

Luqa in 2011

The agro-pastoralist Luqa *kebele* is bisected by the recently asphalted Jinka-Arba Minch main road. The administrative centre is located along that road at 21 km from the *wereda* capital Key Afer (public transport) and developing into a roadside settlement (a few shops and 'modern houses', one café). There is no electricity. The mobile network covers some areas but it was faulty during the fieldwork. Access to safe water is uneven (2-3 functional water points). Most of the 566 families live in the *kebele* flat, lowland part. Residents are Tsemay (80%) and Bena (20%). There are about 25% female-headed households. Livestock can graze anywhere (bar for 260 ha recently enclosed) so some say there is no landlessness; others mention 120 landless youth. About 20% of the community is Protestant and Protestantism is said to rapidly gain grounds among the young generation.

There is a history of drought with recently serious livestock and crop losses in 2008/9 and 2010/11. Food aid has regularly been provided and is shared following the community's norms (the *wereda* is not in the PSNP). There is a strong perception that climate change (erratic shorter rains, increasing temperature) undermines both pastoralism and the slowly expanding rainfed agriculture. There is ground water but the irrigation potential in the *kebele* is unknown. A few households obtained irrigable land along the Woito River, outside of the *kebele*, but their rights are not legalised and it is unclear whether this could further expand. A few families grow cash crops alongside subsistence crops, including sesame introduced recently (privately) and vegetables and fruits on irrigated land, and do quite well. The bulk of the community depends heavily on livestock/ product sales to buy food. The *wereda* with NGO support has introduced hybrid breeds (camel, cattle, shoats, poultry) on credit; there is a (partly trained) mobile vet, and drug supply seems to be reliable. These initiatives are generally appreciated, though limited in scale and the DA believes in caution as the community would lose trust if one mistake occurred. A few men engaged in farm product trade and livestock fattening and trading; a few successful ones have further diversified (grain mills) and employ a few people, in spite of various constraints (production, storage, weak bargaining position against non-local traders with trucks) and high taxation. A few women raise an income with some success (shops, the café, food/beverage sale on market days). The *wereda* with NGO support is trying to establish youth and women production cooperatives but it is early days. Credit is available through local cooperatives and has helped some people. Omo MFI is preparing the ground to start working in Luqa.

There is a health post and one HEW, but little take-up of health services still provided mainly through monthly outreach by *wereda* workers or at the *wereda* health centre. There is greater interest in all forms of education available in the *kebele* (Gr1-4, ABE, 0-grade, adult education). But few parents agree to send post-Gr4 children to Key Afer hostel (needing boys to herd, favouring early marriage bringing bride wealth for girls, fearing urban influences). However, the community contribute to upgrade the school to full cycle and role models of educated male and (very few) female youth are emerging. Under the joint influence of the government and Protestantism there are some changes for women. A few have resisted widow's inheritance and obtained divorce with their family's support and a few women are economically, socially and politically active. Government initiatives attract various types of response but no outright opposition; the (overlapping) government/party and customary and religious elite 'mediate' the government requests. Tension arises rather from strong Protestant stances against some of the customary rituals. In other cases all three forces (the government, the Protestant and some progressive elders/customary leaders) join hands with success (e.g. eradication of *mingi*, the custom of abandoning children thought to bring bad luck).