

# **Ethiopian Village Studies**

(Designed and edited by Philippa Bevan and Alula Pankhurst)

## **Imdibir Haya Gasha**

**Gurage**

researched by

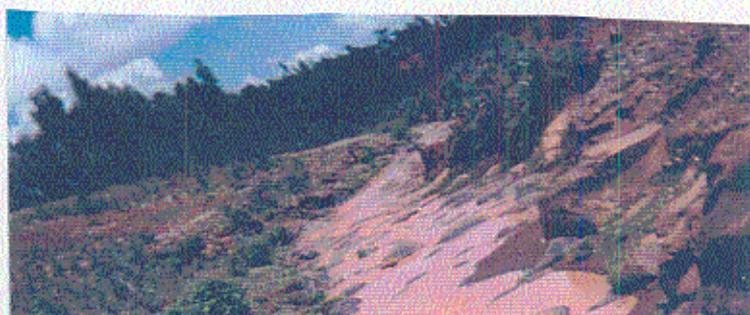
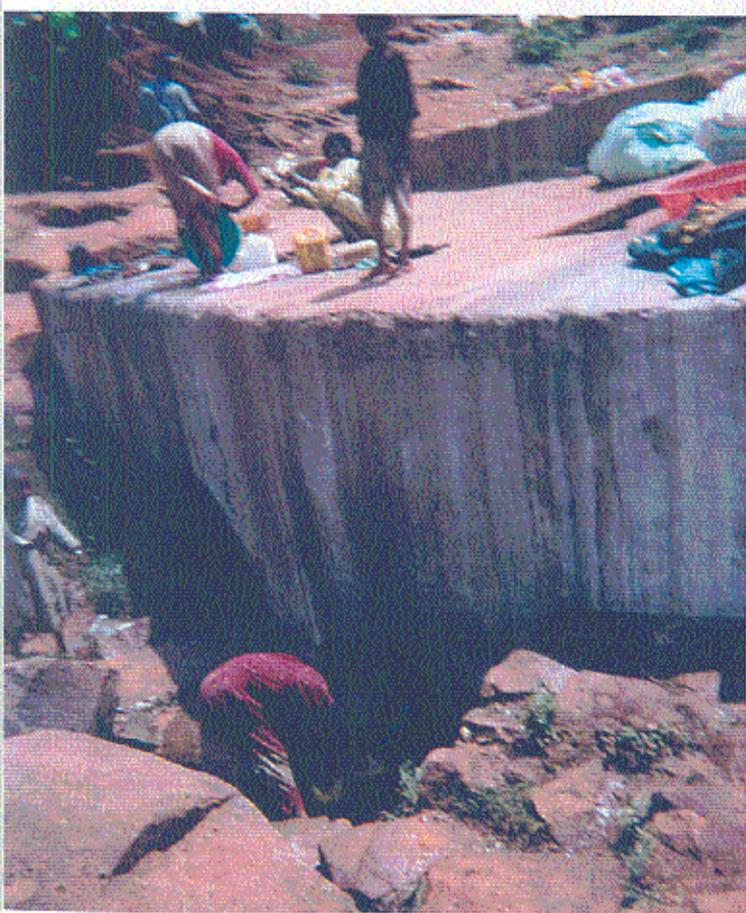
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## Forward

All the reports in this series have been constructed from a number of sources:

- A background paper on aspects of the local culture in which the Peasant Association is located, based mainly on secondary sources;
- Some rapid assessment material collected in the PA by site managers and enumerators whose chief business was administering 3 rounds of a household economic survey which covered a whole year of economic activity;
- A field visit to the site by an anthropologist who took a draft village profile for correction and supplementation. In a few cases the profiles were not ready before the field visit was done, but the same questions were followed up;
- A questionnaire completed by the enumerators at the end of the survey;
- A community economic survey administered by the site managers.

A large number of people has been involved in the construction of these profiles. Most important are the people in the villages who answered questions, raised issues we had not thought of, and provided hospitality for our fieldworkers. The site managers, enumerators, and anthropologists played a vital role, but are too numerous to mention by name here; the names of some are on the title pages of the profiles. Etalem Melaku-Tjirongo and Joanne Moores constructed the majority of the first drafts of the profiles. Sandra Fullerton Joireman provided important assistance in the preparation of the final drafts. Backup in terms of translating, editing, word processing, mapmaking and general support were provided by Tina Barnard, Ziggy Bevan, Girma Getahun, Haile Redai, Sarah Smith, and Ruth Tadesse. Our economist colleagues at Oxford (Shukri Ahmed, Stefan Dercon, and Pramila Krishnan) and Addis Ababa (particularly Bereket Kebede, Getinet Astatke, and Mekonnen Tadesse) provided ideas and conversation from economics which stimulated our thought processes. The administration in the Economics Department at Addis Ababa University was extremely supportive.

Profiles are available for the following villages:

<i>Tigray:</i>	Geblen	<i>Gojjam:</i>	Yetmen
	Harresaw	<i>North Shewa:</i>	Debre Birhan environs
<i>Wollo:</i>	Shumsheha		Dinki
<i>Arssi:</i>	Korodegaga	<i>Gurage:</i>	Imdibir Haya Gasha
<i>South Shewa:</i>	Sirbana Godeti	<i>Wolayitta:</i>	Gara Godo
	Turufe Kecheme	<i>Kembata:</i>	Aze Debo'a
<i>Gamo:</i>	Do'oma	<i>Gedeo:</i>	Adado
<i>Harerghe:</i>	Adele Keke		

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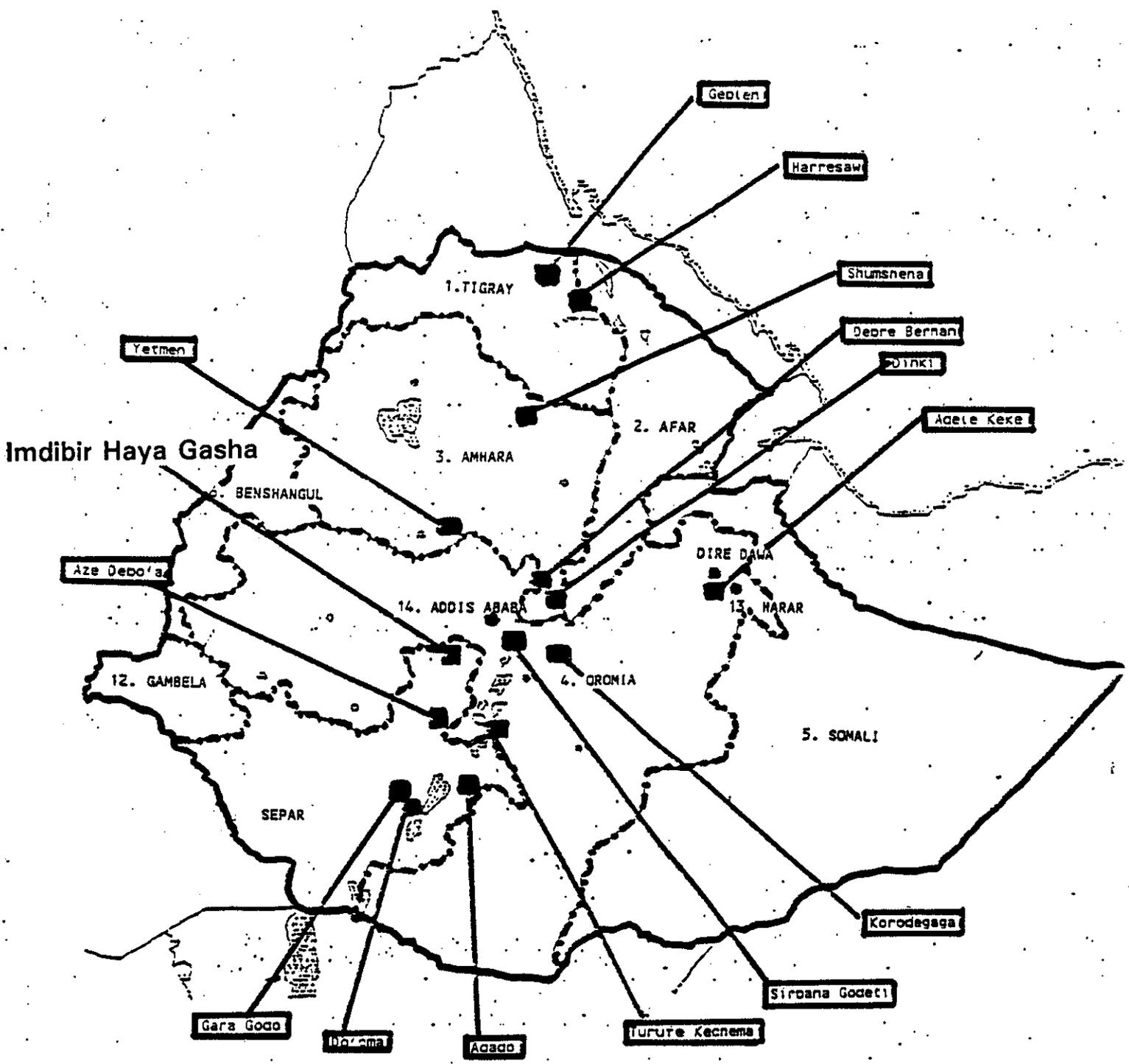
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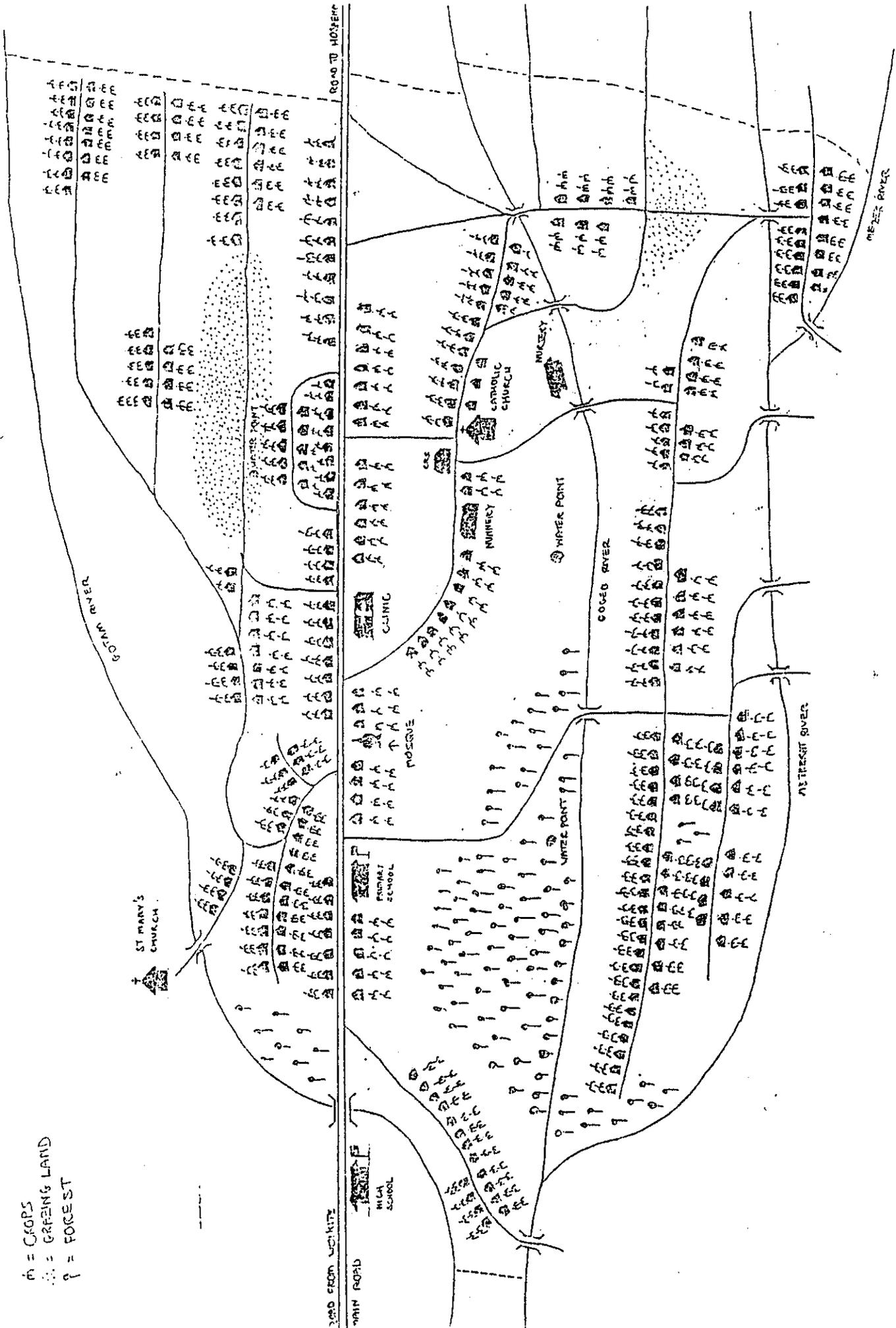
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- m = CROPS
- = GRASSLAND
- ∩ = FOREST



ROAD FROM WCHITZ

MAIN ROAD

ROAD TO HOYERE

ST MARY'S CHURCH

MILK SCHOOL

PRIMAT SCHOOL

POSSIVE

CLINIC

NURSERY

CATHOLIC CHURCH

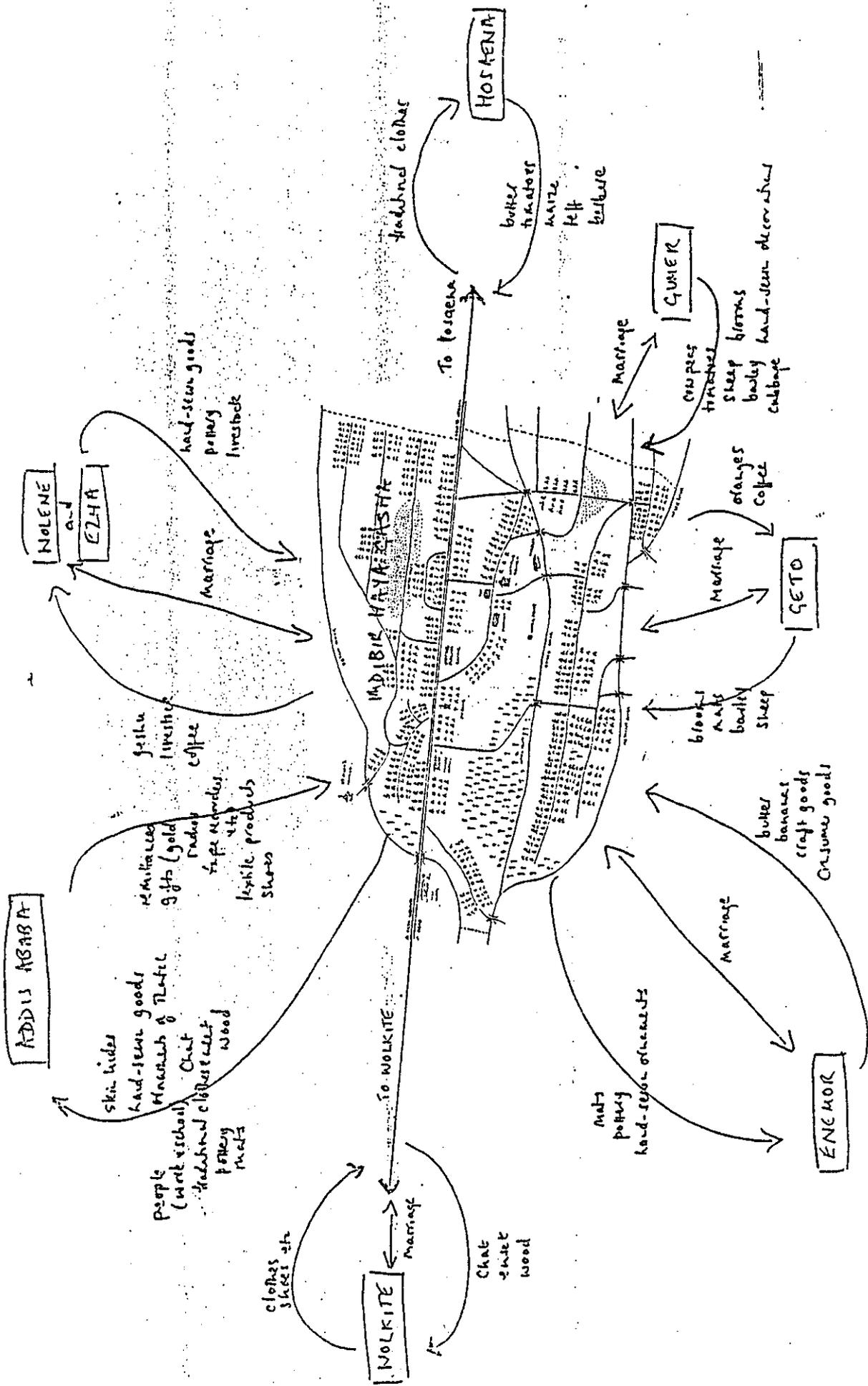
WATER POINT

MUCKSY

BOGED RIVER

GOTAN RIVER

METER RIVER



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# 1. Locating the Site in Time and Space

## *Geography and Population*

In national political terms Gurage Peasant Associations are now part of the Southern People's Administrative Region; these administrative areas do not coincide with tribal administration. Imdibir peasant association (PA) is located 180 km from Addis Ababa and 30 km from Wolkite (the present capital of Gurage political administration). Imdibir town is 1 km to the north west of the Imdibir Peasant Association and has been the capital of the Chaha Gurage<sup>1</sup> i.e one of the seats of the traditional political administration of the *Sebat-bet-Gurage* (Gurage of the Seven-houses or tribes). Imdibir means "mother forest". *Im* means "mother" and *dibir* "forest" which indicates that the area was forested. Around Imdibir there are also places locally known as *Girar Dibir* (Acacia forest) and *Yawre Dibir* (forest of wild life). The nearest water sources of Imdibir are Gotam, Gogeb, Metrekat rivers; Hebir and Yewoden springs.

Although Gurageland has a favourable climate and abundant water resources, the terrain is mountainous and has always been difficult for settlement and cultivation of crops. Imdibir PA is situated on twenty *gasha* (800 ha.) of flat land. Along the river-side soil erosion has become a problem. According to the *Woreda* office of the Ministry of Coffee and Tea Development, currently the eroded land in the PA covers about 5 percent (40 ha.) of the total area. The settlement pattern in Imdibir is such that villages are densely concentrated along the plateau and river banks. *Enset* plants are cultivated in a semi-circle around houses. Settlement sites are mostly permanent because a single *enset* plant requires a relatively long period ( 8 years) for maturity.

The total number of households in the PA is estimated to be 552 of which 75 are female-headed. The total population is around 2714. There are no landless households at the site. All residents are Gurage. Gurage is the main language spoken at the site but most people also speak Amharic. There are no people not registered in the PA. This village is smaller than the surrounding villages. According to Menbere (1993) the marital status of a sample population at Imdibir PA indicates that 47.6 percent were married, 46.8 were single and 5.6 percent were widows. The average population density in Imdibir is estimated to be 340 persons/km<sup>2</sup>. This is about 8.6 times higher than the national average but slightly less than the average density in *enset* growing regions, i.e. 400-500 persons/km<sup>2</sup>.

## *Climate*

Imdibir has an elevation between 1,500 and 2,300 metres above sea level and is traditionally classified under the *weyna dega* agro-climatic zone. Imdibir has a single principal rainy season called *Zar* from early June to mid-September. The entire plateau has a single rainy season from about mid-April to mid-September. The rain falls in varying intensities - there are big and little rains. 50 - 60 inches of rain fall in the wet season. Between July and September the rains reach their highest level and Gurageland may be virtually cut off from the rest of Ethiopia - if the Awash overflows and the high waters of the Wabe river seal off the NW corner. Movement between villages is reduced to a minimum; the open grass plains may be saturated with water several inches deep. By mid-September the plains begin to dry and social relations between the villages increase, markets are larger and inter-tribal exchange starts again. *Abar* covers the drier months extending from mid-September (*Meskel*)<sup>2</sup> to May. October and November

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<sup>1</sup> The Gurage ethnic group is divided into the Sebat-Bet Gurage, the Soddo, the Meskau, Dobbi, Silti etc. The Chaha, of which Imdibir is a part, belong to the Sebat-Bet Gurage (seven houses) that consist of the tribes of Chaha, Ezha, Muher, Geyto, Ennemor, Aklil and Wollene-Worriro. According to the 1984 population and housing census, the Chaha Gurage accounts for 5.5 % of the Gurage population.

<sup>2</sup> Meskel (the finding of the true cross) is a big religious holiday which marks the beginning of a new year. Traditionally it is believed that Meskel is the ending of the rainy season and the beginning of dry season.

are the coldest months.

### *Production*

In the colder highlands of Gumer and parts of the Muher tribal lands people grow cereals and legumes, otherwise the major crop is *enset*. The principal crops in the lowlands include *tef*, maize, sorghum and *nug*. In the colder highlands barley, peas, beans, and flax seeds are grown. In the river basins cotton is grown as a cash crop and in the warmer lowlands people grow spice, sugarcane and some fruits. In the *weyana dega* temperate zone, where Imdibir Peasant Association is, coffee, tobacco and *chat* are grown with *enset* supported by the rearing of livestock.

### *Infrastructure*

There is an all-weather road through the PA.

### *Social Structure*

Geographical grouping among the Gurage is often different from linguistic grouping although this is not the case for the Chaha. The tribal group is a distinct geographical and political entity with its own political form. While language and religion vary between tribes the Gurage use the same artifacts, technology, mode of production, house design, patterns of settlement and economic and social organization. The maintenance of these traditional forms of culture is very important to the Gurage identity.

There have been no ethnic conflicts at the site.

All residents in Imdibir PA belong to the Gurage ethnic group and the majority (about two thirds) of them are bilingual. The maintenance of traditional culture has contributed to their ethnic identity and mutual support. Because of their physical mobility and adaptation to different socio-economic environments there is no place in Ethiopia that the Gurage have not reached and settled. Hence, the current ethnic politics prevalent in the country have had a negative impact on the Gurage adaptive strategies. Most of the population are Orthodox Christian or Catholic; not more than one quarter of the population are Muslim. Orthodox Christians and Catholics are more or less equal in number; if there is any difference there are more Orthodox Christians.

### *History*

The Sebat-Bet Gurage have been traditionally administered by a council of elders known as *Ye Joka* - a pan-Gurage judicial and administrative assembly. The name *Ye Joka* is adapted from a name of a place near Imdibir PA where the first meeting of the council of the Sebat-Bet Gurage took place.

Gurageland was incorporated into the wider Ethiopian state by Menelik II in the 1880s. Until then the Gurage had an acephalus political structure. Following defeat by Menelik the Gurage became tribute payers (*gebar*) to the soldiers (*neftenya*) until the land reform of 1975. In 1963 the Sebat Bet Gurage established one of the strongest ethnic associations in Ethiopia, the Sebat Bet Road Construction Association. This association built the first all-weather road that passes through Imdibir connecting Addis Ababa through Wolkite to Hosaina. This road has been important particularly for the socio-economic life of the people in Imdibir. In 1976 the land reform gave people access to land. In 1977 the Red Terror affected the site.

In 1984 drought affected almost every household in the community. During this year there was no rain and also the *enset* in many households was affected by the plant disease known as *chire*. During this famine, although insufficient, the community received clothes, maize, milk, butter and oil from the Catholic Relief Service and the CRDA. Some richer farmers also supported those households affected

most. Also in 1984 people started to build dykes and plant trees on the community lands to conserve soil. The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the CRS distributed seedlings and had them planted through food for work programmes. Since 1993 the CRS has placed an emphasis on the provision of clean water through clearing springs and constructing cemented walls for the springs.

There has been no period in the last 10 years when many people suffered considerable hardship. The site has not been affected by war except that more than 100 men were conscripted. About 20 have returned: aid to demobilized soldiers includes land, and money to buy utensils, etc.

At present peri-urban farmers are worried due to the expansion of the municipality at the expense of their rural land holdings. There are indications that the land of some rural households will be annexed by the municipality.

## 2. Seasonal Activities and Events

The following calendars are included in the Appendix: health; cropping activities; labour (men, women, girls, boys); off-farm activities; livestock sales and diseases; rain and pests; fuel and water availability; consumption, hungry season; credit needs (men and women); festivals.

Notable features are: that men are less busy on the farm from February through May and most busy October through January; women are especially busy in October, November and December when *enset* is harvested; the hungry season is from April through August and this is the time when women need credit; men need credit from February to September; and women are sicker in November, December and January.

## 3. The Farm Economy

### *Crops*

The household economy of Imdibir is mainly based on the production of the principal crop *enset*. *Chat*, coffee, cabbage, maize, potato and tobacco are also grown in association with *enset*. *Tef* is grown in some homesteads and *tef* fields are sometimes fenced with *enset* and *chat* crops. *Enset* and coffee are not usually sold but *chat* is mostly sold. There is a crop history at the end of the profile which shows that the newer crops of sugarcane, coffee, *chat*, and banana were introduced in the 1960s and early 70s.

The development of an *enset* plant requires a period of 8 years (6 to 7 years on fertile land). There are a number of varieties. It is capable of resisting drought and can be stored for years, if not decades. *Enset* fibre is used for making ropes, mats and baskets while the leaves are used for covering, wrapping, thatching, fodder, fertiliser and other purposes. The roots of special types of *enset* are used in traditional medicine. *Enset* requires intensive cultivation and manuring for the first half of its development. Transplanting and harvesting of *enset* are laborious tasks and carried out by men, otherwise *enset* does not need much attention once it is transplanted, apart from the manuring and mulching done by the women. It is not a cash crop to the same degree as cereals like *tef*.

*Enset* grows easily with minimum care although a long dry spell could have serious consequences. Severe rains do not damage it. Its main enemies are *furteya* (worm disease), beetles, insects, pigs and porcupines. About 10 plants a year would feed an adult. Fields are divided according to 4 stages of *enset* growth; plants move to a new age grade every 2 years. Each section of the land takes its name from the plant grown on it: *fanfa*; *takyat*; *matkya*; and *hyeba*. Animal manure and vegetable matter are applied but artificial fertilizer is not used. In general, *enset* does not need much attention once it has been transplanted. For *enset* there are no agricultural seasons.

Eucalyptus is grown and used as fuel and for construction and it is sometimes sold. No fertilizer or pesticides are used. Some of the crops are affected by diseases - *enset* by *chire*, coffee by coffee berry disease and pests such as porcupine, bushbuck, ape, klipspringer pig, etc also attack these crops.

Consequently the amount households harvest hardly meets their consumption needs and in most cases they have little to sell. To meet other requirements they are obliged to engage in off-farm work like wage labour. This in turn occupies most of their time so they have less time to work on their fields. Because of their smaller landholdings most people do not have grazing lands. Due to lack of sufficient feed the livestock are weaker and cannot provide enough milk.

Because of the small size of the land that they own farmers do not have separate land for each crop. Consequently each farming activity is performed for all the crops at a time. Most of the crops grown are perennials. However, in the *belg* season people intercrop annual crops, mainly maize, tomato, *gommen*, green pepper and tobacco with either young *enset* or coffee.

Women's tasks include scraping *enset*, applying manure and mulching, milking cows and other domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water (unless there are children who can do this), and going to market to buy and sell. Ploughing, planting and weeding are men's tasks as are preparing wood for fuel and selling men's goods.

### *Livestock*

In Imdibir the main domestic animals are cattle; there are few oxen - bulls are usually sold or eaten before becoming oxen because agriculture is based on use of the hoe. The cultivation of cattle and *enset* are mutually interdependent: manure is continuously applied to the *enset* and the cattle are fed on *enset* leaves. Due to population pressure the small amount of grazing land available has limited the size of herds. In most households cows are more highly valued than bulls. Sheep, donkeys and horses are reared for cash income and transport. Almost every household encloses a certain area of land for grass cultivation. After the grass is harvested they let their cattle graze on the enclosed lands and the communal lands (*jeffero*) found in front of all the houses.

In the early 1930s on average people owned 1 ox, 2 cows and 1 calf. There were a lot of households which did not have donkeys, sheep and goats. The largest herd of the period was about 100 but very few people had this many. The decline in fertility of the soil meant that people had to use more manure as fertilizer which led to people tending to own more livestock. The average livestock held now is 6. This may include cows, heifers, young bulls, or bulls and calves. Although livestock now are greater in number they are physically weak and most cows provide little milk. This is mainly due to lack of sufficient grazing land and feed. Vaccination was introduced to the area in 1984 and the community has had access since. Cross-breeding is not known.

Livestock diseases mainly attack and kill cows, heifers and bulls. The flies bite mules and which after some time the wounds kill them. The disease that kills the mules is not known so far by the community. Farmers keep their livestock in their houses.

People have an agreement, with other people in the PA, and with people in another PA in the *woreda*, whereby they give them their cattle (*wekia*), particularly cows and heifers. These are reared by the other party who benefits from the milk, cheese, butter and manure.

Households use manure on their fields. They apply it 2 or 3 times a week during summer (*kiremt*) and once a week in winter (*bega*) after hoeing up the soil around the crops - mainly *enset*.

### *Land*

Land is a scarce resource among the Gurage. For the majority of peasants *enset* fields, together with a small amount of grazing land, is the only homestead land available. A very small group of households owning more land may cultivate *tef*, barley and wheat. Because of the small size of land holdings, farmers do not have separate plots for particular crops. Consequently, each farming activity is performed for all the crops on the same field. Most of the crops grown are perennial. However, in the small rainy season farmers practice intercropping of maize, tomato, cabbage, green pepper and tobacco with immature *enset* and coffee.

In the early 1930s average land holding by household was estimated to be 3 *wodero*<sup>3</sup>. The largest size of landholding was 20 *wodero*, but few farmers used to have this much. The smallest holding was about ¼ of a *wodero*. There were also farmers who did not have land until the land reform of 1975. At present, the average size of land holding in Imdibir is 1.56 *wodero*. The largest size is 3 and the smallest about ½ of a *wodero*. There is no officially known household head who does not own homestead land. In reality, there is hardly any share of land that can be transferred from father to each son. Theoretically, all sons have an equal right to land. However, sometimes disputes over land become so serious that it costs human life. The fieldworker observed an incident when a man returned to Imdibir and decided to settle there after twenty years of absence and then he died. It is suspected that he was killed by one of his brothers because he claimed a share of land. The police are still investigating this incident.

During the 1930s farmers had access to land through tribute (land ownership through paying tax), *adera* (land given through special favour), through kinship affiliation, inheritance and sales. At present farmers have access to land through inheritance and sales (through underground dealings only). Periodic redistribution of land has been restricted due to heavy population pressure. The price of land depends on the quality of the soil, particularly its capacity to produce *enset* for a long period.

The PA was not villagised since it was already a nucleated site. No people were resettled at the site. Since May 1991 there has been no significant change in the land allocation at the site. There is no share-cropping between households and no land rental. There are no officially recognized households who do not own *enset* land. A son who wants to marry and establish a household usually enters into share-cropping arrangements with his father. There are some women in the PA who own *enset* land; they are divorcees or widows or they inherited it. Disputes are often brought to the council of elders which is the most influential institution among the Gurage.

The soil is *lem* and the altitude is *weyna dega*.

Some people who lost land in the 1975 land reform are apparently starting to deal with the people who obtained the land during the reform. They agree to pay a certain amount of money as compensation for the crops grown on the land and the latter take the compensation and leave the land. The rationale behind the request of the former owners for the land is that it is "clan's land". In the past nobody could transfer land to anyone in any way (unless forced to do so with such policies as land reform). If one did any close relative or member of the clan has the right to claim the land. Such controversies are usually mediated by clan elders. The *woreda* administration has recently included a part of the PA in the municipal area of the town of Imdibir.

### *Labour*

Men are responsible for clearing land, tilling soil, planting *enset* and other crops, and transplanting the *enset* plants. Women participate in herding and milking cattle but not in slaughtering. They are also engaged in agricultural tasks such as weeding, manuring, and harvesting, and preparing and storing *enset* and other crops.

All the able adult males and boys on the homestead are expected to co-operate in transplanting *enset*. Traditional labour parties are common among both men and women. Men have parties called *giyez* when digging *enset* fields and women have parties called *wusacha* when harvesting and processing *enset*. Young boys herd cattle and transplant the smaller 2 *enset* plants while older boys and men transplant the next 2 and harvest. Sometimes this needs 3 able-bodied men. Men prepare the harvested *asat* for the women to process in a special women's area. Only one root can be done in a working day by 2 women overseen by an older woman. The women extract the edible substance; it is stored in the ground and later ground into flour.

The farming calendar for *enset* is as follows: cultivation in January; planting from January -

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<sup>3</sup> A *wodero* is a local unit of measurement. One *wodero* is equivalent to half hectare.

March; harvesting from October to January.

According to informants in the early 1930s about 75% of farm labour was provided by traditional work groups and about 25% was provided by the household. There was no wage labour. Now between 60 and 70% of farm labour is provided by work groups like *giyez* and *wusacha*, 10 - 15% by family labour, and the remainder by hiring labour. Wage labour has been known in the community for less than 35 years: people might be paid either in cash or kind. Men used to be paid .50 cents in cash and women used to be paid in kind only. Wage labour still exists and payment is made in cash only. Some people provide (particularly for women) food in addition to the money but not as part of the wage. The daily wage at present is 4 *birr* for men and 1.5 *birr* for women. Men and women also engage in food for work (for the Catholic Relief Service).

The type of work done by wage labour includes land preparation, weeding, harvesting (men - grass and women *enset*) and building (an 8-hour day for the CRS); food for work (17 days); thatching and carpentry. Three quarters of households employed someone to do the land preparation in the last 12 months; about half employed people to do weeding and harvesting and a very few employed servants. Households who hired labour for land preparation, weeding, harvesting and any type of building work provided food which was not part of the wage. The wage cost on average 4 *birr* per person during the preparation and harvesting seasons and 2 *birr* per person for weeding. Not more than 30 people employed thatchers. There is no labour scarcity in the area but people do employ labour from outside the area (for some reason). The only very important criterion for employing someone is if he or she is a relative. It is not important that the worker should live in the village, be known in the village, or be from the same ethnic group or religion.

People also hire in labour on a contract basis. Both parties bargain and conclude that the employer will pay a certain amount and the worker will work the defined area of plot (usually to prepare the land). The contracts vary and the maximum found by the fieldworker was for 6 people to prepare 726 square *zhir* which took 20 days and cost 750 *birr*. In the minimum contract found 7 people worked for 6 days, prepared 242 square *zhir* and earned 400 *birr*. This type of employment is very common and is mostly offered by the better-off.

The women put manure, ash, dried leaves of *enset* and grass on the men's field throughout the year so as to improve soil fertility. They have no fields of their own but harvest *enset*, coffee, potatoes, oranges, bananas and sugarcane with men. Scraping *enset*, cooking and going to market are women's tasks; selling "men's" goods is the task of men.

Every girl of more than 8 is, in most cases, involved in domestic work such as fetching water, taking out manure and sometimes herding cattle. Those who are more than 12 are involved in everything their mothers do. Boys collect firewood, fetch grass, fodder or cut leaves of *enset* for the livestock and herd livestock. Those who are more than 14 or 15 are mostly involved in all the activities that their fathers do. Since most children go to school it is mainly during the school holidays that they help their parents.

Old men participate in judging and administering communal affairs.

The following holidays are observed - St Michael, St Mary, and Baelewold.

When 2 or more homesteads are related by close kin ties (more often than not the rule in the village) they commonly assist each other, working as one large extended family. If male labour is low, others, even those unrelated, will share the burdensome tasks. However, there will be grudging reluctance if the absence of the men is not for a good reason. All Gurage men working away from home are meant to return to help with transplanting.

### *Technology*

In the early 1930s the only items used by the community were the plough and the sickle. Since then changes have taken place in both the shape and the weight to increase efficiency. At present the most widely used tools are the hoe, sickle, spade, *geso* (like an axe), and plough. Plough tillage is rare on account of the limited arable land.

Women decorticate *enset* with an axe, and cook food with utensils made of clay. *Enset* is stored under ground and it is claimed that protein is lost in storage. Household items are usually carried by people. In some cases donkeys, mules and horses are used as pack animals.

Transport to Wolkite is expensive; the tariff by the Gurage Road Association is only 3.90 birr but private landrovers charge as much as 6 - 8 birr and carry as many as 20 people.

### *Innovations*

The following innovations have been introduced in the community: *chat* (c1944); coffee - *chercher* (c1944); eucalyptus - red (c1944); green pepper (c1944); pumpkin (c1944); sugarcane (c1964); banana (c1964); oranges (c1964); coffee - *avore* (c1974); coffee - *saja* (c1974); papaya (c1974); beetroot (c1974); carrot (c1974); improving soil fertility (c1979); dykes (c1984); vaccination (c1984);

This section describes the 6 innovations that one member of the community thinks were the most useful.

#### 1. *Dyke formation and planting trees*

Since 1984 dykes have been built in the PA by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Catholic Relief Service particularly in places where rain and floods severely wash away the soil. Parallel to dyke construction grasses are planted in the form of a contour. Then trees are planted to conserve soil. All the activities have been carried out through food for work. The project has been successful to the extent that farmers whose individual land was eroded have copied it. Since 1992 the CRS has largely been performing this activity. Although there is still erosion, the construction of dykes has reduced the problem and farmers have learned how to undertake the work by themselves.

#### 2. *Eucalyptus*

The introduction of eucalyptus has brought significant changes in land use. Red eucalyptus is one of the tree varieties introduced to the community around 1944; ever since the community has grown eucalyptus at an increasing rate. Initially individuals planted it for construction and for fuel. Later the higher income generated from it has become the major reason. It was successful and a lot of people with a relatively larger size of landholding adopted it. People who were landless or only had a small amount of land did not plant eucalyptus trees. In most cases people benefit a lot from it. However, there is also some fear among some individuals and the *Ye Joka* that the increasing planting of eucalyptus reduces soil fertility and competes with grazing land.

#### 3. *Mulching*

People have used manure on their soil for a long time and between 15 and 20 years ago they introduced mulching - leaving dried leaves (*enset*, coffee, other plants) and hay to decay at the bottom of the crop. This has helped to maintain the fertility of the soil. It was introduced by individuals and copied by everybody.

#### 4. *Growing chat*

*Chat* was introduced about 50 years ago. Almost everyone in the community grows it now and most of them generate a cash income from selling it. Initially it was Muslims who grew it to chew then other Muslims copied. Orthodox Christians initially didn't copy because of religion. Men chew *chat* while working on homesteads as a stimulant to manual work and a substitute for food.

#### 5. *Growing fruit*

Oranges and bananas were introduced about 30 years ago first as a food and then to sell. Missionaries brought orange and banana trees and planted them in a hospital known as Atat that is about 17km from the site. Almost everyone has copied as time has passed; people who have not copied do not have enough land. Oranges and bananas are eaten by the community and sold to townspeople in the local market.

The fieldworker asked for the names of 10 farmers who are always willing to experiment with new things. Seven men were listed as model farmers in the PA who cultivated and managed a good size of *enset*, *chat*, orange and coffee plantation together. They are Biredaw Mama, Sewa Abash, Petros Banksira, Derege Keraga, Mare Kelesh, Tio Adeb and Woldeyesus Yabe. These men are local experts

who do all farm work at the right time and efficiently: they prepare their soil very well, always try to improve the fertility of their soil in both traditional and modern ways, and are always ready to improve their farming techniques and the amount of their harvest, and learn from everyone's experience.

### *Common Property Resources*

Theoretically, every member of the community has equal use rights to communal grazing lands, forests, rivers, streams and spring water. However, most of the communal grazing and forest lands in Imdibir have been threatened in the last 20 years due to population pressure and changes in land use patterns. Irrespective of the distance every member of the community can fetch water from each spring, stream, and river.

### *The Environment*

Most parts of Gurage are eroded and as a result *enset* fields are traditionally conserved with stone and soil bunds. In order to reduce raiding by wild pigs and porcupines peasants build stone walls and use locally made traps.

During the 1930s about 20% of the land was covered with natural forests. This has almost completely been destroyed, especially in the years 1991 and 1992. At present the nearest and largest natural forest (about 800 hectare) known as Ziarem forest (sometimes called Forehina) is located outside Imdibir PA. However, since the early 1960s people have started to grow eucalyptus on a greater scale. Now about 60% of the land is covered with trees, mainly eucalyptus; planting has intensified due primarily to the high income generated from its sale.

Since the early 1960s the fertility of the soil has been declining. Since before 1934 they have used manure as fertilizer. They have also applied hay, dried *enset* leaves, and other plants for the last 20 years and they hoe their land twice a year. The smaller landholding of the community, increasing population, and declining soil fertility has reduced the local economy to below subsistence level.

Grazing land has reduced a lot but the number of cattle in the area has increased. About 50% of the grazing land that used to be communal 25 years ago has been cultivated. No cattle are moved to other grazing lands during any season. The quality of grazing land has deteriorated. In one of the places bare soil has started to be seen and the type of grass has also changed. The other one holds more water and is better. To protect their crops and the grass they are growing from animals trampling and wild animals demarcating land has become necessary. Previously, people cut and left the weeds on the land to act as fertilizer but now they also use weeds as fodder. 20-30 years ago a little working was enough but now because of the increase in population people have to work hard. Much land in the village has lost its fertility substantially and people work more on their farms than they used to. However, the size of the *enset* that people harvest at present is much smaller than it was 20-30 years ago. Since a lot of people are growing eucalyptus substantially and the amount of rain has reduced people believe that these are major reasons behind the loss of fertility. No land is left without being cultivated but people who own bigger plots grow eucalyptus and grass on the land that has lost its fertility or started to be eroded. Those with small plots have no alternative but to grow *enset* and other crops.

Cutting down trees, mainly the big ones in the community forest, is prohibited. However, children still fetch twigs, branches and leaves from this forest. There are some individuals who cut trees at night.

## 4. Off-farm Income Activities

### *Within the Community*

Income from *enset* and livestock is insufficient and besides supplementing it by selling crops such as coffee, *chat*, oranges and bananas, people often depend for further supplementation on remittances from

out-migrant family members, and off-farm activities such as handicrafts, carpentry, trade, etc. Long distance trade has been an important coping mechanism for a long time. People at the site remember it occurred before 1934; however the volume of migration increased very much after the Land Act of 1929 which made taxes payable in cash. Traditional clothes, livestock, saddles, tobacco, and gun belts were some of the items sold by the community in the 1930s. They were selling in Addis Ababa and to the nearby towns. There are still a few people engaged in local trade but the type of items sold has changed. There is no saddle or gun belt production at present. Tobacco production has also declined. In addition, there are people who are engaged in trade in Addis Ababa and other nearby towns where the markets are a lot better than the local town. Few men engage in local trade and they trade throughout the year. Most women engage in local trade.

There were people engaged in weaving in the 1930s and there are still people weaving clothes. In the 1930s there were a few people who did carpentry and there were people who produced saddles, belts, gun belts and other similar handicraft products. Carpentry has become a well-known off-farm occupation and there are several people engaged in this activity at the moment. People have stopped producing leather goods. Wage labour is one of the major off-farm activities in which many men in the community engage at present.

House construction, woodworking and weaving are men's activities undertaken particularly by men from outcast groups. Among the Gurage the *Fuga* are woodworkers, the *Nawfra* are smiths and the *Geze* are tanners. Women are involved in basketry, pottery, matting and preparing alcoholic beverages. In the 1930s a few women engaged in pottery and they used to spin but they did not sell food or brew beer. Since 1974 more women have started to make pottery partly because the attitude of the people towards pottery changed and partly the income to be generated stimulated them so that pottery is now a widely performed activity. Women still engage in spinning. Most women make *areki* (*katakala*) and brew beer in the community. Some also make *injera* and sell it in the town. Most women also engage in selling things like salt, *enset*, butter, oil, and wheat.

### *Migration*

Migration is an important means of risk management. The reasons include possible failure of agricultural productivity, shortage of land, the high cost of living and taxation. Gurage work in domestic off-farm activities and towns irrespective of the qualities of the job. Their activities range from owning big hotels and factories to jobs like shoe-shining and selling lottery tickets and magazines.

People from the community have regularly migrated to a range of places for trading but migration for temporary work has only recently started in the community. The number of Gurage who migrated for wage labour was expanding until the regionalization programme led to ethnic conflicts in some places. In Imdibir at least 1 man from each household was away in Addis Ababa and other towns at all times during the agricultural off-season.

It was mostly younger men who migrated; they need the cash and have fewer attachments and at least 1 trip abroad is an assertion of independence and symbol of manhood. Beginning from the age of 10 many male children migrated to urban centres following household members to look for work.

Gurage abroad mix with each other and form self-help organizations: urban *idir* and *equb*. The recruitment cuts across lineage, clan, religion. The economic benefits are used to help unemployed tribesmen. Most earnings are invested in cattle, land when available, marriage and other social obligations. Old men receive gifts in cash and food from younger wage-earning relatives.

## 5. Reproductive Activity

### *Fuel and Lighting*

The main source of light for all households in the PA is kerosene and naphtha. Food is cooked with wood and twigs from private eucalyptus trees and some from the community forest and dry *enset* leaves.

Imdibir town received electricity very recently.

### *Water*

The sources of water are shown in the calendar in the Appendix. The river is about half an hour walk from the village. The Catholic Relief Service has started "damming" water but the work is not finished. There is a shortage of water. Although the volume of water in both the streams and rivers becomes less during the winter season water is available throughout the year. Some people fetch from streams and others from springs depending on the distance they have to go. The rivers become muddy during the rainy season and people have to walk to get spring water. During this period since everybody fetches water from the springs people have to queue. It is during this season that the water problem becomes serious.

### *Sanitation*

Some households use pit latrines while some do not have them.

### *Fertility*

The fertility of Gurage women is among the highest in Ethiopia. In general the Gurage culture favours high fertility in a number of ways such as early marriage, high parental expectation of child support, and high social status attached to high fertility rates manifested in a ritual known as *samer*, and *anqit*<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the numerical superiority of a clan, lineage and/or a family is considered as a sign of power and therefore high fertility is encouraged.

Consequently, the fertility of Gurage women is among the highest in Ethiopia (OPHCC, 1987; Betemariam, 1991). The 1984 census showed that the average parity of Gurage women in urban areas at age 45-49 was 6.36 compared with 4.06 for the Amhara and 4.82 for the Oromo. In a survey conducted in Imdibir and Ezha-Wolene PAs by Menbere (1993:15) out of 605 women and 156 men interviewed, 60 percent of women and 75 percent of men replied that they would like to celebrate *samer* at the birth of the tenth child. The problem of infertility in men is not considered as unfortunate as that of women. Family planning in its modern or traditional sense is not widely known in Imdibir.

### *Socialization*

Qualities considered desirable in men by a group in the PA included being a hard worker, kindness, honesty, courtesy, being good with their hands, a sense of humour, intelligence, cleverness, bravery and to be good at arguing. People are born with some of these qualities and learn others. Through learning many qualities can be developed. Experience and learning can increase the ability to work hard but the willingness to work cannot be learned. Since most of their sons work with them in their off-school times they learn the desirable qualities in men from their fathers. They also tell them about individuals from which they should learn certain qualities. Undesirable traits include theft, lying, crime, drunkenness, smoking cigarettes, laziness and lack of respect for elders. Although in the community people respect each other's religion they hate those who shift from one to another.

A successful farmer is hardworking and performs each farm activity in its due time. He keeps and improves soil fertility, conserves soil through planting trees or other plants and introduces new crop varieties or the already known varieties in a better way. He also engages in cattle breeding. His

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<sup>4</sup> *samer* is an elaborate feast for the birth of the eighth and/or the tenth child; *anqit* is the fear of stigma attached to a woman attributed to remarriage without the consent of the former husband. Any kind of ill health including infertility is explained by *anqit*.

particular skills involve identifying every aspect of farming activities, the seasons, the required and available things and the means that can help him to fill the gaps. The technical skills most respected are any type of woodwork or carpentry, weaving and thatching.

Informants agreed it was very useful to be able to read, write and do calculations. At primary school children learn a lot of things concerning the social and economic aspects of a society. They learn to read, write and do sums. And they learn how to respect people and how to behave in front of older people. Education is useful for being a better farmer, irrespective of the size of landholding. Depending in the type of off-farm work schooling helps to earn off-farm income. It does make a difference how many years they stay at school. There are a lot of people who dropped out of primary and secondary school who are farmers at present and one can see the difference from the way and types of crops they grow.

Respected social skills include mediating between people who have quarrelled, organizing *idir*, *equb* and other types of *mehber*.

A group of women listed desirable qualities as being hard working, obedient, kind, good at arguing, and clever, and showing leadership, dexterity, bravery, a sense of humour, and courtesy. There are some qualities people are born with. They are also learned from shared experience. Girls help with domestic work and women advise and teach them through time. They also learn from school and the community. Undesirable traits in children include drinking *areki*, chewing *chat*, being disobedient to parents or elders, naughtiness, lack of interest in work, and smoking cigarettes.

A successful farmer's wife can represent her husband in controlling and supervising farmwork. She always moves *enset* to her store for household consumption and emergencies. She knows how to keep the house clean and how to entertain strangers who come to the house. She is good at scraping *enset*, caring for livestock, and handling her property. She knows how to be economical and how to care for children. The most respected skills are spinning, stitching, basketry, and pottery. It is very important to be able to read and write and to do sums. Social skills respected include being a good intermediary, and being a good leader of *mehber*, *equb* or other local organizations.

The women's group believed that children at primary school acquire knowledge to enable them to see and fully understand at least the environment and the social and economic activities of the people they live with. At church school children learn how to read, write and do sums. They also learn religious and other songs. Education is useful for being a farmer's wife because acquiring such knowledge enables a woman to socialize easily with people in a better way than the others, to control and supervise the farmwork representing her husband, and to perform all farm or off-farm work in a better way.

It is easier to earn off-farm income if you have been to school. Most of the women in the community are involved in off-farm work like trade which is easier to do if you can do sums. The group said that about 50% of the girls in the community are at primary school and about 30% at secondary school. The remaining 20% do not go to school.

Old women watch infants and train girls for marriage and household activities. Old men train boys for work.

The local conception of intelligence involves a sense of economic independence through cultivating good *enset*, coffee, *chat*, eucalyptus, rearing cattle and participation in off-farm activities. A person is called intelligent if he or she is economically independent, and sociable and has industrious children.

### *Education*

There is a kindergarten built by the CRS with a capacity of more than 200. The fees for a year are 25 *birr* per child. There is an elementary and junior secondary school (grades 1-8) and a senior secondary school (grades 9-12) in the town of Imdibir. The headmaster of the primary school informed us in April 1994 that there were 1358 students in the school of which 757 are boys and 501 are girls. In the previous year 204 students went to secondary school and of these 105 were boys and 99 were girls. The curriculum includes Amharic, English, Maths, Science, Geography, Farming, Drawing, Sport and

Music. The tuition fees for a year are:

Grades 1 and 2 7.5 *birr*  
Grades 3 and 4 10.25 *birr*  
Grades 5 and 6 11.25 *birr*  
Grades 7 and 8 12.75 *birr*

In April 1995 there were 1202 children at the primary school, 53 teachers and 28 classes. 3 of the teachers have 10th grade plus 2 years training; 1 has 11th grade plus 2 and 53 have 12th grade plus 2. 4 teachers with working experience from 20 - 26 years are paid salaries ranging from 472 to 565 *birr*. 53 teachers with working experience between 3 and 31 years are paid salaries ranging between 305 and 565 *birr*.

There is a shortage of chalk, pens, pencils and paper at the school. Lack of tables, chairs and desks are the main problem faced by the school. They do not have enough classrooms (only 15) and they are crowded and there is no meeting hall.

The church school is run by a nunnery and has 80 students of which 56 are girls and 28 boys. Last year 72 students went to high school; of these 34 were girls and 38 boys. There are 2 divisions in the school - beginners and those who know how to read and write. Most of the expenses are covered by the nunnery but parents have to pay 2 *birr* a month. Of the total students 37 students are exempted from paying.

Imdibir comprehensive school is 2 kms from the site. It has 1164 students, 49 teachers and 20 classes. 12 teachers have 12th grade plus 4 years training (salary between 636 and 800 *birr*) while 31 have 12th grade plus 2 (salary between 500 and 636 *birr*). No child can enter the school without presenting good enough exam results. There are not enough books in the library and there is a lack of technical teaching aids. The problem of school fees prevents some children from continuing at school (an estimated 120 *birr* for uniforms and food; 30 *birr* for pencils etc; 500 *birr* for food during school; 2.50 *birr* for books). Those from the poorest families stop if they get a job.

A group of men said that about 75% of the children in the PA were at school and 45% of them are boys (30% girls) and of these 45% 28% are at primary school and 17% at secondary.

Although there is no apparent bias among parents in deciding which children should go to school, there is no strict follow up and interest in counselling school children. As a result, there are many unemployed school leavers in the PA assisting their parents in all household and farm activities. It is reported that some students from the PA have joined colleges and Universities.

### *Health*

When they are ill inhabitants of Imdibir resort to self medication, traditional practitioners and they have access to the following formal health facilities:

1. Imdibir government clinic.
2. Attat hospital (12 km from Imdibir is run by missionaries).
3. Wolkite private clinic.

### *Self-medication*

There are special *enset* plants grown in a special section of the garden, whose roots are used for medicine. The root is hidden for use when a personal amulet is needed.

There is a drug shop in Imdibir town. Few drugs are available at the clinic. On a visit to the drug shop it was found they had the following drugs:

painkillers	like paracetamol, aspirin
antibiotics	like tetracycline (tablet) and eye ointment; ampicillin; penicillin
anti-malaria	chloroquine phosphate
others	metronidazole

	Berantin syrup
	Theoephedrine
	Ephedrine MCL
	Promethazine
ointments	sulphur ointment
	lotion for pediculosis
	zinc oxide
	white field
anthelmintics	dechlorophine
	niclosomide (cosopharm)
	Ketrax
vitamins	B complex
	Multivitamins and iron tablets

As an example of prices tetracycline eye ointment costs 1.50 *birr*; Ketrax costs 0.60 *birr*; Niclosomoide or dechlorophine costs 1.50 *birr*. People can buy drugs without a prescription, but not injections.

#### *Traditional practitioners*

There are 2 types of traditional medicine: cure through non-ritual means and cure through ritual and magical means. There are traditional medical practitioners who are bone-setters and provide different types of herbs and roots for different illnesses. The roots of special *enset* plants (like *astara*) are used as traditional medicine and these plants are cultivated in a special section of the garden. The root is hidden for use when a personal amulet is needed. There is one famous traditional birth attendant in the village.

There is also an individual who many people worship who is considered as a spiritual healer. After his father's death he took over the position and became *Yeway demam*. If an individual is sick and if his relatives believe in the *Yeway demam* they take the sick person to him and he stays there until he is cured. During his stay the *Yeway demam* and his followers pray for the sick person in a secret language known as *Demuamit*. There is no cost for visiting. However, those who are cured become followers and learn the secret language. A festival is held once a year (*Chist, Nipuar* or *Bozhe*) - from January 29 to February 5. During this time all the worshippers and followers gather in a place known as Nangira to celebrate and pay tribute either in cash or in kind - umbrellas, perfumes, livestock etc. During these feast days a large sum of money is collected by the *Yeway demam* and his relatives.

#### *Health facilities:*

The health facility most frequently used is Imdibir clinic. The clinic is staffed by four dressers but does not have enough drugs and patients must take prescriptions to the private drug shop. They have a vaccination programme against TB, tetanus, polio and measles but otherwise they have no preventive programmes because of problems of transportation. A typical visit costs 3 to 5 *birr* on average. There is no nurse at Imdibir clinic but there is one at Gura Megenase clinic which is 5 km away. Imdibir clinic is open 40 hours a week, Gura Megenase clinic is open 44 hours a week. Antibiotics are in irregular supply at Imdibir and malaria drugs are not available. Both are regularly available at Gura Mengase. Polio and measles vaccinations are regularly available at both. Each clinic has a fridge and stove powered by kerosene and has a minimum supply of bandages, compresses, sterile needles and syringes. The most frequent illnesses seen at Imdibir (in order of frequency) are: other respiratory illnesses; trachoma; intestinal parasites; skin infections and diarrhoea. The most frequent illnesses seen at Gura Megenase are: malaria; trachoma; other respiratory illnesses; skin infections; and intestinal parasites.

#### *Prevalence of diseases:*

A group of men ranked diseases as problems as follows: gonorrhoea; toothache; amoebic dysentery;

severe headache; pneumonia; eye diseases; liver diseases; TB; mental illness; blood pressure; and anaemia.

A group of women ranked diseases as follows: toothache; backpain; eye disease; earache; gastritis; "sharp pain"; amoebic dysentery; heartburn; abdominal pain; severe headache.

For children the diseases ranked by the group of women were: dysentery; vomiting; *tikitik* (pertussis); measles; *gudif* (chickenpox); coughing; fever; eye disease.

A calendar giving information of when the groups said these diseases were most prevalent can be found in the Appendix.

#### *Causes of diseases:*

**Toothache:** The women's group said this was mainly caused by lack of effective cleaning, that they rinse their mouths with water after every meal to prevent it and that if they get it they apply salt and brush their teeth with lemon. If these treatments don't cure it they extract it by themselves or go to the traditional healer, clinic or hospital for it to be extracted. The men's group said it was caused by chewing *chat*, smoking cigarettes and lack of effective cleaning. They do nothing to prevent it and if they get it they chew garlic or put salt on it. Some rinse their mouth out with *areki* or lemon which gives temporary relief. When it gets worse they go to the traditional healer for it to be extracted.

**Gastritis:** The women's groups said gastritis was caused by drinking too much coffee and the unbalanced nature of the food they eat. There is nothing they can do to prevent gastritis but if they get it they reduce the amount of coffee they drink and take milk if there is any. If it gets serious they go to the clinic and then to hospital. There are also times when they use traditional medicine. The men's group said that gastritis was caused by hunger, rage and eating food with poor nutrition value. They do nothing to prevent the illness and if they get it they eat pulses and drink milk and barley flour mixed with sugar and water. When it becomes serious people go to the clinic, then the hospital.

**Back pain (women):** This is caused by lifting heavy things, overworking or cold. There is nothing to be done to prevent it. If they get it they use the leaves of plants known as *Tenadam* and *Anamro* and other traditional medicines. When it is serious they go first to the clinic, then the hospital.

**Eye disease (women):** It does not involve pain so they don't know how it starts but many complain that their eyes weaken to see. They believe it must be due to malnutrition. Nothing can stop it; if they get it they go to the clinic, then the hospital and get eye ointment and maybe glasses.

**Earache (women):** This illness has been affecting both older and younger people. They suspect it is caused by malnutrition. There is nothing they can do to prevent it. If they get it they apply butter or oil for temporary relief; then they go to the clinic and hospital.

**Gonorrhoea (men):** The group said this was mainly caused via sexual intercourse but overworking and lack of balanced diet are other factors that cause it. They do nothing to prevent the illness. If they get it they use the leaves of a plant known as *yetebeter* which they squeeze with butter and then drink the liquid. They also drink a herb mixed with water known as *kosso* then eat part of the *enset* leaf known as *astara* (with salt-soaked beans). If this does not work they go to the clinic, then the hospital.

**Amoebic dysentery (men) (children):** The men's group said drinking contaminated water and eating mainly vegetables which are not cooked will cause this. Highly fermented *tella* or *tej* also cause it. They do nothing to prevent the illness; if they get it they mix squeezed acacia leaves with a grass called *gimt*, butter, *enset* and pepper powder and eat it as medicine. If this fails they go to the clinic, then the hospital. The women said the children get dysentery from drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food and using unclean materials to feed children with. Not keeping children clean also causes the illness. They do nothing to prevent dysentery; if children get it they give them tea with bread for some time. When it becomes serious they are taken to the clinic, then the hospital.

**Severe headache (men):** The groups believed that some people inherit this illness. Otherwise it is caused by anger, rage or fury. They do nothing to prevent it; if they get it they use a squeezed herb (*ariti*) mixed with butter which they inhale through the nose. People also put this mixture on their head. When it becomes serious they go to the clinic and then the hospital.

**Vomiting (children):** The women's group believe this is caused by poor sanitation, keeping

children's food uncovered and careless handling of the materials used in feeding them. There is nothing they can do to prevent the illness; the treatment is the same as for dysentery.

*Tikitik* - pertussis (children): This disease is transmissible; they do nothing to prevent it. They give children medicine made from the herb *ariti* and make them drink goat's milk. When it is serious they go to the clinic

Measles (children): This is transmissible. Vaccination is given by the people from the clinic. If they get it the children are kept in the house and not exposed to sunlight. They brew coffee and dispense popcorn in the house. Serious cases go to the clinic, then the hospital.

*Gudif* - chickenpox (children): This disease is transmissible and children are vaccinated against it. The disease wounds the children so they are not allowed outside the house; if they do not heal easily they go to the clinic and hospital.

## 6. Consumption

### *Food and other day-to-day goods*

There are no emergency crops - the Gurage have never experienced crop failure due to reliance on *enset*. However a few people known as *fuga* (outcasts) sometimes hunt animals for food. The Gurage eat the root and stem of leaves and the inner bark of the *enset*. The edible portion is kneaded and ground into a flour paste to make pancake bread (*wusa*) and, for special occasions, very refined bread (*tegraya*) which stays longer in the ground. Preferably *enset* is eaten with meat, butter, vegetables or lentils. Every household member eats the same kind of food, but in the presence of guests the wife and children eat separately.

The festivals are held at the New Year (*Mesqerem* 10 -21), *Chist* or *Nipuar* (*Ter* 21- 27) - celebrated in this region only and Saint Mary's Day.

### *Housing*

In general, houses in Imdibir have thatched roof huts and walls plastered with mud and have no partition. Wealthy people have big and tin roofed houses with walls made from Acacia timber. These houses are very costly (more than 8000 *birr*) and are made for life.

### *Household Assets*

In wealthy houses one expects to find an iron bed, a radio, and other modern furniture.

### *Local Services*

There is no wholesale trading though the Service Co-operative has a shop which has very few things to buy. The PA is very near Imdibir town and people have access to all the town's facilities.

## 7. Local Institutions and Organizations

### *Households*

The term household (*abarus*) is usually used to refer to 2 spouses and their children possibly including

wives of migrant son(s), grandchildren and parents of spouses who live in a house in which they eat, work and sleep together. However, the household may vary considerably in size and composition and it may be headed by father, father's brother or father's father or by a woman. There may also be adopted kin and individuals with non-kin status. Migrants are often considered part of the household since their children and landholdings stay within the village. Most migrants retire to their village of origin. The post-marriage residence pattern is mostly patri-local unless, rarely, homestead land belongs to the wife.

As women contribute much labour for the production of *enset* they have almost complete authority in making decisions about its disposal. Normally women do not have the right of access to a man's income from trading, weaving and carpentry, nor from the production, harvesting and marketing of cereals since their role in the production of these is negligible. After the land reform of 1975 it appears that some women control the income earned from their own activities such as the sale of mats and alcohol.

Gurage husbands often migrate to towns and in most cases establish additional households at their place of work.

Authority is vested in the head of household. All persons in the *abarus* are under his (or occasionally her) jurisdiction. A son with wife may set up his own hut if he has land and money but he will still be in a subordinate position to his father. If a husband is away the older kin will keep a close watch on the wife. Elders acting jointly administer the property of a man who has died and undertake disciplining of the sons if there is no adult son or elder of the minimal lineage to take his place. Children are seldom distinguished by sex until they are 2 months old when they are formally named.

### *Marriage*

Monogamy is the most frequent form of marriage but there is some polygyny among Muslims and wealthy Christians. Co-wives rarely meet since they live in different villages. There is some sexual rivalry, and conflicts over status and prestige, but there are seldom conflicts over land since each household inherits its own land separately. Families of different religions (Islam and Christianity) within the same tribe occasionally inter-marry. There are numerous prohibitions on marriage between close and distant kin and fictive kin. Levirate and sororate are rarely practised. Women who are never married are considered "worthless" and are rare. Women are under strict surveillance before betrothal.

At least theoretically Gurage usually want to ensure that a would-be marital partner has no trace of non-Gurage blood, no ritual illness in the family, and no *Fuga* blood (is not an outcast). Boys marry at about 18, girls at about 15. In traditional Gurage culture marriage is arranged by parents and kin groups and children have no choice. However it seems today that boys are more free than girls to choose their own spouses while allowing their parents and kin to conduct the customary prenuptial arrangements. Elders act as go-betweens and give the final sanction to the choice. They examine the bride and note any peculiar bodymarks which might later be attributed to wife-beating if she is sent back home during the early stages of marriage. Bridewealth often takes the form of money (up to 500 *birr*) and cloth. However the feast is very expensive and requires the assistance of out-migrant families and/or the sale of cattle or land. The girl is not expected to meet or know her future partner (except for knowing and calling his name) until the wedding ceremony takes place, often after 1 year. Marriage can also be effected through elopement in cases when parents refuse to accept the request of the boy's parents.

In the past the groom had to provide clothes and a special mat made of hide for the bride's family. This was changed and grooms have been paying 500 - 1000 *birr* to the bride's parents. Because of complaints from young men and their parents the *yejoka* decided to lift the rule so that everyone can get married without paying this sum.

Christian Gurage usually marry in *Hedar* or *Wato*; Muslims and other Gurage in the off-seasons of cultivation. A week before the wedding each family invites the bride and groom with their friends (*yegenia*). On the day the bride is taken from her village to the groom's family her family give the first feast. The second takes place some time later and is provided by the groom's family closely supported

by related kin in the village and elsewhere. Before the 2 lineages are linked prospective in-laws must be avoided. There is a song duel between the lineages. When a son gets married the parents provide a house for the couple and a cow and heifer for the bride. The wife often spends the first 6 months in seclusion in a hut when she should resist the husband's sexual advances. His family have to provide all her food during this period. Then she goes back to her village for 2 - 3 months, then she goes back to him and thereafter cannot leave the house without his permission. During this time they have to work to generate income to buy gifts for those kin who invited them.

Marriage feasts are very expensive and the family may incur considerable debts. The feast lasts several days and everyone in the village is invited. This is expected even though the family may not be able to afford it. However, recently the elders issued new regulations so no-one now pays bridewealth. This is the result of the people's, mainly the young and their parents', complaints.

The ideal pattern is male domination and separation of the sexes. Men show little affection to women, at least in public. A woman is expected always to have ready large quantities of *kocho* and coffee for her husband and guests. The man controls food production; the wife is expected to regulate consumption from the earth storage with great care. Wives should show deference, walk behind her husband, serve his meal first and wash his feet at night if there are no young children or servants to do this. When her husband retires she must sleep on the floor alongside his bed. The Gurage man tries to extend principles of male superiority outside home. At least theoretically he expects women to turn their backs and hide in the bush when he passes by.

A man may hit his wife without provocation, neglect her in favour of a co-wife, send her home to her parents yet keep her to marital fidelity, and there can be no reprisal from her side or it would lead to a feud. A woman sent home for barrenness or laziness is unlikely to marry again. Most cases of infidelity seem to involve married women - he can be fined and she can be ritually cursed to prevent subsequent marriages. Women cannot accuse husbands of adultery or sue for divorce. However a woman cannot be formally sent back to parents once she has borne 8 children - after that divorce is rare.

### *Divorce and Widowhood*

The rate of divorce is small as it is culturally condemned. Divorce may happen when wives are found infertile although this is not the case for husbands. However, the influence of traditional authorities is so high that family breakdowns do not easily occur. The stable character of Gurage marriages is reflected in the complex of folk tales involving wicked stepmothers. If the couple get divorced the bride can take her wealth with her. The children stay with the husband if they are grown. If there are infants she can take cows, if there are any, in order to feed the children. Once they have grown and returned to the father she must return the cows. If she does not have children and she initiated the divorce she has to leave the house taking her clothes, money, jewellery and other possessions. If she is not the cause of the divorce she has the right to claim half of the property that her ex-husband owns. In the past Gurage wives were prohibited from taking their dresses on divorce and there is a saying that men sometimes make consecutive marriages with old dresses from the ex-wives.

Widows in most cases live with their parents until they get remarried. If they don't get the chance they can stay with their parents as long as they like, even if they have children with them. Most widows, beside helping their parents with domestic work also make *tella*, *areki*, or engage in some other business activity.

### *Inheritance*

The Gurage inheritance system is strictly patrilineal: daughters are only used to intertwine different lineages so fathers favour the birth of sons. The son can perpetuate the family line of descent, the family's farmland, and the father's prescribed roles. The higher the number of sons the higher the

probability of permanently using family land. Hence blessings like "have a son" and "let a son stand by your shoulder" are used frequently in Gurage folktales. As a result of this the main items of property such as land, houses, livestock, farm equipment and others are transmitted from father to son. Land is equally divided among sons except that the first born takes an extra share, including the house of his father, for his leadership and the remaining children choose their part in descending order under the supervision of the elders. There is only one way that daughters can inherit property: if they have no brothers. Male elders are responsible for dividing inherited property. In practical terms women do not have a right to a share of any property. Currently women can be considered as guards of homestead land, cattle and other forms of property because of the absence of husbands. Only unredeemed illegitimate children have rights of inheritance in the mother's family. Father-son relations are distant from 1 - 4 years; close from 4 - marriage; and then distant again. The crucial factor in this is the inheritance of land; the eldest son expects the major portion if he has been "ideal". There is conflict between siblings.

### *Kinship*

The kinship structure of the Gurages is similar to that of other segmentary African societies. The household, as a consumption and production unit is the lowest level of social organization. Kinship prevails in everyday life ramifying through social, economic and political organizations. Most of the important Gurage institutions are built around kin relations in household and village.

Unlike the Amhara and Tigre the Gurage have no institutional relationships established along cognatic ties whereby property, status and titles are distributed from mother and father lines. Duties of maternal kin to a man compared with those of paternal are of little consequence. Maternal kin are not required to defend a man, perform mortuary rites, or support his heirs.

### *Lineages*

These are patrilineally organized and political power, authority and wealth are vested in the lineage structure. In theory though not practice lineages are equal. Ritual power, authority and wealth are vested in lineages directly associated with the principal Gurage religious cults - *Cest* for men, *Damwamwit* for women, and the cult of the thunder god - *Boza*. The lineage is called *teb*. The totality of *teb*-related villages is dispersed through a number of *teb*-related districts which comprise the entire *teb* or clan territory. A clan is a large *teb*, a village a small one. Next to households, patrilineages are important units of social organization. These are composed of exogamous households which are agnatically related. Patrilineages are responsible for political and legal matters among kin members. Traditionally each patrilineal kin group has its own demarcated territory for settlement and cultivation. Exceptionally there are a few households which have settled on different territory by buying land.

At present there is an overlap of kinship affiliation and territoriality. Patrilineal affiliations do not strictly respect territorial boundaries, particularly after the land reform of 1975. The customary practice of selling and leasing land to unrelated people, if relatives could not afford to buy the land may also have contributed to this effect. However, as a social organization, patrilineal kin groups are still operating, particularly with respect to the regulation of the transfer of ownership rights over land by out-migrant member households to unrelated households.

An *ager* is the highest level of social organization next to the lineage. It is a "self-contained" settlement unit with its own church(es), common land for grazing, forest, road and public places for assembly. Traditionally this is the most viable and highest level of social organization and territorial unit in Gurageland. Each *ager* is not only a spatial unit but also a political unit formed out of different patrilineal homesteads (Bekalu, 1995).

Traditionally each Gurage tribe consisted of *ager*. In Imdibir there are 14 *ager*. Each *ager* has its own council of elders responsible for the administration of internal affairs including disputes over land among residents. This territorial division in Imdibir did not disappear under the *Derg*, when Peasant

Associations were imposed over the traditional social organizations throughout rural Ethiopia. Nevertheless, as marriage often takes place between different *ager* and as some lineages may reside beyond their *ager* there is mutual co-operation among *ager* on certain common interests. Marriage usually takes place between different clans.

Inter-household relationships are strong and expressed through gatherings for coffee which involve neighbouring households, monthly assemblies among lineage members, monthly congregations for *equb* and *idir* and through working parties. Unity and solidarity are expressed in two ways - the degree to which members of the lineage are mobilized in action (at the rituals of marriage and death) and the sanctions governing the participation of members in lineage activities. Feuding involves the corporate group; and individuals depend on the minimal lineage for protection. At times disputes may become widespread and people may exact compensation or seek vengeance. If mediation fails fights may ensue.

### *Age Grading, Life Cycle Changes and Rites of Passage*

There are no tribal-wide organizations based on age. Within the household hierarchy age is important. Circumcision/clitordectomy takes place between 8 and 10. This is done by the *Fuga*.

Boys learn *asat* cultivation, clan genealogy, traditions of clan and heroes, and *gurda* - the moral obligations involved in making a ritual covenant. Girls used to be abducted to the bush by the Chief *Fuga* and older girls and taught secrets, including the ritual language - *Fedwat* - so they could sing in it at religious festivals. Until the age of marriage (15) most of the social activities of girls are confined to the *merat* (a group of girls of same age). Among the Cheha and Muher Gurage initiation has virtually ceased under the influence of the churches.

### *Friendship Contracts*

*Gurda* is an institutional form of ritual bond-friendship made between distantly related clansmen. It creates ritual ties and reciprocal obligations which span social and spatial distances. The lifelong association is reinforced by supernatural sanctions and involves moral obligations of mutual assistance. The most extreme sanction is *zitana*, evil spirit possession, which causes swollen limbs and stomach and has no cure. People with ritual illnesses are rejected by their lineage and village who fear contamination and must join the ritual outcasts who wander begging. They cannot be buried in the lineage plot and their kin cannot inherit their property.

### *Citizenship*

Clan citizenship - *ang* - ensures all Gurage security and protection. Gurage men are equal respective of age, clan, position, or status. There is also equilibrium between major and minor clans.

### *Markets*

Gurage markets have been established for many years and are part of inter-clan and inter-tribal relations. There are no markets for the sole use of members of a single group but the integral structure of the market is controlled by groups on whose land it is held. There is a market cycle; the 3 major markets (Imdibir, Ezha, and Ennemor) are held on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. There are also smaller inter-clan markets. The clan chiefs act as market elders to control the markets supported by the chief of the clan in which the market is held. They act as policemen and judges.

Shack (1966) reported that during his field work he observed about 20,000 people in the market at Ennemor. Face-to-face meetings at markets are as important, if not more, as economic transactions. Political and ritual activities also take place at markets. Chiefs and other political figures often make announcements of tribal policy. Ritual agents of deities make pronouncements concerning taboos and behaviour prior to important religious ceremonies. Newly circumcised adolescents parade ostentatiously

through the market.

There is no market in the PA but Imdibir town has been a traditional market place for the surrounding Gurage tribes on Fridays and Tuesdays and in Kochi (a small market place) every day. In the colder highlands of Gumer and parts of the Muher tribal lands people bring cereals and legumes. The Gurage who live in the lowlands bring *tef*, maize, sorghum and *niger* seed and those in the colder highlands bring barley, peas, beans, and flax. In the surrounding river basins cotton is grown as a cash crop and in the warmer lowlands spice, sugarcane and some fruits are grown and brought to Imdibir market. Unlike *chat*, *enset* and coffee are not usually sold in Imdibir. The production and exchange of tobacco, *chat* and pottery have become specialized activities among the Chaha Gurage. At present, eucalyptus trees are grown and used as fuel wood, a source of cash, windbreakers for *enset* plants, and for construction.

Women bring tobacco, butter, fodder, *enset* paste, ropes, umbrellas, hens and eggs. Men bring oxen, rams, a few horses, coffee, dried skins, meat.

### *Credit and Social Security*

In times of personal crisis people get every kind of help - financial, material, labour or other depending on the type of crisis. If their houses burn down they get wood, thatch etc; if their cows or oxen die they can at least get a heifer, cow or bull. They get help from kin - mainly brothers, uncles, cousins who either live in Imdibir or in other urban areas. Friends, neighbours and other organizations like *idir* also help them. Depending on their financial situation, *idir* give about 1000 *birr* for people whose house burns down. Although the way of life the community leads depends a lot on family relationships, lineage is more important in times of need.

Many people have been going to Addis Ababa and other urban areas for work since long ago. Since most parents of these people are living here they come to visit at least once a year during *Meskel* or they send gifts or remittances in a normal situation and they will most probably respond to any crisis their parents or close family members face. Those who are members of the family and living in the region will also help with whatever they can afford. In times of crisis friendship, neighbourhood, kinship, and lineage are all important.

Most people belong to an *idir*; membership may range from 100 to 300 and contributions may range between 2 and 3 *birr* a month; there is also a contribution to be made when someone dies. Anyone can be a member. There are a number of *idir* in the PA. Most people belong to more than 1 *idir* on the basis of clanship or neighbourhood.

St Michael's *mehber* is usually for men and St Mary's for women. There are *mehber* to which both men and women belong. Membership may range between 15 and 20. Poor people do not belong to *mehber*. The basis for membership is affiliation to Orthodox Christian religion and willingness and capacity to prepare feasts on the day. The main function of these associations rests on the feeling of belonging and mutual support.

There are other types of *mehber* but not religious ones, organized and lent money by the MCH programme of the Catholic Relief Service. There are 3 of these each having 30 members who are all mothers. Some of these women are skilled at making pottery, some in spinning, some in other handicrafts, and some in trading. On the basis of their skills they obtain loans and engage in business activities which can enable them to generate income.

The contribution to *equb* is usually between 3 and 5 *birr* a week and membership may range between 70 and 80. Payments are made every week. People from outside the PA may belong to any of the *equb*. There are many *equb* in the PA. People's decisions about which *equb* to join depends on the amount of money collected in each respective *equb* as there are rich and poor people's *equb*. People borrow much from the *idir*, friends and relatives. The *idir* often charge interest of 10% per annum. People also borrow from moneylenders; a typical loan is up to 300 *birr*. There are special kinds of savings associations organized for some particular festival and the saved amount plus the interest obtained from lending by the association is paid usually a month before the festival.

### *Community Decision-making*

Both the PA and the elders make community decisions though most of the decisions are made by the elders. These decisions concern the social and economic problems of the community. Decision-making elders are chosen by the people in their respective villages.

Disputes within households and between households that are related are usually resolved by the family council. The council is appointed during marriage negotiations. If the council cannot resolve the problem it passes the case to the elder's council where such disputes are usually settled. Disputes between households that are not related go straight to the elders' council. If things are not resolved at the elder's council they pass to the higher body known as *ye joka kicha*. This is named after the place known as *ye joka*, near Imdibir where selected members of the *Sebat Bet Gurage* tribes gathered to settle complex issues for the first time. The higher elder's council has regulations on murder, theft, and several major and minor crimes like burning someone's house or causing injuries (eg broken leg etc).

Recently the increasing cost of living forced the *ye joka* to change certain rules including the amount of bridewealth, the number of *yegenia* (friends of the groom and bride) and expenses for feasts incurred during collective labour (*geiz* and *wosacha*). However, following requests from the community and in order to reduce the crime rate in the community the *ye joka* has decided to increase the rate of restitution (from 2,000 to 20,000 *birr*) for every crime (it used to fine people between 500 and 5000 *birr* depending on the type of crime). If someone murders someone else he immediately runs away taking his possessions and family with him, after which he applies to the council, through his relatives, for the case to be mediated. After obtaining the consent of the family of the deceased the *ye joka* investigates, collects evidence, and finally judges and decides how much the murderer should pay to the injured party.

The Government police and the community have been accepting all the decisions the elders make.

Taxes are collected by the PA committee and the rate of taxation for each farming household is uniform.

### *Local Organizations*

A group in the community was asked to describe important local organizations and rank them in order of usefulness to the community. They said that before 1940 there were *idir*: there are *idir* just for men, just for women, and mixed. Around 1945 *equb* were introduced and, as for *idir*, there are 3 kinds. Since before 1941 the *Ye Joka* meeting has existed. This is the association in which elders of the Gurage community meet to mediate or give solutions to quarrels and any problems between individuals and within the community. This association presently deals with many problems of the community. It also has regulations by which every member of the community is governed. Also existing since before 1941 are the *mehber*. There are separate ones for men and women. They are religious groups. In 1961 the *Sebat Bete Gurage Road Construction Organization* was set up. The organization built the first road that passed from Wolkite through Imdibir to Hosaina in 1965.

The groups ranked the organizations in order of usefulness as follows:

1. *idir*
2. *Sebat Bete Gurage Road Construction Organization*
3. *equb*
4. *Ye Joka* meeting
5. *mehber*

### *Redistributive Mechanisms*

Feasts are a form of redistributive mechanism. Rich and traditional authorities often sacrifice cattle

with much butter which is required to confirm status. All members of the community are welcomed to the feasts irrespective of wealth status.

## 8. Beliefs and Values

### *Land*

Land is not ceremonially blessed to increase yield and there is no association of land with ancestor-worship. Men used to be buried in the *enset* field but that is no longer the case. Land is the personal responsibility of the Gurage and success depends on rational decision-making.

### *Religion*

The local religions are Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic. According to a sample survey in Cheha *Woreda* in the early 1980s 67.1% were Christians and 32.9% were Muslims. There are also certain people who follow a traditional religion called *Damwamwit*. Some Gurages believe that the *Fuga* ritual experts possess magic and their sorcery and malediction are feared. The chief deity is the sky-god - *Waq*. There are a range of nature spirits associated with mountains, rivers etc. There are 2 principal tribal-wide ceremonies: *Cest* for men in December and *Damwamwit* for women in February. There are other festivals at a local level.

Lineage principles of co-operation are not weakened by different religions and the people respect each other's religion. However, they hate those who shift from one to another. At present in Imdibir many people have converted to Catholicism because of the activity of the CRS in the PA.

For Orthodox Christians the *Meskel* (the finding of the True Cross) festival at the end of the rainy season is probably the most important ceremony. Every family has a confessor who expects food, and money in return for blessings, anointing the sick, hearing confessions, removing evil curses etc. Most followers, particularly the elders - do not work on St Michael's, St Mary's, and St Gabriel's day. Most Catholics work every day except Sundays. However, due to the nature of the work people work in groups (*Debo - Geze*) and if a man is in an agreement with an Orthodox believer he cannot work on Orthodox holidays because he cannot work alone.

Religious customs are muddled - Christians practise polygyny and there is no purdah for women.

On Wednesdays and Fridays the Orthodox and Catholics do not eat meat, eggs or cattle products. They also fast for 2 months in March and April. However, this is only strictly followed by elders. Muslims fast for a month during *Ramadan*. Since they stay awake during the nights they do not work effectively on most of the days. Muslims brew coffee in their ancestors' names and pray for them but they do not believe that they have any power.

### *Explanations of Misfortune and Illness*

Gurage attribute most frustrations and illnesses to ritual afflictions. Fear of ritual illness is rife and only ritual agents can prescribe effective remedies. These anxieties overlap with those from witchcraft and sorcery. Illness and accidents are also explained as the result of God's will. However, there are times when people think of them as due to other reasons. This is when they occur repeatedly in a family or among relatives. Then people believe that somebody in the family, either living or dead, must have done wrong or hurt someone unfairly. The one who has been hurt cries and prays on his knees for God to see his hurt or sufferings. With the request of the ill person or their family the elders meet to investigate the harm, locally known as *barch*, that caused the illness, after which, if the person is identified by the investigators, or by the confession of the ill person or his family, the elders decide that the hurt person should be compensated.

*Enset* is presented in ritual offerings to *Damwamwit* - the deity concerned with the health and

wellbeing of the Gurage. There are monthly rituals to appease evil spirits. There are local sorcerers who are believed to have some power. If somebody has some property stolen and he does not know who he tells the sorcerer, paying some money, after which she hangs out *wokashe*. The thief should go immediately to the sorcerer and pay for the *wokashe* to be brought down, otherwise he and his family will die. There is also a rainmaker; if she is asked to do it and is paid for it she is believed to be able to make rain. She can also stop rain. People whose relatives die during the rainy season pay her to stop the rain if it comes before the burial is finished.

Sons support their dead fathers with ritual practices and pour beer on their graves once a year.

### *Community Values*

Self-sufficiency is prized and people are not afraid of hard work. Land is their most cherished possession and they will fight amongst themselves and against outsiders to retain their land and their independence.

Gurage men are unwilling to discuss their household expenditures, family budget, earned income, or any matter concerning finance that they assume might be used for the purpose of levying taxes.

## 9. The Community

### *Community Organization*

Within villages there are relationships of kinship and economic co-operation during cultivation, the sharing of grazing on successive days, the loaning of cattle, grain and other food, the rendering of service after births, mourning at death rituals and participation in village politics. Gurage men attach great importance to maintaining tight bonds and meet every night in small groups in each others' houses in turn discussing recent events and their effects on the village.

The pattern of settlement ensures a fair distribution of land under densely populated conditions. Village norms ensure that no individual can exploit village resources at the expense of others.

Members of different clans are sometime found in villages but this is not the norm. The core of the village is the minor lineage (including ancestors); households related by actual or fictional kin ties. Ideally all inhabitants of a village should be related. Village exogamy is practised.

The village controls the rights of ownership and use of land. No household can dispose of its land to an outsider (one from another clan) without approval of the minor lineage heads. Land ownership implies lineage affiliation.

### *Politics*

Headmen and elders often meet to make economic and political decisions. Economic assemblies are often called to discuss the formation of work parties, the distribution of market goods, and sale of cash crops. Political assemblies are less frequent; they may be called by any adult male in the village or the headman. The village men participate in the discussions and make decisions which are executed by elders. A favourite past-time is debating actual and unreal situations for the sake of discussion. Women meet rarely as group apart from when working and attending kin/religious ceremonies restricted to women.

Since the end of the *Derg* regime the PAs have lost power and the elders have become more powerful.

### *Social Conflict*

Feuds are frequent, often involving loss of life and blood vengeance. They often arise over debt

reclamation.

### *Poverty and Wealth*

The main characteristics of poor households are that they have a small amount of land and cattle. They have small harvests of fewer crops. Because of this poor men are usually involved in woodwork, and *kerkeha* (bamboo work) while the women are usually involved in pottery. Poor people have large families which adds to their poverty.

Former landlords are better off but traders are not necessarily wealthy. The wealthy are those with more land and cattle who grow cash crops They work themselves and also hire outside labour to work on their farm. They migrate for trade and are often engaged in some form of business or receive remittances from their children. There is no difference between young and old. People with a wide range of types of crop may also be wealthy; such as a great deal of *enset*, coffee, *chat*, *gesho*, orange, banana, and eucalyptus. A "big" farmer will harvest between 60 - 80 *enset* and a small one between 25 and 30. Another source of wealth is investment in the occupation they have through trade in other areas. Inequality seems to be decreasing as all seem to be poorer.

The poorest people in the community are always vulnerable to any form of change.

### *Social Mobility*

There is occasional but rare downward mobility from the wealthy group. Respondents gave a number of possible reasons including bankruptcy of a business when the owner has not invested much in the farm; death, illness or old age of the head of household when there are no children old enough to take over; or the children are not hardworking; crop diseases and animal pests.

People become poor and vulnerable to crises if they do not both work hard on the farm and give enough time for off-farm wage-earning; if they mishandle their property; if they do not save enough; if they have too many young children; if they are getting old; through death or illness in the family; through crop failure due to disease or pests; if their land is less fertile; if they have no additional source of income apart from the farm.

Households move frequently between the middle categories of poverty/wealth.

Upward social mobility through the acquisition of land is becoming more difficult in Gurageland due to land shortage. Children of poor people can become rich if they inherit more land and grow *chat*, coffee, *enset* and eucalyptus (which has become one of the major cash crops) on a greater scale; if they can earn off-farm income, particularly from trade and use this income to improve their farm; if the children become old enough to support their parents on and off the farm. Without additional income and working only on the small amount of land inherited it is very difficult to become wealthy.

### *Status*

Among the Sodo Gurage many personal qualities such as courage, kindness, honesty, and generosity are admired and may be used in evaluating people's status. However, public feasts and political action are used as a formal means by which hierarchical titles, *abegaz* (commander) and *azmach* field commander, are granted to outstanding individuals. Status used to be attributed to war leaders, large landowners and religious dignitaries. Men who achieve high status bring prestige to their lineage, clan and tribe and after death may be immortalized in poetry and song.

The most respected people in the community include good farmers who prove their ability by their work and share their experience with those who need it; people who organize others to participate in activities like building bridges; elders who speak the truth, mediate between quarrelling people, advise anybody who needs it, and speak against anything that affects the welfare of the community with Government or NGOs; rich people who help the poor by lending them money or providing livestock to those with none(*wokia*).

Men get personal status from the height and girth of their *enset* plants and the size of their *asat* holding. Social and economic status accrues to men with extensive polygynous households. The giving of large feasts at marriage and death demonstrates conspicuously the economic status of an individual and accumulated savings or earnings are readily spent on such functions. Status also comes from skill in the art of litigation and men can establish tribal-wide reputations. An outstanding ability in debate, the practice of traditional medicine, or the composition and recitation of religious or heroic poetry are all still important in tribal life. Status is also attained by wealthy men who can exert influence beyond the village to the wider clan unit through the lending of cattle or money. However a poor man is reluctant to admit any inherent difference in status between himself and a wealthy man.

People can also get prestige as a result of Gurage efforts to form a bureaucracy out of the traditional political system. Formal education and a reasonable knowledge of tribal law are necessary for some government jobs. Young educated Gurage are only recognized as having authority in the area where they are specialists.

One respondent named five members of the local elite. *Ato* Tesema Amerga is from an aristocratic family in the region and has married a woman who is related to noblemen. He has a minimum modern education and is administrator of the *woreda*. He participates in different economic development programmes in the region and has contact with high government officials and his close relation to the society has helped him to understand it. *Ato* Shewa Abashe is literate and has served as treasurer in different regions which has helped him to have close contact with government officials in the community. He has participated in different social and development programmes and is helping the community as an elder. *Ato* Denbu Yirorga is literate and has served in various government capacities, has participated in development projects and is an elder. *Ato* Woldemichael Abdo and *Ato* Wolde Ferege both completed grade 10 and 2 years in teacher training. They served as teachers for long years and now are serving as elders. These members of the elite all achieved their positions during the Emperor's regime.

Another respondent described the elites as party members and the wealthy. He suspected they are in conflict with each other. Another said that some elders are considered as elites and nothing has changed with regard to them. As usual they serve the community as before and they are respected and loved in return. There are people, however, who are involved in current politics who are being paid good salaries which they were not used to, and they get other privileges.

Women are considered to be impure at all times and rituals of cleansing are necessary.

### *Social Stratification*

There are low-"caste" occupational groups of hunters and artisans and ritual specialists who are remnants of the earlier inhabitants of the Horn. They are known as *Fuga* - (*Wayto* in Amharic) and are woodworkers. Their knowledge and technical skills serve most of the technical requirements of Gurage life while the art which is an extension of their craft activity reinforces the aesthetic values of the tribe. Also blacksmiths (*Nawfra*) and tanners (*Geza*) are despised. All three occupations are believed to be associated with evil spirits.

The *Fuga* usually resemble the Bantu negro: they use the language of the dominant group while also using their own "jargon" in certain ritualistic observance (eg circumcision and burial). Their relationships with the rest of the society is institutionalized and reinforced with supernatural sanctions. The language of the ritual experts is called *Fedwat* and only they and followers (mostly women) speak it. Marriage between *Fuga* and Gurage is forbidden and the ban is backed by ritual sanctions. They are landless and forbidden to till or herd cattle. The Gurage believe they can destroy the fertility of the soil and stop cattle breeding. It is believed that they take the form of hyena at night and attack children and eat their entrails. The *Fuga* calls the Gurage *Abiya* (Master) to which the Gurage replies "Kill the animal". If a Gurage harms a *Fuga* he will be fined in money or cattle; the strongest punishment is a ritual curse which produces an illness that is often incurable.

The houses of religious and political dignitaries have an inner and outer circle of fencing and inside

4 or more large houses. Political and religious office is usually inherited. Village headmen and their close relatives have prestige and a range of social privileges within their own village and clan territory. The village headman accrues political prestige rather than wealth although if he is in favour with the people and the clan chief he might get rewards. The village headman is elected by the minor corporate lineage; he used to collect taxes and have a government salary commensurate with the tax revenue but this is no longer the case. The senior son of a headman should succeed his father but this must be approved by the elders. One important function is the maintenance of *ema* - the proper sharing of responsibilities over grazing land. He represents the village in the clan and acts as judge in local disputes, although people can appeal against him to the elders.

The administration of tribal affairs takes place almost entirely through the traditional authority system; to the government the most important person is the village headman. The accumulation of small sums of wealth, traditionally and now, is the prerogative of offices of ritual and political leaders and village headmen. Political chiefs get no direct tribute but can accumulate money from payment of fines in court; when he takes up office every head of household gives him a gift.

Ritual chiefs receive annual tribute - bread, cattle, ivory ornaments, gold and silver jewellery. The motivation for the tribute includes fear of supernatural sanctions but the giver expects some spiritual benefit in return. Assistants get a share; they collect tribute and distribute amulets. Ritual agents have potential control over considerable wealth; more than the chiefs who depend on them. There is a patron-client relationship.

Some Gurage have acquired considerable wealth from cash-crop farming, trading, wage labour, and business enterprises in the towns and there is a new class developing not as a consequence of indigenous social and economic organization but because Gurage are getting involved in new economic undertakings. The professional class includes teachers, religious dignitaries, *Fuga* specialists, and clerks.

Social differentiation is still seen in the rituals of death; the length of the mourning period and number of participants in the funeral. The most important social distinctions are based on tribal origin; outsiders are alien. The Sidama and Oromo are regarded as inferior.

## 10. Relationships with other Communities and the Wider Society

### *Clans and tribes*

All Gurage claim descent from the founder of a clan. Some tribes contain only a few clans but the Cheha have 15. The tribe is the largest unit of common values and there is a strong sense of tribal loyalty. Clans have hero-ancestors but tribes do not. Clans gain status from the historical and political events in its mythology and the relative status of its chief.

The clan is a political unit with other functions as well. The chieftainship is vested in a particular maximal lineage and is hereditary in the senior male line. Chiefs should have knowledge of the law and customs, provide everyday hospitality, lend cattle, and should be old. The primary political function of the clan is the maintenance of social control. The clan council is called by the chief and consists of elders as act as advisers. It considers complaints and offenses range from theft and quarrels to murder. The chief acts as a mediator trying to reach a decisions within tribal norms. He has no armed force at his disposal but ritual sanctions, personality, and public opinion strengthen his authority.

Although inter-clan relations involve economic and political rivalry they are bound together by strong ties of obligatory goodwill. Myths, genealogical relationships and the ideology of kinship provide a rationale for this. The tensions produced by this double-edged social relationship are reduced by clan joking relationships, pranksterism and public ridicule.

The inter-tribal council - *Ye Joka* - meets at the shrine of the Sky God.

### *Villages, Towns and Regions*

Villages are within neighbourly distance of each other and 2 or 3 villages often share common property resources such as grazing land, water, and markets, and consultation is needed. They are also linked by kin and lineage ties. Village units linked together in a network of social and economic relations are known as a *teb*. There is no status differentiation between villages apart from those where religious dignitaries live where ritual ceremonies are held. This PA is poorer than 2 other villages in the area, but almost equal with another one.

### *Relationships with Wider Ethiopia*

Out-migrant Gurage people have been affected by the recent ethnic conflicts. Because of their physical mobility and adaptability to any socio-economic environment it is said that there is no place that the Gurage, like the landover, do not reach. But at present migrant Gurage merchants have started returning to their villages due to ethnic cleansing politics in certain parts of the country. Those Gurage who earn income by selling second-hand clothes, newspapers and magazines of the free press are subjected to persecution by the police in Addis Ababa. The return home of demobbed soldiers is another problem as they demand land for their subsistence.

The Gurage regarded the various Sidama, the Amhara and Oromos as their traditional enemies.

### *Effects of Government Policies*

One respondent argued that people were worse off than in 1991 since displaced people have returned, unemployment has increased, production has declined, the cost of living has increased and mobility is restricted. The question of regionalization was too sensitive to discuss. He did not think people know about the Constitution or have heard the word democracy. Another disadvantage suggested was the creation of unemployment so that many who have finished their training are unemployed and are a burden on their parents. Another respondent said people were worse off because of the mobility problem; for example people who used to sell secondhand clothes on the street in Addis Ababa are back and dependent on their families. People oppose regionalization very much because the country has a long history of unity and a lot of Ethiopians do not want it. They also oppose land ownership by the government. People are also worse off as a result of privatization and the sacking of government employees.

A second respondent said people were better off: obligations and duties, conscription and contributions of all kinds have been abolished and all in all things are peaceful. The community supports the current policies except for a few beneficiaries of the past. People are opposed to regionalization since the nationalities in the country want to work together and the new concept is going to cause conflict and divide the country. People broadly know about the Constitution and some think it useful. Others think it will influence them, especially on the question of land ownership - land will be owned by the government. They support the idea of democracy giving human rights to all. There is no conflict within the community.

Another respondent said the difference between the current government and the *Derg* is like the difference between an angel and a devil. As a result of democracy people have peace and are progressing. Another said there were 2 views on current policies. The majority of peasants who used to live in fear of military service and contributions support the policy. Some farmers and businessmen do not support it.

Another said the supporters of the new regime and members of the party are better off. They have got the opportunity for employment but the position they have and the level of their education is unbalanced. There is conflict between them and members of society who oppose the regime. Even if it is not publicly done they oppress and exercise their power on the non-supporters. The community is ruled by power, not democracy.

Another said the community is better off in some ways and worse in others. The end of forced contributions, conscription etc has improved things but increased unemployment, especially among those who have completed high school, have made some worse off. Those who migrated to the bigger towns (eg Addis Ababa) cannot work or sell their goods and have been forced to leave, wandering here and there to look for other work.

Regionalization is going to intensify land shortage. The supporters of regionalization (pro EPRDF) believe that the best way of democratizing the country is through regionalization. Another respondent said that unemployed school leavers complain they cannot get jobs not only in other regions but even in the nextdoor *woreda*. For example someone who passed the agricultural extension exam in his neighbouring *woreda* and who got the best result was refused employment in that *woreda*. Apparently there are a lot of similar experiences.

One informant said that people do not know about the Constitution; they do what they are told to do. Even those who live in the big towns do not understand democracy.

### *Government Activities in the Community*

Government assistance is not significant but they have provided seedlings for trees, medicine for cattle and new types of crops for the farmers (carrot, beetroot, etc). A respondent reported that no-one had used the new crops.

Memories go back as far as 1941 (after the Italians left) when the Ministry of Finance arrived. The police and a court were set up in 1944 and the primary school started in 1945. The high school opened in 1957. In 1977 there was a forestry project. In 1978 Literacy Campaign programmes, Service Co-operatives, the Peasant Association and the Health Clinic were introduced. In 1983 there was Food Aid and in 1984 veterinary services for trypanosomiasis. In 1984 telecommunications came to the village and there was food for work. A group from the community ranked the Government's activities in order of usefulness to the community as follows:

1. school
2. health clinic
3. police station
4. court
5. telecommunications
6. veterinary services
7. literacy programmes
8. Ministry of Agriculture (presently changed into the Coffee and Tea Development Office)
9. The Peasant Association
10. forestry projects

The Ministry of Agriculture provided pesticides and insecticides for about 2 years after which they stopped. The community would like these services to be started again.

There is only 1 health clinic in the area and the service and medicine it provides has not been sufficient for the community. For a better medical service the community would like the Government to build at least 1 more clinic and provide drugs.

Although there are 3 springs in the PA most of the people in the community fetch water from the rivers. Hence a clean water supply is something the community would like the Government to provide.

### *NGO Activities in the Community*

The earliest date for which information was provided was 1980. In 1980 the Franciscan sisters of Our Lady nunnery started a kindergarten school. In 1984 drought affected almost every household in

Imdibir and relief assistance was provided by the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA). Since 1984 both relief and development efforts have been carried out in Imdibir. In 1987 the CRS started a Mother's and Children's Help programme where they are provided with wheat and oil. In 1987 the CRS built roads. The construction of dykes and plantation of trees have been some of the efforts to conserve soil. The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the CRS distributed seedlings and had them planted through food for work programmes. In 1992 a Food for Work programme was introduced by the CRS to build dykes and they established a nursery which gives the community access to acacia trees. In 1993, although inadequate, 3 springs and water wells were cleared and covered with concrete to enable the community to get a clean water supply.

In 1994 a loan and savings programme for mothers was launched by the CRS on May 1st and on the same date they launched a self help programme for the soldiers of the previous regime. The group ranked the activities in order of usefulness to the community as follows:

1. school (kindergarten)
2. Mother's and Children's Help (MCH) programme
3. Food for Work
4. Springs and water wells
5. Loan and savings programme
6. Self-help programme for soldiers
7. nursery
8. roads
9. food aid

The MCH programme provides wheat and oil for pregnant women and for children who are between 4 and 24 months if their weight is good and 36 months if they are underweight. However there are a lot of children who are under-nourished and the community needs such a programme to provide food for all children below 5 years of age.

The Food for Work programme appears to be welcomed by the community in general and by the poor individuals who got work. Since there are a lot of people seeking employment opportunities and since there is a great deal of erosion in the area people would like the Government or the NGOs to expand such programmes or other development activities which benefit both the community and those employed. Also there are some people who need to be helped with food.

#### *Future Provision to the Community*

The *Sebat Bete* Organization is one of the major local organizations which is concerned in development activities in the region, mainly in road construction. Since it has to build roads in many *woreda* it cannot start other activities at the moment. There are 3 rivers in the PA that people must cross to go from one place to another. In all of the rivers there are several bridges that are made of wood. The community would like the government to build roads and some major bridges so that they can transport eucalyptus and other things that need to be carried by vehicle.

*Equb* is the local institution that serves the community as a saving institution. Since the community itself is the source of the money which the *equb* pays its members, and since people's ability to pay *equb* has been declining they need some other source from which people can get access to credit. The community would like the Government to establish an institution from which they can get credit.

With regard to the problem of shortage of land one respondent suggested redistribution of land; those whose outputs are good and have a small holding should be given land taken from those who are lazy or prefer to be labourers or are weak and cannot farm. They should receive compensation. Peasants who are willing to move should be moved to neighbouring PAs. Government holdings, co-

operative holdings and the holdings of religious organizations should be redistributed. Compensation should take the form of access to cottage industries and small business activities (individually and in groups). An old people's home should be built and interest-free credit provided.

Scientific research into *enset* and *chat* for the eradication of disease should be done. Vegetable gardening should be demonstrated and free seedlings provided. Beekeeping should be supported and modern farm implements and equipment made available. Improved crops (reducing reliance on *enset*) and improved livestock should be introduced. Cottage industries such as bakeries and carpentry should be supported. Contraceptives, clinics, pharmacies and a clean water supply should be provided. People should be encouraged to send their children to school. To implement these programmes foreign investors, aid agencies and government should be encouraged.

A second respondent said that reallocation of land is not a solution and people do not support it. Scientific methods of farming are the answer. Growth development and poverty reduction could be achieved by establishing factories and clinics.

A third respondent said that increases in population and livestock have led to one third of the population migrating to town; the solution lies in land redistribution because some have more holdings than others.

Restoring freedom of movement would help the land shortage.

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### **GLOSSARY**

<i>Araki:</i>	A distilled spirit.
<i>Arriti:</i>	A herb used for medicinal purposes.
<i>Belg:</i>	A short rainy season usually occurring during February/March/April. The harvest from this season takes place in July and August.
<i>Birr:</i>	The currency of Ethiopia (9 birr= approximately £1).
<i>Chat:</i>	A bushy plant which has leaves which are mildly narcotic. The leaves are chewed.
<i>Enset:</i>	Also known as false banana. The roots and the inside of the trunk and branches are

eaten often after being stored in the ground to allow for fermentation.

*Equb:* A rotating savings and credit association.

*Gesho:* A plant, the leaves of which are used to make beer.

*Gommen:* Spinach.

*Idir:* A burial society.

*Injera:* Ethiopian flat bread.

*Kocho:* Emergency food derived from *enset*.

*Lem:* Fertile land.

*Mehber:* A religious society which meets monthly on a Saint's day; each member takes a turn to host the group providing food and drink.

*Nug:* Rapeseed.

*Tef:* A millet-like cereal.

*Tej:* Alcoholic mead.

*Weyna dega:* The temperate zone (Ethiopian intermediate altitude).

*Woreda:* An administrative division.

*Yewag demam:* A spiritual healer.

### ACRONYMS

CRDA: Catholic Relief and Development Association

Imdibir

Crops	Mesqerem	T'eqem	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazy	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase
enset	weeding	soil preparation	harvesting	harvesting						weeding		
coffee	weeding	soil preparation								weeding		
chat	weeding	soil preparation	harvesting	harvesting		harvesting				weeding		
geshu	weeding	soil preparation	harvesting							weeding		
orange	weeding	soil preparation		harvesting		harvesting				weeding		
banana	weeding	soil preparation			harvesting					weeding		
trees	soil preparation						soil preparation			weeding		
green pepper	weeding	harvesting				soil preparation				weeding		
gornnen		soil preparation					harvesting			weeding		
tomato	weeding	soil preparation	harvesting				harvesting			weeding		
sugarcane		soil preparation		harvesting						weeding		
tobacco	weeding	soil preparation	harvesting				harvesting			weeding		
maize	harvesting		soil preparation				weeding			harvesting		



Imdibir

Labour	Mesqerem	T'eqemt	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazya	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase
Men												
Hours 12												
11												
10			soil preparation									
9												
8										planting		
7	off-farm											
6	work		off-farm work								off-farm work	
5												
4						planting						
3						off-farm work						
2	weeding		planting								weeding	
1												
Women												
15Hours												
14												
13				housework including								
12	child		child care									
11	care									housework including		
10				wood fetching						childcare		
9	water					housework including						
8	fetching					childcare						
7	wood		off-farm work									
6												
5	house		harvesting									
4	work											
3												
2												
1												

Imdibir

### Imdibir

Consumption, harvesting and credit														
		Mesqerem	T'eqemt	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazya	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase	
<b>Consumption</b>														
	enset													
	injera													
	maize													
	potato													
	gommen													
	milk													
	butter													
	chicken													
	eggs													
	meat													
<b>Hungry season</b>														
<b>Harvesting</b>														
	enset													
	coffee													
	potato													
	orange													
	banana													
	sugarcane													
<b>Credit needs (women)</b>														
<b>Credit needs (men)</b>														
<b>Festivals</b>														

Labour												
	Mesqere	T'eqemt	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazya	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase
<b>Boys</b>												
Hours 12												
11												other
10												fodder fetching
9												
8												
7												wood fetching
6	other											
5	fodder fetching											
4		other										
3	wood fetching	fodder fetching										livestock herding
2		wood fetching										
1	livestock herding	livestock herding			livestock herding					livestock herding		
<b>Girls</b>												
10												
9												
8												other
7												
6												
5		other domestc work								other		food preparation
4												
3												
2		food preparation								food preparation		water fetching
1		water fetching								water fetching		water fetching
<b>School terms</b>												







## Crop History

Crops	1934	..	between	..	1994
Enset	before 1934				still grown
Coffee (Abasha)	before 1934		around 1970 planting started to decline		still grown but less
Coffee (Churcher)		before 1944	" "		" " "
Coffee (Avole)			planted around 1974		still grown
Coffee (Saja)			" "		" " "
Eucalyptus (white)	before 1934		since 1983/4 planting declining due to pests		grown highly
Potato (Gurage)	before 1934		" "		still grown but less
Potato (Gudere)	" "		" "		abandoned almost
Potato (Abasha)	" "		" "		" " "
Haricot beans	" "		since late 1960 planting declining since 1970 growing declined due to pests like apes, pigs		growing abandoned some still grow but less
Maize	" "		since 1970 planting increased		still grown
Gommen (green leaf)	around 1944				grown at increasing rate
Chat	" "		introduced in 1964		" " "
Orange					less grown
Boye (potatolike)	around 1934				" " "
Geshu	before 1934				
Banana					
Sugarcane	before 1934		introduced around 1974 since grown at increasing rate		less grown
Tobacco			introduced around 1964 since grown at increasing rate		less grown
Eucalyptus (red)	around 1944		since early 1960s intensive growth has been abandoned due to pests (apes etc)		grown on large scale
Pumpkin	around 1944		has been reduced due to pests (apes etc)		little growth
Green pepper	" "		introduced around 1969 - abandoned around 1979		reduced growth
Teff			(soil not suitable)		