and support for marketing.

5. Cooperatives

Cooperatives can be important in addressing the resource, production and market constraints that households, especially the poor, face. The services they can provide in this regard such as credit, savings, insurance and marketing can play an important role in supporting sustainable livelihoods and reducing poverty. Service cooperatives are a suitable venue for these services but they can also be implemented in unison with community groups and associations which as the paper have shown are accessible, accountable and participatory institutions.

5a. Credit

While the provision of credit can play a vital role in supporting the production and income-earning activities of farmers, the impact of MFIs that offer credit is weakened by low availability and inflexibilities in purposes of loans, criteria for participation, duration and interest rates. There is therefore a critical need to substantially expand the availability and accessibility of credit by promoting cooperatives and revolving funds which should have greater flexibility in offering loans for a variety of purposes – particularly emphasizing support for acquiring seed, draft power and reproductive animals, handicrafts and trading – and having variable entrance criteria, durations and interest rates suitable to

households who have differing needs and capabilities. The establishment of linkages with employment schemes or savings and insurance schemes (see below) can address possibilities of and concerns about failed credit-funded projects and resultant indebtedness that often discourage potential participants.

5b. Savings and Insurance

The provision of savings and insurance services to households can allow them to invest in and preserve their assets so as to enhance their productivity and resilience against shocks to their livelihoods such as crop failure, illness and human and animal mortality. In addition to providing credit therefore, cooperatives can mobilize savings from households that they can augment further by investing in various enterprises. Government can encourage participation by reducing or canceling taxes (proportional to the economic status of households) for participants and providing them with insurance against embezzlement or misuse of their savings. Matching funds for participant savings from government or donor sources can be made available to serve as a form of insurance against livelihood shocks. The stake that households would have in the accumulating funds and community verifications of damage caused by such shocks can be expected to discourage drop-outs and unjustified insurance claims.

5c. Marketing

Cooperatives can also reverse the disadvantageous terms of trade that rural households face in the market by engaging in the assembling, transport and marketing of grain, livestock and other peasant products, as well as the supply of commercial products to these households. As their capacity grows, their involvement in the purchase and resale of grain and livestock to and from households can mitigate the financial and asset losses that they sustain due to price fluctuations and shortages of food and animal feed brought about by seasonality and crop failure.

6. *Social Policy*

Important areas of social policy that can have significant implications for poverty reduction are concerned with the strengthening of programs in the areas of health care, health and nutritional education, family planning, water provision, and food and cash assistance to labor constrained persons such as the elderly and the physically disabled.

Female-headed households make up a large proportion of the poorest and most vulnerable households in rural areas. Policy and program initiatives to address this can include improvements in legal and administrative protection of female divorcees in the division of household resources and the adequate inclusion of female household heads and other women in the design and implementation of the programs discussed above. Discouragement of early marriage through public education, improved implementation of legal prohibitions and introducing requirements for completion of primary and junior high school before marriage, can substantially improve the status of women and reduce the incidence of female-headed households.

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Annex 1

Table 1. Socio-Economic Profile of Case Households

| Name of Hhhd | Sex of Hhhd | Age of Hhhd | Family Size | Land - holdings | Labor Status ¹ | Oxen No | Poverty Status ² |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Bekele ^s | M | 39 | 7 | 4 <i>gemed</i> | Adequate | 1 | Chronic |
| Alenew ^s | M | 41 | 1 | 1.5 <i>timad</i> | Single Male | 1 | Severe & Chronic |
| Belaynesh ^s | F | 45 | 7 | 4 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 1 | Temporary |
| Abate ^s | M | 45 | 8 | 5.5 <i>timad</i> | Good | 1 | Temporary |
| Gebre-hiwot ^s | M | 43 | 6 | 4 <i>timad</i> | Good | 0 | Temporary |
| Tewabech ^s | F | 24 | 5 | 3 <i>timad</i> , 1 rented out | Poor, No Male labor | 1 | Severe & Chronic |
| Negash ^s | M | 40 | 5 | 3 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 0 | Temporary |
| Gebrehana ^y | M | 50 | 8 | 4.5 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 1 | Temporary |
| Mulata ^y | F | 48 | 8 | 3 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 1 | Middle Income |
| Teferi ^y | M | 35 | 3 | 3 <i>timad</i> , 1.5 rented out | Adequate | 1 | Temporary |
| Negatu ^y | M | 40 | 7 | 2 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 0 | Temporary |
| Tsegaye ^y | M | 45 | 6 | 4 <i>timad</i> , 2 rented in | Good | 2 Bulls | Middle Income |
| Estefo ^y | M | 27 | 2 | 1.25 <i>timad</i> | Poor, No Female Labor | 0 | Chronic |
| Kidane-Mariam ^y | M | 47 | 8 | 3 <i>timad</i> | Good | 0 | Temporary |
| Wubishet ^y | M | 36 | 6 | 3.25 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 0 | Temporary |
| Abebayehu ^y | F | > 60 | 5 | 3 <i>timad</i> | Adequate | 0 | Severe & Chronic |

Notes: ^s- Shola meda *kebele*, ^y-Yezaba *kebele*.

¹ Labor status: Good – More than 2 adult laborers; Adequate – At least 1 male labor, 1 female labor and 1 child labor; Poor – Lacking at least 1 male or female labor.

² Poverty status: Temporary – temporarily food-insecure and asset-deficient commonly due to recent crop failure; Chronic – food-insecure and asset deficient on a long term basis; Severe and Chronic – severely food-insecure and asset deficient on a long term basis; Middle income – normally adequate food-security and asset status.

Annex 2. Household Case Studies

**CASE 1: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got.
Ato Bekele Behailu, Age 39; Family size 7: 5 Children
M 12, F 8, M 6, M 4, F 3.**

My mother was from Menze, which she left to escape from the Italians. She came to this area and worked in a household as a servant. I was conceived in that house, and my father who was her employer supported her for one year. He then took me in and I was subsequently raised by my stepmother. Later, when I asked my father for land, he told me to ask a rich person for land. Instead, I began to rent land from my father. I then bought two bulls after saving some money in on *equb*. I also got married after building a house. After the *Derg* took power, I was given the 12 *timad* of land that I used to rent out, on the basis of a family size of 3. I was also elected as a militia member and trained for 3 months, after which I served in that role as well as in the executive committee throughout the *Derg* period. At the end of this period, my livestock holdings consisted of a pair of oxen, a donkey and 2 goats. I continued being involved in *equb* groups which allowed me to buy utensils, clothes and production equipment. I used to produce 4 to 5 quintals yearly, but the size of my family remained at three.

Our production was moderate in 1984-1985, about 3 quintals. We were supported by food aid which everybody received that year. Grain production has been declining since then. I have therefore stopped being involved in *equb* groups, and begun selling grass and wood to buy grain.

In 1989, I was labeled a *birokrasi*, and much of my land given to four other households, leaving me with only 4 *gemed*. I complained that my family is being punished. It is the guilty who should be punished. Why should the *birokrasi* be punished? Why were we separated? Why should some be punished and others let go? They told me that you have eaten during the *derg* period, so you cannot continue in the same conditions now.

They also took 1.5 *timad* which had 1000 trees. They would not allow me to give up my backyard instead as I would have preferred. I sent an intermediary to the recipient of the land to ask for some compensation. He responded by saying that it is what government has decided, and that I should go and ask the government. He subsequently gave the land to his father-in-law who had lost his plot due to a landslide. Land recipients are being allowed to do what they want with the land that they have received.

The 4 *gemed* I was given did not provide me with enough grazing space and grain since my family was growing as well. I was no longer able to support my family on what I produced, which only amounted to three and a half quintals. I tried using fertilizer but was not successful. I also attempted to limit the size of my family after we had had three children by encouraging my wife to

go to the clinic for birth control, but she stopped using it after a while saying that it gave her a 'heartache'. She subsequently had 2 more children. Our family size is now a burden to us.

Since crops began failing three years ago due to drought, I have been producing only 1.5 quintals. I began to work in the seedling nursery in our *kebele*, where I was paid 90 kilos per month for a year. I had been able to retain my oxen for two years despite our difficulties, but I had to sell one ox last year for 600 *Birr* in order to buy grain, clothes and taxes. This was a big change from the time I used to sell grain. I also sold our donkey in the last rainy season because of the food shortages we faced despite the grain we received every 3 to 4 months. The money from the livestock I sold provided food to last us till last September, after which we subsisted on fresh maize.

Livelihood Strategies

In order to conserve my land and maintain production, I am planting trees on the land, building *drainage channels* and terraces. I put *compost* on the land two times a year. I work on the terraces every year whenever I get the time. I do feel that the remaining 4 *timad* of land will remain mine. How can they make more reductions from 4 *timad* of land. There may be reductions from those who have 8-12 *timad* of land. They may be uncertain about their ability to maintain control of the land.

I have also been selling hay and wood to help meet our expenses. I go down the hillsides to collect wood every week to earn about 6 *Birr* when we had the donkey, but only 2 *Birr* for the wood my son and I carried to the Debre Sina market after we sold the donkey.

I wanted to be involved in livestock fattening but cash shortages have been prohibitive. I was denied credit from funds administered by ACSI because I had not yet repaid my fertilizer loans. I started using fertilizers in the *derq* period. It enhanced our production only the first year, but has not increased our output since then. I continue to use it only because it boosts our straw supplies. I wanted to stop using it two years ago but I was forced to take what was required for a quarter of a *timad*. After crops failed again, the *kebele* imprisoned me for not paying my loans, and I had to sell my last supplies of *telf* to make the payment. I was again forced to use fertilizer last year, and I still have yet to come up with the money to make the payment on my loan. I have now said that I will not take fertilizer, even offering to give up my land.

Participation in formal interventions

My request for a loan from the agricultural bureau that would allow me to acquire tree seedlings was rejected. I therefore sold a goat to buy 1000 trees seedlings and planted them on a quarter of a *timad* about three years ago. I had not realized the benefit that I would get from them before, but they are now growing well. I bought 500 more last year in *Hamle*. I expect that the

trees will mature in three years, when I plan to sell them to buy oxen or build a house; if I manage not to sell them in small amounts when facing food and cash shortages.

I started working in the seedling nursery about three years ago after our crops failed. The payment in grain helps us meet our food deficits. We were selected on the basis of our skills and hard work.

Present conditions

We are so short of resources that we cannot replace farming equipment. My children who are in the 6th and 2nd grades are dropping out for lack of school equipment and schools. We eat as food is available. If *injero* is not available, the children are given *kollo* to eat. We are selling hay and wood to buy grain. I have borrowed 100 *Birr* to pay back 100 kgs of grain (100% interest).

Critical needs and problems

Adverse climatic conditions, crop failure and unproductive land are the major constraints on our household. Our children's various needs have become burdensome. Land shortage is also an important factor behind the constraints we face.

Prospects and desired interventions

If the climate and our crops improve we will regain our previous economic status. If conditions remain the same, I will migrate to work and send money for my children. If government were to create employment for us, we could work and help ourselves. Receiving food aid for the next three months would help get us back on our feet.

CASE 2: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got. Ato Alenew Arega; Age 41; Living by himself.

I was a 10th grade student when I joined the military in 1980. I was part of the airborne division for 4 years. In 1991 (when the previous army collapsed), I returned to my village without receiving any reintegration assistance. I worked as a servant in several households for six years receiving food but mainly without an additional salary. In some of the households, I was paid up to 1 quintal of grain per year which I used to buy 2 calves.

In the last household I worked in, my employer offered to give me one *timad* of land. One day, my employer's daughter told me that her father wanted him to marry her. I told her that I liked the idea, saying that we may become independent one day. I therefore asked her father for her hand in marriage after she became pregnant, which he accepted. In a meeting with some elders, I asked

to be given his second house and half a *timad* of land. He refused however, saying that I would take the rest of my land and that he wanted them to live with him and continue to serve him. I therefore refused to go ahead with the marriage. Since I had worked on *gulema* land that he had given me previously, I claimed my payment in cash. But I later dropped my claim under pressure from the elders. It was preferable to break off the marriage, because I would not have been able to improve my condition continuing to work there as a servant. I would need to pay for hay for my livestock. I can now breed livestock independently.

If I had the know-how, I would sell the animals to engage in trade. I lived by myself for two years, when somebody advised me to marry a poor woman. I then asked two to three divorcees for marriage, but they all refused because they were looking for a wealthier man. My ox and house was not enough, and they wanted grain enough for a year, as well as sheep and money for clothes. Women are afraid of hard times and want a man who will satisfy all their needs. Since I don't have assets, I am giving up on marriage. I cannot marry my former fiancée because I would need twelve months worth of grain stocks and money for shoes and *netela*.

During the 1997 land *shigsheg*, I was given 1.5 *timad* of land on the basis of a one-person family. It was not productive, only good for growing hay. I later sold one of my oxen to feed workers who built my house. The ox I had left allowed me to gain income ploughing for others. It also serves a source of security in case of illness or death, and as a guarantee in case I need a loan. I have recently received money to buy a calf from a *Rebi* arrangement in which I maintained a cow for its owner. I also bought another calf by saving money, eating only one time a day. Since we do not know what will come in the future, I acquire and maintain calves not because I have extra money but by avoiding buying clothes and shoes, even though I want these.

Livelihood strategies

I now survive by working as a wage laborer. This year for instance, I ploughed for others in July, weeded and cut hops in September, and will work harvesting crops in December and January. I am paid 3-5 *Birr* a day for ploughing, 3-4 *Birr* for weeding and 3 *Birr* for digging. When I use my ox to plough for others, I am paid 2-4 *Birr* for the ox and 3 *Birr* for my labor. I also cut hay for others, getting half of the produce as payment which I use to feed my ox or sell to acquire food.

I cannot rent in land for farming because I do not have money to buy seed or fertilizer. I also cannot use my ox in a *mekenafo* (sharing) arrangement, because I do not have the feed that it would then need. I would rather fatten it to exchange it for a smaller ox, which would allow me to buy food and clothes from the difference. I would like to sell it in May or June in Tegulet or Debre Sina when prices come up.

I tried trading in *teff* once. I had received 50 *Birr* for 6 months of work as a servant, which I put together with 90 *Birr* I received for onions that I had planted as well. I thought about what I

wanted to do with the 140 *Birr* I had and decided to engage in some trading. I bought 60 kilos of teff for 117 *Birr*. After I spent money for lunch and transport, I realized that I did not make any profit, so I abandoned trading. I spent the money I had left on trousers.

Involvement in formal interventions

I was prohibited from getting a loan for seed because I did not have land of my own. I had also applied to get a loan from ACSI (which provides credit to groups of farmers that would allow them to buy oxen for fattening), but my group refused to support me saying that I was alone and without a herder, which might lead to the loss of the ox bought on credit.

I have not taken tree seedlings from the center because I use the little land that I have to grow hay. If I get credit this year however, I plan to buy 5-10 *birr* worth of tree seedlings for planting. I am worried about the interest on it however, which might prevent me from doing so. I was interested in gaining employment at the tree nursery. But the employees only get paid once every several months, which they are able to cope with because they are either youngsters who live with their parents or because they are leading independent households. This is difficult for me because I do not have enough to live on for a month [without getting paid continuously].

Participation in community institutions

I help out with preparations for funerals, carrying patients to the health station, making contributions when animals die and helping households facing emergencies in agricultural tasks. They in turn employ me as a daily wage laborer. I also participate in social activities such as feasts, funerals, baptism ceremonies. I try not to be outside of society.

My relatives live around Tarmaber. I have moved here on purpose because I would find it hard to put with the perceptions and criticisms of my relatives when I engage in lowly tasks for a living.

Prospects and desired interventions

I intend to improve my living conditions, since I am not a drunk or a thief. If I was able to get credit, I would buy animals for fattening, which I would maintain by working for animal feed.

**Case 3: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got.
Wz. Belaynesh Meshesha; Age 45; Family size 7; 5 Children - M 15, M 12,
F 10, F 6, M 4.**

I got married to a divorcee during the *derg* period. He brought one ox and a donkey and I brought a cow to the marriage. We used to produce 10-15 quintals of grain. We gave birth to 4 children after which my husband died. I remained unmarried for seven years in severe difficulty. His older son ploughed for us but he was not very skillful. I did not get along with him, so I left him by himself and remarried, taking my four children with me. I also kept one cow and an ox, leaving one ox behind. My second husband, who I have been with for 20 years, did not have any livestock. He had 4 *timad* of land after some land was taken from him during the *derg* period. We were not affected either way during the last land redistribution. We did not experience severe problems in 1984-85 because our crops did not fail and we were working in the tree nursery too.

I sold the ox two years ago because I got sick and also to help cover expenses. We used to produce 8 quintals a year before the ox was sold. We have had to rent out our 4 *timad* of land to sharecroppers after we sold our ox for two-fifths of the produce. We have been facing severe food shortages since then. Last year, we only received 1 quintal of grain, partly as result of drought. We have coped by selling wood and grass, and borrowing money at 100% interest. My husband and I also work in the tree nursery. Our growing family size has gradually become burdensome as well.

Livelihood Strategies

We used to put compost and leaves on our farmland to increase production before we started to rent it out. We also terraced the land and dug drainage channels. To get extra income, we have continued to work in the tree nursery. We received about 50 kilos of aid in October. We borrowed 500 to 600 *Birr* this year alone for food and expenses which will have to be paid back with 100% interest when we get our payment for our work in the tree nursery. I have started to use birth control, because I have decided not to have any more children.

Involvement in Formal Activities

We used to use fertilizer in the *derg* period, but we abandoned it after sustaining crop loss for 2 years. We have never taken credit because we are worried about not being able to pay. Four hundred out of the 600 tree seedlings that we were given for free are growing well. We are sending one child to school without too much difficulty, but the rest are not old enough to go to school yet. The health care we receive in Debre Sina (half an hour away) is adequate. Our children have been vaccinated. The health station staff and the drugs are quite helpful.

Needs, prospects and desired interventions

Our main problems are shortage of clothes and food. This is due to our low production levels as a result of crop failure and lack of oxen. We have not been able to acquire oxen due to the continuous deficits that we face. We have not been able to engage in labor-oxen exchanges because we are too busy selling wood and grass and working in the nursery.

We hope to improve ourselves through the *ekub*. I expect that children will soon be able to help us out by digging and selling wood and grass. If we were to get an ox, we could be self-reliant again, and we could use our salary to cover our food expenses [instead of having to use it pay our debt].

Case 4: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got.

Ato Abate Aleyu; Age 45; Family size 8. 6 children - F 15, F 8, M 7, M 4, F 2, F 1.

I came to this area from Wello in 1975. I worked as a household servant for 3 years. I then married a woman who headed her own household. I only had 100 *Birr* and she had a cow. My wife also had 4 *timad* of fairly productive land. She was also a very good potter. We lived well, producing about 25 quintals our first year, and our animal holdings grew to 3 oxen and 3 cows. My wife was infertile however. After I told her that I would like to have children, I had a girl and a boy from another woman.

We were not affected either way by the land shigsheg in 1989, but my childrens' mother, who had moved in with us, was given 1.5 *timad* of land. However, our crops began to fail. Last year, we produced only 1.5 to 2 quintals of grain. The shortages have become severe, since our family has become large. I therefore sold one ox and 2 cows for food, clothes and for school equipment. I first sold the ox four years ago when we produced only 2 quintals, an amount that was only enough for 4 to 5 months. I sold it in June for 600 *Birr* which kept going until October. Since our crops were not that much better the next year, I sold a calf in October for 300 *Birr* to pay taxes and to buy grain. Our grain supplies lasted till June when I sold another ox for 450 *Birr*. I then got a loan of 400 *Birr* through ACSI to buy an ox I could fatten and sell. I sold it 8 months later for 700 *Birr* and bought some sheep with the profit. I subsequently borrowed 800 *birr* and bought an ox for 700 *Birr*, but had to sell it for 600 *Birr* because cattle prices had gone down. I then borrowed 1000 *Birr*, bought an ox for 700 *Birr* and used the rest to buy food. The ox subsequently fell down a cliff and died. I plan to sell an ox and a calf to pay the debt, which would mean we would only have one cow left.

I have been trying to increase our crop output by using fertilizer since 1987. It brought about good results in the first two years, but we have sustained crop failure and indebtedness in the last three years. We repaid the loans by selling the pottery that the women make and taking out

additional loans on interest. I also put compost on our backyard plot as well, on which we plant the Maize that is the source of urgently needed fresh supplies in September.

Present Living Conditions and Livelihood Strategies

Our living conditions have become very poor since our production has been failing. Everybody in the community is now poor. We share 2 *injera* amongst the family twice a day, and we buy clothes only once a year as opposed to two times a year as we used to. Since the crises started, we have been coping by selling animals, pottery, grass and wood. We are continually taking out wood and hay to the market unless it is planting time. We buy hay and wood from the *kebele* and other farmers for sale in the market, and also maintain half a *timad* of land for growing hay.

I plan to take in a cow in a *ribi* arrangement in order to rebuild my stock, because I do not have the ability to buy animals currently. I also intend to borrow more money from ACSI in order to buy an ox for fattening which will mean that I will need to work for additional draft power.

I have planted 1200 trees seedlings recently, which are doing quite well. I planted them on arable land when production failed. I had not planted trees previously because we were doing well and we had livestock as sources of income. It is because of the difficulties that we are facing today that I decided to grow trees.

Access to Social Infrastructure

It is close-by in Debre Sina. The staff however are not very motivated, often ignoring us and making us wait long hours for treatment. The treatment and drugs have also become quite expensive in the last two years, requiring 10 *Birr* for diagnosis and up to 80 *Birr* for drugs.

Desired interventions

If we were to get assistance (in grain) for one year, we would be able to become self-reliant because we would not spend our resources on food. The provision of tomato seed would also be quite beneficial to us.

**Case 5: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got.
Ato Gebrehiwot Yifru; Age 43; Family size 6. 4 Children
M 17, F 13, F 8, M 3.**

I got married in 1978 as a child. I had an ox and my wife brought a cow to the marriage. My family gave me one *timad* of land. I also started to sharecrop 2 *timad* of land paying one third of the produce to the landlord. We used to get about 4 quintals of grain a year. In 1980, I came to

Sholameda to work in a government training center. Since I had lost the land in my previous *kebele*, I was given 4 *timad* of land by the *kebele* administration, which allowed us to maintain the same level of production as before. We were living well. Our animal holdings had grown to a pair of oxen, 2 bulls, 2 cows and 2 calves. I was considered a 'middle level' farmer.

We used to sell tea and snacks in 1984-85 to drought victims and soldiers for additional income, but we have stopped since the demand for this has died down since then. Facing some 'difficulties' in 1988, I sold all the animals apart from a pair of oxen and a cow. Our living conditions have become lower since our production began to decline in 1993. In 1996, our pair of oxen died and our crop output has also been failing drastically since. Friends have been helping me by loaning me oxen. I have also been renting out 1 *timad* of land for a third of the crop output. I am ploughing the rest of the land myself but our production has been limited by waterlogging and untimely rain. We were left with one cow which was later sold for food and clothes. A cow I have maintained as *rebi* from relatives has had 3 calves which I will share with the owners.

Since 1996, I have been selling grass and wood, buying from others for sale as well. I planted 2000 tree *seedlings* in the years from 1900 to 2000 on land that was no longer productive due to waterlogging. We avoided planting trees previously, preferring to grow crops on the land instead. Now everybody is planting trees, sometimes by renting out land from others to compensate for reduced crop production.

Living conditions

We are severely short of food and cash these days. I used to have a number of clothes before 1996, but I am wearing only old clothes now. I was able to buy clothes for children only last year. I worry about this a lot. My daughter has been pestering me for some sports clothes that she needs for school which I am not able to buy for her. I cannot even sleep at night because of this.

I now go to the market in Debre Sina with wood and grass twice a week, and sometimes twice a day. I earn about 4 *birr* a day to buy maize as well as coffee which we find very comforting. For food, we have *kollo* in the morning and more *kollo* or some *injera* in the afternoon. At night, we have *injera* together as a family.

I consider the family as medium sized. The children help us in our marketing efforts mainly, but they are mostly in school. The expenditures on their clothes are quite burdensome. They should also eat before school, which is troubling when they sometimes are not able to.

Participation in community activities

Social activities in our *kebele* have declined since 1996 when our crops began to fail. I used to be involved in an *equb* group, but it has now disappeared. But we have recently started one in which we pay 2 *birr* a week. We also have only two *senbetes* functioning now, where we used to

have four to five previously. We are however attempting to build a church in the area, for which committees have been established in Debre Sina and Addis Ababa as well. Feasts for wedding celebrations have also declined substantially, often limited to signing ceremonies. We used to have large feasts for Easter, slaughtering sheep and preparing 3 to 5 pots of *tella*. We also visited relatives and stayed with them for up to a week, bringing them vino, sugar and coffee. Last easter however, we remained at home and just visited my wife's parents. The way it was previously now sounds like a myth.

Some friends have been helping me by loaning me their oxen. I am too embarrassed to ask this of others however. I am also not able to ask for a loan of grain or money, since I do not have the means to repay it.

Prospects and desired interventions

We are looking to God for a good *belg* crop, which will help us meet our food needs in the pre-harvest season. We need the *belg* crops at this time because we cannot sell wood and grass in the *kiremt* because it is too wet. I also plan to plant tomatoes in the future. We need more relief assistance this year. The government is our father. If it does not help us this year, we do not know what we will do.

Case 6: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got.

Wz. Tewabech Yitagesu, Female Head of Household; Age 24; Family size 5; 2 Children - F 9, M 4, in addition to her mother and niece;

I was in school till I reached the 4th grade. I got married in 1983. I had been given a heifer by my parents and my husband brought an ox to the marriage. But we soon got divorced in 1985, and I started working at the tree nursery in our *kebele*. I started living with my mother after my parents divorced. I remarried in 1986, but my new husband had to go and live in Debre Sina to escape the military draft. He managed to return only in 1991.

We used to plough 3 *timad* of land that belonged to my mother, producing up to 3 quintals a year. My husband did not have an ox, so we used my mother's ox to plough the land. My husband and I also both worked in the tree nursery. We had two children, while another one died of illness. My husband also got sick and died soon after. We then had to hire men to plough our land. I regret that I married early without finishing school. I have not remarried because I want to take good care of the children and educate them, which a new husband will not want to do.

Since 1991, our crop output has declined to 1 to 2 quintals a year due to damage brought about by grasshoppers, worms and *beetles*. I did not receive any land during the 1997 land *shigsheg*, because my father decided that my mother and I had enough land and returned the ticket

that would have entitled us to some land. We were not able to build up our animal stocks because of the shortages we were continually facing. In fact, I had to exchange a cow for a heifer in order to buy food, school materials and clothes with the difference. I also had to sell all our sheep for expenses when my husband died. Currently, my child takes care of the animals until she goes to school when we keep them in the stable. I sold my cow about two months ago when we needed money to cover our school expenses.

Livelihood Strategies

We hire laborers who use our ox to plough our land, while my niece and I do the weeding and ploughing. I have been renting out one *timad* of our land for three years after my father died, because we are not able to plough all of it. We have one and a half *timad* of the land ploughed for us, and leave a half *timad* for grazing and growing hay. We plant mainly beans, wheat, sorghum and maize, and only a small amount of teff because it requires fertilizer and a lot of labor for ploughing and weeding which we do not have.

We have been working in the tree nursery for the past ten years in order to make ends meet. My niece used our donkey to market the wood that she collected after school. We get 2 to 4 *Birr* which is only good for salt, coffee and *eder* payments. I had also been producing *arake* for sale in the past two years but stopped after any profits from it disappeared due to low *arake* prices and growing prices of grain inputs. I used the income I received from *arake* sales to make payments on our *equb* funds, which I used to purchase clothes and taxes.

At present, we are eating fresh produce and consuming grain that that we bought after selling the cow. The crops which are still in the field are being spoiled by the rain.

Participation in formal interventions

In 1999, I received a loan of 500 *Birr* from ACSI and bought a bull. Because of the drought that year, I was not able to fatten it, so I sold it for 400 *Birr*. I had to join an *equb* savings groups to repay the loan. This year, I borrowed 700 *Birr* and bought a bull for 650 *Birr*. It is in good condition. I plan to sell it in May and use the profit to build a house.

I planted some trees in 1992 which I have been able to sell to cover some expenses. I have not planted more trees because I have not found extra time, since I am the one who does most of the housework. But I do want to plant more trees in the future.

The tree nursery project paid us one and a half quintals in August for work we had done in March and April. We used half of it to repay our debt and the rest for food. I had borrowed 100 *Birr* from a merchant earlier, which I had to repay with 100 kgs of grain (100% interest). I expect that the children that we educate would not suffer like us and would be able to help their parents even though their salary is often not enough. I have faced much difficulty because my child has been

sick. He had diarrhea and had been coughing. I have been satisfied with the treatment that I have been receiving at the health center in Debre Sina. The staff received me well and gave me drugs which were priced moderately — 15 *Birr*. But it is much higher now, ranging from 20 to 50 *Birr*, and they send us to the pharmacy now because they do not have the drugs anymore.

I do participate in *kebele* meetings representing our household. I find it demanding to participate in the mandatory work that we are asked to do including conservation works and assisting the families of those who are at the warfront. I did not receive any relief this year because I had an ox, although there were some who had an ox or other animals but who still received aid because they knew *kebele* officials. The officials do know who is food-insecure regardless of who has an ox or not. It would be preferable if the agency which provides the grain is present when grain is distributed to listen to appeals against unfairness.

Participation in community institutions

My godmother who is also a relative of mine supports me by giving me grain for seed and food. She also advises me about things and comforts me. My cousin also helps me with herding, taking care of children and harvesting crops. Nobody else helps me. I just joined Maryam Senbete so that she will take care of my children. I am also a member of the *eder* association.

Problems and prospects

Our living conditions are poor. The only thing I have is my labor with which I work at the nursery. Our crops this year are poor due to excessive rain. We might do better in the *kiremt* if the *belg* harvest is ok. For the future, my only hope is that our children will grow up to take care of themselves.

Desirable Interventions

It would be good if we got paid regularly at the tree nursery. I will stop working at the tree nursery if our payment is delayed much longer. I will just sell hay and wood instead. The loan of 50 *Birr* from the agricultural office that we used to buy seed was very beneficial however, because it has allowed us to produce the beans that we are eating now.

Case 7: Tarmaber Wereda, Dokakit Kebele, Shola Meda Got.
Ato Negash Belayneh; Age 40; Family size 5; 3 Children — M 10, M 8,
M 6.

My mother raised me in Manyamba (a nearby community) and came to Dokakit to remarry, subsequently having four children. I served my stepfather until 1974, but then quarreled with him

and started off on my own working as a wage laborer. I went to Addis Ababa to escape the military draft in 1984, but later signed up and went to the Northern battle front. I was wounded in 1987 and came back to the military hospital at Addis Ababa. I returned to the front but was later sent back to the hospital after I got wounded again. I came back here to my own *kebele* in 1990 and gained employment as a guard at the local school. I soon got married even though I did not have any assets after some elders encouraged me to do so, saying that you can work and get wealth in time. My wife has been raised by her stepmother and had been working in town for five years. We had no land or other assets. I earned income working at the school for 50 *Birr* a month and doing some basketwork, saving money with an equb association as well. My stepfather allowed me to build a house on some of his land. I received one *timad* of land that was meant for ex-soldiers, in addition to an ox, some fertilizer and farm equipment. I maintained a *rebi* cow. I ploughed the land I was given in addition to another *timad* that I rented in, using my ox in a *mekenajo* (oxen sharing) arrangement. I had a heifer from the *rebi* cow which I sold for 300 *Birr* to buy domestic equipment, and the owner and I shared the proceeds from the sale of a bull as well.

I subsequently quarreled with my stepfather over land and his demands that I work for him. Although he told me to leave, I was given 2 *timad* of his land in the land redistribution of 1997. He had appealed the decision claiming that he needed the land as a passageway and that I had extra land. But we have reconciled since and we help each other by exchanging resources. Although we did not receive land proportional to our family size, I am happy with the redistribution. Without it I would still have been begging my stepfather for land and doing wage labor. We can build a house and escape depending on others. It has also given us roots in the area and *mebet* (rights). As taxpayers, we can receive assistance from the government. I also now have something to sell in the market and I dress equally with others. But our income is limited, and we would not have anything to sustain us if I were to become ill for instance.

In the past three years however, our production has been limited by adverse weather conditions. I only produced a quintal and a half of *teff* last year. We have coped by selling wood and hay from our land. We have been buying hay for sale and for our animals as well. I have also been breeding chicken after I received seven of them from the agricultural department. Although three of them died, the rest have been beneficial to us.

I have not tried to rent in land because I would rather work on my own land rather than giving up some of the produce. I sold an ox last year to repay my fertilizer loan, to buy various items and a donkey as well. I have also bought an ox on credit that I plan to fatten for sale. I will exchange my labor and straw supplies for draft oxen until my calf from the *rebi* cow matures. I have not had the money to buy sheep for breeding. They also do not do well here in Shola Meda, possibly because of the wet conditions, although the agricultural office gives us drugs for them.

Presently, we are coping by selling wood, grass and onions to make ends meet. We have been subsisting on fresh maize recently. Market conditions are good. I now consider myself equal to others — I buy and sell like others. However, we are all poor. A poor person is one who cannot buy clothes, lives from day to day and does not have extra money. He cannot improve himself by building a house or buying an ox for instance.

Involvement in formal institutions

I took credit only this year to buy an ox. I avoided taking a loan for two years, fearing indebtedness. I decided to accept a loan after I saw how others used their loans and benefited. The ox I bought is doing well and I will be able to sell it for a profit. The loan I received to buy seed has been beneficial especially because it does not have interest. I bought 45 *Birr* worth of seed including teff, wheat, barley and onions. As for fertilizer, it can do more harm than good depending on weather conditions.

I did receive aid this year since I do not have any oxen. We used to get free health services as ex-soldiers. Now they are asking us to pay for health care and it is getting to be quite expensive. Our children get vaccinations from health workers who come to our village. Two people from the community who have also undergone 15 days of training in family planning are also supplying birth control to people who want them.

I want to educate my children when they are old enough so that they do not have to dig for a living. They now herd the animals. Since I do not have much land, I am not short of labor, although I am not able to work as a carpenter as I want to.

Participation in community life

I have been participating in a *Senbete* for the past seven years. I am also a member of the committee to build a church. I provide service to the community by maintaining the water supply and supervising conservation works.

Prospects and desirable interventions

I hope that we will get some *belgrain* fall. I had planned to buy a calf but I was frustrated by crop failure. The creation of employment or income generating activities would be beneficial.

Case 8: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Ato Gebrehana W/Gidan; Age 50; Family size 8; 6 Children - F 15, M 12, M 8, F 7, M 5, F 3 months.

I was raised by my mother and stepfather. I got married in 1971, having 1 ox and 4 quintals of grain. I was given 3 *timad* by the *kebele* officials that I am still farming. The land was productive then, yielding about 5 quintals of grain, but it is being washed away by floods despite our terracing efforts. Our production is declining as a result.

I later bought a bull using money that I earned trading grain between Tegulet and Debre Sina. When the bull matured, I sold it to buy two bulls, but then I had to sell one of them when we faced shortages in the last few years.

In 1991, our harvest was burned during the conflict. We coped that year by working as wage laborers in Debre Sina and selling sheep. At the time, I had 2 oxen and one cow. Since that year, crop production has been low due to frost, drought and hailstorm. Our difficulties have become especially severe in the last several years. We make ends meet by selling sheep and working in town in construction, getting 5-6 *Birr* a day that we use for food, coffee and salt. I also sold one of the oxen for various expenses. I could not continue trading because my donkey died. I was given an additional 1.5 *timad* of moderately fertile land during the 1997 land redistribution, but our productivity remained constrained by weather conditions. I have not been able to rent in additional land because I only have one ox. I used to sharecrop-in land from my mother during the *dergi* period, but I left it to my brother when I received land in 1997. We did get *belg* rains 2 years ago, but we were only able to plant a certain amount of land because we only have one ox. We use compost to enhance our production. We do not use artificial fertilizers though for lack of cash. I have not done much terracing by myself, but I have applied to the *kebele* for group work to be done on two plots.

Presently, I have only one ox which is preventing us from planting on time. To avoid further impoverishment, we are breeding sheep in a *rebi* arrangement, which helps us cover our various expenses. I could have maintained more *rebi* sheep but the lack of housing for them has prevented me from doing so. For cattle feed, I follow a tenth of a *timad* for hay, and our animals also graze on land that that we share with two other households. My plan for the future is to maintain *rebi* sheep in order to acquire an ox eventually. I also intend to buy a donkey when harvests are better.

Continued crop failure is keeping us in poverty despite our efforts however. My family has become large, and our food consumption is therefore variable from day to day. The children are only able to herd animals and do not do other work.

Involvement in formal activities

I am wary of taking loans for fertilizers because I may have to sell my ox to pay off my debt if the crops fail. I have also not been able to acquire sheep on loan from the agricultural department because I have not yet built a stable for them. I intend to build one this year however. I had planted 9 *birr* worth of trees, but they were destroyed by rodents and flooding. I did receive assistance amounting to 1 quintal of maize in May on a quota meant for a family size of five.

The health care we receive has been satisfactory. Our children have been vaccinated regularly, and the health care we receive in Debre Sina has been quite helpful. I want to educate my children although I have found the expenses involved difficult to meet. My wife and I will herd the animals while my wife sends children to school. I don't want them to be like me.

Involvement in community institutions

I do not have much need for *wenfel* or *debo* (labor exchanges) due to the limited level of production on our farm. We also do not have *equb* groups in our area. We do not have the money for it. The people in lower areas do have them though. We only contribute two *injera* and one *birr* during funerals. I am not involved in *mahebers* however, because I may not be able to host a feast when times are unusually difficult. The feasts we prepare for Easter and other holidays have become quite limited.

Prospects and desirable interventions

I just hope that the weather becomes much better so that our efforts will yield fruit. I would like to receive sheep on loan from the agricultural department.

Case 9: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Wz. Mulatua Gebre, Age 48; Family size 8; 7 Children - F 16, M 13, F 10, F 7, F 5, M 3, M 2. Husband away at the warfront.

I got married after the first land redistribution of the *derg* regime. I was given one cow by my parents and my husband had an ox which we used to plough in *mekanajo* (ox-sharing) arrangements. We received 1 *timad* of land from his parents and 2 *timad* from the *kebele*. We used to produce about 3 quintals a year, and often sold the calves that we bred for various expenses. Since our landholdings were small, one ox was enough for our draft power needs. We were living fairly well in the eighties, but it has been about seven years since our crops have been failing due to frost. It has been a day to day existence since. We have been surviving by selling offspring from the *rebi* cow and sheep. Our sheep die frequently from disease however, and we now have only 2 sheep. We do not have any other livelihood activities except to produce *arake*

(local liquor) occasionally. We have been facing severe food shortages since last year after both the *belg* and *meher* seasons failed to give us adequate crops. This year we have received relief for the first time. We received grain four times in the past year, for a total of about one quintal, partly because of our status as a family who has sent a member to the battlefield.

We have been trying to enhance our crop production by applying dung on our fields only every four to five years because our livestock are limited. We also try to take advantage of both *belg* and *meher* seasons in one year by alternating cereals with legumes or by replanting after crops fail. We have used fertilizers before but had to sell a bull to pay-off our loan because the crops failed that year. We have been sharecropping - in 1.5 *timad* of land from friends who are short of seed.

We now live at a middle income level (*dehena*). My husband sends us money every now and then, which I use to buy children's clothes. We try to avoid further impoverishment by adequately managing the conditions and sales of our animals, and planting crops on time.

Involvement in formal interventions

I have never received credit from government sources, fearing indebtedness. I have preferred to try to raise sheep on my own rather than to acquire them on credit. Although I was interested in taking a loan this year, there is not enough credit to go around.

I have planted some trees several years ago, mainly using them for our own needs rather than the market. Our children are getting vaccinated regularly. They are also in school after we held them back due to the long distance to their school. School expenses are limited and quite manageable at this early stage.

Prospects and desirable interventions

I do not have plans for the future since my husband is absent. It is only when a couple support each other that they make plans for the future. It is also only if God helps us and blesses our crops that we can improve our lives, not with government assistance.

Case 10: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Ato Teferi Asfaw; Age 35; Family size 3; 1 Child M 10, in addition to his mother,;

I started school early and reached 8th grade before I had to quit due to problems at home. I got married in 1984, after receiving one *timad* of land, two sheep and a cow. I sharecropped 3 *timad* of my mother's land. I never received land from the *kebele* even in the recent land redistribution because I was considered part of my mother's household. I used to get oxen from relatives, sometime for free but mostly in exchange for straw and labor. I got divorced in 1980 and

began living with my mother. We had to sell the cow in 1991 for seed and food, from which we had gotten a calf that has now grown to be an ox. I have not remarried because of the shortages we have been facing. I may do so if our crops perform better in the future. I used to trade in eggs and *arake*, especially when we used to have the soldiers around here. I later had to stop trading when I spent all my money on food after we sustained crop failures after 1991.

The lack of oxen so far has also reduced our production levels because we are unable to plant on time. Our crop output is only enough for six months of the year. The rest of the year, we survive by receiving help from my sister who works in Addis Ababa, selling straw and sheep.

I have not been able to rent-in land due to lack of oxen. One ox is enough only to plough my own land. I have sharecropped out and mortgaged 1.5 *timad* of our land to cover our food needs. I would have been able to regain the land if the produce had been good.

Food shortages were especially severe last year because both *meher* and *belg* crops failed due to frost and lack of rain, respectively. We received assistance every month for five months on the basis of a family size of three (36 kilos a month). I also worked as a wage laborer for about 30 days that year for 5-6 *birr* a day. Since October, I have borrowed 1 quintal of grain since we produced only 3 quintals last year and 2.5 quintals the year before.

I consider myself poor because I only have an ox and no cow. I have been poor most of the last ten years. I plough in a *mekenajo* arrangement which has brought about a reduction in our output. We have not had sheep till this year. I would like to acquire a cow which will give us offspring and butter. I have not been able to find a *rebi* cow because people are selling off their cows and do not have any to give. I have tried to avoid further impoverishment only by working hard and nothing else. I am not able to engage in trading any more due to lack of cash.

I plan to escape poverty mainly by breeding sheep and chicken. So far, our chicken which I received from the agricultural department, have been an important source of income and have allowed us to cover various expenses. If conditions get worse, I will have to quit farming and go work as a guard.

Involvement in formal interventions

I have received a loan of 450 *Birr* from the government to buy 5 sheep. They are in good physical condition and reproducing well. Although I used fertilizer this year, our production was only moderate, and I may have to sell some of our straw to repay our debt. I have been reluctant to take loans so far because I did not know how I would repay them. I have not been able to plant trees for lack of space. Although my parents have planted trees, we are not able to market the wood because we don't have a donkey to transport it with. My ten year old son is only in second grade because we delayed his schooling due to the distance that he needs to travel to his school.

Participation in community institutions

I do not participate in an *equb* group which I would have done if I had money. We participate in the community *eder*, making the monthly 50 cent payment and contributing *injera* in the event of a funeral. My mother and I are also members of a *maheber*, where we host a feast once a year. Due to the shortages we have been facing in the last few years, we are no longer able to take food to mourners who do not belong to our *eder*. We also do not visit others for holidays any more either.

Problems, prospects and desired interventions

Our most important problem is crop failure and lack of cash for clothes and food. Shortages of oxen have also prevented us from planting on time and renting in land. Land shortage is also a major constraint on our productivity since we only have 3 *timad*, one of which is allocated for grazing animals. If the *belg* rains do not occur I do not know how I will survive next year. We will be further impoverished. I would like to continue my education if possible. The creation of employment opportunities would also allow us to work and help ourselves.

Case 11: Tarmaber *wereda*; Yezaba weyen *kebele*, Yezaba Neus *Kebele*. Ato Negatu Hailegiorgis; Age 40; Family size 7; 5 Children: F 11, M 9, M 7, F 5, M 2;

I grew up around Mezezo town, where I also entered school. When land redistributions took place in the seventies, my mother brought me to this *kebele* to claim her land. I continued my schooling but stopped due to the demands of the work campaigns at the time. I got married in 1980. We started out with my ox, my wife's bull and 3 *timad* of land which was of moderate quality. We used to produce 5 to 10 quintals. It was better then. I later sold the bull to buy a cow. I took in *rebi* sheep, and also traded in grain using my donkey. I used to get about 5 *birr* at a time that I used to buy salt and coffee. I later had to quit trading though because of the need to herd animals, since the children were too young. My grazing land was taken to be used for a state forestry project. I sold my 15 sheep about 10 years ago to avoid the complaints from the project staff when the sheep trespassed the boundaries of the project.

I have been selling the 7 to 8 offspring that the cow has had to cope with the unsatisfactory crop production we have had since 1984-1985. Although I was interested in trading, I have been prevented from doing so by restrictions on farmer marketing³.

I am very short of land, which amounts to only 2 *timad* at planting time. This has constrained our crop production as well as our capacity to breed animals. I therefore started to sharecrop-in land from the elderly in the nineties, paying the taxes on the land as well. I was given some land that I could use to grow hay in the 1997 land *shigsheg* because the people who were selected to carry out the redistribution knew of the animal feed shortages I faced which forced me to plough other people's land in exchange for straw and crop remains. I did not influence them in any way since they were secluded during the time they carried out their work. I also began to rent in about 3 *timad* of land for 200 *Birr*, selling some sheep to come up with the money. However, I stopped renting in land after selling our ox for 800 *Birr* when the belg rains failed last year. I have spent 1300 *Birr* on food alone last year. To cover our deficits, I have also been selling stones to people from Debre Sina who want them for tombstones.

Involvement in formal activities

To enhance production on our land, I apply compost on our *dej meret*, which does improve yield. I have also been using fertilizer on my own land and the land I rent since the time the D.A. was assigned to our area. I do not use it on the land I sharecrop-in because the landlords are not interested, saying that the land will get used to fertilizers without which it will not yield output. I have not fallen into debt from using fertilizer even in the last few years, and I, at least, have been getting more straw as a result.

I do not do much work on terraces since my landholdings do not require them. I have planted trees by buying the 1200 seedlings in 1991 and 2500 seedlings in 1998 from the Mezezo project. I have been making use of the wood by selling it every year to pay my taxes and to buy clothes, as well as for fuel and house construction.

I received credit amounting to 380 *birr* to buy 6 sheep in 1999, but I have not been able to pay back the loan which is accumulating interest at 10.5%. This has prevented me from getting more loans. The loan has helped me a great deal, allowing me to sell sheep regularly, although our grazing plot has become severely restricted by the forestry project.

I have two children in school and plan to educate all the children, although I find it quite burdensome. I feel that my education has made me a better household manager — planting trees,

³ Local officials recognize former traders by their grain purchases in the post-harvest season and repeated visits to the market in comparison to the patterns maintained by other farmers. They then fine these traders claiming that they are draining local supplies of grain.

communicating with D.A.'s, writing letters for fees and trading, as opposed to some farmers who lose money on the market.

Present living conditions

Although I am farsighted because I am educated, I do not produce enough. I am not poor but I am struggling. The poor are the ones who do not have any sheep or chicken. As a result, I get second priority in getting relief aid. I have been impoverished by weather conditions, crop failure, the growth in the size of my family and our limited land resources. My sister and sister-in-law are each educating one of my children. I don't want to have more children. We had the last two without wanting to because my wife has been discouraged from using pills by her relatives and the experiences of other women who have become sick from using them, especially because she has asthma. I have tried to avoid further impoverishment by planting trees. I also plan to use our donkey to bring the remains from home brews from town to try to fatten animals for sale.

Those who remain chronically poor are those who do not make the effort even though they may have the labor capacity, and those wasting resources by drinking. A person has to explore many options like *rebi*, working as a wage laborer and trading in chicken and eggs. In contrast, I have doing things like taking sheep on loan, trading and planting sheep. There are some who started with one sheep and have come to own an ox.

Desired interventions

The loan that I received to buy sheep has been of great benefit to us. I would like to get money for fattening 2 oxen. When I think about it, I can only progress by fattening animals. I can trade in grain to buy straw, salt and remains from home brews. However, I think group loans are problematic. Some members of the group may lose or waste money. Our P.A. leader has also refused to take the responsibility to initiate group loan arrangements. It is much more preferable to give us loans on an individual basis.

Case 12: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Ato Tsegaye Mamo; Age 45; Family size 6; 4 Children - M 20, M 17, M 16, M 11;

I was raised by my own parents. I got married in 1969 with 100 *Birr* and .25 *timad* that I received from my parents. My wife did not bring anything to the marriage, having been raised by her stepmother. I was later given 2 *timads* of land on the basis of a three person family. The land was infertile. I ploughed it using my father's oxen, and got a fair level of production from it. I also bought a calf with 40 *Birr*, from which I later got 7 calves subsequently. Our sheep breeding has

been restricted by land shortages and disease. For a living, I only plough the land and market animals. I have not tried to do other things such as trading, because I have to herd animals and guard crops against wild animals.

I served as secretary of my *kebele* from 1974 to 1991. Our living condition was good during the *derg* period, at the end of which I had 2 oxen, 1 cow, 2 calves, 1 donkey and 1 goat. We used to produce 2 quintals in the *belg* period and 2 quintals in the *meher*. I sold sheep and goats to meet our food requirements. In 1997, the *kebele* officials took .5 *timad* of land from me, to restrict my landholdings to 4 *timad* after I had been designated as a *birokrasi*. We did not sustain any reductions in output due to land loss. Since then, I have also been sharecropping-in as much as 2 *timad* of land from the elderly and the sick. No prepayment is required for this land. I have not been using fertilizer because of lack of cash.

We have had difficulties in the last few years because our production has been much lower. Our food consumption is lower and our children have stopped going to school. We have coped by marketing animals which has led to a decline in our livestock holdings. In 1997, I exchanged an ox for a bull in September after our crops had failed completely, and spent the difference on food. I did not sell the cow because it would not bring in enough money. I subsequently exchanged another ox for a bull, which left me with a cow and two bulls. I now plan to plough using a *mekenajo* arrangement. I prefer to have a pair of oxen for security purposes, income and in order to sharecrop-in land. I have only a small number of sheep because of our small landholdings.

We will continue to struggle as long as we have the energy. I can describe my status as an industrious farmer. We have been impoverished by weather conditions. I have not been able to rent-in land to improve our productivity for lack of seed and adequate draft power. Land is available on the market however.

I try to avoid further impoverishment by ploughing adequately, avoiding conflict with neighbours, buying and raising small animals to raise, and saving money. Only agriculture is the source of sustenance for us.

Involvement in formal interventions

I have never taken credit, but I plan to take a loan to buy sheep. So far, we never saw the benefit of taking credit. I received 10 kilos of grain as relief in September, after the poorest households who were selected for assistance decided to share it with us saying that 'you are the ones who help us and bury us.' I am also struggling to educate 2 children because they need to pay for their clothes and their room and board in Debre Sina. They are now complaining about the lack of clothes. Because of their schooling, we have to herd the animals ourselves along with our youngest child.

Participation in community institutions

I am secretary of our *Eder*. I am also *Equb dagna* in an *equb* association that I have been a member of for many years. I serve our community in such ways and I am respected for it. I contribute as much as I can afford, about 1 *birr* a week whereas others may put in 4 to 5 *birr* a week. I use my savings from the *equb* to pay for clothes, taxes and school equipment.

Prospects and Desirable Interventions

I plan to borrow seed from relatives this year. I can only hope that our current harvest will be allright. In the future, I also intend to utilize fertilizer and improved seed on loan. I would like to get a loan to buy sheep.

Case 13: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Ato Estefo Bekure; Age 27; Family size 3; 1 Child - F 3;

I was raised by my parents, along with my sister. After repeated conflicts between my parents when my mother often left temporarily, they finally divorced. Since I suffered a lot as a result, I decided to marry early in 1988. My parents had given me one *timad* of land and my wife had been promised a calf by her parents. My mother had given me an ox but took it back to sell it when she left us. My father gave me a horse and a calf which I sold to buy an ox that I used to plough using *mekenafo*.

We had to sell the ox in April to meet our food deficits in 1997. I used 450 *birr* from the sale to buy a bull but resold it for 300 *birr* because it got sick. I then bought a donkey to replace one that died. I had to work 2 days in such tasks as threshing, harvesting and weeding to get an ox for a day.

My in-laws refused to give us the calf that they had promised. My wife and I separated because she sided with them and refused to bring the calf. She left with our child because she was better able to feed her. I now have only 1 *timad* of land in addition to the quarter of a *timad* that was given to me in the 1997 land redistribution. From this land, I produce only 2.5 quintals. I have never rented-in land because I do not have oxen. Land is also not readily available because wealthier farmers from lower areas have been renting-in much of the land here.

To get additional income, I used to engage in grain trading on three day trips to Sasit every week and get 10 *birr* after sales that I would use to buy coffee, salt, grain and to pay for the grain mill. I traded because of the shortages we faced not because it was very profitable. But I have had to stop my trading activities after being arrested for being a 'peasant trader' and fined 5 *birr* per donkey. Other difficulties I have faced as a trader are the time that 30 kilos of teff were stolen

from me, exhaustion of donkeys on the road and cash shortages which have forced me to borrow from friends.

I recently borrowed 50 *birr* from my father to buy clothes. I have recently been made part of the *got* leadership which has prevented me from trading. This was also partly the reason behind our divorce, because I did not earn enough money.

I have been keeping a *ribi* horse whose offspring I sold to buy grain. Last year, I produced about 3.5 quintals which lasted for a whole year. This year has been the most difficult since we only had a *belg* crop of 50 kilos. I plan to borrow seed from my father to plant in the *belg* season. I have also been eating at his house since my divorce.

I now consider myself a middle-income farmer since I am better off than those who never change their clothes or wash them. I am not poor. It is the bad crop conditions that have impoverished me, since I sold my ox when crops failed in 1997.

Involvement in formal interventions

I used fertilizer in 1996, but the crops failed due to pests. We got a fair amount of straw which we sold to pay-off our debt. I have not used fertilizers since. I have also received a loan to buy 5 sheep after being judged to be a hardworking person. I received 36 kilos of grain in July, but I never got assistance before that because I had quarreled with members of the former *got* leadership for letting their animals loose on my crops.

Participation in community institutions

I have not joined *maheber* due to the resource shortages that we have been facing. I used to be a member of an *equb* group when I used to be involved in trading. I also do participate in *wentele* arrangement and Christianity celebrations.

Prospects and Desirable Interventions

I plan to maintain *rebi* sheep and calves in the future. Nobody will give you a cow these days. I am also maintaining the sheep that I received on loan. I intend to beg some of my friends to plough my land. I would like to get paid for my tax collection responsibilities. I hope to repay the loan that I used to buy sheep so that I can get an additional loan.

Case 14: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Ato Kidanemariam Abebe; Age 47; 5 Children - M 20, M 18, M 16, M 3, F 2; (Fostered out 2 children - M 8, M 4).

I was raised by my mother and stepfather. I was given 1 *timad* of land as *gulema* before I got married in 1980. My wife and I both brought one heifer each to the marriage in addition to 1 quintal of grain that I had. She was quite industrious and used to plant onions and breed chicken as well. I bought a donkey and began to trade grain to and from Molale and Sasit, using my profits to cover our small expenses. We were later prevented from trading by local authorities, and I started to weave which I learnt from my father, earning 2 to 3 *birr* per piece of work. The land we had was inadequate. We produced only 1 to 2 quintals, so we sharecropped-in 2 *timad* of land from an elderly couple after giving them gifts to get their favor. Our living condition was not good but manageable because of the small size of our family.

Our cows had given birth to two bulls which grew into oxen. Altogether we had 2 oxen and 2 cows. Due to land shortages, the oxen were underutilized, but I continued maintaining them hoping to get more land. I used to loan them out to others who fed and used them. I had 3 sheep which had 3 offspring, but they all died soon.

A few years later, I had to sell one ox to buy food and clothes when our crops failed. My wife subsequently said that we are not doing well, and that I should go to my mother and serve her. She left taking one cow and we sold our last ox to share its value between us. I was left with two children because my wife took one child and because I had given one son to a priest to become a deacon and another one to a female relative who needed a herder. I then married a woman who had been a servant and only had one *timad* of land and one sheep. The cow gave birth however and her sheep had 5 more offspring which I sold to buy clothes.

In 1997, I was given only 1 *timad*. Our landholdings therefore came to 3 *timad* including the 1 *timad* that my second wife had brought. Two of the 3 *timad* were prone to water-logging and were only good for barley production, whereas one was fairly good allowing us to grow peas as well. Our output was only enough for home use not for sales. I have not been able to sharecrop-in land after the land redistribution because land is no longer available on the market. The land we have is somewhat adequate for our needs, although it is fragmented. The last land redistribution has helped me, enlarging my holdings from 2 *timad* to 4 *timad*, and allowing me to breed animals.

In the last seven years, our crops have been failing after being hit by *wag* (crop disease). I would often be able to produce only one quintal. My weaving work was no longer profitable. For the last four years, I have been coping by working as a wage laborer in Debre Sina. My wife would also go to Debre Sina to sell tree leaves. I sold our last ox three years ago and bought a bull to use the difference to buy food and clothes after our crops had failed. I sold all our sheep as well.

Last year, I was able to plant *belg* crops in February and got about 2 quintals of grain, which we were able to supplement with wage employment and tree leaf sales. Some friends helped me out by loaning me a pair of oxen in order to cultivate our land and I helped them with harvesting their crops in return. Our productivity at present is limited by frost. Since September, we have received about 60 kilos of relief grain on the basis of a 5-person family. We were to receive the same amount last year, but we opted to divide our share among 5 families which left us with 30 kilos each time. I have not been able to use fertilizer, because I do not have the money for it. Instead, I have been keeping two *rebi* horses to use the *leg* on our land. We have also been terracing our land in groups.

Involvement in formal activities

I was given 5 sheep on loan for breeding purposes. They are reproducing well, giving me 2 offspring each. I am maintaining them on grazing land that I was given in the 1997 land redistribution. The loan has therefore improved our economic status. We have been able to plant only a limited number of trees for construction purposes because of shortage of land.

As for health care, we often experience delays and neglect by the health staff at the health center in Debre Sina. The drugs we receive have been helpful but expensive. Although I had intended to send two children to school in September I couldn't do so because I got sick. I had not been able to send them to school earlier because of cash shortages for clothes and school equipment.

Participation in community life

Mutual assistance in terms of grain loans is no longer possible due to widespread resource shortages, although people help me by loaning me oxen. We do not engage in *wentel* exchanges anymore due to crop failures, but we go to town together to work. I am also not involved in such groups as *equb* or *senbete* because I do not have money or resources needed. However, I am a member of the local *eder*, paying 50 cents per month.

Future Prospects

We have been impoverished by crop failure due to frost and rain failure in the *belg*. I have been trying to avoid destitution by working as a wage laborer, hauling wood and stones. In order to improve our economic status, I intend to breed the sheep that I have received on loan and to pay off our debt. I want to stop working as a daily wage laborer and concentrate on farming and cattle fattening using guaya and animal drugs as well. I also plan to educate the rest of our children.

People who remain permanently poor are the elderly and the infertile who do not strive much thinking that 'I only have to fend for myself.' They are also kept in poverty due to crop failure.

Case 15: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Priest Wubishet Fiseha; Age 36; Family size 6; 4 Children - M 10, M 8, M 5, F 8 months.

I got married in 1990 with two oxen that my wife and I brought to the marriage and 2 *timad* of land that I received from my family. Both oxen died from disease in 1992. We therefore became poor and subsequently divorced. I began to keep a *rebi* horse from which I got a mule that I sold to buy a cow. This cow died soon after. My wife returned and began to make and sell basketwork and I started working as a wage laborer. We gradually began to buy and breed some sheep and chicken with which we accumulated some funds to buy a cow that later gave us a calf. We ploughed our land by working for the oxen that we got from others. We were given 1.25 *timad* of moderately fertile land during the 1997 land redistribution.

Our crops have been failing since so I have been working as a wage laborer in construction in Debre Sina for the last 4 years. I get only 12 *birr* per year for my services as a priest. I have not tried to pursue other sources of income. I have not been able to rent-in land because I do not have an ox.

This year, we are planning to sell a cow to buy seed and to pay-off our taxes and loans. I will plough my land by exchanging two days labor for a pair of oxen. I will have to leave some land fallow due to lack of seed as I have done in the past few years. We produced only 1 quintal last year.

To enhance our production, we have been working on the land in groups as well as individually. I also used 48 *birr* worth of fertilizer this year on crops which failed totally. I intend to pay off my loan by working as a wage laborer.

We are now in a state of poverty due to loss of our animals and crop failure. We were not really poor when our oxen died in 1992 because we managed to produce sufficient grain by working for others in exchange for draft power. It is only after our crops failed since 1997 that we have become poor.

Involvement in formal institutions

I have not received credit for to buy livestock that I can fatten for sale this year, but I am interested and may get it next week. I have planted as much as 40 to 80 trees seedlings, although I have been restricted from planting more by land shortages.

Participation in community interventions

Nobody is able loan us grain these days. Everybody is going to work as wage laborers. As a result of our difficulties, we have stopped participating in *maheber* and other similar social activities.

Prospects and desirable interventions

In the future, I plan to continue working as a wage laborer, to maintain *rebi* animals and to take loans to breed sheep. The chronically poor are the elderly who do not have any relatives to help them. We will be better off only if God is merciful (if the rains come). I would like to get a loan to buy sheep that we can breed and use to buy clothes.

Case 16: Tarmaber wereda; Yezaba weyen kebele, Yezaba Neus Kebele. Wz. Abebayehu Teklemariam; Family size 5; 4 Children - M 18, M 18, M 12, M 9;

My husband and I used to live well in the eighties, except in 1984-85 when our *belg* crops failed. We survived by working in a tree planting project from which we received relief abundantly. The *meher*, or long rains, were good that year however, and we were actually able to help many people who had come from Wello. My husband, and my son who was in the military, also died in 1991. I therefore started leading a family of six by myself. At the time, I had 2 oxen and 1 cow.

We are now paying 90 *Birr* in taxes on 6 *timad* of land that is shared by my household and those of my two sons. I now have only 3 *timads* of land after 3 *timads* were given to my two married sons. I gave them 1 *timad* each, but the *kebele* officials took one more *timad* from us and gave it to them. We now have only 3 *timad* for the five of us. I am appealing to the officials to have this land returned to me, arguing that they have taken the land that belongs to the rest of my children. My sons are also pushing into my land. Since I am poor however, nobody listens to me. Because they are young, they are listened to.

Since my husband died, I have been renting out land because two of our oxen and one cow died, partly for lack of care. We have been requesting the help of others to have our land ploughed, and we have also been shorecropping-out the land for six elevenths of the output. My sons help out by working for others in exchange for draft power and collecting leaves from government land for sale. Crop conditions have been poor from 1996 to the present.

I have been impoverished as a result, although I have been hurt by the death of my cattle as well. Presently, we have been eating fresh beans in October and November, and my sons go to Debre Sina to sell leaves and wood to buy food since. This year I intend to beg other farmers to

plough my land, who will each plough a portion. But it is getting to be more difficult to get help because many people have been left with only one ox after selling their second one.

Participation in formal activities

We received relief assistance three times last year. The last time, we chose to share it with the community because everybody was hungry due to crop failures in the past. So I received only 12 kilos. Many have left the area to beg for food and others such as the elderly and those who do not have supporters have fallen ill and died. We have not been able to help them.

We have never used fertilizer due to cash shortages, but we use the compost that we make from the droppings of the goat, donkey and 2 calves that I keep. We have been able to plant *besana* and a small number of trees. We have limited our tree planting due to land shortage and our concern that the eucalyptus trees will damage our farm land. I now intend to plant some trees on land that is not suitable for crops.

We have not been able to receive loans to buy sheep because they probably think that we cannot repay the loan because of crop failure. I was not able to educate my children when their father died. They have also recently stopped to go to school because I am no longer able to meet their food and other expenses.

Prospects and desirable interventions

If the weather becomes more favorable, I hope to produce grain that will be sufficient for our needs. Since I have rights as a person who has land and pays taxes, I hope to get a loan to buy and breed sheep or fatten an ox for sale.

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