

## Dinki in 2010

Dinki, along the river of the same name, is one of five gotts in Hagera Selam kebele. In Chibite, the kebele administrative centre 1 to 2 hours walk from Dinki, a very small town is emerging, with a few 'modern houses' built also by people from surrounding gotts including Dinki, and a small market. The kebele is located on the lower edges of the escarpment down to the Afar Region, which it borders; it is one of a few lowland kebeles in Ankober wereda in Amhara, with a rugged and hilly topography and small scattered hamlets of a few households. Also in contrast with the predominantly Amhara population in the wereda, almost two thirds of the population of the kebele are Argobba Muslims and one third Amhara Orthodox Christians. In 2004 it was estimated that over half of the population of Dinki (689 people) was under 20 and slightly more than twenty percent of the households were headed by women.

The kebele and Dinki are remote. A dry weather track (crossing a river without a bridge, which can cut off the kebele at times in the year) links Dinki to the gravel all weather road from Ankober to the Afar Region. Along this road is Aliyu Amba, a small town which is the main market for the people of Dinki and to which they go on foot taking a shortcut (8 kms; 2 hours). Further on this road is the centre of Ankober wereda (25 kms from Dinki). The track to Dinki also goes to Chibite, farther away from the 'main road'. It is being improved as there are plans to develop irrigation in Chibite. There is no electricity and no plan to have it in the foreseeable future in the kebele. Mobile network coverage is starting to be available in a few spots. There is a wireless phone in Chibite, which has not always operated reliably though it has lately improved.

Compared to highland kebeles landholdings are large – though communal grazing land is scarce, which explains the community's resistance to attempts to transform hillsides into forestry areas or to give land to groups of unemployed youth. Rainfed agriculture is not as dependable as in the past: in 2010 there had been regular drought for five years and emergency food assistance had had to be provided. From 2007 it was provided as Food-for-Work. The main potential for Dinki is irrigation with water from the river. This is practised by about one third of the households, who have land near the river. Production of vegetables and fruits has picked up. It is sold on Aliyu Amba's market, providing a good income, and additional food items in the diet of the households concerned. But the river flow recently changed and some households have been affected by erosion that has eaten away their irrigated land. Moreover, tapping the irrigation potential more fully would require better access to markets, something that might improve somewhat with the ongoing works on the track to Dinki and Chibite. The amount of water in the river is decreasing as well, and while an irrigation users committee was set up to manage water better and get people to work on canal clearance, it is clear that the potential of irrigation in Dinki is not infinite.

There is also a nursery near the river that provides seedlings including experimental varieties of spices. The nursery and irrigated horticulture of private farmers are a source of daily labour for other households. When food-for-work is available, as it has been for the last three years, most households have at least one member participating. Poorer households, elderly and female-headed households tend to sharecrop out their land. There are a number of very poor, destitute households, many headed by elderly people or women, which depend on other people's assistance to survive. They are more vulnerable to abuses and do not have the support necessary to seek redress. Poorest households may have male members migrating out for work or become dependent on richer ones for whom they work full-time.

In addition to domestic chores and for the Amhara women, gender specific farming tasks on the family land, some women participate in daily labour and food-for-work. Some earn an income from petty trade, preparation and sale of drinks, and selling small livestock. Traditionally, Argobba women do not engage in farming but there is some change especially for the poorer ones. There also are changes in women's land rights and signs that even Argobba women are ready to claim these rights even though they face more resistance than their fellow Amhara women. Women in Dinki are

little involved in local politics and administration although the woman wereda Councillor is an active person who contributed to get some requests from the community acted upon by the wereda.

There are a very large number of (mainly young) landless households. Young men face big obstacles to access land, and the new land and family laws strengthening women's rights of ownership and inheritance are likely to further increase the pressure on land. There are emerging signs that women claim and obtain these rights. Some young men may continue to work for their parents and gradually get land to exploit themselves. For those who do not there are very limited off- and non-farm opportunities, and the promises of the wereda of finding ways for groups of youth to engage in productive activities have come to nothing except for very few who got space and could raise credit to open kiosk shops in Chibite. The one attempt to give youth land was resisted by farmer who made claims to the land they were allocated and other ideas for non-land based income generation activities were not taken forward. The current situation causes a lot of discontent among the youth.

There is limited use of fertiliser because of the cost and lack of sufficient rain which makes it ineffective. Short maturing varieties of maize have been tried but require careful weeding and also enough rain, and the supply is also not sufficient or not timely. The newly re-established service co-op cannot yet provide inputs at a better price, though it has the advantage of bringing these closer to the farmers. The service co-op does not provide loans for lack of seed capital. Credit is available from ACSI, with centres in the kebele. There is no consensus among groups of respondents (community members, wereda and kebele officials) as to whether people who took credit generally improved their lives or not. There are stories both ways, and a sense that credit is good only for strong farmers and those very careful with money. ACSI repayment conditions are thought to be unrealistic, and a big issue is uninsured death of livestock for reasons beyond people's control.

People in Dinki keep livestock. A few rich households have camels that are used for transport and are very valuable. Attempts at improving and diversifying livestock production with new breeds of poultry and beekeeping were unsuccessful, but a qualified vet is now in post in Chibite and even though there are some issues (very large area to cover, shortage of drugs and equipment), people are very appreciative of the service which enables them to get their animals vaccinated a lot more easily.

People in Dinki have access to the kebele health post in Chibite which, because initially it was planned to be a clinic then was downgraded, was allocated a nurse – although it otherwise lacks basic facilities and even a table and chair. Water is still taken from the river. People can also go to the health centre of Aliyu Amba, which has lately become better equipped. The sanitation measures taught under the government health extension programme are adopted only to a limited extent and in particular, few people use latrines even among those that dug one, though younger people seem to be more convinced of the benefits. There is a sense among different groups of people that the use of contraception is becoming quite widespread, although there are also reports of husbands' resistance or resistance on religious grounds or because people – including women – want more children. Malaria is still present in the area while TB is decreasing. HIV AIDS is considered to be an urban issue, although there are a few cases of people suspected to live with HIV AIDS in the community, and there are a few HIV AIDS orphans though from people who migrated.

There is a full cycle primary school in Chibite and two satellite schools in other gotts including Dinki. The reduced distance to school and the shift system enabling children to attend school and to have time to help at home or in the fields helped boost enrolment, including of girls now enrolled equally to boys. However, there is still absenteeism and dropout, linked to the need for child labour and some children's poor performance which discourages parents from continuing to send them to school. A few children go to the secondary school recently opened in Aliyu Amba. This is better than when they had to go to Ankober, but still requires them to stay away from home during the week – which is an issue as it decreases households' labour capacity. The community has no access to TVET or tertiary education.

Following the EPRDF regime's policy with regard to minorities' rights Argobba have the upper hand in the local kebele politics and administration (though not the wereda), although their fellow community members suspect kebele leaders of working to their own advantage, regardless of the ethnic group they belong to. In 2004 Argobba appeared to be at a disadvantage economically. In spite of these factors and some allegations of bias one way or the other, relationships between Amhara and Argobba are fairly good, although some people say that the community cohesion is only superficial. The two religious groups are tolerant of each other and have common organisations (joint iddir) and people invite each other to customary ceremonies – in the past some fundamentalist preachers tried to instil less tolerant ideas including that Muslims should have their separate iddir, but these were not taken up. Mutual assistance between relatives and neighbours and through iddir is important, involving various types of assistance mainly 'in kind'. People in Dinki also devote much time, energy and resources to life cycle and religious ceremonies.

In contrast, people's involvement in government and party matters is distant, even though formally, there are a large number of kebele and sub-kebele level structures for both government and the ruling party. These structures strongly overlap, with the smallest ones overseeing five or ten households' performance in development activities and in adopting the measures promoted by the wereda and responsible for mobilising people for collective labour and raising resources. However in spite of this system of micro level mobilisation, since the adoption of the good governance package in 2007 non-participation is seen as a right. Kebele officials have far fewer means to overcome people's reluctance to participate, which puts them in a difficult position vis-à-vis the wereda.

One of the issues provoking people's discontent is the transformation in 2007 of food aid into food-for-work, which people say, is against the federal/regional policy and which some claim was decided by wereda and kebele officials for their own benefit. This fuels a sense of unfairness as people do not see why they should work whereas people in Afar get free food.