

# A Tale of Two Productive Safety Net Programme Sites

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The people of Geblen suffered from considerable hardship during the 1984/5 famine in Tigray. The famine, coupled with the *Derg*'s forcible resettlement scheme caused a double tragedy. During this famine people died from hunger and an epidemic, and they lost their livestock through death and forced sale and they have not re-stocked yet (1994). (Geblen, *Ethiopian Village Studies* 1996: 6).

It was a time when there were no birds singing. They must have died too, I suppose. Vultures drifted high in the air without flapping their wings. They didn't need to since the air rising from the ground was so hot. Cows bellowed from hunger throughout the night and cockerels crowed at strange times. But, children didn't cry. That was the worst of it. Children looked their mothers in the eyes, pleading for food, but there was none. I couldn't find any and my breasts were dry. My little girl died on the fifth day without food. I should have died with her. *Woman, 35, Korodegaga 1985* (Webb & von Braun, 1994: 81)

## Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> traces and compares the longer-term trajectories of two drought-prone rural communities in East Tigray (Geblen) and Arssi (Korodegaga) which were included in the Productive Safety Net Programme and associated credit programmes from 2004<sup>2</sup>/5. The data<sup>3</sup> from a longitudinal community study which launched in 1995 (WIDE1) with revisits in 2003 (WIDE2) and 2011 (WIDE3)<sup>4</sup>.

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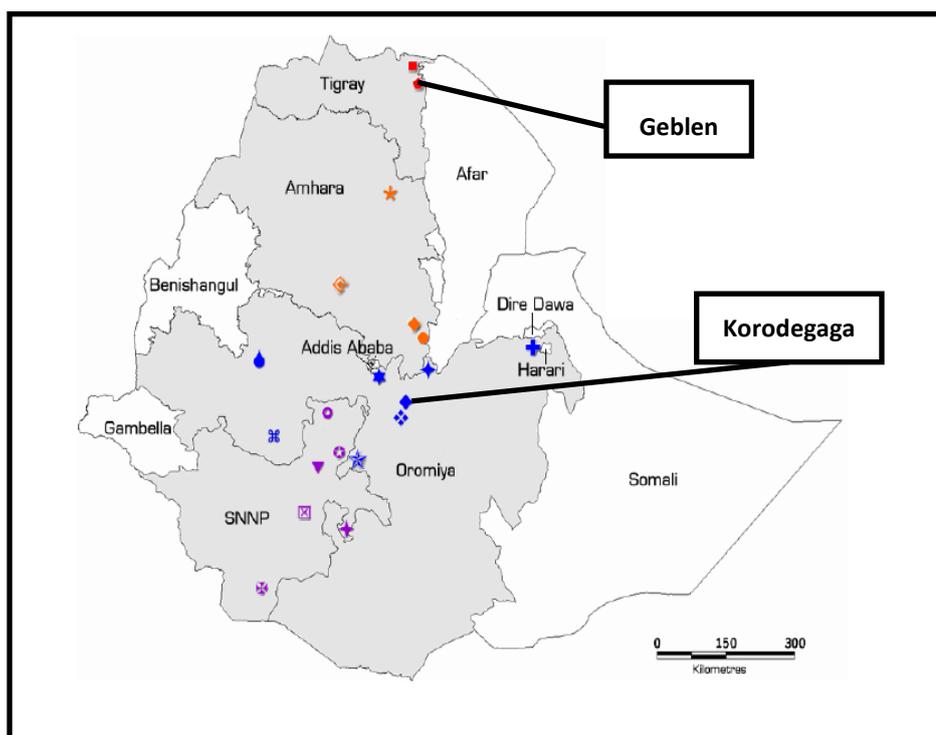
<sup>1</sup> The paper will appear as a chapter in 2013 in *Food Security, Safety Nets and Social Protection: the Ethiopian Experience*, edited by Alula Pankhurst, Dessalegn Rahmato and Gerrit-Jan Van Uffelen and published by the Forum for Social Studies, Addis Ababa.

<sup>2</sup> The programmes in Geblen were launched as pilots in 2004.

<sup>3</sup> In all rounds the data were made through semi-structured interviews with a range of informants and the interpretation involved triangulation and judgment. Numbers in the paper should not be taken as exact; they are estimates provided by informants and have only been included if they appear to make sense in the light of other data.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.wed-ethiopia.org](http://www.wed-ethiopia.org) for more information. I would like to thank the field researchers who made the data so thoroughly [*Geblen* – Kiros Gebre Egziabher and Solomon Tegegne (1995), Yisak and Asmeret (2003), Eyerusalem Yihdego, Melete Gebre Giorgis, Alula Ayele and Yohannes Gezahegn (2010); *Korodegaga* – Assefa Tolera and Mesfin Tadesse (1995), Demissie and Tizita (2003), Aster Shibeshi and Yared Tefera (2010)]. I would also like to thank collaborating colleagues Alula Pankhurst (WIDE1, WIDE2 and WIDE3), and Catherine Dom, Rebecca Carter, Agazi Tiiumellisan, Mengistu Dessalegn and Philip Lister (WIDE3) and too many others to name involved in WIDE1 and WIDE2.

**Map: Geblen (Tigray) and Korodegaga (Arssi)**



Ethiopia's history has been punctuated by famine with one of the earliest recorded drought periods occurring between 253 and 242 BC. Tigray has been particularly badly afflicted; in a 'nonexhaustive list', in addition to droughts general to Ethiopia and in Northern Ethiopia, Webb and von Braun listed severe droughts particular to Tigray in 1812-16, 1831, 1835-38, 1864-66, 1876-78, 1880, 1953, 1957-8, and 1964-66 (1994: 20). Geblen comprises two villages in the *woyna dega* area on the Eastern Tigray highland plateau and two villages in the *kolla* area on the steep slopes down to the plateau in the Afar region. Rainfall has regularly been erratic and inadequate and much of the land cannot be used to grow crops due to the steep and stony terrain and sandy soil. In 2010 there was a very small town, Mishig, emerging around the administrative centre which was connected by a small all-weather road to a tar road joining the zonal capital Adigrat (35 kms), and Freweini, the *wereda* centre (39 kms).

'Korodegaga lies on the floor of the Rift Valley in the drought-belt of an otherwise prosperous region' (Webb and von Braun, 1994: 60). It is a few kilometres from the resort of Sodere on the opposite side of the river Awash. The Arssi Oromo in the area were agro-pastoralists who came under Ethiopian imperial rule towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were forced to leave the 'flat, fertile and cool areas of Arssi land' and move to the 'arid, hot and ragged lowlands' where they gradually settled (WIDE1 Korodegaga, 1996: 4). There are nine villages scattered over a large area which is almost encircled by the rivers Awash and Qelete. In 2010 access to the *wereda* centre, Dera, was either by a dry-weather road with an average walking distance of 3-3½ hours, or by crossing the Awash River on a manually-hauled raft and walking to the nearby all-weather road where there were minibuses to Dera (19 kms) which was 30 kms from Nazreth the third largest city in Ethiopia.

The data and analytic approach comes from a longitudinal case-based study of twenty exemplar rural communities in the four Established Regions which began in 1994 and is still ongoing. WIDE<sup>5</sup> began with a 1995 baseline (WIDE1) and repeat research was conducted in 2003 (WIDE2) and 2010/11

<sup>5</sup> Eighteen of the communities have been included in the panel Ethiopian Rural Household Survey.

(WIDE3 Stage 1<sup>6</sup>). Each of the three research projects was designed to explore how the rural communities worked as a whole using comparative case-based analysis of qualitative data made by Ethiopian fieldworkers of both sexes using a protocol approach. The WIDE2 fieldwork included a special focus on wellbeing, and the WIDE 3 fieldwork on policy. While none prioritised social protection there is sufficient material in the databases to construct two comparable narratives.

The chapter is organised in two substantive sections.

In *Section 2* we describe the paths which led each of the communities from famine experiences in the mid-1980s, through drought with food aid and no famine in the mid-1990s and 2002/3, to their inclusion in the two programmes in 2004/5 and their handling of the 2009 drought. In *Section 3* we identify and explain similarities and differences in the ways in which the two programmes were implemented and show how disconnects between, on the one hand, the assumptions implicit in the macro policy design and, on the other, assumptions implicit in local values and power structures and relations, led to outcomes which had not been imagined at the macro level. We argue that the progress of the programmes depended to a considerable degree on the existence or absence of development interventions in other sectors and other economic and political features of the locality and more widely. We also describe the ways in which the programmes interacted with features in the wider economic, societal, political and cultural systems of the communities. We conclude by presenting some hypotheses about what one would expect to find in other rural communities with similar social protection and asset-building programmes.

## **Livelihood histories**

### **Leading up to 1995**

#### **Geblen before 1995**

As described above Geblen inhabitants settled in two highland villages and two lowland villages in an area that is mostly steep and in places cut by ravines. For many years before 1995 Geblen's core livelihood system had been based on crop production and animal husbandry supplemented by trading, migration and food aid. The community was badly hit by the 1974/5 famine and from the later 1970s to the later 1980s embroiled in civil war. As the battlefield shifted, Geblen was administered by three organisations, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party, the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front and the Derg. A few men were conscripted for the army by the Derg and there was substantial conscription by the TPLF. People from the community were imprisoned, banned from marketplaces and fined by the Derg.

The 1984/5 famine, combined with war, forced around 200,000 Tigrayans to migrate to Sudan. In addition an estimated quarter of a million died and up to one million were displaced (REST, 1993). As in 1974/5 people in Geblen died from hunger and famine-related disease. Also many people were forcibly re-settled. They were called to Edgahamus for food aid distribution, rounded up in military camps and then moved to resettlement sites in Wollega. Some were killed trying to escape from the camps or by wild animals or robbers as they tried to return to Geblen. Others stayed in the sites and were doing well in 2003 (WIDE2).

In 1995 Geblen had a population of roughly 2,500. There was no market, school or health facility. There was a dry weather road to the *wereda* capital Edgahamus (20 km) but no public transport; the walk from the nearest village took roughly 3½ hours. During the 1980s there had been attempts to construct terraces but they had failed to control the erosion. Trees and bushes were being rapidly destroyed and the fertility of the soil had degenerated over the years. Crops included maize, sorghum, tef, barley, lentils, linseed, and *beles*/cactus some of which grew wild, while the major livestock were

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<sup>6</sup> Stage 1 was conducted in six of the twenty communities. Stage 2 fieldwork in eight drought-prone communities, seven of which were in PSNP *whereas*, had just been completed at the time this chapter was written.

goats and bees, since farmers had still not re-built stocks of cattle lost during the droughts of the 1980s. There was little communal grazing land. Agricultural technologies included crop rotation, use of manure, and customary water and soil conservation techniques and very limited use of fertiliser and improved seeds. Even in a year of 'good' rainfall the average harvest only supplied food for 3-4 months. Other sources of income included sale of livestock, masonry for a few men, and gender-specific handicrafts for both. Individuals and whole households migrated for daily agricultural labour, mostly to Western Tigray, between October and March-June, while men migrated to Eritrea and some from there to Saudi Arabia for temporary manual employment, usually in November.

Informants said that since the TPLF took control of the area inequality had decreased. They differentiated the peasant class into three categories: poor, self-supporting and better-off. Geblen was inhabited by a mix of Tigrayans and Irob; in the highland villages the Tigrayans were the majority while in the lowland villages the majority were Irob. It was estimated that 65% of the population were Christians, mostly Orthodox but with a handful of Catholics, and 35% Muslims. While the Christians and Muslims mixed socially religious differences meant that the community was not tightly knit.

The first act of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia to affect Geblen was a ban on land re-distribution in July 1991. In 1995 there were two Extension Agents from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Natural Resources responsible for three *tabia*<sup>7</sup>. They interacted with two agricultural development cadres and two women development cadres in each of the four villages. Each of these was responsible for ten Model Farmers or Model Women. There were some complaints about too many government meetings and the free work service people were expected to provide.

### **Korodegaga before 1995**

As described earlier the first Korodegaga residents were evicted by northern settlers from their old lands and settled in the lowland area in small villages to protect themselves from attacks by other pastoralists, particularly the Kereyu and Jille. During the Italian occupation in the early 1940s Amhara settlers took more land and the Arssi Oromo became tenants until the 1975 Land Reform; at that time there were two landlords in Korodegaga.

Respondents said that the people had regularly suffered from hunger since the early 1980s; there were major food crises in 1983, 1986, 1987, 1989 and 1990. Forty-five per cent of households surveyed in 1988/9 had experienced at least one famine death (Webb and von Braun, 1994: 81). In 1995 Korodegaga had a population of around 1500. There was no market or health facility but there was a Grade 1-4 school built in 1990 which had 41 students, eight of whom were girls. The dryweather road to Dera was first constructed in 1985 to bring food aid to the site. In 1995 the main rainfed crops grown were maize, *tef*, wheat and beans while the common livestock were cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys. Animal dung was used as fertiliser and there was some crop rotation. Chemical fertilisers and improved seeds were introduced in 1992 by the extension agent; about half the farmers used it that year. Output was increased in 1992 and 1993 when the rain was relatively good but failed in the bad drought of 1994 leading to debt. Livestock suffered during drought and extension workers had been coming too late to deal with epidemics. The main source of household cash was firewood mostly sold by women; during droughts this activity increased considerably. Some poorer women did daily labour on nearby irrigation farms.

In 1995 there was no irrigation activity at the site, although there had been between 1964 and 1993. In 1964 a landlord planted orange trees by the Awash which were watered by hand. After the revolution the farmers divided themselves into 10 groups of roughly 25 people, shared the orange trees and continued to water them by hand until they were taken by the new Producers' Co-operative in 1986. UNICEF provided a pump which was used by the PC to water orange and papaya trees and grow vegetables, and, following its abolition in 1991, by re-constituted groups of farmers. A flood destroyed the generator in 1993 and all trees died within a year. A larger UNICEF irrigation scheme on which work began in 1989 failed to work on completion due to design faults. Almost 100% of the population were Arssi Oromo Muslims belonging to the Sebro clan, which was classified into 11 lineages arranged in a hierarchy headed by the majority lineage which was also

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<sup>7</sup> The name for a *kebele* or Peasant Association in Tigray.

called Sebro. Social interaction was strong at village level rather than being community-wide. The difference between rich and poor depended on livestock ownership and access to food. One respondent said that the richest members could ‘bribe officials and get things they want before the poor know or have heard about them’ (WIDE1 Korodegaga: 29).

### **Comparison of livelihoods in the communities in 1995**

In 1995 both Geblen and Korodegaga were prone to drought, distant from markets and services, with core livelihood systems combining crop production and livestock; as a result the inhabitants needed supplementary livelihood strategies in order to survive. Food-for-Work had become a regular feature in both livelihood systems. In Geblen migration and skilled craft work made other important contributions, while in Korodegaga women sold firewood. Attempts by Agricultural Development Agents to persuade farmers to take credit to use fertiliser and improved seeds were hampered by the fact that this was only profitable if it rained. A big difference between the sites was that Korodegaga had irrigation potential and residents had some experience of using it during the late Imperial and Derg eras, while Geblen residents had migration linkages to nearby towns, and to Humera, Eritrea and Saudi Arabia.

### **The communities in 2003<sup>8</sup>**

#### **Geblen in 2003**

There had been some changes to public goods and urban linkages by 2003. The road to Edgahamus had been improved so that trucks and government cars could travel on it, though transport for farmers was infrequent and expensive, and there were new paths joining the villages. A primary school (Grade 1-4), Health Post, administrative offices and a Farmers’ Training Centre had been built. There were three new tea-rooms and two new small shops in the *tabia* centre and a new grinding mill had been bought by the Women’s Association. Communal land was under protection from grazing animals. A water reservoir was under construction by the Catholic Mission.

Droughts had continued to affect livelihoods on a regular basis:

Before we had honeybees, our country was so rich and it was covered by forest. In fact the children could not change their clothes but were not suffering from starvation like now. We had milk and butter, meat and good harvests. ... Before we were self-reliant economically. At least we could feed ourselves... We did not need food aid. Since the 1985 famine we are experiencing a difficult situation. We used to grow wheat, sorghum, tef etc. – now there is only wheat. Women sell eggs, crops, chickens and off-farm work is mostly petty trade, which does not have much profit, and labouring on nearby farms. All wait for the Food-for-Work programme. (WIDE2: mix of women respondents)

The economy was in decline:

Due to shortage of rains and the unfertile nature of the land the production of crops has been significantly decreasing. The members of the community believe that the area was basically an area of livestock rather than grain. Wealth was determined by the size of livestock. This is still prevailing. However, due to scarcity of rain and poor policy of grazing land the number of livestock has dropped dramatically. As a result the consumption of the people is decreasing in quality and quantity. There is no investment in the area, except some construction of buildings for official purposes. Hence the community depends largely on food aid. (WIDE2: male respondent)

Output of food crops was very low because of the lack of rain and there were no new agricultural technologies. A few people had non-farm work in the *tabia* centre and the only paid employees in the community were the *tabia* chairman and a teacher. Food-for-Work and petty trade were increasing. Migration was still an important livelihood strategy during the dry season for those with land and all year for those without; people went to urban areas for daily labour (7 *birr* a day) and to get assistance from relatives. Men who were good at masonry could get jobs in towns (35 *birr* a day) especially on the re-construction of Zala Ambessa town which had been destroyed by the Eritrean army in 2001.

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<sup>8</sup> The data informing this section comes from WIDE2.

One consequence of the war was that people could no longer go to Eritrea for work or en route to Yemen and Saudi Arabia and migration to the Gulf significantly decreased as a result of tight border controls.

A service co-operative was started in 1999: *'it is useless and the items are easily available in private shops'*<sup>9</sup>. In 2003 seeds, fertiliser, pesticides and soil conservation were provided through the agricultural extension service. Respondents were not enthusiastic; the service *'benefited the fertiliser suppliers and extension agents who got per diems'*. The fertiliser did not *'conform to our area'* – meaning it was unsuitable for the soil. Some seeds were no good and the fertilised crop residue used for fodder was *'poisonous to cattle'*. Those living far from the *tabia* centre could not get animal health services as the agents did not want to travel too far.

A credit programme covering five *tabia* began in 1999. Credit was provided on a group basis: at first groups of seven people with loans of 50-2,500 *birr* at 18% interest; in 2003 groups of three people with loans of 50-50,000 *birr* and 15% interest. Group lending reportedly created conflicts among friends though it helped those without livestock as they no longer had to borrow from moneylenders at high rates. It was said to be harmful for young men who used it for drink but benefited women selling eggs and running small shops and reportedly many old and poor people had improved their lives by taking credit. Some used it to buy food. For the future there were recommendations of irrigation for cash crops and greater linkages with markets via improved roads.

### **Korodegaga in 2003**

No changes to public goods or urban linkages between 1995 and 2003 were reported from Korodegaga. Rain continued to be inadequate and unreliable and there was a serious drought in 2002/3. Asked an open-ended question about Korodegaga's economy a group of farmers responded:

The economy of Korodegaga is going from worse to worst. Recurring drought is affecting the people. We are always waiting for the helping hands of the government. Production is getting less and less from year to year. There is no such thing as saving except the women's saving and credit association. No investment at all in the area. The land is not enough even for the dwellers. Consumption is increasing from time to time as men are marrying two or more wives and many children are born to each household. There are farmers who have 11-13 children from a single wife. What have stayed the same is the hunger and malaria.

A group of women were more positive:

We are getting help from the government. We receive wheat and sometimes oil. Production has decreased due to drought. We have started an irrigation system before three years. It consists of 130 residents. These people are the ones who are living a relatively better life now. Land has never been distributed since Derg. There are people who have about six hectares and there are those who have none. The weather condition was very bad during the last years and the production is too low or sometimes none so that the community's population is found in greater poverty. There is a woman's saving and credit association which is successful in changing the life of some families.

Output of food crops on rainfed land was said to be low and some women said that fewer different types of crops were being grown; the seeds of horsebeans, lentils and millet were too expensive. Farmers said they had started using more fertiliser but it was becoming more and more expensive and there was often not enough rain to get a good yield. Livestock holdings had reportedly decreased 'drastically' due to drought and diseases. Two rich households had acquired camels which survived better in drought conditions.

Local employment opportunities were described as 'zero' although one community member was employed as a Life Guard at Sodere resort. There were local opportunities for daily labour at times of weeding and harvesting and some went to Dera for unskilled daily labour. Ten men had joined the army: three had died, three had returned and four were still serving. FFW opportunities had increased following the 2002 drought. Firewood selling continued.

Starting in 2000 the NGO Self-Help Initiative supported the installation and running of a medium-sized pump in the river Awash and the establishment of an irrigation co-operative with 130 member

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<sup>9</sup> Quotes such as this one have been taken from interviews conducted during WIDE2.

households. Farmers grew onions, tomatoes and green pepper as cash crops using selected seeds, fertiliser and pesticides for which credit was available via the Irrigation Association. The quality of the produce was said to be much worse than similar production during the Derg. Prices were reportedly very low as there was no road transport to the *kebele*. Self-Help also supported the creation of a women's savings and credit association; at the time of the research there were 36 members who were meant to contribute two *birr* every 15 days. They could borrow up to 400 *birr* paying back 430 with interest.

The poor state of the road was described as the biggest constraint on economic development. It took 3½ hours to reach the nearest market at Dera on foot. Some respondents claimed that their community was a very easy one to develop; *'the area can easily be changed through irrigation and construction of a bridge on Awash.'*

### **Comparison of community livelihoods in 2003**

Both communities produced no rainfed crops during the 2002 drought. In the period between 1995 and 2003 there had been considerable investment in infrastructure benefitting Geblen, which was not the case in Korodegaga. However in the latter in 2000 130 households had acquired small pieces of irrigated land to grow cashcrops, although the quantity and quality of the outputs were relatively low. The role of FFW in both economies had increased. As a result of the irrigation there were more daily labour opportunities in Korodegaga; in Geblen a few people had set up shops and tea-rooms in the growing 'urban' centre and an increase in petty trade was reported.

### **Comparison of experiences of drought and food aid between 1995 and 2003**

#### **Drought and food aid in Geblen 1995-2003**

Asked when the community had received food aid the answer was 'always' since 1985. Since the early 1990s it had been associated with work such as road construction and terracing. Such work reportedly affected the productivity of the farmers as it was *'usually programmed in the very important farming days and seasons'*. Committee members and *tabia* leaders' kin were said to be highly favoured. The food was sometimes three months late which was particularly problematic for poor people. The Catholic Mission and the Red Cross were also providing food-for-work in 2003; *'it saved me from begging and exile'*. Through the work the Farmers' Training Centre was built and the road maintained.

Attitudes to food aid were ambivalent; it had helped the community to survive but had also developed *'the sense of a need to be fed by food aid (tetsabaynet)'* reducing attempts to find other survival strategies. It was also suggested that *'food aid should have been given upon provision of productive work rather than simply upon repeated activities (even food for work has brought little change) and free gift.'*

#### **Drought and food aid in Korodegaga 1995-2003**

Respondents said that food security had been steadily declining. *'During the Imperial regime the rain was falling regularly and there were wild fruits. Cattle were plenty. Trees were present. During the Derg period everything was less. With EPRDF there is nothing.'* Food aid started in 1984 following repeated representations to the government by three community leaders. The food aid had saved many lives, particularly of those without friends and relatives to support them.

Respondents estimated that more than 20 people had died during 2002/3 as a result of hunger. *'The causes of the deaths is not clearly known. The assumption is that they died because of malaria which people cannot resist at a time of famine.'* Between 1999 and 2003 Food-for-Work was continuous. The work mostly involved eradication of the partinium weed which had spread when fertiliser was introduced; there was some terracing and road maintenance. There were complaints that the work was not properly policed and because the *kebele* was *'not firm'* absentees received food aid. Other claims of lack of fairness were that some men were registered in more than one *kebele* and that households with the same numbers of members did not get the same amount of food aid.

Again attitudes to food aid were ambivalent: ‘*the community is praising the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission as it provides food every month but on the other hand the spirit of working for oneself is dying... we are born farmers so we have to work for ourselves. Rather than giving us the food aid it is better to build us a new irrigation system or renew the UNICEF built water pump. Then we would be no more parasite... money or job opportunities would be better.*

### **Comparison of coping strategies during severe droughts**

FFW was very important in both communities and in addition in Geblen two NGOs were providing Cash-for-Work for people working on roads and terracing; there were reports that only relatives and friends of the administration had access to these opportunities. Otherwise the leading work strategy in Geblen was migration followed by selling wood and charcoal; in Korodegaga firewood-selling was the leading strategy, followed by migration. In Geblen livestock and other property might be sold; the emphasis was on livestock sales in Korodegaga.

Borrowing for consumption during extreme droughts was reportedly difficult in Korodegaga since everyone suffered food shortages. In Geblen there was borrowing from better-off neighbours and relatives in and beyond the community. Some government credit for farming inputs was used to buy food in Geblen but there was no such credit in Korodegaga. In both sites children might be sent to relatives elsewhere. As things deteriorated migration for begging and stealing increased. The final resort was ‘distress migration’ – going looking for food wherever it might be found. Households also cut back on their consumption; meals would be smaller and/or less frequent. They also gathered wild foods, although in both places many of these were said to have disappeared.

## **The communities in 2010<sup>10</sup>**

### **Geblen in early 2010**

In 2007 the population of the *tabia* was estimated to be 3,500; one third of the 750 households were registered as landless and 46% were female-headed, two trends that were said to be upward. By 2010 a very small town called Mishig was emerging around the *tabia* administrative buildings which were in place in 2003. Electricity arrived in 2008 and recently the *tabia* had provided small plots of land for young married landless families to build houses. Mishig was connected through a small all-weather road to a tar road at Edagahamus going to Adigrat and in the other direction to Freweini, the centre of the new Saesia Tsaeda Emba *wereda*. There was transport three times a week from Geblen to Edagahamus and every day from a neighbouring *tabia* 45 minutes’ walk from Mishig where there was also a small market. There was a wireless phone in the *tabia* office. The mobile phone network reached a few spots in the *tabia* though the reception was not good. There was a new health post, the primary school had become full-cycle and satellite primary schools had been built in the two remote *kushets*. The paths between the *kushets* and the *tabia* centre had been improved.

Less than 10% of the *tabia* was used as farmland and in most areas the soil was poor and even in good years households covered at most a few months of their food needs with their own production. Since 2009 all non-farm land had been put under a strict zero-grazing programme which officials said would revive the area; this caused serious lack of access to fodder for livestock and cactus for people. Terracing and tree-planting activities over the years had borne little fruit. There were reportedly only two relatively good years of rainfall between 2003 and 2009. In three of the years crops totally failed; in one even cactus were destroyed and drought and diseases killed 810 animals. The core livelihood system was in decline and the scarcity of water and the stony soil and topography prevented the use of technologies found elsewhere in the *wereda*. The few existing water structures, which served an estimated 10% of the population, did not hold water the whole year. Around 120 households grew onions, tomatoes, and potatoes on a maximum of 25m<sup>2</sup> for minimal incomes. The very few household ponds built did not hold water as they were not cemented despite *wereda* promises. A programme to

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<sup>10</sup> The data informing this section comes from WIDE3

introduce modern beehives had failed due to drought and use of improved seeds and fertiliser led to debt when the rain failed. A new breed bull had been introduced in 2008.

Households needed other activities in their livelihood portfolios. One option for most households was PSNP work which, although not well paid compared to other daily labour opportunities, including smaller-scale NGO FFW projects, was supposed to be a reliable source of food/income. Although in February 2010 the food aid due seven months earlier had still not arrived. Apart from the PSNP, other local non-farm opportunities were few and occasional, for example NGO development projects needing labour. As in the past people migrated for variably long periods of time to different places, finding jobs on construction projects or quarry work in the Region, going to Humera for the sesame harvest, women finding work in towns as housemaids, waitresses, or commercial sex workers, men as manual labourers. Some women migrated legally to the Gulf States to work as housemaids; an increasing number of men and women were also travelling to these states illegally along people-smuggling routes. There were stories of hardship and failures though a few people were sending remittances to their families in Geblen.

There was a surge in migration by youth who lacked access to land. The *tabia* tried to organise groups and facilitate the provision of credit for them to start economic activities but by early 2010 only one such group had been formed. After strong resistance by others in the community they were given land from the communal land and started beekeeping but like others they failed to get any production due to drought. Market linkages were also an issue. Examples of success among the young people who stayed in Geblen were rare, and linked to some exceptional factors like the story of a young man who invested the savings he had made by working several years in a grinding mill in various local activities. Education and getting a job was hoped by many to be a way out and there was a strong and new commitment to education. Two women from Geblen had recently been appointed as teachers elsewhere.

We do not have sufficient evidence to draw strong conclusions but we suspect that what community-level economic growth there had been was externally generated as a result of migration and remittances and administrative investments. There had been some lifestyle changes; plastic goods had mostly replaced locally-made pots, houses in Mishig tended to have corrugated iron roofs, and there were a few TVs in cafés, bars and homes. Inequality had increased as, although those falling in the poor category were not poorer than in the past those in the rich category were richer.

The PSNP was put in place in 2004 before the national programme was rolled out; there was also emergency food aid in 2005, 2007 and 2009. The local household asset-building programme known as ‘the family package’ focused on credit for goats and improved beehives. There was also credit for fertiliser and improved seeds through the Farmers’ Association Co-operative. The *tabia* and sub-*tabia* administrative and party structures overlapped and had the same leaders. There was a heavy responsibility on party members and especially local leaders to ‘show the way’ and convince others to adopt government policies, including credit. Party membership was high but not universal. For some people it sounded like a matter of genuine personal commitment, for others, particularly women, it brought ‘no benefit but no harm’. However, people generally resented the coercion which was apparent in several areas, particularly to adopt risky packages but also latrine construction and fertiliser.

### **Korodegaga in early 2010**

The only change to the settlement pattern was that the *kebele* administrative centre, Sefera, had started to grow with the building of new *kebele* offices, a savings-credit office, and a health post; a veterinary office was being built. The mobile phone network was put in place in 2008. It was hoped that electricity would soon reach Sefera, as it had during the Derg, as there was a plan to re-connect the large government pump which depended on electricity. There had been no real change to the roads although the seasonal road to the *wereda* town had been maintained by an Australian investor using his tractor.

Regular firewood selling had become a less important coping strategy due to increased daily labour opportunities and the PSNP which was put in place in 2006. There were extreme droughts in 2003 and

2009 and while the economy was said to be improving as a result of irrigation the livelihood system was ultimately still dependent on rainfed agriculture so that when the rain failed, as in 2009, many households found it hard to cope.

The irrigation potential was being increasingly exploited. Some farmers owning small pumps individually or in small groups irrigated their private land. There were two communal schemes operating under one joint irrigation association which gave good services to its members including credit for inputs. The NGO scheme described earlier was still functioning despite the phasing out of SHI support in 2005. Almost all landholding households belonged to the larger government scheme which started working in 2007 but stopped in 2008 when parts were stolen; it was due to re-start later in 2010. Inward investment in irrigated land was increasing; some investors came for one or more production periods and rented land from farmers or the school. Two successful investors had leases; one had held his for some time while in 2009 the *wereda* gave a lease to an Australian investor for 27 hectares on which he was using drip irrigation. Youth and women's co-operatives who had been allocated irrigable land faced obstruction from some farmers.

There were three DAs and the household asset building programme focused on sheep, chickens and oxen. Improved seeds of *tef*, and wheat were made available to some farmers although quotas were restricted. By 2010 credit for fertiliser was no longer available except through the irrigation association. New hybrid maize seeds distributed through the irrigation association failed since the farmers were not taught how to manage the plants. A few farmers tried growing cassava and sweet potato but were not enthusiastic.

Richer farmers spent most of their time on rainfed and irrigated agriculture and livestock-rearing helped by wives, sons and daughters. Many also farmed share-cropped or rented land and employed daily labourers. In some cases family members did daily labour on other farms and/or sold firewood to get cash. Poorer farmers and women heading households usually had a portfolio of activities changing over the year including daily labour, FFW and selling wood. Some young men with access to oxen worked on sharecropped or rented land. There were still virtually no local non-farm activities. *Wereda* officials estimated that about 15% of the community were involved in the government co-op movement. In addition to the co-operatives working on irrigated land there were youth co-operatives using rainfed land and one successfully but seasonally loading and unloading irrigation inputs and outputs. Youth co-operatives producing stones and sand had failed due to poor road access. Starting from 2005, when the first woman went to work in Saudi Arabia, there was a growing interest in international migration; by 2010 seven men and women had migrated illegally to Sudan.

Economic growth was internally generated through increasing investments in irrigation. Richer farmers were building bigger houses with corrugated iron roofs and buying modern furniture. Nearly everyone used improved stoves which had been introduced by SHI. Inequality had increased as the wealth of rich farmers increased and there were signs of incipient class formation: between landed and landless, and within the landed group between successful irrigation farmers and those with no irrigated land or no household labour to exploit it.

Development policies and services related to livelihoods were provided by government and NGOs. They included PSNP from 2006, agricultural extension advice, support for youth co-operatives, savings and credit for women, and credit and seeds for irrigation farming. With community labour the primary school in Sefera had expanded to grade 5 and a new satellite school was built in another village. A health post had been built and two health extension workers were in place although not yet living in the community.

The *wereda* and *kebele* administration played a significant role in the developments around irrigation but many community members were frustrated by the poor access to inputs and output markets. One respondent argued that what was sustainable for the community was irrigation but it could only take off if government provided subsidies for seeds, fertiliser, and fuel and helped with repairing water pumps. Another constraint was the lack of a bridge over the river to facilitate marketing of the products, something which the community raised repeatedly at *wereda* level. The *wereda* and *kebele* officials did not always see eye-to-eye and there had been a high turnover of *kebele* officials in the years between 2003 and 2010.

### **Comparison of the communities 2003-2010**

Geblen's administrative centre was closer to becoming a town than Korodegaga's, while road access and transport from the *kebele* was much better for Geblen residents. This was ironic given (1) potential improvements in productivity in Korodegaga with good road access and (2) the decline of the Geblen core economy. There was no sustainable environmental re-habilitation in either community. Both communities were hit by serious droughts in 2003 and 2009 and, while both core livelihood systems were centred on rainfed agriculture, even in a good year rainfed production plus PSNP were quite insufficient. For Geblen residents the main supplementary strategy was seasonal, temporary or longer-term migration, some international which was mostly illegal. For those living in Korodegaga there were two strategies: involvement in irrigated farming as a smallholder, co-operative member or daily labourer and selling firewood. International migration had just started; mainly on an illegal route to Sudan. In both sites inequality had increased. Such economic improvement as was visible in Geblen was externally generated as a result of migration and administrative investments. Despite the impact of recurrent droughts the Korodegaga economy had improved as a result of the irrigation activities. Government-community relations in Geblen were 'good on the surface' although some poor people complained that the government no longer cared about poor people. Party membership was high but not universal. While nearly all Korodegaga residents were party members for most this was not out of conviction. There were various tensions between the *wereda* and *kebele* officials.

### **PSNP and household asset-building packages in the two sites 2004-10**

The annual emergency appeal process for households in chronically food insecure areas was partially replaced by the national rollout of PSNP in 2005. At the time of the WIDE research in 2010 selection of beneficiaries for PSNP2 had just been undertaken in Geblen; in Korodegaga the *kebele*'s status in PSNP2 was not clear.

### **PSNP 2004-10**

#### **Geblen PSNP 2004-10**

Geblen PSNP1 was a government implemented programme with food-for-work and direct support elements. Officially 70% of households were registered for the programme with benefits for up to six members. Unofficially the assistance was shared through a system of partial family targeting; as a result in 2007 90% of the households benefited for varying numbers of members (Dom: 2007). Other household members could be given emergency food aid during bad droughts. Recruiting committees in each sub-*kebele* selected households and numbers of members. There were regular allegations that some *tabia* officials were benefiting rich friends and relatives, some of which were raised with and addressed by the *wereda*. Some poor people with no connections with the committees were reportedly excluded but there was no suggestion that party membership was a criterion for inclusion<sup>11</sup>. Officials said that all women were given the opportunity to participate in PSNP. There was a lot of conflict during selection for targeting including accusations of nepotism and patronage; some excluded people complained to the *wereda* and *kebele* administration and some were subsequently included. There were tensions over the selection of participants in PSNP2 and several people suggested that targeted interventions damaged social relationships as it divided the community into those benefiting and those not.

PSNP provided food and money for six months each year. Food was commonly provided and cash only sometimes. The value of the cash transfers rose due to inflation from 8 *birr* per person per month in 2008 to 10 *birr* in 2009. Food was preferred because the purchasing power of the cash transfer was not constant, being determined by the fluctuating grain prices at the local market. Also, according to a

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<sup>11</sup> In 2009 there were said to be 270 party members.

male household head, “*men misuse the cash they are given by purchasing alcoholic drinks. Therefore, it is better to us to be given the ration in the form of food. If so, we will directly take it to our house and give it to our women who are using it efficiently*”.

In most years, dependent on the weather, emergency food aid was provided by the government, Adigrat Catholic Diocese Secretariat and World Vision Ethiopia to the non-PSNP households and to PSNP households with more members not covered by PSNP. The emergency transfers were 15kg of wheat per person and sometimes oil. Forty per cent of under-five children received supplementary feeding under programmes funded by World Food Programme, UNICEF, and World Vision although families tended to share this food among all household members. Elderly and other ‘weak’ people, pregnant women and mothers with children aged less than ten months were exempted from the public works while those unable to work in remote areas worked in the village, cleaning the Health Post, fetching water for the Farmers’ Training Centre and so on.

Delays in PSNP transfers caused hardship. With a seven month delay in PSNP implementation at the time of the WIDE research a father of six said that he feared his children could die of hunger if the PSNP rations were not delivered very soon. In addition recipients did not always receive the amount of grain that they had been promised by officials, with an average of 5kg reportedly deducted from each 50kg of grain provided.

The PSNP ration enabled households to meet various needs, such as feeding the family, paying off debts, buying sugar, coffee, salt and non-food consumables and paying for children’s school stationery. For some the PSNP was their only coping mechanism in times of drought: many poor people ‘*would otherwise be dead of hunger*’. The PSNP support also served as collateral for poor people and enabled the better-off to avoid selling their asset base or borrowing money to buy food. There were indications that the aid strengthened the customary social protection system, relatives and neighbours being more willing to lend to each other in anticipation of repayment from future PSNP rations.

The public works included maintenance of roads, watershed management, terracing and school improvements. PSNP was a source of employment, and for many the only work opportunity, but the daily wage rate in 2008 was low at 10 *birr* compared with unskilled labour rates of 20-25 *birr*. Women had a heavy household workload and *kebele* officials had written to the *wereda* recommending that women’s additional workload should be taken into account so that women should not be expected to work the equivalent of men. People were also expected to work for free on community labour projects for 40 days a year, up from 20 days a year previously, although an arrangement was reached for them to complete the 40 days’ work in 20 days.

Terracing in hilly Geblen may have prevented some erosion but did not make a big difference; the Head of the Women’s Association said that “*Relentless effort has been exerted for the construction of terracing and soil and water conservation activities, though we did not see the fruit*”. While people in Geblen were aware the community needed better soil conservation and watershed management, they had reportedly given up hope of the PSNP works making a difference because they had not seen any real impact from their labour over many years. People were appreciative of the work on roads and schools that brought them benefits they wanted. The schools constructed through PSNP were said to be of superior quality to those built using voluntary community labour.

By 2010 no household had graduated from the PSNP due to recurrent drought which, as described below, had contributed to the almost total failure of the household asset building programme leading many people into debt. Some respondents said that poor people in the community were dependent on PSNP because the support was enough to sustain people without enabling them to build up their asset base and bring about a significant change in their lives. There was also a perception that PSNP made people lazy: the *tabia* leader said that in the long run regular food aid was harmful as ‘*those who had been industrious and self-sufficient people are now developing a culture of dependency*’.

Migration abroad, along with daily labour in neighbouring areas, was a common strategy for coping with the economic hardships, especially for young men who felt there was no hope for them in Geblen. However, some PSNP beneficiaries reported being more inclined to stay in Geblen as they

were receiving PSNP support. This was approved by those who were worried about the impact on the community of the rapidly increasing youth exodus.

### **Korodegaga PSNP 2005-10**

PSNP in Korodegaga was funded by USAID and implemented by the NGO Catholic Relief Services. Seventy per cent of households were beneficiaries. *Gerie*<sup>12</sup> selected the beneficiaries for PSNP support based on *wereda* instructions. Local officials and beneficiaries agreed that in PSNP1 the support was not sufficient; Korodegaga's quota was smaller than other *kebeles* due to the judgment by *wereda* officials that the community's irrigated farming would meet some of its food security needs. Officials re-evaluated beneficiaries' wealth, their PSNP ration size and coverage of PSNP family members annually and reportedly decreased aid allocated to some families in order to cover more households. The number of family members supported by PSNP varied each year. For example, one family received support for six members in 2005, four in 2006, seven in 2007 and back to four in 2008.

People not considered as *kebele* residents were not allowed to participate in any organisation or development programmes, though they were included in PSNP if they lived in the house of a resident. There was a case of exclusion of a woman who had grown up in the community but whose husband was an outsider. There were reports of officials favouring rich friends and relations: "*well-to-do families are getting the aid due to corruption and this situation needs to be improved*". There was a lot of mobilisation around the 2010 election and the community was warned of exclusion from PSNP unless they registered to vote in the election and accordingly most people did.

The serious shortages of food aid created tensions between *kebele* officials and the community. There was conflict over selection decisions; some households perceived inclusions of some richer families and exclusion of other less well-off families as unfair: "*Everybody wants to be included in PSNP. The excluded poor went to the wereda to complain and then back to the kebele officials to solve their problem. Then kebele leaders, gerie and DAs with the community discussed the issues and solved the problem*". There was also some conflict related to the Public Works when people did not arrive on time or at all and refused to pay the cash or food penalty.

PSNP assistance was provided for six months of the year between February and July. The planned PSNP monthly transfer was 15 kg of wheat per person and sometimes oil and *fafa*, a soya and cornmeal blend. PSNP households received emergency assistance in very bad years, such as one to three transfers a year of 30kg of wheat and 3kg soya beans, or 30kg wheat and 1/3 litre of oil. Families also received nutritious food and vitamins for malnourished children funded by UNICEF; 96% of children in the community were apparently covered by this programme. The elderly and weak were exempted from PSNP public works and received direct support. There were no reports of direct aid for disabled people. One returned soldier complained that he had to do PSNP work even though his war wounds made it very hard for him.

The food was sometimes delivered late and was not sufficient in times of serious drought like 2009. Although emergency food aid was provided from September 2009 after PSNP1 had ended many farmers said they had to sell cattle to buy food. The community members did not seem to know about a second phase of PSNP and whether it would be implemented in Korodegaga, though *wereda* officials said that, given the irrigation potential, there was a plan to graduate the whole community apart from 77 individuals.

The food aid was essential for the poor, in meeting their consumption needs and preventing them from selling their assets in times of drought. Some poor people said that otherwise they would have died. PSNP aid contributed to the diversified livelihoods of the better-off. Some thought customary social protection was weaker because people expected PSNP to provide the support that in the past relatives, friends and other networks gave each other but others experienced no change.

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<sup>12</sup> Each sub-*kebele* – or *got* – contain 4 or 5 *geries*; a *gerie* constitutes 27-32 households.

The PSNP public works were mainly road maintenance and terracing. Other activities included planting trees, cleaning irrigation channels, filling up gorges, and removing weeds. People were also mobilised to contribute free labour for community projects; it was not always clear which projects were PSNP public works and which general community work. In recent years the community constructed the farmers' training centre; *kebele* and savings and credit offices; a school; a health post; a teachers' home; a health extension worker's home; a veterinary building; fences for the school and teachers' home compound; and a women's toilet for the school and teachers. To choose the PSNP work activities, the DAs and *kebele* officials would discuss with the *wereda* Agricultural and Rural Development/Irrigation and Food Security offices. Some farmers resisted having terracing on their land because it reduced land area though others were said to be keen. There was reported resentment that individual farmers benefited from the terracing whereas projects like road maintenance served the whole community. Livestock often destroyed terraces and newly-planted trees.

People were expected to work two days a week from 8am to 12pm throughout the year and every day when the time of the aid provision approached. This reduced the time households had for their own farming activities. Household members 'substituted' for each other in undertaking the PSNP public works, including wives substituting for husbands, older children for parents. A group of boys aged 13-14 explained that PSNP support enabled them to go to school and learn without being hungry but at times they spent school time participating in the public works.

There had been a target to graduate about 1,200 households with capital of 3,000 *birr* per household member through the implementation of PSNP1 but, as in Geblen, no household graduated. This was partly due to the 2009 drought and partly to perverse incentives. A number of farmers had reportedly sold cattle in order not to qualify for graduation. *Kebele* officials felt food aid increased dependency because people assuming the PSNP would continue forever preferred to sell their assets rather than build them in order to remain in PSNP. They hoped that dependency on food aid would decrease as the area's irrigation potential was exploited. Irrigated farming in Korodegaga was already contributing to improved food security through better productivity, production of maize and vegetables on irrigated land, and more daily labour opportunities. However, in 2010 rain-fed agriculture was still at the core of most household strategies.

### **PSNP Comparison 2005-10**

There were interesting similarities and differences in the implementation of PSNP in the two sites. Geblen's PSNP was implemented by the Government and Korodegaga's by the Catholic Relief Services. The inputs were slightly different: Geblen beneficiaries received mainly food aid and sometimes cash while those in Korodegaga received only food. In both sites the majority of households received PSNP support, 90% in Geblen, 70% in Korodegaga, with a maximum of six household members covered but commonly with fewer members supported in order to spread the aid to more households. In both sites there were delays in the delivery of the aid which made poor families struggle to meet their food needs. Geblen beneficiaries reported receiving consistently less food than promised, while in Korodegaga the insufficient quota granted to the community caused conflict in selection as well as shortages. The same complaint was found in both communities: that officials' gave access to relatives and friends regardless of wealth and poor people without networks were at risk of exclusion. While neither site reported party membership as a criterion for selection, in Korodegaga people were told that registering to vote in the 2010 election was essential for PSNP selection and almost everyone had joined the party. Threats of removal from PSNP were used in both sites to persuade people to participate in different government programmes particularly latrine-building in Korodegaga and the family package and fertiliser on credit in Geblen.

In both sites the benefits were clear: poor people depended on PSNP for survival, to pay their debts and as collateral, while PSNP enabled the better-off beneficiaries to maintain their asset base and avoid borrowing to buy food. Customary social protection was thought to be strengthened in Geblen while perceptions were mixed in Korodegaga. In both sites some people perceived that the PSNP was creating a 'culture of dependency' by giving people just enough to survive but not to change their lives and by making people 'lazy' and less likely to work hard to invest in their own future.

Public works on roads and schools that benefited the whole community were appreciated in both sites. Environmental works were less appreciated and generally ineffective. People from both sites reported some issues and conflict around public works: limiting time for personal farming in both places; overburdening women and the low wage rates in Geblen; school absenteeism and conflicts over attendance in Korodegaga.

## **Household asset-building 2004-10**

### **Geblen household asset-building 2004-10**

The Government introduced household credit-based extension packages in 2004. Credit was provided by the Dedit Credit and Savings Institution, a micro-finance institution founded by the Relief Society of Tigray. Loans were provided for fertiliser and improved seeds; farmers reported being '*forced*' to take these packages even when they did not want them. Even some people without land had to take fertiliser under threat of removing their participation in PSNP. At the time of the fieldwork there was no crops Development Agent (DA) in Geblen. About a third of households took livestock loans, purchasing cows, goats, sheep, donkeys and chickens and 60% took loans for improved beehives. Continuous drought led to shortage of water and fodder for animals and there were epidemics of livestock disease in 2007 and 2009, with more than 800 deaths in 2009. In 2009 a livestock DA was assigned to Geblen but although a vet clinic was built in 2004 it had no personnel or medicines.

In an effort of the *tabia* administration and DAs to try to reach the *wereda* targets for the OFSP, many farmers were forced to take modern beehives packages '*against their interest*', with threats of otherwise being denied other opportunities including access to the PSNP. Party members were expected to be '*in the vanguard*'. Roughly 60% took more than 500 modern beehives on credit. Few people successfully placed bees in the modern hives, some because of the additional cost to get bee colonies, and others because their bees died through lack of rain or limited bee-keeping knowledge and skill. Livestock packages were generally better accepted and whilst many households failed to benefit as their livestock died due to lack of water, fodder and/or regular vet services the livestock holdings of some households increased.

Better-off farmers with access to irrigable land used the credit to purchase water pumps; others engaged in non-agricultural activities put the money towards trading and grinding mills. A number of women were doing quite well using the credit to run small shops, teashops and bars in Mishig. The OFSP non-farm packages also worked for a few youth who '*at least did not get bankrupt*'. But *tabia* officials pointed out that youth needed skills to be able to engage in more lucrative work.

The credit was also used for non-official purposes. One woman in Geblen used half of her OFSP credit to construct a house in the *kebele* centre which then generated rent. Some engaged in small businesses in Mishig used the credit to build new houses and buy modern equipment such as beds, DVD players and TVs. Some parents gave it to children to pay for migration to the Gulf. Others used it to buy food and other consumption goods.

There were problems with debt. Those unable to repay from income were reportedly taken to the social court and either sold their assets or '*mortgaged their land*'. Even so the outstanding community debt was not small. For the poorest households, taking a package under constraint may have aggravated a cycle of debt and due to failure with packages some households previously not receiving PSNP support joined the programme.

People of all ages, including party members, expressed resentment at having to take credit for activities that were unlikely to succeed. One *tabia* official, pointing at the high level of bad debt in the *wereda* as a whole and the usually good performance of the *tabia* in terms of repayment, said that this enforcement '*cannot continue*', as everyone in the *tabia* would become bankrupt. People including officials suggested farmers should not be made to repay when there is drought. However, when one farmer considered as a loyal party member tried to put his dissatisfaction with packages being forced

on people in writing in the minutes of a party meeting attended by party officials from several *tabias*, the *tabia* officials of Geblen threatened him with imprisonment for his '*anti-development outlook*'.

### **Korodegaga household asset-building 2005-10**

Credit was available from a number of sources from 2001. The NGO, Self-Help Initiative (SHI), initiated a credit association for women at that time and in 2009, with help from Japan International Co-operation Agency, the government started a second association for non-members of the SHI association. Credit was given via the DAs for sheep and chickens, improved maize and *tef* seeds, fertiliser and herbicides. From 2003, in different years, credit was provided for *wereda* Agriculture and Rural Development quotas of improved seeds of *tef*, wheat, maize, soya beans, onions, tomatoes, and green peppers. The selection of households for credit extension packages was carried out by sub-*kebele* officials and was intended to target the poor though it was not linked to PSNP support. Quotas of improved seeds were small. The Irrigation Association which was established with help from SHI in 2000 and had its own bank account was another source of improved seeds and fertiliser on credit. Fertiliser for rain-fed land was not available on credit in 2010.

Newcomers to the *kebele* that were not considered to be '*kebele residents*' were not given credit packages. 'Everyone' in the community was a Party member so this was not a criterion for inclusion. It was also reported that people without 'relations' with sub-*kebele* officials were unlikely to get access to packages due to the small quotas in relation to need: '*Improved seeds are not distributed to female-headed households and those who are not relatives of the distributors*'. However there were some women heading households obtained credit through the women's credit associations. Some poor people felt that rich people were benefiting and poor people were excluded: they complained orally and in writing to the *wereda* Agricultural and Rural Development office but the *wereda* said targeting was up to the *kebele* officials who knew the community well. There was a complaint that officials kept the '*important seeds*' (*tef* and vegetables) for themselves and only distributed others which they did not need (maize, wheat and soya beans). Nobody had complained to the *wereda* but the issue was raised in a *kebele* meeting.

Irrigation farmers benefited from improved vegetable seeds: '*Many members of the community have benefited from using improved seeds – he has been benefiting by using improved vegetable seeds. Accordingly, he could buy clothes and food, could produce cereals for household consumption, bought oxen, goats, chicken, and different utensils*'. On the other hand a project to plant improved maize on irrigated land failed totally since farmers misunderstood the advice and removed the fruiting buds. Some women and young people who got credit to buy sheep and goats lost the animals due to livestock disease; there was a newly-built vet post but no vet had been assigned and the three DAs concentrated on crops rather than livestock support. The quota of cattle from the *wereda* Revolving Fund was small. There were no non-farm packages.

Many households were in debt from taking credit for improved *tef* seeds which failed due to drought; for the improved maize that failed for Irrigation Association farmers; and for livestock that died due to drought, shortage of fodder and grazing land and disease. Some poor households consumed the improved seeds taken on credit. While debtors were meant to pay by selling their assets or renting out their land many debts were still outstanding. The Revolving Fund for livestock did not revolve due to lack of debt payment; some recipients said they thought the cattle had been a gift.

According to the *wereda* officials no agricultural extension packages succeeded due to farmers' resistance, technical problems and unfavourable weather. Many credit beneficiaries said they should be allowed to suspend repayments of their debt if their livestock died or when there was drought. One *kebele* official said that when interventions failed, such as water harvesting and last year's new maize seed, both the community members and the *wereda* officials blamed the *kebele* officials. People did not want to repay the debt even when they had the ability to pay it, while *wereda* officials forced the *kebele* to collect debt re-payments on time causing a lot of conflict. He complained of lack of support, encouragement or praise from both community and *wereda* officials.

## **Comparison of household asset-building packages**

In both sites there was intensive activity around household-asset building packages with many households taking credit for crops and livestock inputs. Both had improved seeds programmes; fertiliser was forced on people in Geblen but was not provided on credit for rain-fed cultivation in Korodegaga. Farmers in both had incurred debts for fertiliser when harvests failed. Livestock packages in Geblen were mostly unsuccessful with the almost total failure of the improved beehives and many animals dying from disease and lack of fodder because of recurrent drought. Korodegaga livestock were also affected by drought and disease but some people had benefited from the packages. There was lack of support, with vet posts built in both sites but neither with a vet or medicinal supplies. Geblen had non-agricultural packages that had some success with women and youth; there were no non-agricultural packages in Korodegaga.

Geblen party members were in the vanguard to take credit which harmed many of them. In Korodegaga everyone was a party member so it was not a criterion. In Geblen packages were forced on threat of expulsion from PSNP and there was a high failure rate due to their unsuitability for an area suffering frequent and deep droughts and without key supporting services. In Korodegaga the opposite problem was reported with small quotas of cattle and seed not matching demand and complaints of *kebele* officials keeping the best seeds for themselves and their networks. However, people still struggled to repay their debts when packages failed and there was conflict between *kebele* officials and the community over repayments.

### **PSNP and asset-building packages in the two communities: an exploration of key processes, mechanisms and functions**

In this section we adopt three perspectives on the PSNPs and asset-building packages in the two sites. *First*, we look at how cultural disconnects between government and community assumptions about the programmes and social interactions among the different players affected the implementation of the local PSNP and development packages in each site. *Second*, we consider how each intervention worked within the total web of government interventions entering the community during the period. *Finally* we draw some conclusions about the processes, mechanisms and consequences of the interventions in each site considered in their wider community context.

### **Cultural disconnects and social interactions around PSNP and asset-building packages 2005-10**

The macro-level design of PSNP, OFSP and other credit programmes depended on a set of assumptions about how they could and should be implemented. Some of these assumptions were at odds with community-level values and norms, while others were blind to the role which power structures play in on-the-ground implementation of development interventions. In this section we describe how (1) cultural disconnects between the top-down policies and local cultural repertoires and (2) social interactions involving top-down bureaucratic pressures and hierarchical kin networks led to processes and outcomes which did not conform to the theories underpinning the official policies.

With regard to access to PSNP FFW and direct support we have seen that only 10% of households were excluded from PSNP in Geblen and only 30% in Korodegaga. In neither was full family targeting practised as a result of pressures from the community to meet norms of sharing. These norms challenged the assumption informing full-family targeting that each rural household operated like an independent business; regular and predictable food aid would prevent sale of assets and provide a floor from which households could start to build assets through packages and credit. In reality in such rural communities there are many different kinds of household; they vary depending on where they are in the household cycle, the sex of the household head, and the ways in which members are related. Most households have complex long-term exchange links with other different kinds of household and in both sites in order to allow more households into the programme the number of members of each household included was limited and liable to change each year, reducing the predictability assumed in the top-down model.

Another assumption implicit in the macro model was that it would provide a safety net for poor and vulnerable households. However, while this was the case for many such households in both sites, some poor households ‘*without networks*’ were among the excluded minorities in both sites, while many richer households were beneficiaries. These richer beneficiaries were expected to help poorer households (with whom they had connections) when the official programmes were not delivering, for example when transfers were delayed. Another feature of the PSNP which was not anticipated in the macro policy was its use as an incentive by kebele officials and extension workers who were under considerable pressure from above to meet a set of targets. In both communities people were threatened with removal from the programme if they did not conform with government directives such as to register to vote in the 2010 election and dig latrines in Korodegaga, and take credit for fertiliser and livestock packages in Geblen.

The household asset-building and other credit packages were intended to enable households which had been provided with some long-term security through the PSNP to invest in activities which would increase their assets over the years to the point where they would no longer need to participate in the FFW programme and would graduate. One problematic disconnect in this regard was the top-down choice of crop and livestock packages whose success depended on sufficient rain and, in the case of animals, a reliable veterinary service to provide vaccinations and deal promptly with incipient epidemics. Neither sufficient rain nor vets were available in either site and at the end of PSNP1 no household had graduated. Another disconnect was the assumption in the macro model that everyone would want to build assets and graduate with no recognition of the perverse incentive for people who wanted to stay in the PSNP to sell rather than build assets.

Turning to the social interactions around credit and packages the wereda pressure on kebele officials and extension workers in Geblen to meet package targets was considerable, which was an outcome of pressure on them from higher-up government echelons. This pressure was transferred to farmers, particularly those who were both party members and PSNP participants, and they were forced to take credit and beehives and fertiliser which they did not want and which failed to generate any outputs. Wereda officials dealing with Korodegaga did not seem to be under similar pressure from above to meet package targets, maybe because this mattered less in Oromia and/or the credit programmes involved NGOs. In both sites it was difficult to establish how many outstanding debts were actually collected.

The broad goal of the work done through FFW in PSNP1 was to construct community assets, with a macro-level focus on environmental degradation and roads. In the official programme work, such as terracing, making checkdams, digging ponds, making and maintaining internal roads and paths, was to take place for so many hours a day, on so many days a week, usually for the six months leading up to the main planting period. This was linked with a macro-level assumption that the work would take place at slack times in the agricultural calendar while farmers said the work often interfered with important seasonal tasks. Another cultural disconnect was that in macro policy documents community assets were imagined as benefiting everyone in the community equally while people working on terraces, paths or ponds in particular places could see that they mainly benefited those living near to them.

### **PSNP and asset-building packages in the web of interventions 2005-10**

Since the 1980s both communities had experienced patchy and often unsustainable development interventions in the local infrastructure and environment, and the livelihood, social protection, human development, and governance fields. From 2003, when the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme was launched at national level, followed by the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty in 2005, the number and intensity of interventions increased at an accelerating rate. In both communities during the five years that the PSNP and packages were being implemented there was other work on roads and eroded land, schools were built and extended and more teachers appointed, Health Posts were built and HEWs put in place, Farmers’ Training Centres were constructed and the number and education levels of livelihood extension workers increased, the organisation of co-operatives for youth and women began, kebele structures were re-

designed in various ways, there were changes to peace, security and justice systems, and various measures to improve women's rights and wellbeing were put in place.

None of these interventions operated independently; they were linked in four main ways. First energy, resources and time devoted to one intervention by organisers and beneficiaries reduced that available for others. For example DA involvement in governance matters reduced time for livelihood development, while women's attendance at meetings on hygiene and health took time that could have been spent on livelihood activities. Much of the environment-related community work connected with PSNP and the household work related to unrealistic credit packages wasted time which could have been more usefully spent. Also the linking of credit with a restricted number of official packages made it hard for each household to use it in ways best suited to its particular economy.

Second, for interventions to flourish in the short-term or contribute to development in the longer-term *timing* in relation to other interventions was often important. For example investments to increase productivity of cash crops without simultaneous good access to markets in Korodegaga was inefficient and big investments in education in Geblen not linked to plans for appropriate employment development for future graduates was increasing youth exit and contributing to tense inter-generational relations. Livestock packages would have been much more profitable if good veterinary services were in place before they were launched and they had been accompanied by animal drinking water projects and emergency 'fodder aid' in extreme drought situations.

Third, aspects of some interventions undermined others. For example, preventing access to communal and household grazing land in Geblen to enable longer-term renewal, reduced the efficacy of the livestock credit programme. The timing of the public works programmes interfered with agricultural work calendars. Those who accumulated debt through failed packages were less able to make use of other interventions which required household investment such as education, preventive health and health care. Some teenagers were absent from school to work on the FFW programme.

However, fourth, there were also synergies between interventions. PSNP food reduced school absenteeism due to hunger and more generally increased energy levels for work in schools, on farms and in homes, improving the impact of educational, livelihood and health interventions. The work on roads improved community linkages in Geblen and maintained them in Korodegaga enabling access to markets, schools, and health posts and health centres. Denser governance structures improved the flows of information and instructions throughout the communities and threats of loss of access to PSNP encouraged people to take some interest in government preventive health and livelihood programmes. PSNP provided critical support for very poor households and vulnerable elderly and disabled people and all female-headed households in Geblen were included. There were also credit packages focused on women; through a savings and credit association in Korodegaga and non-farm credit in Geblen.

### **PSNP and asset-building packages in broader community contexts 2005-10**

The ways in which the two programmes were implemented were affected by the ways in which the broader community social systems worked. They entered and responded to the ongoing dynamics in the local economies, societies, politics and cultures while their implementation through the period had some feedback consequences for the systems.

#### **The community economies**

Since at least the 1980s Geblen's core economy has produced annual food deficits of varying sizes and the population has been sustained and grown on the basis of regular injections of food aid and income earned outside the *tabia*. It is likely that in the years 2005 - 10 the annual PSNP aid, supplemented in two years by emergency food aid, injected rather more income into the community than in the days of emergency food aid. Its main contribution to the economic system were to improve individual wellbeing and human resources, reduce household asset sales, keep more people living in Geblen than would otherwise have been the case, and contribute a platform for a growing demand for education at all levels.

Given rainfall patterns over the period the household livestock asset-building and crop packages were misconceived since their success depended on a minimum amount of rain every year which rarely fell. Many households accumulated debts for fertiliser, beehives and livestock with many selling assets or renting out land in order to pay them off. It seems likely that the community as a whole would have been better off without the packages. The farmers who bought local goats with their loans contributed to the local economy via a multiplier effect by increasing the income of local goat-selling farmers. This was not the case with the modern beehives which were not locally made. Given the location and local skill-sets there were few alternative investments that could be made at household level; some women used loans to invest in cafés, bars and rooms to rent in Mishig. The emergence of this small town depended on government investment in an administrative centre for the *tabia*. A few traders used loans to good effect. Loans used unofficially for youth migration had not produced much income feedback to the local economy at the time of the fieldwork. Some loans used unofficially for consumption improved human resources and wellbeing while expenditure on alcohol brought problems for some individuals and households but boosted the local town economy. There was little credit provided to organisations other than households; one youth co-operative took credit for modern beehives which failed.

Privately the DAs recognised that the official packages were not going to work without resolution of the water shortage problem but publicly stuck to the official discourse and did not try to mitigate the negative effects of forced packages on credit. They were not involved in providing advice or skill-training in relation to the non-farm packages which had more potential to succeed.

Farmers in Korodegaga have been experimenting with smallscale irrigation for almost fifty years. At the time of the research there were a variety of technologies in place: small pumps irrigating individual farms and small co-operatives; a medium-sized pump feeding irrigation channels; a medium-sized pump connected to drip irrigation; and two large pumps feeding irrigation channels which were expected to start working shortly. There was also talk of spate irrigation possibly being introduced in part of the kebele. There were a variety of institutional arrangements: smallholders using irrigation; an irrigation association of farmers with small plots fed by one of the medium-sized pumps; small women and youth co-operatives; and private investors from outside the community including one from Australia. While smallholder and daily labour opportunities related to irrigation had increased considerably and looked set to continue to grow in 2010 most smallholders still regarded rainfed agriculture and livestock rearing as their core livelihood activities. Given the two all-year rivers which surround the community the potential for an increase in local production and productivity is much greater than was achieved in 2010.

In this economic context the PSNP aid could be seen as supporting smallholder households through a transition to irrigation-related farming and daily labour requiring a change in mind-set and management skills. On the other hand the work requirements and regular food supply may have reduced the incentive to make the transition which was also held back by the lack of investment in improving access to vegetable markets through better transport connections. It is likely that different types of farmer and household responded differently. The PSNP work and the increasing daily labour opportunities reduced levels of firewood sales.

Poor road access also contributed to the failure of youth co-operatives preparing sand and stones for construction work. Not all farmers had irrigable land, and given that packages were standardised and intended to be accessible to PSNP participants with potential for graduation, the government-linked household credit programmes focused on the risky activities of rainfed agriculture and livestock. These led to economic improvement for some households but to increased debt and economic decline for others. Non-government credit provided through the Irrigation Association was much more effective though it was not linked to good advice; the main failure on the irrigated land was due to mismanagement of hybrid maize. Generally the DAs did not seem to have responsibility for advising on farming activities outside the government-recognised packages.

### **The local societies**

As described above a household's kin networks were important in the detailed allocation of work and food in each year of the PSNP in both sites, while in Korodegaga they were also important in gaining

access to limited quotas of improved seeds and credit. The broader informal security regime was also organised around kin networks within which reciprocal obligations to assist family members in times of need were strong. People in sub-kebeles charged with selecting households and deciding how many people in each to include in the programme were under great pressure to meet their family obligations and, looking to their own household's future, invest in kin networks. Membership of a selection committee also provided a power resource through which they could gain favours and take revenge on enemies. Excluded kingroups fought back by regular appeals to the wereda in Geblen while in Korodegaga clan and kin-based factions were active in engineering frequent changes in the kebele leadership.

In Geblen the programmes reportedly strengthened the informal security regime since poor family members in need at a certain time had expectations of resources with which they could reciprocate. Some respondents in Korodegaga said that the programmes had not undermined informal security exchanges while others said that lower levels of need among poor and vulnerable people receiving food aid and government calls for households to act individually and had reduced reciprocal exchanges.

The focus of both programmes on households boosted the power and resources of household heads, particularly male ones, and while there were special opportunities for women in both sites this was not the case for the growing numbers of un(der) employed young men with varying education levels. Young people in Geblen reported heightening inter-generational tensions reflected in rapidly increasing youth migration. In Korodegaga more efforts had been made to increase youth opportunities through allocation of land to individuals and groups organised in co-operatives with access to some credit.

### **Community politics**

Following the realisation during the 2005 election that there was considerable rural support for opposition parties a number of changes were made to kebele structures: large kebele Councils were established, kebele managers were appointed, and other government employees were given roles in kebele Cabinets. At the same time sub-kebele structures penetrated deeper into the community through the establishment of development groups and 1-5 cells which became increasingly intertwined with party structures. These small structures were intended to disseminate both political and economic information and instructions and with regard to the latter control of access to PSNP food aid and credit for packages was a potential power resource for the achievement of government and party goals. However, although government employees and other officials threatened removal from the PSNP if people did not participate in other interventions, notably voter registration, digging latrines, and taking credit, there were no reports that such threats were followed through.

Generally farmers did not want to take credit for risky fertiliser and livestock and bee-keeping packages in Geblen but the political pressure exerted particularly on party members was hard to resist and officials were unwilling to raise community complaints with wereda officials. All adult residents in Korodegaga were reportedly party members and many women were keen supporters as a result of changes in their lives attributed to government actions; many men seemed simultaneously to be opposition supporters.

### **Community cultures**

Cultural disconnects between the assumptions implicit in the two government programmes and relevant community beliefs and norms have been described above. Kebele officials and some farmers in both communities suggested that regular PSNP aid was encouraging a 'culture of dependency' while some wereda officials responsible for Korodegaga were scathing about the 'lack of awareness' in the community despite frequent long meetings to 'aware' people. The meetings were highly unpopular due to their length and boring and repetitive nature. While they seemed quite effective in transmitting messages about what people should do in some areas there was a large gap between awareness and practice. In some cases this was because household or community resources necessary to implement the interventions were expensive or missing and in others because the locals could not see the point of the intervention.

## **Conclusion: suggestions of some wider implications**

We conclude by presenting some hypotheses about mechanisms and outcomes likely to be found in other rural communities in Ethiopia which are recipients of PSNP and credit programmes<sup>13</sup>. We believe these may also operate in other contexts where social protection is provided through regular food or cash for work and credit is only available for certain packages. We focus on social protection via long-term food aid programmes, the important things that need to be in place if development packages of credit and inputs are to succeed, and the work side of the programmes. We then take a longer-term perspective on the trajectories of the two communities and discuss the implications for other drought-prone communities in Ethiopia.

### **Social protection via regular food aid**

We expect to find the implementation of safety net programmes in other communities to be affected by two major cultural disconnects. The first opposes macro assumptions about the importance of family targeting with local norms of sharing, and the second the macro focus on poverty with the community prioritising of kin obligations.

The regular injection of food or cash into communities provides government employees based in the community and local kebele officials with a valuable power resource. This power is likely to be used in the form of threats and promises in attempts to make community members conform with government interventions which have top-down targets. In some contexts the resources may also be used in patron-client networks organised along clan, lineage or kingroup lines.

The regular injection of food and cash into the community is also likely to improve average nutrition levels with good consequences for livelihood and education participation. It should prevent some deaths of poor and vulnerable people with no or poor production prospects and reduce household asset sales. It should also reduce resort to customary coping strategies such as firewood selling and migration. We expect a range of outcomes for different types of household: those led by entrepreneurial characters will use the safety net as a platform for adopting new household activities and technologies while those led by ordinary farmers will experience gradual improvements in lifestyle. The resources will have fuel bad habits, such as drinking, smoking and chat-chewing, in some households, while they will provide some basic security for those unable to work at all. The balance of these different kinds of response will depend on the opportunities in the wider economic context and some cultural factors. For example communities where Kalehiwot Protestantism is the dominant religion may have fewer men with bad habits since such habits are banned and if practised lead to expulsion from the church<sup>14</sup>.

The regular injection of food and cash will also have consequences for the community's economy; if there is increasing demand for products and services from within the community this will improve community incomes further. The consequences for local informal security regimes will vary depending on the extent to which networks of support are confined to closer families or reach across wider networks and the extent to which individualistic values have penetrated the local culture. The programme is unlikely to have generated a general community culture of dependency and although it may have discouraged some people from adopting new productive strategies it will have supported others to take new risks.

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<sup>13</sup> We will be testing these hypotheses using the data made recently in 2011/12 in eight other drought-prone rural communities in the four big regions.

<sup>14</sup> Recent research found more tolerance of such habits in Mekane Yesus Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity and Islam (apart from drinking alcohol).

## **Development packages of credit and inputs - important things that need to be in place**

If the packages of inputs and credit have not been appropriate for local conditions and pressure to meet top-down economic targets has been strong we expect political imperatives to have dominated at the expense of economic rationality. This is likely to have been associated with increasing levels of household debt. We also expect graduation rates to have been lower than planned as a result of household responses to incentives and broader community resistance. The more the packages have been supported by other interventions such as road-building, electricity, and good access to veterinary services and wider economic changes such as increased demand and good prices for inputs and outputs the greater their contribution to the community's economic growth is likely to have been.

## **FFW/CFW and watershed management**

Environmental public works in both sites involved poor planning, absence of wereda resources to support the work, uneven benefits and unmotivated workers who had been involved in such work over many years without seeing any real changes. We hypothesise that environmental activities will not be very successful unless the activities chosen fit the context, they are well-planned and there is relevant parallel investment in resources, training and supervision. Other public works activities are unlikely to be performed with the energy and commitment which people are willing to expend when rewards are clearly and immediately related to effort.

## **Longer-term trajectories of the drought-prone rural communities**

Compared with 1984 the government approach to drought and potential famine in rural areas has changed enormously as the tales of the progress of Geblen and Korodegaga since 1984 show. Since the 2003 drought, which affected both communities badly but did not lead to large exodus and deaths, government investment in the communities, including PSNP and household asset-building packages, has increased at an accelerating rate.

In Geblen, given the unsuitability of the location for smallholder farming as currently organised, the major role the PSNP has played has been to keep more people in the *tabia* than would otherwise be the case. Looking to the future if PSNP-type social protection is discontinued there is likely to be a considerable increase in out-migration, especially among the youth, and regular demands for emergency food aid with the amounts depending on the weather. There do not seem to be any potential changes at meso-level which might affect local livelihoods unless there is an expansion of tourism, which in any case would be unlikely to provide employment for many Geblen residents.

In Korodegaga the PSNP has also played a role in keeping people where they are, though at the same time the economic system has been affected by the expansion of irrigation. In the future it is likely that more land will be irrigated and drought will have less impact, though it is not clear what the institutional arrangements will be. This will depend on decisions made at Regional and Zonal level. Future possibilities include a large smallholder system organised along co-operative lines; a mix of small investors, smallholders irrigating private land with small pumps, and smallholders organised in co-operatives with larger pumps; and the leasing of all the land to a large investor.

A major lesson from this comparison is that the way that PSNP and packages work in a particular community depends to a large degree on the wider economic context. In the GTP period many drought-prone rural communities with irrigation potential will experience structural upheavals as a result of higher level decisions on local institutional arrangements for irrigation use. The trajectories of communities without irrigation potential will depend to a large degree on whether new non-farm activities are economically viable and what form government social protection policies take when PSNP2 comes to an end.

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