

Oda Dawata in 2013

People, especially from Begejo and Mecro, frequently interacted with Gonde town; parts of Begejo and Mecro, still inhabited mainly by Amhara, were urbanised. The FTC, kebele, DA and vet offices and a HC were all in Mecro along the main road. Each ketena (4) had its full cycle primary school. There was one HP in Akiya. Electricity coverage ranged from 95% in Begejo to none in Chebote. Around 80% used mobile phones. There were internal dry-weather roads in Mecro and part of Begejo; a start was made in 2013 through URRAP (50% costs met by wereda; 100 birr/household) to connect Akiyo (not finished) and Chebote (damaged by floods). Most areas were inaccessible by trucks in the rainy season. There were a few carts. Tree cutting was banned. Watershed work had started in 2012 and while not fully successful flooding had reduced though not everywhere. Rains were good from 2008 but started later (March) and were more erratic in 2011 and 2012 and it was hotter in the dry season. These changes had affected crops. The 2013 weather was good and an excellent wheat crop expected.

Of the 1,624 households, 490 were female-headed and 741 landless; very few men in their 20s had land. The population was 80% Oromo, 19% Amhara and 1% from other groups; 70% Muslim (Arssi Oromo), 29% Orthodox (Amhara and Shewa Oromo) and 1% Protestant; and (estimates) 30% very rich and rich, 40% middle and 30% poor, very poor and destitute. Christian Amhara in Mecro-Begejo were considered to be generally better-off. Half of the community had no access to safe water. Almost all children attended primary school and more than 95% secondary school; but expectations from education were usually dashed given the difficulty for graduates at all levels to find jobs. Female circumcision was reduced; the kebele estimated a rate of 20% and unlike in Oda Haro everyone asked about the ban said they agreed with it; women struggled to get their rights against elders and male officials and corruption in court but the high number of female-headed households arose from more widows refusing inheritance, and more divorces. HEWs, struggling to get people to adopt latrines since punishments were abolished, focused on cleanliness, balanced diets, family planning, vaccination and, since April 2013, skilled delivery at the Health Centre, reporting some success with the recent free ambulance service and Centre offering coffee and food ceremonies. Wereda health officials complained that they were involved in many other activities, including political; this was also true for 29 volunteers trained by JICA, who had become DT leaders and no longer helped much on health issues.

Land registration was prepared but there had been no action. The local economy had gradually improved thanks to potato growing and good prices, better productivity of grain and irrigated crops, increasing non-farm business and labour, and migration to the Middle East; with many households engaged in several activities. Potatoes, wheat, peas and beans were leading cash crops. More land was allocated to potatoes, wheat and peas; since five years sales of potatoes had vastly increased and sales of barley, vegetables, chat and eucalyptus had gone up too. Input prices rose steadily while harvests and output prices fluctuated (e.g. in 2012 farmers faced a significant reduction in wheat production, attributed by some to expired fertiliser, and in price, due to government importing and selling cheap flour to local factories), causing some farmers to use local seeds and insufficient fertiliser with knock-on effects on productivity. Credit was no longer available. In 2013 the SC provided fertiliser, improved seeds (no seeds for potatoes, pulses, oilseeds and trees), pesticides and weed-killers but faced shortages and untimely supply at times, low trust from farmers as previous cashiers had embezzled funds with impunity, and competition from private suppliers in 2011. The wereda had since banned private supply but in the meantime the SC had a surplus of improved seeds that farmers would not buy as they were old and yet the government did not want to supply other seeds until these were sold. Generally farmers wanted new seeds every year and tried to get them from different sources (SC, Kulumsa ARC, other farmers, and recently ATA for selected farmers of different wealth statuses who had also received urea to experiment). Some farmers had started planting in line, intercropping and using recommended quantities of seeds and fertiliser. Tractors

and combine harvesters were rented from private individuals in the neighbouring wereda (roughly 100 and 200 farmers respectively); this was said to be cheaper than hiring labour. In 2012 all rain-fed outputs were sold through a network of traders based in Gonde. In 2013 the wereda had given instruction that the SC should buy all outputs (with a 1 million birr loan from the Union) to prevent farmers from being cheated by traders. By end 2013 60 ha were irrigated by 50 households with at least 12 pumps but most by gravity. Due to water shortage only 2 harvests were possible and there was no scope for expansion without significant investment which people had repeatedly asked the wereda to do, to no avail.

Most farmers used zero-grazing, had many crossbred cows and produced surplus milk sold to a dairy cooperative. FAO had trained an AI inseminator and given him the equipment; people were very satisfied with his services. Fattened oxen were sold at much higher prices than in 2008. Sheep fattening and poultry production were good sources of income for women and youth although chicken epidemics were frequent and there was no effective medicine. The use of modern beehives introduced by DAs was spreading. DAs gave zone-based services and had close contacts with the model farmers. Since May 2013 two DAs were BSc holders and the wereda had regular meetings with all DAs to ask their inputs. Other activities included: increasing, better paid daily labour, grain/vegetable trade, local drink-making, a grain mill, some skilled work, firewood, charcoal, grass and hay sale, petty services, transport services (one car, donkeys, horse-carts), formal jobs (100 locally and 90 elsewhere), daily labour in Kulumsa ARC, on a local stone extraction scheme run by an outside investor and in local factories as well as permanent jobs at the Gonde flour factory. Male migration, elsewhere in Ethiopia (urban and long term agricultural) and illegal to the Middle East and Sudan, was increasing. Female migration to the Middle East was huge and rising (80-100 annually). Remittances were changing lives for those successful and their families. Saving was promoted even in schools; those involved in business preferred investing. Apart from a number of youth stone cooperatives and confusing reports on new cooperatives in October 2013, there was no government specific intervention for youth and for women although most women had an independent income source.

Arssi Oromo referred to the Shewa Oromo as 'Amhara' since they were Orthodox Christians. A quarrel between neighbours had triggered a fight in one zone between an Oromo clan and the Amhara with continuing repercussions. Both Muslim and Protestant groups were rapidly increasing; Protestants were actively trying to convert people. Apart from not sharing the same meat people interacted and sometimes intermarried. However, Muslims and Orthodox had started establishing religiously-based iddirs. There was some tension among Muslims following the introduction of *Wahabism* and returning migrants were said to want to make people as conservative as in Arab countries. Iddir leaders were trained on peace and security and development and mobilised people for public works and financial contributions. TV, radio and links with big cities and organisations like the flour factory made people very willing to adopt modern ideas and practices.

While in 2005 there were several parties which 'confused people', in 2013 there was only one party. There were allegations of corruption by kebele officials and courts and ordinary people could do nothing as the kebele officials were protected by corrupt wereda officials – although by October 2013 the kebele chair had been replaced partly due to alleged corruption. Unpaid cabinet members had not enough time to serve well, and distrusted each other. The Arssi Oromo dominated politically and clanship affected politics. The zone-DT-1-5 structures were in place but not working as planned. People were 'individualistic' and not interested, unhappy with them as control mechanisms, bored with politics; and did not want to be in 1-5s with disliked neighbours. Many youth were not interested in politics but some criticised the government because of growing landlessness and joblessness, and distrusted the youth organisations as instruments to control them. There were too many central government strategies for improvement in various areas, and not enough time for government employees at community level to implement them so they faced criticism from the people.

There were two important campaigns in the wereda in April 2013: expanding model farmers' best practices and joint government/ community environmental protection. The MDG Fund had helped to build roads inter-connecting the 18 kebeles. Since early 2013 the wereda then kebele officials had told the youth that there was a plan to create many jobs for unemployed rural youth through co-operatives and SMEs in metalwork, carpentry, forest protection and honey making, agricultural activities and mineral extraction, but by November 2013 nothing had happened.