

Kormargefia in 2013

In 2005 three sub-kebeles of Fagy kebele were transferred to the town administration and the land distributed to investors. The remaining kebele, renamed Kormargefia, had three sub-kebeles: Kormargefia, Milki and Aloberet. In 2013 the Derg villagisation sites were more densely populated and the one near the main road was developing into a small town. The main road was well-maintained. A new inter-wereda road crossed the kebele toward Debre Berhan; but the sub-kebele bordering Debre Berhan was cut-off from the town as that land had been fenced by an investor. There was no road to the kebele centre; the few internal roads were impassable in the rainy season. Electricity was used by the church, a grain mill and the kebele chairman. A few households used solar panels for lighting. Mobile phones (2004) were used by about half the households. Temperatures were said to have become more extreme and rains more erratic.

By 2013 there were 980 households (29% female-headed, 699 landed); Amhara (95%) and Oromo (5%) (all Orthodox Christians) inter-married and shared social organisations and representation at kebele level was proportional. Inequality was said to have decreased; there were (estimates) 15% very rich and rich, 60% middle and 25% poor and very poor (proportionally fewer than in 2008). Most people had access to safe water all year round but the kebele rationed water as the level in some of the 10 covered springs was decreasing. Beyond G6 students had had to go to Tebase, which many could not afford, but the Kormargefia school was upgraded to G7 in 2013 and planned to reach Grade 8 in 2014. Many wanted their children to continue to secondary but were disappointed by the many failures after so much investment; students from better-off families got support, poorer ones didn't. There was no job opportunity for educated youth in the kebele. There was mixed evidence with regard to female circumcision though very early marriage of Amhara girls had declined. Elders and kebele and wereda officials were an obstacle to implementing women's rights on divorce and widowhood; women brought cases of inheritance from parents to the court. In October 2013 there were new HEWs and they were unhelpful, living in Debre Berhan and hardly ever present at the HP. Latrines had been built under threats from the kebele administration but were infrequently used. Contraceptive use was widespread but women had to phone the HEWs to get them. In spite of a government attempt to stop TBAs from practising, most deliveries in 2013 had been at home.

Smallholder mixed farming with a prominent role for livestock, and irrigation for 26% households, was the main contributor to the local economy, though migration and non-farm activities were also important. Surpluses of staple crops (barley, broad beans and wheat) were sold. Improved barley and wheat seeds had been available since 2003 and by 2013 about a third of farmers bought them from the SC; others recycled their seeds or bought from other farmers. Some seeds were also provided by the Debre Berhan Research Centre (previously ILCA) and by an NGO to poor farmers. The supply was insufficient and seeds from the extension service not always good. Fertiliser was available only from the SC (private supply was banned). Credit for fertiliser and seeds was available from the SC only for a few poor farmers; other farmers could borrow from ACSI to buy inputs. After an unsuccessful attempt at introducing BBM ploughs (too heavy) many farmers prepared broad beds manually, having copied from a neighbouring wereda. Farmers rejected the advice of planting in line as it required a lot of weeding and left crops more exposed to frost. The main cash crop was eucalyptus planted on non-arable land; second and third were irrigated potatoes and carrots (the latter on the rise as less prone to disease). Eucalyptus was sold wholesale to licensed traders coming with lorries, or by tree on the Debre Berhan market. 26% of households practised irrigation (86.5 ha), almost a third with pumps and the others using canals or bucket-watering. DAs facilitated access to pumps and gave advice. There were marketing issues as traders could not reach the farms during the rainy season. Potato seeds came from farmers' own reserves. Improved prices had increased the profitability of livestock production.

There were more cattle than in 2003; 28% were hybrid. DAs facilitated access to AI provided by DBRC and there was some NGO support as well. Kormargefia was the main source of breeding bulls in the area (as it had been since the Derg). Milk (collected and sold daily to a private processor in Chacha), butter, dung cakes and hides were important products. Sheep-rearing was practised by all households since the sudden price rise in 2008; around 30% were hybrid. Grazing land had decreased as some had been allocated to an investor, youth cooperatives and watershed; farmers used different types of fodder and some bought fattening medicine. The vet service used to be better than in 2003 (vaccination, drugs twice a week) but by October 2013 was interrupted as the vet went for training. Many had used ACSI credit to buy sheep or cattle.

There were no traders as farmers sold their products directly. There was one grain mill, one shop, a few areki bars, other women making areki and selling it to retailers, part-time carpenters and builders, firewood and dung cake sale. Government did not provide credit or inputs for non-farm activities, just advice. Job opportunities were mostly informal daily labour for the DBRC, on construction projects, and for industries and factories in Debre Berhan and the area. Migration had increased greatly, mainly to towns (male and female) and Arab countries for young women. The first woman migrated more than 5 years ago and the trend had risen ever since; in 2012 and 2013 twenty went each year. In late 2013 government gave chickens and vegetable seedlings to a few women and had organised a meeting to promote vegetable cultivation. But women said that nothing was done and 'earlier promises about income-generation were totally forgotten'. Most young men were landless; a few selected in a community meeting had been allocated communal land or 'land without heir'. The kebele had also allocated 4 ha of irrigated land to a cooperative (57 members including 8 young women by October 2013), for a fee (640 birr/year); and another 6 ha of rainfed land to a group of 16 young men in 2013. Officials were advising youth to form groups and join the YA to get land or jobs but the youth were suspicious about government wanting to control them. In September 2013 the kebele administration registered unemployed youth telling them that the wereda would provide credit for farm and non-farm activities but nothing had happened by November.

There was high resistance to new religious ideas, especially Protestantism. Religious leaders were involved in dispute mediation. Iddirs were also used in dispute resolution through elders meeting once a month and reporting to the social court on cases they handled. Iddirs acted as a bridge between community and kebele administration. The social court had been given mandate over a number of iddirs and equbs, to help address possible disagreements between members.

A number of farmers and young men opposed government political views but were not organised in opposition parties; some strong farmers, who were 'Derg bureaucrats', refused to be model farmers or party members. The government tried to reach out to the youth in various ways, e.g. calling meetings to recruit young women as 'vanguard' and registering young men as party members at the same time as registering them for the credit scheme for unemployed youth that was being prepared (see above). The zone-DT-1-5 structure had been rolled out since 2010 (male)/2012 (female) but in 2013 kebele and sub-kebele structures were not fully functional. It was not clear how active DTs and 1-5s were. Cabinet members lacked commitment as there was no compensation for the time they spent and the risk of disagreement with community members that they faced. Most people did not like watershed management projects but were relatively positive about school construction and roads and bridges maintenance.

The community's trajectory was influenced in various ways by Debre Berhan's development and the expansion of investments in the area (including land being taken away notably for factories on one hand and job opportunities on the other hand). Wereda officials, ranking the kebele as medium in dairy farming but next to last in agricultural development, wanted to change this and put emphasis on dairy production, fattening, improved livestock production and irrigated farming.