

Harresaw in 2011

Harresaw *tabia* comprises three *kushets*¹: two lying on the Eastern Tigray highland plateau and one remoter, overlooking Afar, full of ups and downs and facing acute water scarcity. A very small town is emerging around the *tabia* administrative centre, with electricity and mobile network since 2008. The *tabia* centre is 20 min walk off the small all-weather gravel road linking Atsbi, the centre of the *wereda* (17 kms), to Dera (a small town adjacent to the *tabia*) and Afar, with nearly daily but costly public transport. All 6,000 residents are Orthodox Christians and Tigrayans. More than 50% of the 1,150 households are female-headed and there are hundreds of landless, mainly young households (more than 350)². Available land is reallocated but is vastly insufficient; generally land and related actions are a source of tension and conflict.

Harresaw suffers from recurrent drought and has been included in PSNP/FSP programmes since 2005. In 2011/12 all households were getting some of the PSNP and emergency food aid pooled resources. In the last severe drought (2008/9) 30 people died and mass livestock losses prompted a sharp increase in illegal migration in Saudi Arabia as the only option for many households to repay their debt. This migration, continuing to rise, is becoming a strategy for households to pay debt, reach a higher level of welfare (health, education, nutrition) and invest, in mixes varying from one family to another, and has multiplier effects at community level including urban migration and investment in business linking urban and rural areas. Irrigation is another change factor. All schemes depend on the rains; in good years about a sixth of the households irrigate some land. Many have discovered the benefit of producing for the market (beans, pulses, vegetables, wheat and barley) given the high prices for farm products. A few landless young farmers invest on sharecropped/rented land. Views are mixed on the usefulness and effects of modern inputs and of DA advice (e.g. early planting while farmers fear frost). High market prices also prompt many to invest in livestock production in spite of the high drought-related risks, as hybrid breed and vet services are available nearby (Dera), and fattening and dairy production can be very profitable. Honey is said to have potential although exactly how much is unclear. Irrigation and migration offers trade-related and daily labour opportunities on irrigated and migrants' farms. A number of people (youth and women especially) run small shops, teashops and bars and offers services in the *tabia* centre. Graduation only starting to take effect is considered favourably by some richer households wanting to focus on their own more lucrative activities though assistance would be needed in drought years. Credit is widely available to help people to seize opportunities, and has been important in some successes, though the level of bad debt of the *tabia* is high. For poor or labour-poor households taking credit is risky and many avoid it when they can.

There is a Health Post and one full-cycle and one Gr1-4 primary school in the *tabia* as well as a health centre and new general secondary school in the neighbouring *tabia* at about 45 min walk from the *tabia* centre and a preparatory school in Atsbi but no TVET in the *wereda*. Expectations from education are mixed: the better access can 'lead nowhere' (exam failure, high costs, un(der)-employment) and migration lures many. The community appreciates many of the development initiatives but resents some aspects of the government drive (e.g. enforcement to take fertiliser, lack of individual choice and of space to challenge development ideas - which is taken as political opposition), and fails to reconcile the emphasis on focusing to improve one's livelihood with the many time-taking meetings and for the 'community volunteers', the demands of their many responsibilities³.

¹ A *tabia* in Tigrigna is like a *kebele*; a *kushet* is a part of a *tabia*, like a *got* for a *kebele*.

² Data on population is not consistent across sources.

³ Community volunteers are the community members serving on the many *tabia* government/party structures.