# Adele Keke site-specific topic: chat chewing

## Religious leader

The religious leader stated that *Juma/Jimate* (Friday) is the day when people ask Allah to leave the sinful people exposed either knowingly or unknowingly. That is why every Friday there is a praying programme. The naming of chat, which is *Jima*, is also has some similarity and relation with the praying day. He said it is called Jima due to the fact that in most cases people chew jima/chat so as to think about Allah and pray deeply.

The religious leader said chat opens up one’s mind. In explaining this he said that when a person chews he talks and interacts/participates more as he becomes awake to think more by being prevented from being sleepy. In short it is the source of the individual’s strength. Due to this he mentioned that chewing makes a person think of Allah and pray. In general, he described that chewing chat enables a person to accomplish what that person plan to do, whether it is work or prayer, as it makes people stronger.

However, the followers of the newly coming Muslim *Wahhabi* movement believe that the religion does not allow to chew chat. They justified that like alcohol drinks chat is prohibited. But in their original Muslim religion he said that in their religious book (*quran*) it is mentioned that what is obtained from the ground is to be eaten by human beings or livestock. As it is obtained from the ground we believe that it has no alcohol content.

With regards to this recently coming Muslim division of religion there was a meeting held at federal level for two weeks. In Harar and Adama training was also held from September 1-5 this year. From one wereda 12 individuals (5 youth, 5 religious leaders and some officials) attended the meeting. In the meeting it was discussed that within the Muslim religion there are some differences in what the followers do and do not believe. In the meeting it was also discussed that the original Muslim religion allows chat chewing. So, chewing is right as it makes them stronger to pray to Allah. Accordingly, the followers of the original Muslim religion, unlikethe *Wahhabi* do not consider chewing chat as bad.

He mentioned that in the days when he does not chew he becomes sleepy and unable to work. He mentioned that once he chews before he eats then his appetite is closed. To overcome this he eats before he chews. He mentioned that different individuals have different characteristics, a few can eat after chewing without difficulty but the appetite of the majority is closed. He said a few individuals also see chat as food. He mentioned that is has no adverse impact and he thinks that is it is be**neficial.** As the production of chat has been increasing over time in the last 10 years the quantity, frequency and regularity of chewing has been increasing, especially in the season when the farmers collect chat (in the summer season, September and March: in these two months it is those who irrigate their land who collect).

## Teacher

He emphasised that what he thinks about chat chewing is its disadvantage from the chewer’s side. He indicated that chewing results in gastric and liver disease, it affects teaching and it affects the budget. He said people who chew are encountering such problems. He said that is why older people grind the chat to take it as their teeth have already been affected by chewing so far.

He emphasised that the chemicals farmers use to make their chat grow well, which include malatine, DDT, cholorcine, etc. kill pests, and help farmers to get good crops. However, they are bad for chewers. But the farmers do not mind about its bad effect on chewers’ health, rather they want only to get good income by increasing their productivity. He said those who worry about such problems use lemon when chewing. He also does the same. But lemon is not available all the time in the area. Others drink ‘Hoja’ (boiled milk with water) believing that this drink somewhat minimize the effects of such chemicals.

He said that as chat is green it is perceived that it is good for the oesophagus and that it has some vitamins. As a result, he said people perceive that whenever someone has a common cold they get better by chewing chat.

He has also been chewing for the last 30 years. But now he is reducing the amount he chews as its price has become expensive over time. To buy chat on average he said he spends a minimum of 10 birr and a maximum of 25 birr per day. Even though he is aware of its adverse impacts he could not stop chewing as he is addicted.

In general, as it is a cash crop it only benefits the farmers but he thinks it has no relevance for the chewer. But farmers continue to chew; even the trend of chewing has been increasing as over time the land covered by the chat crop has been increasing as farmers have become aware of its economic benefit. Similarly, because of irrigation the season when farmers get chat is increasing. Due to this the amount as well as the trends and frequency of chewing chat by farmers have been increasing. In relation to this he mentioned that if they sold the chat they chew they could get more income and use this income for other productive activities. Or indirectly it has minimized their wealth accumulation. He also mentioned that chewing minimizes the chewer’s appetite. But farmers do not consider its adverse impacts.

Until now he said there is no awareness raising in the community or in the schools about impacts of chat chewing. He said it might be good to inform farmers technically to minimize the frequency of chat chewing so as to sell more to benefit from the income and to minimize the impacts of its adverse effects on their health. But as informing the community about it is very sensitive it needs to be very technical.

## Health Extension Worker

She mentioned that chewing chat has so many adverse impacts on health. It closes or reduces the appetite for food. Because of this people chew without eating adequately. This also affects their gastric system. She stated that liver illness (called *jawond*), which is one cause of death, is also rising due to chewing.

As chewing reduces appetite once men eat in the morning they chew immediately and they do not need to have lunch. Their stomach is empty and they need food but they cannot eat. She said farmers do not give due emphasis to eating on time and to preparing a balanced diet, they always eat similar types of food, which are not nutritious. If women are pregnant or have a child of less than 6 months old they need to eat at least three times per day. However, as their husband does not need lunch women do not prepare lunch and they do not eat properly. Due to this their breast milk becomes less and this exposes their children to malnutrition. She even mentioned that she has come across pregnant women who faced malnutrition because of lack of proper eating.

There are a few men that she knows who have been advised by a medical person to stop chewing when they go to a health care centre when they are not able to father a child (facing infertility) or due to illness such as gastric or liver. But they continue chewing as once they are addicted they are not able to work unless they chew.

She also mentioned that whenever farmers use DDT or Malatine the chewers are exposed to gastric problems as the chat has bacteria that affect the gastric system.

She also stated that as chat chewing makes the chewers active and prevents them from getting good sleep they think over what they can do but the next day they do not remember what they planned or what they were thinking.

As the production of chat has been increasing in the area due to irrigation, the quantity, frequency and regularity of chewing has been increasing, especially in the season the farmers collect chat. As farmers do not know the adverse health impacts of chat chewing she suggested informing farmers about its adverse impacts technically so as to reduce the habit of chewing.

## Development Agent

He said that farmers cannot work unless they chew. But once they chew they are active in accomplishing farm related activities. However, they accomplish so many heavy works within one day, which in normal conditions would take more days. Due to this, he stated that chewing enables them to do more activities, which are above their capacity. This work burden in turn makes them tired and to be passive to work. That is why unless they chew they cannot work.

He mentioned that individuals who chew cannot get good sleep after chewing. As an example, he mentioned an old man (who is 60 years old) from Kusho village; whenever he chews his weight is greatly reduced as chewing prevents him from having good sleep. But whenever he stops chewing his body is repaired and returns to its normal phase as he gets good sleep and eats well. Due to this people advise him to stop chewing.

Similarly, he also stated that as individuals do not get good sleep in the evening (which is the consequence of chewing in the day time) the next day they sleep in the morning till 10 am. So, he thinks it wastes the time that they could use for productive activities.

He mentioned that the wereda agricultural office was supplying anti pests. But in 2007 and 2008 GC when anti pests called ‘Lafora’ were used all bees died. Due to this in the last 2 years there was no honey produced at all in the community. Because of this bad consequence there has been no supply of anti pests. Now anti pest is supplied only for hazardous pests. But to increase productivity of chat farmers very much need anti pests but they cannot get them. In relation to this he stated that farmers have great need of a type of anti pest called 'stingush' but they have not obtained it yet. Moreover, it is very expensive. In the past farmers have been using DDT on the chat crop as an anti pest. But the DDT has been resulting in liver problems for chat chewers. After they understood this consequence some farmers stopped using DDT, rather they started to give other care such as weeding on time and to avoid damaged parts, etc. A few farmers also use weha agar (water purifying tablets, which should be used for purifying drinking water) believing that they kill pests.

Thus, he stated that the major advantage of chat production in the community is getting more income, however, it has adverse health impacts for chewers, mainly it exposes chewers to gastric and liver illness. In the past farmers used to chew some but over time as the production of chat has been increasing due to irrigation the quantity, frequency and regularity of chewing has been increasing. As the chemical content of chat is very high since farmers use DDT or *Malatine* as anti pest he thinks more chewers have developed liver illness. He himself feels gastric problems whenever he chews chat on which farmers used DDT as a pest killer.

He stated that unemployed youth use chat as a means to recreate by chewing. As they do not have anything to do they spend the time by enjoying themselves with their friends. Otherwise (if they do not chew) the time is too long for them. He described that unlike in other urban areas such as Dire Dawa or Adama, etc., chewing does not result in youth engaging in unnecessary activities such as unsafe sex since Adele Keke people do not drink alcohol. But in other areas after they chew they drink alcohol to break the dosage of chewing, which is called *chebsi.* But the drink in turn exposes them to have unnecessary unsafe sex and associated consequences.

## Farmer – male and chewer

He mentioned that farmers chew chat as chewing enables them work better since their muscles are relaxed. Otherwise without chewing they cannot involve in any activities. As the production of chat has been increasing over time in the last 10 years the quantity, frequency and regularity of chewing has been increasing. He said above food he likes to chew chat. As after he has chewed he cannot eat, he eats before he chews.

He estimates the chat he chews per day would cost about 40 birr on average if he sold it. He said women do not chew like men as they do not involve in labour intensive works.

## Farmer – male and non-chewer

Formerly he used to chew chat frequently. But later he suffered from gastric problems. The health professionals told him that since he chews more and does not eat enough food because chewing has reduced his appetite, his gastric system has been affected. Due to this they advised him to stop chewing. Accordingly, he stopped chewing in the last three years. Because of this since then his gastric problem is getting better. As he is selling the chat he used to chew formerly his income has increased. As a result of this his living condition has been improving a lot.

In connection with chewing he said the community members do not give due value to food, rather they focus on chewing. As a result of this, he thinks the eating habits of the community are very poor as most adults do not eat lunch and do not eat good quality food.

## Farmer – woman

The frequency and amount of chat women chew is very small as compared with what males chew. Similarly, there are more adults or older women who chew chat as compared with young woman. In most cases they chew in mourning and wedding houses. Above all it is female householders who chew. This is because as they do not have husbands they chew to talk and enjoy time with their friends as they are free. In general a woman who chews like men is called ***‘****kemate****’*** and the social position of these women is lower. This is because the community thinks that as she is chewing like men she is wasting her time by chewing and is not obedient to her husband.

Since, unlike men, women in most cases do not go to farm areas they do not chew like men. The men have developed chewing chat as in the farm they work while chewing there.

## Research Officer additions and comments

* I found asking farmers about the adverse impact of chewing a bit sensitive. Because of this I have not talked more about it and household consumption expenditure with the last three respondents.
* During my stay in the site I have identified that unless farmers chew they are passive and do not listen or understand the conversation. In short I approved “**If no chat, no chat**”.
* I have identified so many cases of liver related problems, which can result from chewing chat as most respondents mentioned them as a cause of paternal mortality and morbidity in Adele Keke. When mentioning the cause of death they say *Tiru*, which means liver problem. Two of the female householders, who were included in Module 7, also reported *Tiru* as a cause for the death of their husbands.