

Sirba in 2013

Ude town, where the rural Udie kebele office is, had become a separate municipality. There was watershed work since 2011: rehabilitating Sirba mountain, terracing along people's farms to reduce flooding and tree-planting on both (Debre Zeit ARC had an experimental nursery in Sirba). Many minibuses on the main road gave easy access to DZ, Mojo, Dukem, Addis etc. but the inter-kebele road programme was unsuccessful (management issues, contractors' failure). Internal dry-weather roads were impassable for trucks and sometimes cut-off by floods in the rainy season. All but 5 households had electricity; there were about 500 mobile phones. Rains were good from 2008 to 2011 but in 2012 they came and stopped early which caused reduced harvests.

By 2013 there were 224 tax-paying households (6% landless, 7% female-headed; 90% Oromo, 18 rich Amhara and Tigreans and a few others). With the growing importance of cash crops all wealth groups were richer than 10 years ago (estimated 38% very rich and rich, 30% middle, and 32% poor, very poor and destitute). Most people bought safe water (private individual or NGO-built communal water point); some got it free from the Chinese construction camp. Sirba's school (2009) was upgraded to G1-6 in 2013 (NGO support and community contributions). It faced various shortages; and less than $\frac{2}{3}$ rd of 7 year-olds started school on time in 2013. The school in Udie had been upgraded to Grade 10 but expectations were decreasing seeing the growing joblessness; 117 Grade 10 and college graduates or dropouts depended on their parents. Abduction and female circumcision had greatly reduced; male violence, still common, was dealt with by elders. Polygyny and widow inheritance were said to no longer exist, and women rights in divorce, widowhood and inheritance to be better practised. The HP (2006), burned down in 2012, was being reconstructed. Most married women used contraception. Measures taken to encourage deliveries at the HC included rewarding the TBAs and an ambulance. Only 4 households had no toilet; the HEW had monthly meetings with women, went door-to-door, and had started working with 7 better educated women designated as DT leaders. Despite bednets and spraying malaria epidemics were annual and there was shortage of quinine. HIV/AIDS was suspected to be the cause of some of ten recent deaths in the kebele.

With the growing importance of teff as a cash crop for the national market, demand for rented land had increased including from outsiders. Crops like teff, chickpeas, lentils, wheat and peas had a higher market value and many farmers had increased production using fertiliser and improved seeds (DAs said 75%). Unlike 5 years earlier there was no credit for fertiliser; DAs had introduced improved chickpea and lentil seeds in 2010 and there was credit for improved seeds from the Udie SC but the supply was not always timely. A few farmers could not afford modern inputs and produced less, which increased inequality. The SC provided fertiliser (most preferred to buy there), improved seeds (many thought they were not really improved but some bought them there because they could get credit), chemicals and other items – based on demand identified by the DAs through the DTs and 1-5s. Until 2013 the Debre Zeit ARC was also providing seeds to reproduction associations which returned the same quantity after harvest and could sell the rest to local farmers but in 2013 they gave their best seeds to traders from which farmers could buy but without credit. The DAs (1 DA crop/village) taught about best farming techniques with some success (e.g. planting in line for teff) though the kebele chair mentioned some enforcement. Rich farmers rented tractors and some combine harvesters. An NGO-provided a water point, electric pump and drip meant to irrigate 15 ha which reached 18 farmers and only 3 ha because of land ownership issues; by October 2013 the project had stopped due notably to corruption by the NGO worker. There was a government plan to dig 150 wells in the kebele, which would give access to irrigation for all landed farmers; 11 wells (3 in Sirba) had been dug in 2009 and 2011 but were sealed although in June 2013 work had started to extend pipes to the farms. The AGP programme (started at wereda level) provided inputs for irrigation.

People had fewer cattle and shoats than in 2003, focusing on quality and feeding them at home. Improved breed cows introduced in 2008 were increasingly used for milk production and some bought improved feed. 550 households in the *kebele* supplied the wereda milk processing company daily and some complained that the supply exceeded the demand. The DAs facilitated access to improved cattle through links with 3 research institutes; there was credit and a vet shop (2007) providing vaccination, medical treatment, delivery service and castration though it faced various shortages. Credit was available from WALKO (though stopped by October 2013 because of conflict in a group), community saving groups and banks but people were increasingly more likely to use their savings to invest. Moneylenders had disappeared and there were big equbs (one businessman said that bank loans were too small). Government encouraged cooperatives, targeting youth in particular (bull fattening, seedling production, beekeeping, poultry). By November 2013 only one group had got credit. There were talks of AGP funds for associations of educated and unemployed youth who should save 1,000 birr each, which some said was unfeasible, and the kebele chair said they were trying to organise youth in each village.

Other activities included grain mills, carpentry, construction, metal work, tyre repair and shops, various petty services and transport services (2 people owned middle-sized buses), stone cooperatives with a total of 200 members (one got credit for a crusher which was broken and being repaired). Women were increasingly involved in small trade, shops and local drink-making but there was no specific intervention. 35 educated people had higher level jobs outside the community; youth graduated from universities had to be EPRDF members to get a government job. Wage labour had significantly increased with the expansion of industries and farm enterprises in the area, due to continue as there was a huge demand for investment land. Young men commuted to other villages for agricultural work; many migrated to work on construction projects or in industries in nearby places. Young women migrated too for similar jobs, work in flower farms or domestic or bar work; some migrated to Arab countries (32 had migrated from Sirba). The sending back of illegal migrants and ban on migration was perceived as a problem at the time of the second fieldwork in November.

Most people were Orthodox, with a few Protestants and Muslims at kebele level. Elders mediated during conflicts. Iddirs were important, especially the big iddir to which most households belonged, which mobilised people for things like rebuilding the HP and was open to ideas from the youth (e.g. the construction of a concretised drinking pond for cattle saving long treks to the nearest river and the upgrading of Udie school to Grade 10). The government also used the iddir to promote messages and mobilise resources and labour. New ideas and innovations also came from urban linkages and women returning from working in Arab States bringing business ideas, international clothes and a different attitude to life.

While in 2005 there were opposition parties and confusion, in 2010 there was only the EPRDF. In 2011 there were factions supporting different people as kebele chair; some appointments were said to result from bribery of wereda officials. The DTs and 1-5s were not working as planned, both male especially with regard to cooperation in farming, and female as 'women did not do what they were told'. In October 2013 a big gimgema severely criticised the kebele leadership for loose follow-up hence poor implementation of the kebele plan but no-one was demoted. There were frequent shifts of attention with new activities coming down from the Region leading to neglecting existing programmes. The kebele was increasingly demanding that all businesses, even very small ones, were registered and paid taxes, while a farmer selling 50,000 birr worth of eucalyptus was not taxed. Women and youth organisations were not active in Sirba. The community was divided with regard to outside investments taking land: not all compensations were seen as sufficient and some thought that the returns in terms of well-paid jobs were not materialising as promised.

Industrialisation and urbanisation along the road was poised to continue apace with increasing impact on Sirba. Recent nearby investments included Al Ahmoudi taking over the nearby hotel, 3 flower farms, a gas station, and blocket factory and weedkiller factories. One investor completed building of a large poultry farm in October 2013. The Addis Ababa-Adama 6-lane expressway due to

be completed in April 2014 borders Sirba; the new railway to Djibouti due to be completed by 2016 will cross Sirba. A Master Plan for Denkaka, one of the emerging towns in the wereda, is being developed. It will affect some areas of Sirba and residents have been told not to build new houses as they may be demolished if they don't fit with the plan.