# Geblen site-specific topic: high proportion of households headed by women

Male research officer self-designed research

The proportion of female-headed households is high in Geblen. Information obtained from the kebele office shows that in the year 2000E.C, 43.5% [316 households out of the total 725] of households residing in Geblen were female-headed households. The group discussion conducted with female household heads revealed that relationships such as widowhood, elopement and cohabitation are the most common factors for the existence of such a high proportion of female-headed households in the locality. In order to know more about creation of the female-headed households the following exemplary cases were identified and discussed briefly

1. Widowhood
2. Divorce
3. Co-habitation
4. Elopement

##  Case 1: Widowhood

The informant who is a widow, a household head is residing in Geblen. She reported that the locality had been under the control of the TPLF freedom fighters since 30 years before. As a result, many people men and women had joined the fighters and quite a significant number of them were killed in the battlefields. Her husband who had been serving as a militiaman had joined the fighters in 1980. In 1982E.C, he lost his life in one of the battles fought in the central part of the country while fighting against the army of the Dergue regime. In 1984, the officials, representatives of the party, told her that her husband sacrificed his life for the sake of freedom and realisation of democracy. The informant has three children. She has her own land and residence house. Now, her elder son is ploughing the land.

Mainly, the household members depend to make their livelihoods upon their land and the PSNP. However, previously, the specific family members had been given 5000 birr as compensation by the government. The government had been, supporting them in the form of not only payment of the cash, but also, food aid [grain and cooking oil in time of drought], free medical service and other free access to other public services. However, since the implementation of the PSNP, the government abandoned to provide the food aid to the families of the dead fighters. According to the informant, termination of the free food aid to them is not a right decision. She said that providing food aid should not have been abandoned, as there is no ample agricultural production in the locality to fulfil the amount of food needed by them. She believed that the food aid should continue to give them the extra aid along with the food aid delivered to them through the PSNP because the farmland in the kebele is infertile and drought stricken thus, most cases they harvest little or no production.

On the other hand, the price of food and other commodities increased sharply, particularly since 20010E.C the level of the inflation augmented. As a result, the household members had faced serious economic hardships. On the other hand, due to the severe drought, the crop in their farmland failed. As a result, the family members had been suffering much from shortage of food. As a result, her eldest son who had been frustrated due to the economic problem the family has faced dropped out of schooling and migrated to Humera in search of work to Humera. He had been an 8th grade class student. Even before he migrated, since 2000E.C, he had taken the responsibility of ploughing the land and engaging in other farming and non-farm activities. The informant wanted her eldest son be successful student in his education than be a farmer. Until recently, she had the hope upon him that complete his education, and be a government employee. She also hoped him to be the one to support her and his siblings [financial support]. However, the hope she had upon him vanished when her son terminated his education and migrated to Humera.

The informant has her own land before 2001E.C, she had been purchasing fertiliser, she stopped doing so in the current year due to the potential danger of the drought. She had been borrowing it from the farmers’ association cooperative. According to the informant the cooperative is providing fertiliser, oxen cows, donkey, selected seeds, fertiliser, motors and manually operated water pump by borrowing it from other private companies like Guna Trading P.L.C .[ A trading company owned by TPLF]. However, she is not benefited from the supply, rather those rich people who do have access to irrigation and fertile lands.

## Case 2: Divorce

Nearly 30% of the females heading households in Geblen are the results of frequent divorce caused by husbands’ unfaithfulness to their marriage. E is a household head residing in Geblen who married in 1997E.C, and has a 3-year old child. The marriage dissolved in 2000E.C. when her husband became disloyal to her and prefers to live in the town of Adigrat. The informant reported that before he migrated to Saudi Arabia they have a very good relationship. The reason for the divorce occurred when he came back from abroad last year and decided to live in the town of Adigrat, a place in which he said there is better work opportunity to him. Consequently, he went to the town of Aadigrat to live there. Since then, for about a year, he neither did send her money nor came back to Geblen to visit her and his child.

In the mean time, she and her parents had heard the news that he has established a relationship and is living with another woman who had also returned from Saudi Arabia in Adigrat. Thereafter, her parents sent mediators with the view to investigate the fact and to solve the problem occurred between him and his wife. However, he denied the issue, though the mediators found out that the rumour the parents of the informant heard was true. After that, the mediators criticised him for his act of infidelity and persuaded him to ask her an apology and to come back to his home and continue to live with his wife and his daughter. Nevertheless, he did not want to live with her and demanded for divorce. He also made his stand clear to the mediators.

The mediators told her and her parents about the facts they discovered and his stand about the marriage. As a result, she decided to break-up her marriage and become dependent upon her parents. At that point, she was frustrated, as she knew that her parents were not strong enough to support her and her child. Indeed, her parents were not strong enough to support her and her child. However, she became firm in her decision, as she feels that the food aid she has receiving through the PSNP is something to contribute to sustain her life and the life of her child. She said that the ration she has receiving through the PSNP is so meagre that it could not cover the annual food consumption for her. Despite to that problem, the promise her father gave to her encouraged her to accept the proposal of the divorce. Finally, her marriage was dissolved and she went to the house of her parents. Since then she is living as a household head with in the house of her parents.

Young women heading households have no support from the administration and association. The informant is critical to the kebele and the wereda administrations as well as the women associations about their lack of commitment to create opportunity for women. Last year, the administration promised to send the young women to Mekele to participate in the long training on different technical skills on such as woodwork and pottery and others. They also collected the list of the participants. However, until now they never fulfil to them the promised opportunities provided to her and other women.

She also criticised the kebele and the wereda women’s’ associations. She said that the kebele as well as the wereda women’s associations have nothing to do to women except to pressurise them to pay the monthly payment in the form of contribution. She is contributing birr 4 annually. The contribution is not reasonable to her as far as the association did not create her an opportunity to generate income.

## Case 3: Cohabitation

Women in Geblen have extra marital relations with multiple men and they are bearing children from different men. The informant who is residing in the village of Mishig, Geblen, has 5 children begotten from different men. In 1987E.C, she gave birth her first child from a man whom she said to have raped her. Once in 1987E.C, a man residing in one of the neighbouring households raped her. As a result, she became pregnant. When her parents informed about how and from whom she conceived a dispute arose between them and the man suspected criminal. In the meantime, the traditional arbitrators interfered in the issue and handled it. After a while, the dispute was resolved through the agency of the mediators. After she gave birth to her child, she went out of her parents’ house and established her own household living in a small house near the elementary school by selling tea and *Siwa*[alcohol].While the father of the child went to Eritrea in search of work. Until now, he did not come back to Geblen.

In 1997, she began a relationship with a man who came from the neighbouring kebele Saesie. She gave birth to a boy from him. Immediately, after the child was born the father of the child left Geblen and migrated to Saudi Arabia. Now, he is living there and he is not sending remittances to help his son.

In 1999E.C, she gave birth to her third child from a farmer living in Irata sub-kebele and who is a member of the sub kebele administrative body. The fifth child is a three years old and her father is a farmer. He has his own household and family. At the same time, he is helping her and still they do have relationship with her.

The informant had built a house last year in Geblen and she is selling Beer and *Siwa* in the newly built house. She also participates actively in the kebele administration as well as women association. She is one of the health promoters in the kebele and is a member of the social court.

The informant has no land. She is participating in the PSNP program. She is also one of the beneficiaries of the government microcredit program. She is using the money she borrowed through the program to build her house. Moreover, she borrowed a modern beehive in 2001E.C, and placed it in the house of her parents. However, she does not place the bees in it due to the drought persisting in the locality. According to the informant, borrowing money to purchase modern beehives is disadvantageous in so far there is the problem of drought.

In Geblen, though there is a significant change in terms of creation of access to education to almost all the children in very accessible areas, the quality of education is poor in that most of the students in the locality are not successful in their educational activities. The informant reported that all her children are attending school located in a very accessible area. However, no significant change was observed among them in their academic performances. For example, her eldest daughter who is a 6 grade student in Geblen Full Primary School cannot identify English alphabets.

## Case 4: Elopement

In Geblen, female students who are living out of their home are bearing children before they get married. As a result; they give up their educational carrier and become household heads. Most of them are dependants upon their parents. The informant is a 19 years old female household head and who had been attending her education in the town of Edaga Hamus. While she gets pregnant, she was in grade 9. She gave birth to her daughter without conducting a legal marriage. The father of the child is a young man, a student who had been attending school in Edaga hamus and he came from kebele welwalo.

The informant reported that while she was a 6 months pregnant woman, she terminated her education and came to her home. She gave birth in the house of her parents. Now, she and her daughter are living in the house of her parents. She is dependent upon her parents. She is doing much of the domestic activities. At the same time, she is working in the field through the PSNP. According to the informant, the food aid delivered to the locality through the PSNP is less advantageous to those people who do have large family size. It is less advantageous for those households who do have smaller family members. She said in Geblen, some people who do have large family size are receiving more than a quintal of grain on monthly basis. On the contrary, she is receiving only 30 kilograms of wheat per month and she found it to be very difficult to make a living. To some extent, the food shortage the household members have been facing is ease in the current year when her son gets the chance to receive nutritional food. He began to receive the nutritional food on September 2002, after the health, workers had examined her little boy and he has been found out to be needy of nutrient food. She said that while the child consumes all the nutrient food, all of the members of the household consume the cooking oil.

The informant has a strong desire of continuing her educational activities. Nevertheless, the responsibility of raising the child and the responsibility to cover the domestic activities, as well as lack of access to secondary school education in the locality prevented her from realising her dreams.

According to the informant, there are various types of opportunities to credit service in the kebele. The kebele administration has been approaching her to take the advantage of the credit and extension and package facilities. They also gave her a chance to use the service of providing with the guarantee to the loan service. However, she did not yet use any of the credit services. That is because there is strong sense of insecurity existing in the side of her. She always fears that her parents will be put in trouble if the business she start using the money she borrowed through the credit service failed.