

# **Ethiopian Village Studies**

(Designed and edited by Philippa Bevan and Alula Pankhurst)

## **Four Peasant Associations around Debre Birhan**

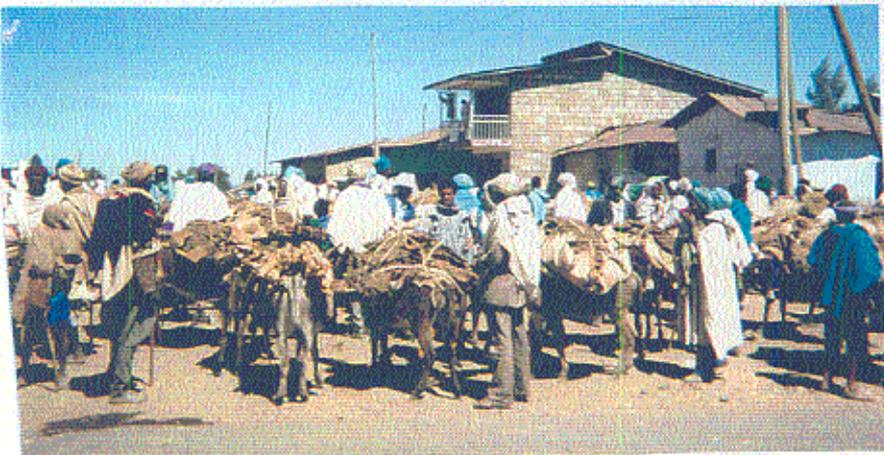
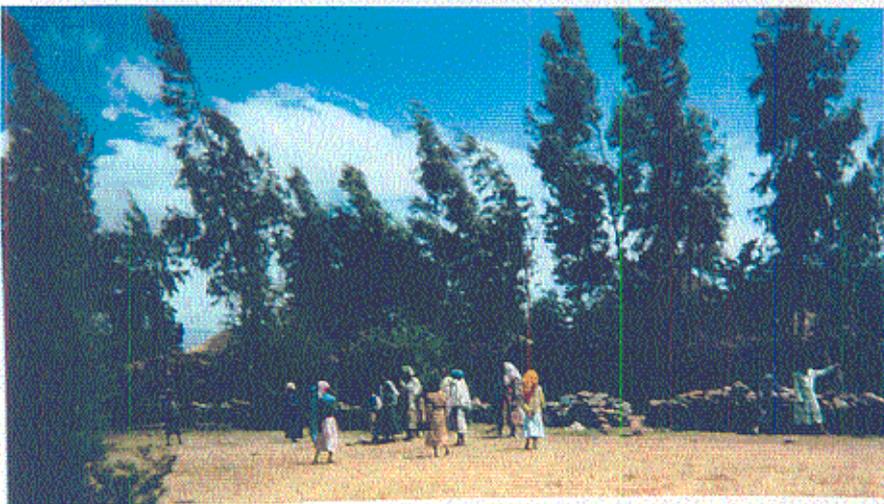
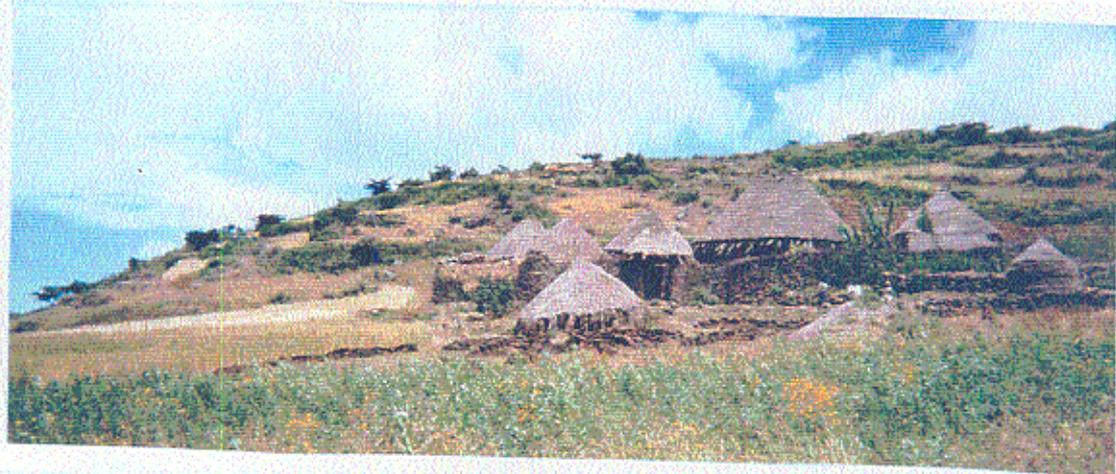
- 1. Fagy and Bokafya**
- 2. Koremargefia**
- 3. Karafino**
- 4. Milki**

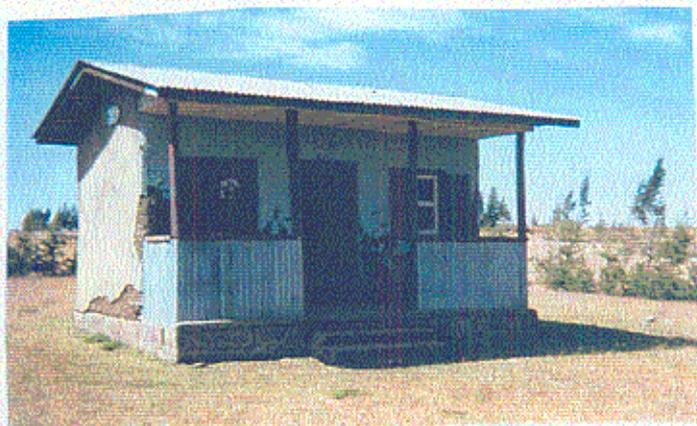
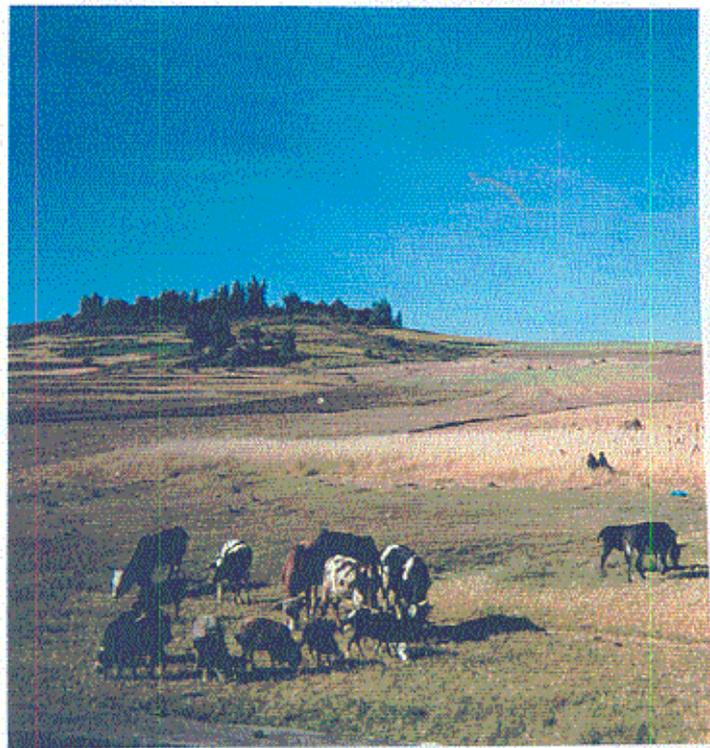
researched by

**Melese Getu, Teferi Abate and Million Tafesse**  
(Field managers: Bereket Kebede and Shukri Ahmed)

**June 1996**

**One of a series of 15 studies edited and produced jointly by the Department of Sociology, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia and the Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford, UK and financed by the UK Overseas Development Administration.**





## 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		

Further information about the profiles can be obtained from:

Dr Philippa Bevan  
Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD)  
ESRC Research Group  
3 East 2.10  
University of Bath  
Bath, BA2 7AY  
UK

Email: [P.G.Bevan@bath.ac.uk](mailto:P.G.Bevan@bath.ac.uk)

Dr Alula Pankhurst  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
Addis Ababa University; PO Box 1176,  
Addis Ababa,  
ETHIOPIA

Email: [pankhurst@telecom.net.et](mailto:pankhurst@telecom.net.et)

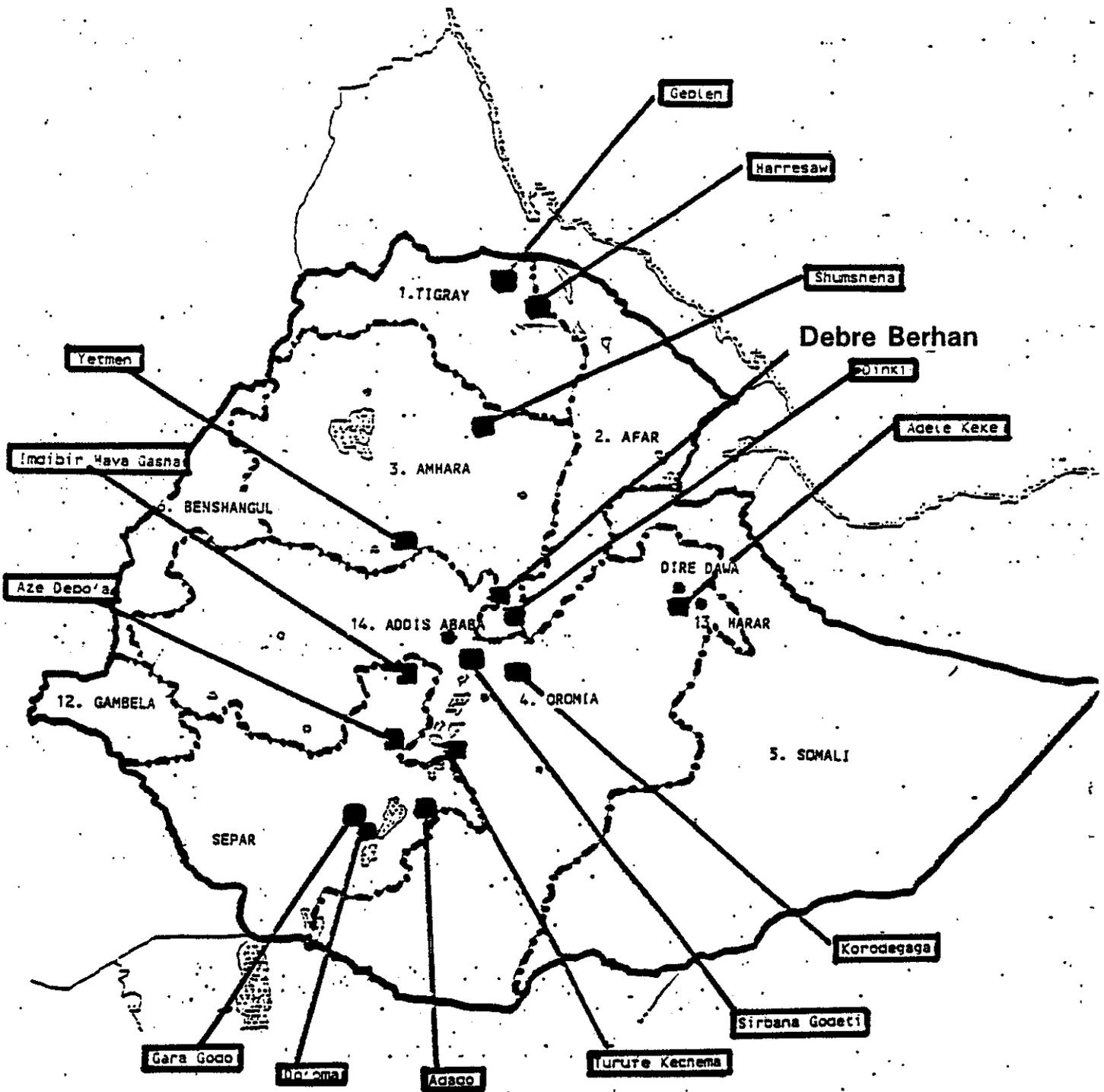
Further information about the household survey can be obtained from:

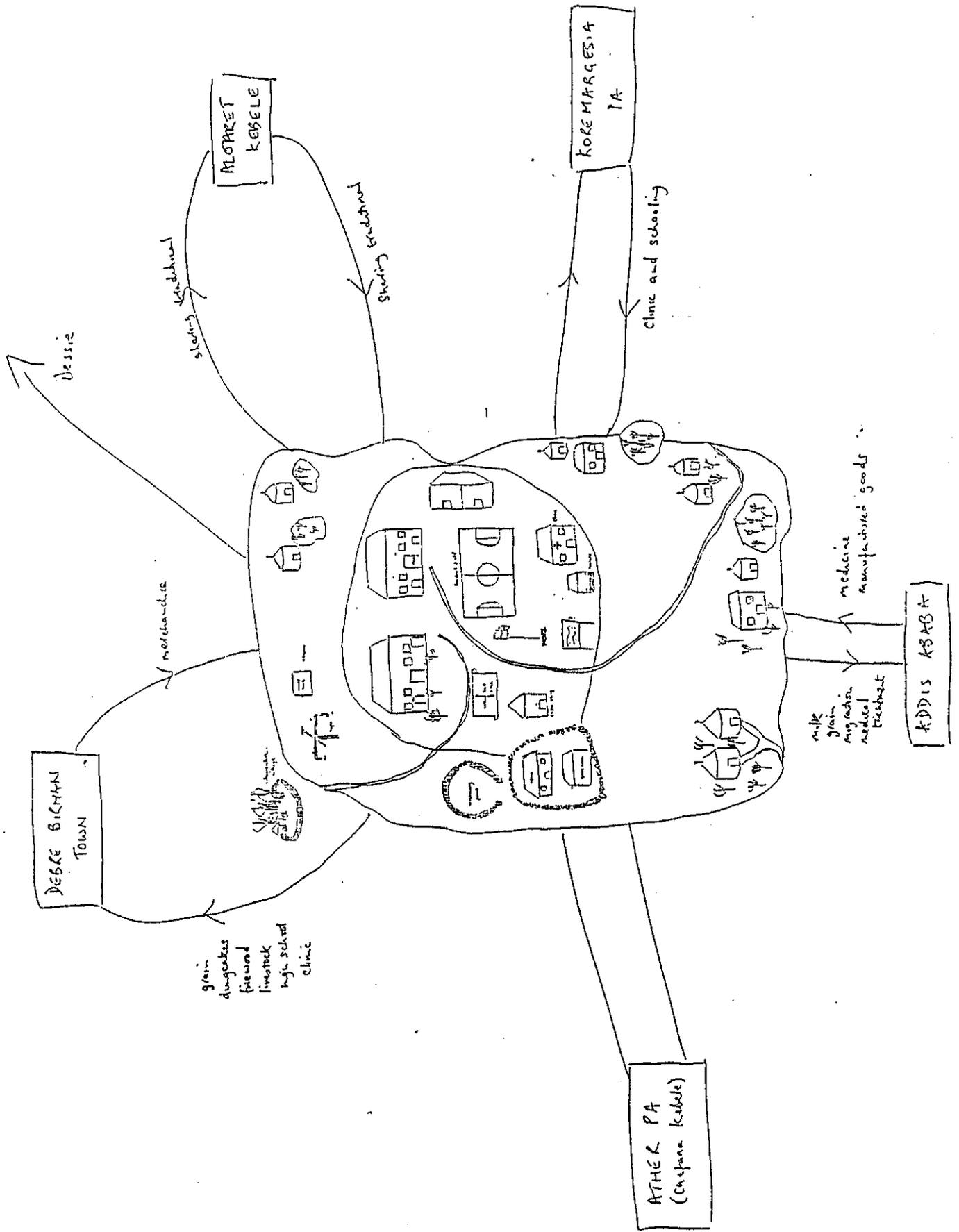
Bereket Kebede  
Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD)  
ESRC Research Group  
3 East 2.10  
University of Bath  
Bath, BA2 7AY  
UK

Email: [B.Kebede@bath.ac.uk](mailto:B.Kebede@bath.ac.uk)

Dr Stefan Dercon  
Centre for the Study of African Economies  
Oxford University, Economics Department  
Manor Road Building  
Manor Road  
Oxford, OX1 3UQ  
UK

Email: [Stefan.dercon@economics.oxford.ac.uk](mailto:Stefan.dercon@economics.oxford.ac.uk)





Desse

ALOTRET  
KEBELE

KOREMARGESIA  
PA

DESSE BICHAN  
TOWN

ATHER PA  
(Chayana Kebele)

ADDIS  
ABABA

merchandise

staring

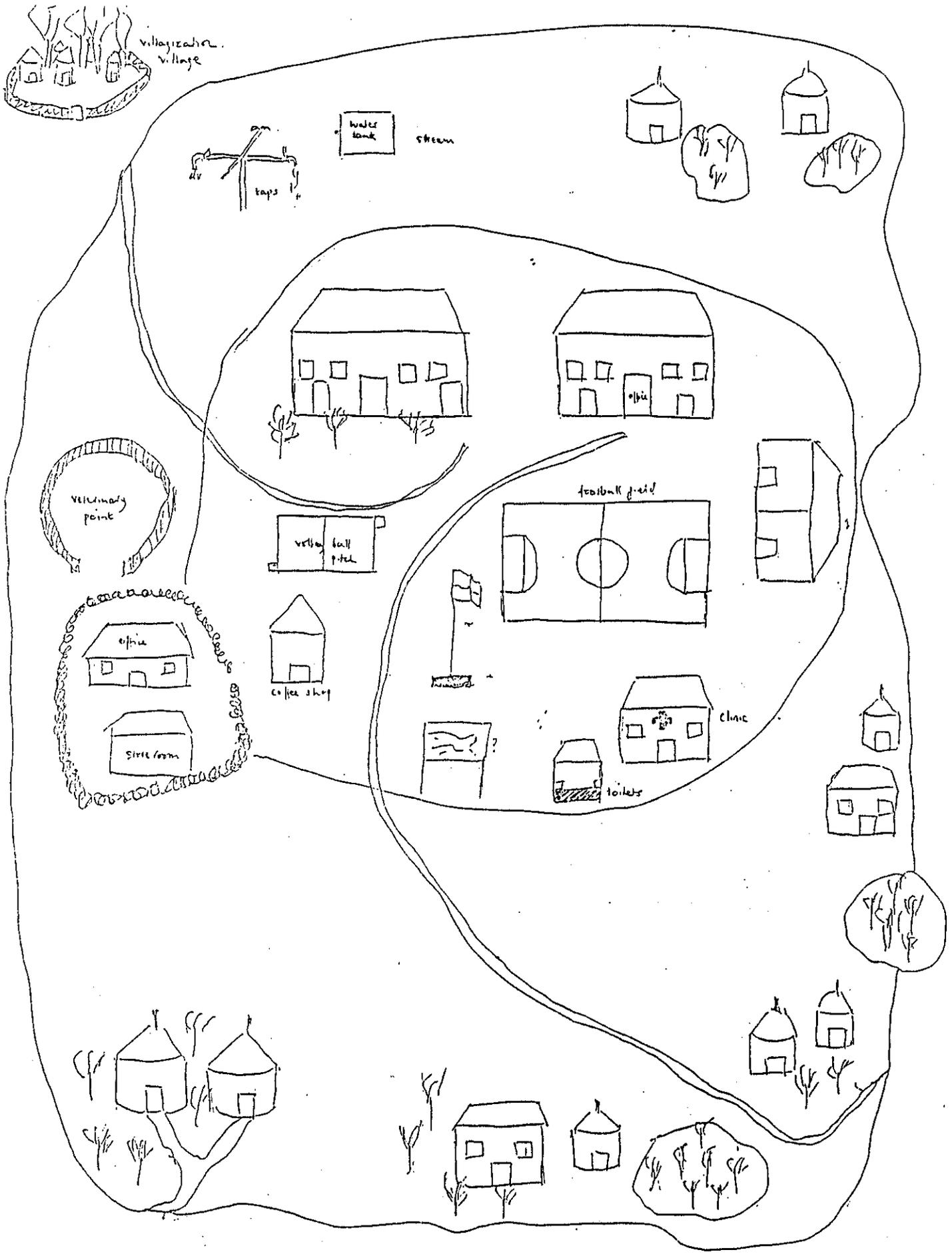
Sharing

Clinic and schooling

medicine  
manufactured goods

milk  
grain  
agriculture  
medical treatment

grain  
dungcakes  
firewood  
livestock  
hyge school  
clinic



FAC1  
 in DEBRE BIRHAN

## Table of Contents

1. Locating the Site in Time and Space .....	1
Geography and Population .....	1
Climate.....	1
Production .....	2
Social Structure.....	2
History .....	2
2. Seasonal Activities and Events.....	3
3. The Farm Economy.....	3
Crops.....	3
Livestock.....	4
Land.....	4
Labour.....	5
Interlinkages .....	6
Technology.....	7
Innovations .....	8
Common Property resources .....	8
Environment.....	9
4. Off-farm Income Activities.....	9
Within the Community.....	9
Migration .....	10
5. Reproductive Activity.....	10
Household Management.....	10
Fuel and Lighting.....	10
Water .....	10
Sanitation.....	11
Fertility .....	11
Childbirth and Childcare.....	11
Socialization.....	11
Education.....	12
Training .....	13
Health .....	13
6. Consumption.....	15
Food and Other Day-to-Day Goods .....	15
Saving and Investment.....	15
Housing.....	15
Household Assets.....	16
Local Services .....	16
7. Local Institutions and Organizations.....	16
Households .....	16
Marriage.....	17
Divorce.....	17
Inheritance.....	17
Kinship .....	18
Life Cycle Changes and Rites of Passage.....	18
Markets .....	19
Credit and Social Security .....	19
Community Decision-making.....	22
Local Organizations.....	22

Redistributive Mechanisms.....	24
8. Beliefs and Values .....	24
Religion.....	24
Explanations of Misfortune and Illness.....	25
Political Beliefs and Attitudes .....	25
9. The Community .....	25
Community organization.....	25
Politics .....	25
Poverty and Wealth .....	25
Social Mobility.....	26
Status .....	27
10. Relationships with Other Communities and the Wider Society.....	28
Villages and Regions .....	28
Relationships with Wider Ethiopia.....	28
Effects of Government Policies.....	28
Government Activities in the Community.....	30
NGO and Community Activities in the Community.....	30
Future Provision to the Community.....	30
Appendix .....	31
Bibliography .....	32
Glossary & Acronyms .....	33

# 1. Locating the Site in Time and Place

## *Geography and Population*

Debre Berhan is located 120km north east of Addis Ababa. Being situated at the centre of highland plateau Shewa, the town serves as an important economic and political centre for the surrounding peasant communities. Before the restructuring of the administrative zones in 1992 Debre Berhan was the capital of Tagulat and Bulga *awraja* and now is the capital of North Shewa administrative zone. In addition to being the central political seat for the region as a whole, the proximity of the town to peasant communities in highland Shewa has made Debre Berhan into a kind of "double capital" for the inhabitants of the smaller administrative units that encircle it. For peasants in Basso and Worana and Debre Berhan Zuria *Woreda* (district), Debre Berhan also hosts the head offices of the *woreda* administrative council and many other state departments of the *woreda*.

Mesfin [1991:22-23] distinguished four different geographical areas in northern Shewa as a whole. First are the plateau *woreda*; second, the valley *woreda*, third, the escarpment *woreda* and fourth, the lowland *woreda*. In the first category are located Qimbibit, Angolela-Tera, Abbichu-Gnea and Sayadebir-Wayu *woreda* (all in the former Tägulät and Bulga *awraja*). Mesfin classified the remaining three *woreda* in Tegulet and Bulga [i.e. Baso-worana, Moret-Jiru and Moja-Wodera] as valley *woredas*. Those in the eastern edge of this area [namely, Kesem, Agere-Mariam, Asagirt and Ankober] are classified as escarpment *woreda*. No locality in the area falls within the category lowland *woreda*.

Peasant communities in the highland plateau of Shewa are generally characterized by rugged topography. However, one can observe significant variations in the landscape of local communities in the region. The landscape of communities on both sides of the main road (Addis Ababa - Dessie) are generally flat with an average elevation of about 2,714m. The temperature is cold, the localities are *dega* (highland), and the people are referred to as highlanders. Deeper in the countryside there is rugged terrain, with mountain peaks and deep valleys, intersected by a few gentle slopes with plenty of small streams. There are perennial rivers and chains of mountain peaks in the valleys; although the temperature is fairly cold and varies from village to village, communities within this zone are referred to as lowland or *kolla*. Inhabitants are referred to as lowlanders.

Highlanders live in large and compact villages usually located amidst wide tracts of agricultural land and grazing areas. The density of communities living within a given area seems to be high. The lowlanders, on the other hand live in numerous isolated villages located in dots on gentle slopes or at the foot of high rising mountain tops. The population in the *kolla* areas appears to be sparse. The settlements of lowlanders have two categories of uncultivable land, known as *arah*: the steep mountain tops and the deep valleys. They account for more than half the total land resources of the communities. Only a small portion of the *arah* land is used for grazing, since cattle are not well adapted to browsing on steep slopes and deep gorges.

Debre Berhan Zuria *Woreda* has 51 PAs under its administration. Four of these are covered in our study: Fagy-Bokafiya, Kormargefiya, Karafino, and Milky. A little of the evidence presented in this paper does not refer directly to the four sites in this study but comes from a recent study of Wayu PA, which is situated about 29km east of the Debre Birhan and is in a valley *woreda*.

## *Climate*

The region has two rainy seasons, namely *meher* which refers to the long rains, usually lasting from June to the beginning of September, and the *belg* season which refers to the short rains which usually fall between January and April. *Belg* production is very important in the altitude zones of northern Shewa where frost is a common occurrence during the *meher* season. However, the *belg* season is highly unreliable being characterized by variability, and delay or absence of rain. In some years, it falls only for few weeks and the *belg* crop cannot be harvested; in other years, the rains fall regularly for a reasonable period of time.

### *Production*

In the highland communities of northern Shewa mixed farming, i.e. crop production with animal husbandry, is the common practice. The main crops grown include barley, various types of wheat, horse beans, peas, lentils, *gerima*, *temenj* and linseed. The main livestock are cattle, sheep and goats, and draught animals such as donkeys, horses and mules. The area is self-supporting in crops and the soil is *lem* (fertile) and *lemtaf* (semi-fertile). This year's *meher* harvest (1994) was not enough to feed the farmers' families. Farmers have already started purchasing grain from the market by selling some of their livestock. Some of them have even started selling their oxen, which will move them towards poverty. The main reason for the decline of their harvest was that the crops were highly damaged by frost during the growing season. There were sufficient rains, particularly at the beginning of *kiremt* and at the time of the harvest as well. During the previous *belg* there was not enough rain and many farmers did not plant crops. But this *belg* (1995) the farmers have planted various kinds of crops like barley, wheat and cowpeas, and the fields have already become green.

### *Social structure*

The people around Debre Berhan belong mainly to the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. The Oromo are a minority that have been assimilated into the Amhara population, through intermarriages, etc. Residents help each other during emergencies and the poorest people are often supported by relatively rich people. Ex-soldiers who have returned from other parts of the country have been given land by the PA leaders. Like other members of the PA they are engaged in agriculture.

In the four PAs under study the main ethnic group is Amhara, but there are some Oromo people living in the area, particularly in Karafino where most are Oromo. About one quarter of the population in the whole site is Oromo. There have not been any ethnic difficulties or conflicts in recent years, because the people have lived together for more than a century, so they have intermingled and respect each other. They intermarry. Amharic is the main language spoken but there are a large number of people who speak Oromiffa.

The only religion in Fagy is Christian Orthodox. People with other religions are not welcomed, particularly Protestants. There are some Moslems and Protestants in Debre Berhan and, while there has never been religious tension in the site (since all are Orthodox), there have been serious clashes in the town between Orthodox Christians and the Moslems and Protestants. The conflict still exists. For instance, Moslems in Debre Berhan cannot pray with a loud speaker, as they do elsewhere, because the Orthodox Christians have stolen the loudspeaker twice. Protestants are also scared to exercise their religion freely in the town.

### *History*

In 1936 the Italians took a lot of livestock and killed some farmers who were against colonization. Many farmers left their homes and went to the bush to fight against Italian colonialism. They stayed in the bush and fought until the Italians were defeated. In 1943 farmers returned to the village and their normal life. In the 1950's a famine locally known as *dubale* (literally "came unexpectedly") affected the community.

In 1974 the *Derg* nationalized land. Because of the introduction of fertilizer, there was a slight yield increase for barley. Peasant associations were established in 1976. Following this, a service cooperative was established in 1978. There was also a mill bought and established by the service cooperative. People from six PAs used to obtain grinding services at a reasonable price.

Members of this service cooperative, named Fagy and Bokafiya, were peasants from the aforementioned six PAs. There were a few people who were not members. The service cooperative was imposed on the farmers by the government and the disadvantages of it were greater than the advantages, since there was a lot of corruption in the system. The cooperative

was abolished in 1991. Everything that was in the shop, the mill and the building itself were dismantled and stolen. What remains is 27,000<sup>1</sup> *birr* deposited in the Debre Berhan branch of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. There was a producers' cooperative in the area and almost all farmers were members of it. It was demolished when the mixed economy was announced (1989) and the members distributed the property among themselves.

In 1984 and 1991 there was famine around this area and people suffered considerable hardship. Many people migrated to big towns like Addis Ababa, Dessie, Jima, Debre Berhan etc. to look for work.

In 1988 the government started implementing its villagization programme and due to this many were forced to leave their old homes. Much time was spent on construction of houses and less time on farming. The new village was far from most peoples' farms and they could not look after the crops. As a result some animals and livestock destroyed their crops. Since 1992 farmers have been returning to their old villages. Now production has increased to some extent.

At the end of the *Derg* regime there was not any actual fighting in the area though there was a high concentration of soldiers. This was because around this area the people are highly resistant and the landscape very difficult to recapture once it is captured by opponents. A small number of bandits used to trouble the government troops. There was substantial conscription from the site: some have returned to start a new life as farmers while others have not returned and their whereabouts are not yet known.

## 2. Seasonal Activities and Events

The following calendars are included at the end of this profile: Health, Water, Crops, Labour (men, women, boys, girls), Migration, Off-farm activities (men, women), Credit (men/women), Livestock, Rain, Pests, Consumption, Fuel, Festivals.

Notable features are that the hungry season occurs between July and October; that women need credit during this time; men need credit in May and June (when they are planting) as well as August to October.

## 3. The Farm Economy

### *Crops*

The main crops grown include barley, various types of wheat, beans, peas, lentils and linseed. The most important are barley and beans. Most production is for consumption; very little is sold. However, farmers do not want to release information concerning their income from the sale of crops. Thus an enumerator on the household survey wrote: "For example, if you see the main questionnaire part 2, section 2, questions 5-7 you may find only 3% of them answer yes. (Questions concerning crops sales) .... Nevertheless, if you see their expenditure they disclose every information without concealing anything." Farmers traditionally classify their land-holdings into plots for *meher* and for *belg*, mainly depending on the soil texture. Plots with sticky soil texture, usually located in pockets of flat lands are used for growing *belg* crops. These plots usually turn into swampy and marshy lands during the *meher* season. However, because of their water retention capacity, they provide good produce in the *belg* season. Other plots are cultivated during the *meher* season.

Peasants said *belg* production is usually risky because of variability, delay or absence of rain. Rain is highly unreliable. In some years, it falls only for a few weeks and the *belg* crop cannot be harvested; in other years, the rains start in a hot and dry month and continue to fall regularly for a reasonable period of time. Good yields can be harvested in such years. However, many peasants decide to miss the ploughing time because of worries about the continuity and

---

<sup>1</sup> According to some members of the then executive committee of the service cooperative the service cooperative has about 36,000 birr deposited in the bank.

adequacy of the rains.

Farming households employ risk-aversion mechanisms in the following ways. If the *belg* fails to come in February and March, then planting will be postponed to the next *meher*. A delay in the onset of *belg* rain beyond February means that the peasants cannot cultivate *belg* crops. A further delay of *belg* rain beyond March and April means that the land prepared for *belg* crops will be used for planting *meher* crops in July. Similarly land prepared for *meher* planting will be used for the next *belg* if there is a failure of the *meher* rains. In general, most informants tend to idealise the past in the sense that they appreciate the good harvest and living conditions of the past. This is for two main reasons. First, for various reasons the agricultural yield has been decreasing over time. Second, the size of livestock has also been decreasing vis á vis the fast-growing human population.

The farming system in the area is labour intensive. The number of hours spent on agricultural activities during the *meher* season seems to be higher than during the *belg*.

### *Livestock*

The main livestock in the area include oxen, cows, sheep, goats, donkeys, mules and horses. Mules are the most expensive. Livestock is a very important component of the economy of the farming households around Debre Berhan. Oxen are needed for ploughing and cows for milk and milk products and for replenishing the oxen of the household. Dung is used for fuel. A household largely depends on small stock for generating cash to be spent on clothing, paying of taxes, and covering other basic expenses. Donkeys and horses are mainly used for transporting grain and other local products such as firewood and pottery from cheaper places to more expensive places. People have a side income from the sale of livestock and animal products including milk, butter and dungcakes.

In the past people used to keep their livestock in a cattle kraal locally known as *beret*. In those days people used to construct small houses only for small stock and draught animals. However, today all people keep their livestock in a section of their houses or in separate houses which are built for animals only.

The size of herd varies considerably between the highland and lowland communities. The highlanders have higher herd sizes because of better grazing areas. In the lowlands many head of cattle are killed by rolling stones coming down from hill tops or they fall down cliffs while grazing. Sheep seem to constitute the largest component of the herd in the area.

Animal disease used to be a major killer of livestock in this region. The most common was rinderpest (*desta beshita*). Vaccination started in 1974 by the Ministry of Agriculture and the disease is under control. Since then, the mortality rate for livestock has decreased. The average livestock herd used to be three times what farmers own at present. This change was brought about by a decrease in farm size. Since the revolution each farmer owns only two hectares which makes it difficult to possess a large herd.

Generally speaking, informants maintain that the overall size of individual livestock holdings has been decreasing over the past decade. This is mainly because of a livestock disease locally known as *wodoma* and the decrease in the size of grazing areas. The people say that there is a medicine for this disease available at the veterinary clinic. However, people complain about the increase in the price of the medicine. During the 1985 famine a lot of people had to sell a significant proportion of their livestock holding.

Informants believe that raising livestock would be the most lucrative trade in this area if there were sufficient grazing land. The price of livestock has been increasing. For instance, an informant draws the following comparison. One could buy an ox (for traction) for 50 - 60 *birr*, 400 *birr* - 500 *birr* and 1,000 - 1,300 *birr* during the Haile Selassie, *Derg* and the present regimes respectively. He added the price of hides has also increased at an alarming rate. The price of a sheep skin was 5 *birr* and that of cow hide was 10 *birr* some 5 years or so ago. However, now a sheep skin costs 25 *birr* and a cow hide 60 *birr* at Debre Berhan market.

### *Land*

Before the revolution land was occupied by a few landlords: each had a minimum of 1 or 2 *gasha* (40-80 hectares) of land. Almost all the indigenous farmers were tenants and landless.

There were a few farmers who had land and used to pay a land fee to the landowners in cash and kind. When the land reform was implemented, land was nationalized and distributed by the PA on the basis of 10 ha of land per farmer. As the population density increased, the size of the holdings grew smaller and smaller from 10 ha to 2 ha at present.

Now the government takes land from those who are very old and cannot use it and cannot pay tax and gives it to the newly married and those who do not have land. But it is becoming impossible to give land to all farmers who are establishing new families. They are forced to share their parents' land of 2 ha or participate in sharecropping (*megazo*). It is a critical problem for the people living in the area - how to get land. There are a large number of people who do not have land who survive by making sharecropping arrangements with women whose husbands have died and old men who have no-one to help them work on their field. The landless include young newly married couples, returned soldiers and those who cannot afford to pay the land tax.

Women have equal rights to inherit or own land, and there are a large number of women household heads who have their own plots of land.. They give these for sharecropping, or their children or other relatives plough for them.

Before the revolution, children inherited land from their parents. If their parents did not own land, they used to contract land through the sharecropping system on the basis of a 3:1 tenant: owner ratio. Others used to gain access to land by rent from those who had more. After the land reform, land became the property of the state. There is no renting. Even old people who can not cultivate their piece are not allowed to rent it out. The elders enter into sharecropping arrangements or give the land to some strong farmers to cultivate it for them. However, while land rental is not practised legally, it is practised under the cover of sharecropping. Sometimes the cultivator uses the land and gives a certain amount of grain per year to the landowner, whether he produces or not.

At present there seems to be no friction between people on land issues. However, if there is any dispute over land, people will usually go to the PA leaders who have redistributed land in the past. Of course elders can also assist in settling conflicts between two parties.

### *Labour*

Male labour plays a crucial role in the traditional farming process of peasants. Male labour is employed in farming, weeding, fencing, harvesting, threshing, and other agricultural activities. The tough task of ploughing, and digging steep slopes with the hoe are culturally defined as male tasks in the region.

Female labour is largely restricted to indoor activities such as food preparation, storage, looking after children, entertaining guests and the like. Women are responsible for fetching water from the nearest possible spring, river or other source. With some help from children and a few generous husbands women have to climb up the hill tops or descend steep cliffs and gorges in search of fuelwood. In addition, women take part in agricultural activities such as weeding, fencing, *gay* (the common practice of burning the soil to enhance its fertility) and sometimes harvesting and transporting the harvest to the threshing ground (*wudma*). Ploughing and preparing the land is solely men's work. Fetching water and collecting dungcakes are exclusively women's work. Selling grain and dungcakes in the market, livestock herding, and taking grain to the mill are done by both sexes.

Food preparation around Debre Berhan is extremely laborious. It involves hand processing grain (barley or wheat) to make it into flour using a wooden mortar, pestle and grinders cut from stone. A woman is busy for the largest part of the day preparing the food required for a medium size household.

The two main labour exchange arrangements are *wonfel* and *debo*. In both cases the person who calls for labour prepares food and *tella* (local beer). These are traditional arrangements. These parties are on the decrease since many people cannot afford to prepare food and drink for a big group. Others prefer to hire labourers on a daily basis. Farmers hire labourers for weeding, harvesting, and collecting. The harvesting season (October-December) is said to be the peak agricultural labour time.

In this area it was common to hire labour for farm activities until recently but over the last 3 years there has been a shortage. People used to come from Menz to be employed as day

labourers during the weeding, harvesting and ploughing times. There were also people coming to work as herders. The price of labour has increased a little since then as a result of the shortage. Since Northern Shewa has not been politically stable for the last 4 years, the number of people migrating to Debre Berhan has decreased by a large number. Many local farmers now work as wage labourers on farms. Nearly 50% of the farmers are engaged in wage labour for some agricultural activities. The rate has gone up to from 2 *birr* per day. In addition to the payment the labourer is also provided with lunch and is expected to work from 7am to 5pm. However, people in the area most of the time do not want to work as day labourers. They consider that they are lowering their pride to work for someone in the village. In the past many of them would not do this, even in the worst times.

The wages paid to day labourers are:

weeding	4-5 <i>birr</i> a day
harvesting	5-6 <i>birr</i> a day plus lunch (1 <i>injera</i> with wot)
ploughing	5-6 <i>birr</i> a day
ploughing	140-150 <i>birr</i> for 1 <i>timad</i> including <i>gulima</i> (prepares land efficiently for planting)
herding	100 <i>birr</i> a year plus lodging and shelter
building work	40-50 <i>birr</i> per house (could take more than a day - paid when finished)

People do not hire domestic servants. Females are only hired as herders.

There is not really a scarcity of labour in the PA; people used to hire the people from Menz because they wanted to complete the work quickly. Farmers in the area have a lot of plots of land - the average is from 8 - 10 plots - and they need more labour to prepare for the next season.

Criteria for selecting employees may be only that the person can work. Sometimes they will not employ people from another religion (eg Moslem or Protestant). When they hire a shepherd he must either be a relative or have someone who provides a warranty. They do not mind what ethnic group an employee comes from.

Farming households in the area accomplish different types of agricultural activities by organizing labour parties. One can identify three types of work parties which are clearly differentiated in terms of organizational complexity, cost entailed, and the nature of labour reciprocity:

1. *Debo*: This is a big work party involving many individuals and much cost. *Debo* has specific rules and regulations. A person calls friends and relatives for a *debo* if he is unable to accomplish the seasonal agricultural tasks of his household for reasons known to the community. The request is made some weeks in advance. The household prepares food and drink for the work team. The type and amount of the feast varies, according to the season and the nature of the work for which the work party is mobilized.

2. *Wonfel*: This is a labour organization which involves a few individuals often living in the same village. It is immediately returnable in the sense that the work team labours on the plots of all the members in rotation. Some *wonfel* parties have a rule which require the host household to provide the party with lunch, if the party is to labour on the fields the whole day. In most cases, however, the *wonfel* team usually retires for lunch in the middle of the day. Unless the host household has reasons to invite them, all members of the team will go to their respective houses for lunch. The party will then start working after a few hours. Taking a rest at mid-day is a customary practice especially when the seasonal task is preparing the land with hoes, which is one of the toughest jobs for farmers in localities characterized by rugged terrain.

There are days when farmers do not work. On the 1st, 5th, 12th, 19th, 21st, 23rd and 27th days of the month farmers spend their time in church. Usually they spend half the day in church and the other half in accordance with their interest. If they find people working on these religious holidays some selected elders will advise him first not to do so. If the person takes no notice he will be cast out of the community, so no-one breaks the rules.

### *Inter-linkages*

The main forms of local-level economic arrangements through which peasants in the study area

obtain access to land, labour, oxen and other key factors of production include the following:

1. *Crop-sharing agreements*: The following are the major crop-sharing agreements in the area:
  - a. *Yekul*:- a crop-sharing agreement by which both the land owner and the tenant divide the produce from a given plot equally at the time of threshing. Aspen (in Ege, 1990:157) suggests that this arrangement applies to land which has been ploughed previously and is well prepared.
  - b. *Siso*:- this is a crop-sharing agreement that entitles the land owner to one third of the produce from a given plot. This land is not well prepared (*ibid*).
  - c. *Erbo*:- this is a crop-sharing agreement according to which the land owner obtains only one fourth of the produce from a given plot. This is land which has not been ploughed before (*ibid*).

The person who is cultivating the land is supposed to cover the costs of all inputs like fertilizer, seeds and oxen. The share of the harvest depends on the agreement; usually it is based on *siso*.

- d. *Asrat*:- this is the kind of arrangement where the cultivator pays or gives an additional 10% from his share to the landowner. The owner charges this so as to cover his land tax expense. This system was demolished with the downfall of feudalism but is now reviving again.

2. *Exchange agreements*: The main forms of agreements through which peasants households exchange important factors of production include:

- a. *Moyategna*:- *Moya* literally refers to one's skill, or ability that can be employed in production. *Moyategna* is a system through which a peasant extends his labour (skill) to a household in return for a fixed amount of money and lodging services for the days engaged in work.
  - b. *Egni*:- This is an arrangement through which a peasant exchanges a certain amount of man-hours of his *egni* (labour power) in order to obtain access to use the oxen of a household for a specified length of time. The exchange rate is normally two days *egni* for one day's use of a pair of oxen.
  - c. *Ribbi*: This is an agreement through which a livestock-rich household gives his livestock (usually cows, mares, sheep and goats) to a household who happened to be livestock-poor, but rich in labour and grazing land, in return for equal share of the offspring.

### *Technology*

Farmers use oxen, hoes ploughs (*maresha*), sickles, *layda* (*maberaya* - for threshing), and *menshol* (*geleba maweha*). These tools have not changed since before the 1920's. Peasants around Debre Berhan use animal sources of power. Animals such as donkeys, mules and horses are used to transport almost everything, including harvest, firewood, and straw, both from field to home and to the market.

Cross-bred cattle were introduced in the area in 1978 by ILCA (International Livestock Centre for Africa). In Fagy and surrounding areas it is not uncommon to see cross-bred cattle. People are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of having cross-bred cattle both for milk production and traction purposes. A cross-bred cow produces more milk than a local one and a cross-bred ox is stronger for traction. However, according to the practical experience of peasants who have these cattle, some of the disadvantages of cross-bred cattle compared to local ones are that they require more fodder and are more vulnerable to diseases.

The only modern input farmers use is fertilizer. There are 2 types - DAP and UREA; they prefer DAP and use UREA only for grass and *gerima*. They can get fertilizer at the right time but many of them cannot afford it now.

As described above, the food processing done by women in the peasant communities around Debre Birhan, where barley is the main staple food, is extremely laborious and time-consuming. This is well explained in the following couplet which is believed to have been written by a woman from the *tef* and sorghum who married into the barley-growing zone:

*Eerat belto ergicha,  
Dorro sichoh qine,  
Sinega chibche,  
Moq sil ezaba,  
Achilign wodyalign, yagerkin lij agba.*

Rubbing<sup>2</sup> [the land] after dinner,  
[Creating] poems<sup>3</sup> when the cock shouts [at early morning]  
Clapping<sup>4</sup> in mornings  
Cleaning the kraal when the sun gets hot,  
I can no longer tolerate [all these routine tasks], you better marry a girl that grew up in this country.

### *Innovations*

Barley, horse beans, wheat, *temenj*, linseed, cow peas, lentils, and onions have been cultivated since 1936. The International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA) introduced *gerima* (oats) and potatoes in 1986 and showed the farmers how to cultivate the new crops. The production of potatoes was stopped soon after, because of attacks from porcupines which dig them up and eat them.

The following innovations are said to be the most useful: *gerima* or *sinar* (oats); potatoes, cross-bred cattle; and vaccination. Because of the low level of productivity of the existing system of agricultural production most people, if they get the chance, seem to be willing to experiment with new things.

1. *Gerima (sinar)*: *Gerima* (oats) is a type of crop which can be eaten by both humans and livestock. For human consumption it is mixed with barley and cooked. Some people give it to their cattle as concentrate. It was introduced by ILCA in 1985 as animal feed. ILCA proposed it and a few model farmers tried it first. At the beginning it was not welcomed since it was not eaten by people. It has become popular as food after some people tried it. Still not many people grow it. Many people did not adopt it since they consider it as a weed. In the long run, it might be a good source of food for cattle.
2. Potato: Potato planting and management was introduced by ILCA. Model farmers tried it. However, it was not adopted by many farmers of the problems with porcupines.
3. Cross-breed cattle: These were introduced in the region in 1975. ILCA introduced them to model farmers. This project was successful and has been copied by all the farmers who could afford to feed the breed. Only poor people who cannot afford to buy and feed the cows do not keep them. This innovation has had long-run positive effects.
4. Vaccination: Vaccination was started in 1974 by the Ministry of Agriculture and major livestock diseases are now under control. Many farmers have accepted it. The mortality rate for livestock has decreased.

### *Common property resources*

There are springs and some eucalyptus trees for the use of the community. Everyone has a right

---

<sup>2</sup> "Rubbing the ground" refers to the movements of the feet of the woman which tends to scratch the earth while she is pounding the barley with a mortar, i.e. putting a certain amount of barley in a deeply carved wood container and pounding it with the tip of a piece of strong medium sized wood. The women has to be in a position of "jumping and landing" till the barley gets pestled.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the poems that the women create and the songs she usually sing while grinding the grain starting from mid-nights.

<sup>4</sup> "Clapping" refers to the noise that the women produces while trying to differentiate the barley floor from its cover using wonfit (the traditional filtrating device).

to use the springs any time. However, no-one can cut the trees without a community decision. The community had a "livestock rearing centre" which was run by the service cooperative. Since the disbanding of the cooperative in 1991 livestock have been owned privately.

One informant reported that there is no communal land in the area which could be used for grazing or other purposes; the usual practice, for a long period of time, has been that every farming household has its own grazing land. A second informant said that people in the area have their own private grazing land and communal grazing as well, which is accessible to everyone in the community.

### *Environment*

Soil fertility in the area has been declining over time. The greatest decline occurred in the last twenty years. The two main reasons given are deforestation, which left most of the soil uncovered, and a kind of pest commonly known as *faki*. Crops planted in areas infested with this pest will not produce.

Traditionally the fertility of the soil was maintained by using manure, crop rotation and ash. The use of dung for fertilizing the soil seems an old practice in this area. People dig pits and bury dung to prepare manure. When it is ready they spread the manure on the fields. Nowadays, only the dung of sheep, goats and draft animals (mules, horses and donkeys) is used for preparing manure. Cow dung is entirely devoted to making dung cakes which are widely used in the PAs as a fuel and are sold for cash to buy salt, coffee and so on. Since 1974, farmers started using commercial fertilizers, DAP and Urea. Some strong farmers use the *gay* system in addition to fertilizers. The *gay* system involves accumulating soil on a plot of land and scattering it after burning. When the plot is on a slope, farmers employ a terracing system in order to protect the soil from erosion.

Almost every peasant tries to control water on his plot by building ridges made of stones and earth. Since land has grown scarcer and scarcer, peasants are concerned about the need to control erosion.

There have been almost no trees in this area as far back as they can remember. However, recently people have been forced to plant trees by the PAs and the Ministry of Agriculture. At present not more than about 2% of the area is covered with forests and trees. The people say they have problems with growing trees in the area. Seedlings are usually affected by frost before they have become established. Moreover, the land is not suitable for growing trees since it is generally swampy. They plant trees on the hills and in dry areas. They also cover the young seedlings with leaves during frosts.

## 4. Off-Farm Activities

### *Within the Community*

Other economic activities that earn peasants some income in the communities include sewing clothes, selling local brews (*areki* and *tella*), weaving, tanning, pottery, trading in agricultural products, ecclesiastic services in churches, selling woodwork (mainly timber stools, chairs and other artifacts) and trees, in the form of charcoal, firewood, construction poles, doors, etc.

Traditionally, men were mainly involved in trading, weaving, and serving in the church. In addition to trading, men at present earn additional income from daily labour, selling livestock and selling dungcakes. Women are involved in spinning, brewing and selling *tella* and *areki* and dungcakes. Most people sell dungcakes rather than other things. Men and women spend the income from selling dungcakes on things they need.

Trade in agricultural products is one of the most lucrative businesses in the area. A few peasants transport grain such as barley, and wheat, and beans from the food-surplus highlands to be sold in small weekly markets in food deficit areas. Other peasant traders bring sorghum, maize, *tef* and *gesho* from the remote lowlands surrounding the area to communities in highland plateau Shewa. Many farmers also take sheep and goats from the area to Debre Berhan and Ankober towns for sale at higher prices.

Many women earn a good income by selling local brews. As the chief crop is barley the region's *tella* and *areki* are famous throughout Ethiopia. In addition to a good local market, some women transport *areki* to Addis Ababa, Debre Berhan, Sheno, Debre Sina, Ataye, and Dessie.

The number of peasants engaged in weaving, smithing, and tannery is not significant. Fagy peasants usually buy these products from Debre Berhan and other smaller markets in different localities. However, communities around Debre Berhan, especially in the lowlands, are very famous for their pottery. It is interesting to note that, unlike the situation in classical communities, making pottery is no longer a despised job in Wayu. People freely engage in it and the product is exported to various localities through merchants.

### *Migration*

Some people from the area were resettled in Jima and Wollega during the *Derg* regime. Some of them are returning to the area since there have been ethnic conflicts with the Oromo people since 1991. According to these people they had good relationships with the local people when they first settled. The clash started as soon as the EPRDF took power.

Peasants usually stay in the village throughout the year. Migration of people to other areas is not common in this area. This is partly because people are busy carrying out various agricultural operations one followed by the other throughout the year. Group discussions with peasants reveals that the only rest time farmers have in this area is during the festivity of Ethiopian Easter. Whenever a man has time free of agricultural tasks he will engage in off-farm activities, rather than migrating to other areas as an option. However, a few people migrate to Addis Ababa or other towns for work as day labourers. They usually go in April and May and sometimes until mid-June.

## 5. Reproductive Activity

### *House management*

According to the ideal social division of labour, house management is allocated to women. The wife usually cleans the floor, washes the clothes of the household members and cooks the daily food. This does not, of course, mean that she does not receive any assistance from her children [particularly her daughter(s)]. Fetching water from the river is the task of the wife and her daughter(s), except at times of childbirth and the mother's period of confinement (for 30 to 40 days depending on the socioeconomic status of the farming household in question). In such a situation, unless there is a capable daughter in a household, the husband may participate in fetching water and pounding grain.

### *Fuel and lighting*

The main fuel used is dungcakes. A significantly small number of richer farmers (about 2%) use kerosene for lighting. Collecting and storing wood and dung and making dungcakes are women's tasks.

### *Water*

Generally water is not a problem. Most of the farmers have spring water near their houses. Sometimes farmers dig water holes for themselves. The water flow decreases from January to May but there is no shortage. The maximum distance travelled to fetch water by the women is less than 15 minutes per trip. There are more than 10 springs in the PA available for everybody's use without pay. There is a pond for animals in Karafino which was prepared by

ILCA. There is piped water in Fagy and Bokafia.

### *Sanitation*

As in most other rural parts of Ethiopia people in Fagy do not have latrines. People normally defecate in the open space. The only latrines one finds in the village are those constructed inside the school compound and used by the school community.

### *Fertility*

Although communities around Debre Berhan are geographically close to urban centres, there seem to be no noticeable changes in the fertility and childrearing practices and beliefs of farming households. The PA is visited by equipped immunization staff at least once a month for the immunization programme. However, only a few mothers, and sometimes none, wait for the health personnel at the fixed places.

There is an awareness of rapid population growth in the area. However, the peasants have little appreciation of birth control and other types of family planning. Both men and women have access to family planning. Yet neither sex makes use of the facilities and people do not seem likely to use them in the near future. The ultimate reason why people do not use birth control techniques has to do with beliefs about the procreation. Fertility and childbirth, and sterility, are attributed to the will of God. Thus, pregnancy is considered as the gift of God against which one should not attempt to do anything.

Generally speaking fertile women are more highly valued than barren ones. However, an infertile woman may not necessarily be divorced for her infertility.

### *Childbirth and childcare*

Pregnant women continue their usual work until they give birth, although towards the end they perform tasks which are considered very light. The actual length or number of days for which a woman is housebound after delivery varies from household to household, depending on its socioeconomic status. However, generally speaking, a woman will be confined at home for a period of one month before she resumes house and other work. At this time a woman's mother, sister or sister-in-law will come and replace her in discharging her day-to-day responsibilities. The husband, again depending on the economic status of the household, is expected to slaughter small stock for his wife after her delivery so that she will be well fed (*metares*). In general, irrespective of the socioeconomic status of the household, a woman after delivery is not expected to resume any agricultural activities. This is ensured by the cultural practice called *chiristina masnesat* (christening a baby).

### *Socialization*

According to a group of men, the qualities which are desirable in a man include strength and working harder than anybody else, honesty, having enough stock from year to year, being good with his hands, training children, and being brave and good at negotiating. A group of women said the qualities desirable in a man were to be a diligent farmer, to have good behaviour and social relations, not to want other peoples' property, to respect others and have a sense of humour and kindness. Some of the qualities (such as being a strong farmer and teaching the children) are acquired from the community and parents. The person is born with other qualities.

According to the male group, reading, writing and being able to calculate are very important and those who can read and write obtain respect from the community. The women's group also think literacy and numeracy are important for solving problems they encounter in their daily activity. The most respected social skill is to be a good elder; which means being a person who is capable of settling disputes between and among households. Children are taught good qualities and skills on a continuous basis. For example, boys are taken to the field, shown what to do by the father and then made to do it. Parents also talk to children and teach them to be honest and truthful, and not to steal or covet other peoples' property. Girls are taught by

their mothers how things are done and made them practise their skills. Youngsters are generally expected to respect their elders. Grown ups are also expected to provide much attention to their younger siblings. Physical punishment might be used when children behave in ways which do not conform to important social norms such as repeated failure to accept the orders of parents or insulting elders. Laziness, talkativeness, and stealing are regarded as undesirable in men. Undesirable characteristics in women, boys and girls include theft, talkativeness, infidelity, and not showing respect to parents and elders.

The following characteristics make a woman a successful farmer's wife: encouraging and initiating her husband to work, assisting her husband in farming activities, being sociable with neighbours and the people in the community, and taking care of her children properly. A successful farmer has other skills such as carpentry, weaving, roof-making, in addition to farming. The skills the woman has besides performing her usual activities include spinning, yarn-making, and special basket making (*sigaja*, etc). Children learn mathematics, English, Amharic, Science and Social Science in primary school. In church schools, children are offered religious education which includes reading the bible, *wongel* and *Dawit* in Geez (a medium of instruction in secondary level church schools and monastic centres of learning).

Having a religious education is considered useful in becoming a better farmer and gaining respect in the community since the person will spend his leisure time serving the church. Schooling is helpful for being a better farmer's wife as she will be proud of her husband and economically self-sufficient compared to other households. A group of men and women said the number of years you have been at school does not matter and education does not make it easy to earn off-farm income. The total number of boys going to both primary and secondary school is not more than 10% of the community. The group of women did not know how many girls are at school.

### *Education*

Fagy and Bokafiya elementary school was established in 1988 with only two classrooms built by the community. Now the school has been expanded to six classes. The additional four classrooms were built by ILCA. The local community provided wood and labour. Pupils are from different areas (such as Koremargefia PA 45 minutes walk, Aloberet *kebele* 45 minutes, and Chofana *kebele* 85 minutes). The school is located 10 km from Debre Berhan (2 hours walking distance).

The number of students varies at the beginning and the end of the academic year. It starts high and gets smaller at the end of the year. For instance, the number of students at the beginning of 1994 was 113, it declined to 96 by the end of 1994, and now it is only 88. Some of the reasons given are that some get married, others will be needed on the farm, and some stop because the school is far. Twenty students transferred to secondary school last year.

The school opened following the villagization programme. It was in the middle of the village and on average it was not more than 10 minutes walk for the children. For this reason many farmers sent their children to school; they could go home during the lunch break. Now the farmers have returned to their old villages, that for some of them are more than 5kms away from the school, so the children cannot go home at lunchtime and it is a long way to walk. If it were not for this there would be more than 200 children at the school, as there were before the people returned to their old village. The school has 17 teachers although it should only have 6. The school provides free education for those who cannot afford it, although they must have a letter from their PA. The school provides mathematical instruments for use in the class room. They get these from donors like SIDA. The school also provides books for the students which they get free from the government. Students from grades 1- 4 pay 1 *birr* annually; 30% goes to the school and 70% to government. The 3 main problems are that there are not enough staff rooms, the classrooms do not have proper windows or enough desks, and it is too far from the village so the children cannot have lunch.

The number of girls attending school is higher than that of boys. In 1994, out of the total number of 113 students, 73 were female and 40 male. The Amharas in the region do not send girls to school and believe that girls should stay at home and help their mothers. However, the Oromo group send their girls to school accounting for the higher turnout. There is no clear special reason that accounts for this difference between these two groups. However, it is

tempting to say that in the past, among some subgroups of the Amhara, the wide practice of early marriage might have contributed to the issue.

The school curriculum is prepared by the Ministry of Education. However, the school also includes supplementary practical subjects taking into account the needs of the community. The additional programme is "labour education". Under this programme students learn the basic concepts of farm activity such as how to plough, weed, harvest, and so on for two hours a week.

Parents have to pay a total of 4 *birr* per year for the following: 2.50 *birr* school fee; 1 *birr* for book rent; 0.50 *birr* for sport. Book rent is not paid for grades 1 - 3. They get books for free.

The decision on which child should go to school and which should stay and work on the farm or tend livestock, depends largely on the number of children the couple has. In households with three or more children the probability of sending at least one child to school is higher than among families with less than three children.

At present there are six school leavers in the PA. Of these, only three are living with their parents in the PA. The rest live with relatives, who are either in Debre Berhan or in other nearby towns. The case described in the box reveals what unemployed school leavers do in the PA.

**Case No.1**

Sex: Male

Age: 25

Demeke completed high school in 1986 EC. He sat for the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination and obtained a grade point average of 2.00. This result was below the minimum requirement for joining tertiary level institutions in that academic year in the country. Accordingly he was not able to pursue further studies or be trained in any field in any of the higher institutions.

Demeke assists his parents in carrying out different agricultural operations. His parents have 2 *timad* (pair of oxen). He tills his parents land with 1 *timad*. In addition, last year he entered into a sharecropping arrangement called *megazo*. According to this arrangement he tilled 5 *timad* (4 *timad* is roughly equal to 1 hectare of land) of a poor man's land. He produced and obtained 7 quintals of grain after deducting one fourth of the produce given to the landowner.

Demeke has the following animals: an ox, 2 horses, 2 donkeys, 5 sheep and 2 goats. On certain saint days, when there is no work, he transports firewood with his donkeys and sells it at Debre Berhan market. In the eyes of Demeke the living standard of the people in these areas has been gradually deteriorating.

Even though the chance of becoming a government or NGO employee is rare he still aspires to be so. If this does not materialise, his plan is to continue making a living in agriculture. When he gets married he would like to have not more than four children. The problem he envisages that he will most likely face in the future is scarcity of land. His parents will give him a plot of land though it might not be sufficient. The only way of getting more land is entering into sharecropping, as he is now doing.

### *Training*

There used to be different institutions established by the *Derg* regime entirely for the training of farmers. A number of male farmers have been taken to such institutions and trained in different agricultural fields. For example, some farmers have been trained in veterinary practices, soil and water conservation systems, irrigation practices, improved ways of livestock raising and so on. At present some are making use of the knowledge and skill they acquired during their training, while others are not for various reasons.

### *Health*

One respondent said that except for a few elderly people who treat some illnesses like skin wounds, with the use of herbs, the practice of traditional medicine seems very limited. This is partly because of the absence of forests so that herbalists cannot easily find the trees they need

for different treatments. Thus, they are unable to make use of the knowledge they have accumulated over generations. However, another respondent said that the farmers rarely visit doctors; they prefer to go to witch doctors. They consider hospitals to be places where many people die.

There is a health clinic which used to provide first aid for farmers and students but now there is no nurse and no doctor and it is closed most of the time. People from the Red Cross come once a month and give vaccinations to children and adults. The clinic does not have any drugs in store at present. They only have alcohol, plaster, bandages and gentian violet. All treatments, including vaccination, are given free of charge. There is one woman known as a traditional midwife who helps women during childbirth and other traditional healers in the villages. The nearest operational clinic is in Debre Berhan town which is 10km from the centre of the site. There is also a hospital in Debre Berhan.

The following list of drugs and prices was gained from the nearest clinic:

<i>drug</i>	<i>adult dosage</i>	<i>price</i>
tetrocycline	56 tablets	0.09 birr per tablet
ampicillin	56 tablets	12.30 birr
procain-penicillin	4 vials	10 birr
chloroquine	10 tablets	.50 cents
premaquine	supplied free - gets it from UNICEF	

There is a supply of sterilised needles and syringes but the hospital only keeps them for intravenous use since there is a shortage. The hospital is ready to provide measles and polio vaccinations but there is little demand. The most frequent illnesses seen in the hospital are the following:

<i>Disease</i>	<i>Total no of patients</i>
TB	2117
Broncho-pneumonia	2013
Acute upper respiratory infections	1658
All other infective and parasitic diseases	1549
Gastrics and duodenitis	1132
Hypertrophy of tonsils and adenoids	1105
All other accidental causes	1090
Infections of kidney (except TB)	1016
Bronchitis - chronic and unqualified	1011
Fever of unknown origin	968

The total number of AIDS patients recorded at the hospital in 1986EC was 60 male and 40 female. 8 males died and 4 females. The age distribution was:

Under 1 year	2
1-4	1
5-14	0
15-44	83
45-64	14
65 and over	-

Both the group of men and women interviewed separately ranked diseases as follows: flu; *kerato* conjunctivitis; stomach ache; *mitch*; and meningitis. These diseases occur at any time of the year. However, a group of women ranked children's diseases as problems as follows: *kerato* conjunctivitis; flu; *mitch*; stomachache (*dinetegna* = sudden stomach illness); and meningitis.

Each group described the causes and treatment of diseases:

1. Flu: The men's group said flu is caused by playing, passing or working around dirty areas with a bad smell. This is treated in a traditional way by drinking hot porridge locally known as *atmit*.
2. Kerato conjunctivitis: The men's group think it is caused by *mitch*. This is treated using a

traditional herb. The infected eye is rubbed with leaves from a specific kind of herb. If it does not get better they buy medicine (penicillin eye drops from the nearby pharmacy).

3. Stomachache: They do not know what causes stomachache. A person suffering from it is made to drink a juice made from a root of a herb called *tult* and the leaf of a plant called *feto*.
4. *Mitch*: This is caused from exposure to sun rays after cooking food and eating hot and spicy food. Some of the symptoms of this sickness are: high body fever and pain. This is treated only traditionally. The body of the person suffering from *mitch* will be rubbed with leaves of a medicinal herb called *hule geb* (literal meaning "fit everywhere"); and drink the juice extracted.
5. Meningitis: They do not know the causes of meningitis. Symptoms include high fever; feeling cold and part of the body swelling. Meningitis is treated traditionally by cutting the swollen part of the body with a razor blade. They believe modern medicine does not cure meningitis. They said people who had meningitis died after they were taken to the hospital.

## 6. Consumption

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

The main staple in this area is barley. The people sometimes mix barley with wheat, sorghum, and horsebeans in good years. Women usually bake *injera* and cook pea sauce for lunch and supper. In the afternoon people eat roasted cereals, often called *mekses*. Sometimes, however, during holidays and some religious festivals they eat meat, chickens and eggs.

A married couple often eat their meal from the same plate if both of them are at home. Children of both sexes and more or less similar ages eat together. As to the type of food almost all of them share the same type of food. Yet it must be noted that small children and those who tend livestock eat before other members of the family. In consuming milk and milk products priority is given to children.

### *Saving and Investment*

The most common form of saving that farmers use in this area is investing in livestock particularly small stock. Savings in the form of cash, jewellery or in other forms is rarely practised. At times of good harvest farmers try to sell part of their produce and invest in livestock and fertiliser. Moreover, under such circumstances they also prepare marriage feasts and the amount of food, *tella* and the like consumed in *mehber* and *senbete* increases, for example a sheep might be slaughtered. Normally in *mehber* and *senbete* people serve *injera* with pea sauce, *tella*, bread and roasted barley mixed with peas.

### *Housing*

Almost all (approximately 90%) houses in this area have stone walls with either a corrugated sheet of iron or a grass roof. Ideally a household should have at least three houses: a living house for members of the household, a kitchen and one for livestock. Actually except for a very few old men and women, most members of the community have at least two houses. All of these houses are found within the compound. Roughly a quarter of the houses in the community have tin roofs.

At present to build a new tin roof house costs about 2,850 *birr*. A stone wall house with a tin roof lasts between 25 and 30 years. The largest house in the community has five rooms. Owners of such houses are said to be well-to-do households.

## *Household assets*

In a wealthy household one can find the following household assets: an iron bed, a hand gun, a radio, kitchen utensils. While in a poor household one finds a wooden bed and kitchen utensils.

## *Local services*

There are no shops in the PA. The nearest shops, including drug shops, are found in Debre Berhan. An ordinary shop normally stocks salt, sugar, soap, coffee, needles, cigarettes, sweets, hair oil, hats, spices, etc. Farmers maintain that one can easily find medicine for one animal in any drug vendor shop. The problem is that they cannot afford the price of the drugs.

There is no *kaleecha* in Fagy PA. However, peasants say there are a lot of *kaleecha* in an adjacent PA (Aloberet) where members of the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups live together. Members of the Fagy PA seem less aware of the detailed practices of the *kaleecha*.

There are three birth attendants, two individuals who have the skills for circumcising, and one bone-setter. Depending on the relationship of the practitioner and the person who seeks the service, people pay either in kind or in cash for the service rendered. For instance, for circumcising a baby 3 *birr* will be paid (provided he is not a relative) and the circumciser will be invited for lunch.

## 7. Local Institutions and Organizations

### *Households*

As in other rural communities of Northern Ethiopia, the household (*beteseb*) in highland plateau Shewa makes reference neither to kinship nor to contents or property. It is characterized by rapid turnover in personnel. A household is created when a married couple start to live in their own house separated from their parents' household. This usually happens two years after the actual marriage. The couple normally take house utensils and other assets which they have accumulated during the preparation years and start cooking and working independently from the parent household. This independence is referred to locally as *gojo mewtat*. The smoke from the firewood in the hut implies an independent household is established. The head of the household is the husband. He represents his wife, children and other members of his household in the legal and political affairs of the community. PA leaders make reference to household heads when allocating land to each farming household, or collecting taxes, and other obligations.

In northern Shewa, women assume leadership only when the husband dies or migrates away for a given period of time. Most female-headed households depend on male-headed rich households, who are their relatives, for labour, food and other necessities.

The husband, although culturally designated as head or manager of the household is usually assisted by his wife, grown-up children, elders and other members of the household when making decisions. For example, a household head normally seeks the advice of his wife and old father, if alive, and any other close relatives in the neighbourhood before deciding to sell or buy an ox or a donkey, concluding a certain agreement (eg a sharecropping agreement), and making other important decisions. This does not mean that the suggestions of each family member will count equally.

Usually there is conflict over the use of cow dung. Men often prefer to use the dung on the agricultural fields while the women want to use it for cooking. Although the women understand the return from the agricultural fields when manure is used, their preference is dictated by the scarcity of firewood. Men do not care whether women cook the food of the household with wood or cow dung as long as it is ready on time. This puts women in the position of demanding firewood in exchange for dung.

## *Marriage*

The marriage feast involves a lot of investment. Depending on the general economic background and the amount of its harvest the household slaughters 2 to 4 cattle and brews *tella* (2 to 6 quintals of grain). Neighbours and relatives from different places are invited for lunch. The number of guests on the wedding day is usually expected to be more than 200. Very close relatives and neighbours will be invited both for lunch and dinner for 3 to 7 days, again depending on the overall wealth of the household in question. This is the largest investment in the life cycle of a peasant household. There is value attached to elaborate and extended marriage feasts. Those who manage to invite more people and invest a lot in such feasts are said to be the well-to-do and respected members of the community.

First marriages can either be arranged or result from choice. When a son gets married for the first time, his parents give him everything that is essential to establish his own house. Ideally this includes oxen, a cow, grain, sheep, a horse and a donkey. When a daughter gets married, parents give some gifts, but in smaller quantity. This is because her husband will bring more. Other kin give gifts and the wealthy ones give up to 5 *birr*. The couple live at the husband's parents' house for 2 or 3 years depending on the conditions of the harvest and the relative age of the wife. After that the father builds a house for the couple near his house and the couple move in taking everything they were given for their marriage.

## *Divorce*

Divorce is not very frequent, since it is looked down by members of the community at large. It usually occurs with good reason. If the couple divorce they divide the wealth equally. Divorced fathers keep children who are 3 years and older. Even those who are less than 3 will be taken by the father when they are 3. It is said that it is not good when children live with their step-father. If women want to get remarried they have to do it by themselves. They have to pick their respective partners without any gift. Special gifts (clothes like trousers, shoes and scarves) are often presented to a girl at marriage. Such gifts are not meant for a woman who has married before and remarries.

## *Inheritance*

The Amhara household in highland plateau Shewa starts with a certain endowment given to the couple from both of their parents, or accumulated by the partners personally before marrying one another. It is a customary practice for household heads to allocate a given plot of land and a certain amount of small stock (mainly sheep and goats) to grown-up children. Land granted to a boy by parents is locally referred to as *gulma meret*, and livestock or any other asset extended to grown-up children is widely known as *antura*. These resources are normally used as endowments upon the marriage of individuals to whom the grant is made.

In addition to *gulma meret* and *antura*, parents in the Amhara communities of northern Shewa extend additional property to married children through the customary practice of *kotera* or *kutr* (lit: counting or number) upon the wedding date. The parents of both the groom and his bride will be formally requested to "count" gifts of property to their children.

The father of the groom usually takes the lead, to be followed by the parents of the bride, in the "counting" process. When the groom's father "counts" an ox (or declares that he is giving an ox) to the couple, the parents of the bride will follow by "counting" a cow. If the groom's father counts again, for instance, 5 quintals of grain for the couple, the bride's parents will follow by "counting" 2 quintals (or any other assets always by certain amounts less than that of the former). Both parents of the couple will in this way continue to top up the marriage endowment of their children as far as their economic situation allows. All the gifts will be transferred to the couple when they set up an independent household.

Members of a household in northern Shewa commonly own a given amount of land which is allocated to them by PA leaders, a house or two depending on the economic strength of the household and the size of its members, and certain heads of livestock, farm equipment and house utensils. Members of the household jointly consume or employ these resources in the

process of production for common goals. Normally, all utensils used in processing food are considered the property of the wife. The wife has the right to lend such materials to a neighbour or exchange a utensil for another one. If a certain item is missing, the wife is also responsible for buying that utensil or obtaining it in whatever way she can. The husband also has the same duty with respect to his farming equipment.

When it comes to the use and allocation of the important assets of the household, however, the husband will apply his managerial power. No member of a household is entitled to sell grain, small stock, wood, or any other asset of the household without the consent of the head. Consequently, peasants mentioned that wives and children are sometimes caught "stealing" grain and other items which they take to market in order to generate money for buying dresses, shoes, and other materials for personal use.

All adult members of the household are culturally responsibly for the well-being of every other member of their household. However, the household head usually shoulders more responsibilities for providing food, clothing, housing, health needs and other necessities. Because of assuming these responsibilities, the household head controls almost all the income generated within his household.

If a household ends in divorce, the wife is entitled to take back all the properties "counted" by her parents and given to the household. Moreover, the wife is entitled to request her share from the total wealth of the household, since the widely used principle through which marriages in this area are concluded is the *habtish habite* (lit: "your wealth by my wealth") contract. This contract entails that both parties are equally entitled to all properties that they jointly produced and accumulated under the umbrella of the marriage bond. On the breaking of the marriage bond, therefore, both parties in theory deserve the right to take away their share.

In reality, however, women claim their share from "movable assets" (mainly livestock and grain, if there is enough in the store of the household). The husband continues to be the owner of the land that the PA allocated to all members of the household (including the outgoing woman), the house, trees around the homestead, etc. If there are children born of the marriage, the young ones will go with their mother, while the grown-ups remain with their father.

A widow will inherit all her husband's property. His relatives do not get anything. If she wants to get remarried she can do it easily. If the widow is kind and doesn't care for wealth she will give her children and all the property to her in-laws and go to some other place and get married.

Children usually inherit their parents' property. However, the share differs depending on their parents' will. Children who assisted their parents in farming, in their homes and have respect are generally given a greater share. Blessings from the dying parent is considered as inheritance in this area. The dying parent gives his last blessings to the good children and distributes his property in front of witnesses composed of elders of the community, relatives and a god-father. This holds even in court as long as the witnesses agree to testify.

There is no distinction between male and female. In other words, ideally both brothers and sisters have an equal right to inherit the property of their deceased parents. However, as already discussed above, there is a discrepancy between the norm and the day-to-day practice. Illegitimate children or children born out of wedlock are not entitled to inherit the property of their step-parents, unless they have made a considerable contribution to the accumulation of household property for a long period of time.

### *Kinship*

Like other Amhara people the descent system of people in Fagy is ambilineal. A person traces his or her descent through both the lines of parents. As already described above the same rule governs the issue of property inheritance.

### *Life cycle changes and rites of passage*

Christening a baby boy and a baby girl after 40 and 80 days of delivery respectively is a common practice among peasants in this area. The household concerned offers *tella*, and *injera* with sauce to priests and deacons who perform the christening ceremony. Close relatives and

neighbours are also invited for lunch. The ceremony, irrespective of the sex of the baby, may or may not be elaborate depending on the economic background of the household.

Another rite of passage a person has to pass through is circumcision. Both boys and girls are circumcised during their early years. This ceremony does not involve a lot of expenditure.

### *Markets*

The nearest market is in Debre Berhan and is held on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. The major market day is Saturday. All sorts of products are traded on this day. Unlike in the past, today farmers usually measure small amounts of produce with a plastic container locally known as *popo* or *bobo* (a potty). One *popo* of cereal is believed to weigh one kilogramme. This container, originally used for fetching water for washing hands, is widely used as a measurement of any produce below 50kg. To measure 50kg of grain and more, artificial fertiliser sacks are used (the small sack contains 50kg and the largest a quintal).

For the last three years the price of agricultural produces like other goods is determined by the supply and demand market principles. Since the price of both agricultural and other goods is increasing people worry a lot about this issue.

### *Credit and Social Security*

Many households need credit in May and June to buy seeds; from August to October they borrow for consumption and some borrow between June and August. This credit is sought from relatively wealthy people in the community, traders and moneylenders. If they take from a rich household they may or may not pay interest. Most of the time they do not pay interest. If they take credit from a moneylender they pay 10% interest every month until they return the money. If they take credit in cash from grain traders they repay in a fixed amount of grain when they have their harvest.

People have established *idir*, *equb*, and *mehber* to help each other in times of personal crises. These serve as life and property insurance. When there is a major accident the victim will also be assisted by people who are not in his institution. He is given money, grain, and some household goods depending on the kind of crisis. He will also receive help from kin who live nearby. The *idir* and *equb* have their own regulations as to how much to give for what types of crisis.

People in the area consider *mehber* to be very important because they believe that whatever they share through the *mehber* will be paid back by God after death. There is strong attachment to the Orthodox Church and *mehber*.

*Idir* is a territorially based voluntary association of peasants formed for mutual help and cooperation. At present, there are about 3 *idir* in Fagy as a whole. These *idir* closely resemble one another with regard to the resources they mobilize from members and the kind of assistance they provide in return. The only difference is in the number of members of each *idir*.

The primary objective of all the *idir* is to help member households (in material ways and with labour) in times of difficulties such as the death of a member, loss of property, accidents, and the like. In order to achieve this objective, the members of one *idir* of peasants, for instance, collect a membership fee of 25 cents monthly and two *kuna* (about 20 kg) of beans annually from each household head. Widows and divorced household heads pay half of this amount. The money and the grain is stored in the house of the treasurer for later distribution to members faced with problems according to the rules and regulations of the *idir*. Part of the money is also used for buying cups, digging tools, and other materials employed in preparing graveyards and mourning with families whose members have died.

The amount of assistance that the *idir* provides to members depends on the nature of the problem that the given member faces. If the problem that an *idir* member household head faces is the death of a family member, the amount of assistance provided to him depends on the exact relationship that the deceased individual had with the head of the member household. The *idir* of farmers in Boled village, for instance, provides member households with the following

items,<sup>5</sup> if the deceased individual is a son or daughter:

1. six *kuna* (about 60 kg) of beans
2. fourteen glasses (about 5 kg) of coffee
3. a certain amount of firewood for preparing food for guests coming to attend the funeral ceremony
4. two *injera* from each household to be served for guests that come to attend the funeral ceremony
5. five *injera* from each household to be served for guests that came for the *arba* (lit: fortieth day commemoration of the deceased).
6. sufficient labour for preparing the grave and hosting the guests, and for covering the seasonal agricultural activities of the mourning household (if it is a labour peak time).

If the uncle, aunt, brother, sister, or any close relative of a member dies in the nearby community, the *idir* will provide them with four *kuna* (about 40 kg) of beans and one kilo of coffee. Moreover, all members of the *idir* are required to attend the funeral ceremony of the close relative of their fellow *idir* members.

*Idir* also provide all the materials needed for ceremonies. For example, if a member's child is getting married the *idir* provides such things as tents, kitchen equipment, chairs, tables etc. If someone is a member of an *idir* he is obliged to attend funerals. If he does not he will be fined and people may not help him in future.

In spite of the important role that *idir* now play in the lives of peasants, informants said that this kind of self-help association was unknown in the Amhara communities around Debre Birhan before the early 1980's. Elders said that the *idir* is a new institution that mainly resulted from a gradual deterioration in the economic position of peasants and contacts with towns. Many came into being following the 1983/4 famine. Traditionally the Amhara household in this area, unlike that of the Oromo, Gurage and many others in the south, was operating as an independent economic unit without much involvement in kinship or territorially based local institutions.

Peasants mentioned that the neighbourhood group which is defined by the practice of sharing the same *adbar* (a tree which is believed to have powerful spirits within it) was the only territorially- based association of households in the past. Compared to the *idir* and other lineage-based associations of Southern Ethiopia, however, the Amhara neighbourhood group was not cohesive enough to be differentiated as a local institution. Members of a neighbourhood group (or *adbartegnoch* as they are locally referred to) meet at a given common place, usually under a tree which they designate as an *adbar* (a tree with spirits) for holidays like *Meskel* (a holy day to commemorate the founding of the true cross), Christ-Mass, *Ginbot Lideta* (Lit: the eve of May), New Year, etc. They jointly offer sacrifices to the spirits of that tree so that peace and prosperity will come to the village as soon as the spirits of the *adbar* are satisfied. Among the items frequently contributed by each household within a neighbourhood group for a joint sacrifice to the *adbar* are sheep, coffee, boiled cereals, *tella* and *areki*, bread, and the like. Compared with *idir* members, informants said that *adbartegnoch* provide very little assistance to its members. If a son of a household head dies, for instance, the *adbartegnoch* will assist the mourning household with labour and sometimes with firewood. Otherwise, mobilizing materials and grain is the headache of the household head whose member died, or it was before the emergence of *idir*.

The assistance neighbourhood groups extend to one another in times of accidents seems also to be limited. If the ox of a farmer accidentally dies or falls down a steep cliff, for instance, the neighbourhood group slaughters the animal and distributes the meat in return for a price usually less than the market price of the living ox. In the case of the *idir*, on the other hand, the individual who loses an ox or a pair of oxen in this way is entitled to assistance

---

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the items listed here, each farming household usually provides assistance to one another individually depending on their kinship relationships. This is simply a list of items that one is required to pay as *idir* members, regardless of kinship ties.

comparable to the price of the lost property plus a right to freely use the oxen of his *idir* mates on his plots.

Experiences of farming households in the area suggest that people managed to live without any *idir* in the past mainly because of their prosperity. In the past most households were food self-sufficient. They could easily provide the food and other items required of them in times of death of a family member and other difficulties. Moreover, there were many rich households who could extend a loan service, usually interest free, to those households who were not self-sufficient in times of difficulties. As a result, it appears to have been possible for the peasants to live without establishing strong local associations like that of *idir*. Moreover, the assistance a household head could obtain from the neighbourhood group, relatives and friends was sufficient in the past.

However, following the continuous deterioration in the living standards of people, which informants in this area believe is an outcome of continuous diminutions in average land holdings that reached its apex in the mid-80s, farming households have failed to be self-sufficient in food. Moreover, households which were once rich have tended to move down the village-level economic ladder to occupy a position where they can no longer provide credit services to poor villagers. Consequently, people looked for an association which could promote assistance and cooperation among themselves. Informants argued that this is the rationale for the recent flourishing of *idir* in different areas.

The *equb* is a voluntary association that provides rotating credit services for members. There are no *equb* in Fagy. However, there are three *equb* in Wayu whose organization is described for information. The *equb* have a kind of "office" where members bring their contribution and witness the lottery being drawn. The "office" of one of the *equb* in Mitak village is the house of a woman who earns the largest portion of her living by selling local drinks (mainly *tella* and *araqe*). The amount of credit that this particular *equb* provides is 1,020 *birr* per month. This amount is a sum total of 10 *birr* monthly mobilized from 83 individuals. The Chairman of this *equb* explained how this sum total is paid as follows: 62 members have only one share (they pay  $62 \times 10 = 620$ ), 20 members have two shares (they pay  $20 \times 20 = 400$ ) and the remaining 10 *birr* comes from the owner of the "office" in the form of *tella*.

All the members receive two glass of *tella* which come as the contribution of the house owner. That means that the winner of the day will receive a total of 1,010 *birr*. The winner also settles the 10 *birr* bill for the *tella*. The *equb* Chairman is responsible for collecting the money from each member and effecting the payment. The rule of this particular *equb* states that the money has to be presented for bidders before the draw is conducted every month. Accordingly, members who want some money as capital for rural trade have a chance to borrow it in return for some interest. The Chairman of this *equb* explained that the interest rate for borrowing 1,010 *birr* reaches 100 *birr* per month in times when peasants are free of agricultural activities. Although the interest rates appear very high, the Chairman of this *equb* said that individuals can make a good profit by investing this capital in taking eggs to Debre Birhan, trading in grain, transporting clay and *gesho* from relatively cheap places to those where the demand is high, and so on.

Informants explained that the *equb* money could also be sold to outsider (non-member) bidders, if they offered the association a handsome interest rate and managed to bring a guarantor. The *equb* designed this strategy in order to expand the collective cash of its members as much as possible. A closer analysis of the economic background of *equb* members reveals that the largest majority of them are individuals who obtain some income from off-farming activities [Teferi, forthcoming]. All the foremen, store guards and nursery guards in FARM-Africa's project site, for instance, pay a price of two shares per month in the *equb* in Mitak. The remaining members also earn additional income from the various off-farm activities described above.

*Senbete* and *Mehber* are voluntary associations of farmers established in the name of certain Christian saints. Although religious in form both play a great role in the economic and social life of farming households. These organizations create a sense of fraternity and cohesion among members and also serve as arenas in which peasants can express their problems, exchange ideas and conclude important economic agreements. In a crisis a household head can ask his *mehber* or *senbete* for help. Each organization has a kind of "constitution" that clearly

states the type and amount of assistance a member is entitled to as a result of being a victim of a certain problem.

The difference between *senbete* and *mehber* is that the former is a weekly (or monthly) party established in the name of a saint and held in the compound of the church, while the latter is a monthly party also established in the name of a saint, but held in the house of each of the participating households in rotation. Unlike *senbete* the *mehber* is not parish-based - it is a mechanism through which farming households broaden their interaction with fellow peasants over a wider territory. Almost all members of the PA belong to at least one *mehber* and *senbete*. Both spouses are members of *mehber* and *senbete*; accordingly they participate in the party (usually the party is divided into two: one for men and another for women).

### *Community decision-making*

Community decisions are made by the people after heated debate and discussion. The responsibility of calling the meeting on a particular day lies with the PA. There are three groups who make decisions on issues. They are the PA, elders elected by people from the PA and elders elected by the village. When the matter is to do with some regulations or directives "from above" (the government) it will be the PA's responsibility. When a dispute is between households or within households the first to deal with it are the elders from the PAs. If it is beyond them, they will try to solve the case with the other elders of the village. The case usually will be resolved at this level. However, if it is not solved, they will take it to court. Criminal acts are passed on to the police station immediately.

Collecting taxes is the responsibility of the PA leaders. Unlike in the past, this year each household, irrespective of its wealth, paid an annual tax of 20 *birr*. However, while the fieldworker was in the field, he observed that PA leaders were instructed to assess and classify households according to their wealth so that the government can levy taxes on this basis. PA leaders said that the criteria they use in measuring household wealth is based on the number of pairs of oxen and livestock they possess and the size of arable land they own.

### *Local organizations*

There are four main categories of local organization in the Debre Berhan region: those that function as part of the formal political structure (eg PAs); those that function as part of the informal political and social structure (eg elders, working parties); voluntary associations of farmers for co-operation and mutual assistance (see above under credit and social security); and the local churches.

A group from the community ranked local organizations in order of usefulness to the community as follows: *mehber*; *idir*; peasant association; *equb*.

The PA is a grass-root level administrative unit established by Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, and strengthened by Peasant Association Organization and Consolidation Proclamation No. 71 of 1975. This institution has witnessed various changes in organizational structure, political authority vested in it, leadership, and many other characteristics over the past 19 years. At present, each PA is governed by a 33-person council elected by the general assembly of all members (all the tax paying household heads). Women are represented through husbands, unless they themselves are *gibregna* (tax paying household heads). In the same way, newly married household heads are represented through their respective parent-households on whom they are dependent for land and food.

The 33-person PA council has the following standing committees and functional units:

1. A nine-person executive
2. A three-person Justice Committee
3. A Standing Committee for Health issues
4. A Standing Committee for Educational issues
5. A Standing Committee for Social affairs
6. A Standing Committee for Development
7. A Standing Committee for Defence
8. A one-man representative Committee for each *got*
9. A three-man committee of local cadres whose responsibility is to teach and mobilize

peasants.

In terms of hierarchy, all these committee members are accountable to the executive committee which is constituted of one representative (usually the Chairman) from each of the above mentioned committees. The Executive Committee is in turn accountable to the PA Council and the General Assembly. The PA Council is directly accountable to the *Woreda* Council. The PA Council and the General Assembly formulate policies that have to do with the administrative, economic, political and social concerns of the PA. The Executive Committee, with the help of all the other standing committees, implement these policies and directives coming from the *Woreda* Council.

Peasants complained that the PA and its leadership have been very harsh to them over the past 19 years. The PA leadership was responsible for implementing the socialist agricultural policies of the past government which are criticized by farming households for not taking account of their interests. However, peasants fully realize the need for a local-level administrative unit which can act as a link between farming households and the government.

Compared to other parts of Ethiopia in which the fieldworker has some experience, the PA is a powerful institution in Wayu. It has the capacity to implement decisions formulated at local level or those coming from the *Woreda* or any other part of the government hierarchy. The fieldworker has observed the Executive Committee of this PA collecting taxes from each tax-paying household head, a 2 *birr* penalty from those who failed to attend meetings, mobilizing peasants to act as partners in formulating local-level development strategies with staff of FARM-Africa, punishing non-conformists and carrying out many other important activities. Interviews with current PA leaders also revealed that all peasants cooperate with the leadership, since the leadership is implementing policies which are in line with their interests.<sup>6</sup>

Peasants in Wayu would argue that the PA leadership was efficient enough to implement government decisions at local level for the largest part of the past 19 years. Experiences over the past two decades seem to have taught peasants how to implement government policies. The problem peasants complained about is not lack of administrative knowledge, but corruption cases frequently manifested among the PA leadership. For the largest part of the past two decades, power incumbents in the PA leadership have frequently been accused of allocating fertile land to themselves and their close relatives and friends. Many PA leaders also seem to have treated peasants preferentially when collecting obligatory contributions (such as forced grain delivery to the AMC, mobilizing materials for the "Call of the Mother Land", literacy campaigns, mobilizing labour for development projects, etc.).

In order to cope with these problems, there have been frequent changes in the PA leadership throughout the past 18 years. Peasants seem to hope that a new leader will be better. As a result the Chairmanship position has been occupied by nine individuals in Wayu. One important thing that all the ordinary peasant and PA leaders in Wayu commonly agree upon is that "power must be respected". Elders are frequently heard saying that "Wayu and Anget Mewgiya shall have a powerful Chairman. Otherwise, people will not abide by the law".

The Service Cooperative is an association established jointly by peasant household heads within "not less than three and not more than ten PAs".<sup>7</sup> The objectives of SCs stated in Proclamation No 71 of 1975 include "to market the produce of members at fair prices", and "to supply consumer goods to the members according to their needs". These objectives seem to have attracted many peasants to join Service Cooperative societies in the second half of the 70's. Farmers mentioned that the membership fee required from each household head for joining the SC was 7 even *birr* in Wayu. The SC to which farmers in Wayu belong is made up of 4 PAs, namely, Telassa, Keba, Arsi Amba and Wayu itself. This SC is located in Arsi Amba. Farmers appreciated that the SC provided them with basic commodities (mainly salt, sugar, coffee, soap and clothing) at reasonable prices. However, the SC has stopped functioning

---

<sup>6</sup> In January 1993, in Kelala Woreda (Southwestern Wollo) this writer witnessed PA leaders trying to implement government directives coming from above (such as tax collection, mobilizing mothers and children for vaccination, etc) through the help of idir, interchangeably referred as kiré in that locality. The idir appeared to be stronger than the PA in mobilizing peasants.

<sup>7</sup> See Peasant Association Organization and Consolidation Proclamation No 71 of 1975.

following developments after the coming of the EPRDF forces into the area. The house and the other properties of the SC were not looted<sup>8</sup>, but this institution is no longer in a position to provide commodities at reasonable prices owing to the "free market economic policy" of the current government. Many informants expressed the view that they would appreciate it if the SC could resume its old functions as soon as possible.

On the other hand, however, farmers complained about the SC concerning its service of "marketing the produce of members at fair prices". Contrary to this noble goal, the SC was turned into a channel for compulsory quota delivery of grain to the AMC which used to pay farmers a price far less than the local market price. Currently, some efforts are being made to enable the SC to resume its functions, with the hope that it will no longer serve as a mechanism for oppressing farmers' interests. A 12-person Committee, elected from all the 4 component PAs of this SC, frequently meet at the head office of the institution in order to facilitate this process. The big tin-roofed house of the SC which is partitioned into a store, a public shop and office is still in a good condition.

Churches are influential in the day-to-day activities of farming households in the area. As a result, one finds churches dotted throughout the communities around Debre Berhan. In fact specific places are called after the parish church. Individuals use the parish church as an identification marker. The church performs ecclesiastical services upon death, marriage, holidays and other rites of passage (eg christening, sacrificing etc) and rites of "intensification" (such as the delay of the *kiremt* rain or absence of the *belg* rains, years of famine, plague, animal disease and other common crisis). Priests also serves as mediators when individuals quarrel with each other and settle disputes over resources.

### *Redistributive mechanisms*

All members of the village are welcome at feasts, like *arba* and *serg* (part of the marriage ceremony). All people are invited for lunch and will be served *tella*. For such feasts all members of the community are welcomed. Depending on the type of feast, people are expected to contribute to the household who prepared the feast (eg. *serg* and *arba*). The amount of money they contribute, although affected by kinship and other relationships, is not fixed. Usually people pay from 2 to 5 *birr* for an *arba*.

It is very difficult to say these feasts act as mechanisms of redistributing food from the rich to the poor or otherwise. This is simply because feasts are prepared occasionally.

## 8. Beliefs and Values

### *Religion*

Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is the only local religion in the area. People are fanatic Orthodox Christians and do not tolerate other kinds of Christianity such as Protestantism. If people convert to Protestantism, they will be given advice, by elders and godparents, "to come back to" their previous religion, Orthodoxy. If they does not agree, they will be condemned by the community and rejected from social organizations like *idir*, *mehber* and *equb*. Nobody talks to them. When members of their families die they will not be buried in the cemetery. The church does not accept them.

There are many days considered Saints' days when people do not go to their fields. On average, it seems that 15 out of 30 days of the month are not working days (religious holidays). The most prominent ones are the following: on the 1st of each month is *Lideta*; 5th day of the month *Abo*; 12th St Michael; 19th St. Gabriel; 21st St Mary; 23rd Giorgis; 27th *Medhane Alem*; 29th *Beale Egziabher*. People have the strict belief that if they go to the field on these religious holidays, they will be punished by God. If they see someone working on these days, he

---

<sup>8</sup> There are reports where farmers looted properties of the SC in parts of Wollo and Gojjam [Teferi, 1993; Personal communication with Ato Getie Gelay, currently writing his MA thesis in Gojjam].

will be admonished by elders of the community. If he insists on working on these days, he will be condemned and ostracised by the community.

The fasting rules of the church are also very much respected. No-one eats or drinks livestock products on Wednesdays and Fridays. Everybody is expected to fast during Lent and 15 days in August.

People in this area have special respect for elders. They listen to all the advice the elders give and help elders economically when they need it.

### *Explanations of misfortune and illness*

There are no witchfinders or rainmakers in this community. People believe devotedly in God. They explain every accident or illness as a punishment from God for their sins. However, it is understood that there are some witches. The community do not want to confirm this since they think that witchcraft is not tolerated in the Orthodox religion.

### *Political beliefs and attitudes*

Some farmers thought that at the beginning the interim government would again redistribute land according to household size. This is because members of the producers' cooperatives were given a large amount of land (both arable and grazing) when the cooperatives were established. When the cooperatives ceased to exist, at the time when the interim government came into power, members distributed the land among themselves. Some farmers complain that as a result these people obtained a relatively large amount of land compared with other members of the PA.

## 9. The Community

### *Community organization*

The community prepares a feast once a year in October. It is traditionally known as *Adbar*. This celebration is performed in relation to a certain belief that they worship and thank God for what he has done for them and to make conditions smooth in the coming season.

### *Politics*

Some peasants listen to the radio and thereby try to acquaint themselves with what is going on in other parts of the world. Yet most of the people seem to rely on rumours and informal means of communication. Accordingly, most people do not seem to have accurate knowledge about the political life of the society at large.

One respondent said that there is no difference between the *Derg* regime and the Transitional Government for the people living in this community. The political system is still centralised. There are some political institutions created during the *Derg* which are still functioning as the extended hand of the new government. Government passes orders and regulations to the people through these institutions. Observers did not observe any political activity. Nevertheless they got the impression that there is strong resistance to some of the government's regulations.

Another said it is too early to assess the effect of the regionalization policy on the socioeconomic and political life of the people at the grass-roots level.

### *Poverty and wealth*

In one person's opinion the wealthiest people are those who have 3 to 4 pairs of oxen, more than 5 cows, at least 2 horses and 2 mules, 10 sheep and those who are ready to do any kind of work. The poor are those who are too lazy to work and do not have oxen and land. Some people who had land previously returned it to the PA since they could not afford to pay the land

tax. A person cannot be rich because of his political position or as a result of inheritance. The only way to be rich is to work hard and to have good social relations. If the person has good human relations and is poor, some farmers will give him land to cultivate and share the harvest.

In a wealth ranking exercise 3 members of the community each divided households into 3 groups. Features of those in the wealthiest group included being a hard worker, knowing the traditional skills, having oxen and farmland, inheriting a large fortune, lending money (usury), having a father or children to help, off-farm income (eg salary from priest), market interlocking, she would have been wealthier if she were not a widow, healthy, exceptionally fertile land, made a fortune when holding a post as local administrator, wisely manages labour.

The middle group included men with pairs of oxen and livestock (no land) and women with land and livestock either with children or giving land for sharecropping, and people with oxen and land.

Examples of people from the poor group included household heads whose only means of income was collecting dungcakes from the fields and selling it, widows with no male labour, a demobilized soldier who only recently got land, a war victim with a wounded arm who cannot plough, an old man with no land, she returned her land to the government as she could not pay the tax.

In Milky people defined wealth by the number of livestock and number of plots of land. A man is rich if he is a strong farmer who can farm a large number of plots, rears livestock and has male children to help him on the farm. In Kormargefia "a person is considered wealthy if he has a large number of livestock, saves money, has land and farming instruments like *maresha*, *mofer*, and *wogel*". In Karafino "if a farmer has more than 2 pairs of oxen and has grains in the stock for 2 years he is considered as wealthy". In Fagy and Bokafia the definition of wealth was different. "People said there are no wealthy people at present, wealthy people are wiped out with the fall down of the feudal system. During the feudal period the landlords used to have more than 1 or 2 hectares of land and they also had tenants and large numbers of livestock. Now you can't find a single person with these amounts of land, livestock etc. Everybody got an equal amount of land during the land redistribution (although see above) and everybody pays an equal amount of money for land tax which is 20 *birr* a year".

In Milky people say poverty is the result of laziness and bad habits like drinking and gambling. A man is poor if he is lazy, drinks too much, sells his livestock and spends his money on unnecessary things and gives his land for sharecropping arrangements when he could farm himself and get the benefit. In Kormargefia people are considered poor who have no land, livestock, oxen, savings or farm instruments. In Karafino those people who do not have land or livestock and have a large family and are not able to feed themselves are considered poor. In Fagy and Bokafia people are called poor if they do not have livestock, no ox, do not have land or have land but cannot pay the tax (if this is the case he will return the land to the government).

### *Social mobility*

One observer commented that in the past wealthy farmers tended to be children of wealthy farmers and the poor were children of the poor. However, today the chances of becoming a wealthy farmer for both children of the poor and rich seem to be relatively low compared to the past. The gap between the wealthy and the poor farmers seems to have been decreasing. Farmers maintain that scarcity of land and the general deterioration of the fertility of the soil, a rapid population increase, and an increase in the price of artificial fertiliser, has resulted in lower overall production in agriculture. This situation seems to have been preventing the younger generation from becoming as wealthy as the farmers of the past, and has led them to consider farming as a non-lucrative trade.

During the wealth-ranking, the 3 sets of respondents were asked about upward and downward mobility. Respondents said people moved down from the wealthiest category most of the time, not rarely, and very frequently. One respondent said "it depends on the time" explaining that "if times are harder the person starts selling his livestock and purchases grains. If they have, for instance, a pair of oxen, they will sell one of them and ask for *mekenajo* for the following *meher*. If there is a crop failure in the following year also they will be forced to sell the remaining ox to sustain themselves. Therefore the frequency depends on whether the

time is favourable or not." Other reasons given for downward mobility included age, marriage of sons, livestock death, crop failure (especially in Karafino where frost is frequent), and inability to afford fertiliser.

Asked how frequently people move up from the poorest category the following answers were given: nobody can make it; a very rare case; almost impossible; and again it depends on the time. If there are no crop failures and people are blessed by God they slowly move to a higher category. People become wealthier in good times as they produce and sell more. They buy cows and sell milk and buy other livestock. Other reasons given for the difficulty in moving up are because times are harder now and production is decreasing from year to year. People frequently move between the middle categories of wealth since everyone now has some plots of land and can borrow oxen from other people who can borrow his farm land. In order to move up from middle categories people need a small amount of capital, to rear livestock, and to have sons. Since many people lack some of these things they frequently move in the middle categories. People become wealthier if they have additional income from rearing livestock and selling livestock products such as dungcakes, milk and eggs. They must not depend only on agricultural income because of the regular destruction of crops by frost.

In Karafino apart from the problems of unfavourable weather and the rise in price of fertiliser mentioned above "a continuous decline in soil fertility is a remarkable phenomena characterizing the village". Households are not financially sound enough to undertake any new methods of farming or new ways of generating income. There is rarely a chance of getting access to credit and almost no type of outside support. Under these circumstances there is no way or chance of people moving from the poorest category to the next higher one. An elderly peasant in the group pointed to the green irrigated fields in the distance (a World Lutheran Federation project) and said:

"Look there! If we had money we would have had that type of green plot since we have this big river you see. .. If the price of fertilizer continues to shoot up like this and if you come after two years and do the same thing as you have done now you will find us all in the poorest category."

When God turns his merciful face, and there is favourable weather for at least 2 to 3 years continuously, hard-working people will harvest substantial food. The number of livestock they own grows, children are fed better and they become strong so they work better in the field. More work means more harvest and more harvest means more assets in the form of livestock and stocks of grain saved for bad days. If farmers harvest more they feel confident about buying fertilizer even at higher prices and they are better able to sharecrop or lease land in to cultivate. This was how the very few farmers who managed to improve their wealth position succeeded in doing so.

### *Status*

Peasant households in the area do not represent a homogeneous economic group. Households can be ranked into different wealth categories based on a number of indicators, mainly size and quality of plots, herd size, harvested yield and stored grain, cash income generated from other possible sources and the like.

Even though, descent and family background are sometimes mentioned (as in marriage arrangements, arbitrating between conflicting individuals, seating arrangements in public celebrations, etc.) there seems to be no ascribed criteria such as religion, ethnicity, and lineage, that prevent the movement of individuals from one economic group to another. However, one observer said that occupations such as building, blacksmithing, and weaving are still considered as jobs for low-caste people

In the light of the current situation in the communities, good farming and engagement in wide-ranging off-farm activities (the most lucrative being trade) are the main routes to wealth in the area. Status entitlements such as military prowess, political positions in the PA leadership, and litigation skills, appear not to be direct routes to wealth.

In this community people are respected because of their age, and their good social relations. Elderly people who give advice to younger ones and who are religious are most

respected in the community.

A respondent said that elites in the area are those who are rich and have many cattle and land-holdings. Some of them got their wealth from the people when they were involved in the administration of the community in the past, and others became rich through hard work. They are generally getting richer. There are no conflicts among them. Another said that elites in the area do not fight for supremacy in the economy. Business in Debre Berhan is dominated by the Argoba. Another said that there are people who have key positions in the government. They are getting wealthier using their power. There are conflicts and competition among them to get richer or become more powerful than the others. He said that anyone who is Tigrayan, whether educated or not, has the power to be heard anywhere in the country and he or she has no problem in accumulating capital.

Another said that the local elites are elders and religious. This does not make them wealthier as they are selected to the PA which involves a lot of committee work, and this cuts into their farming activity making them poorer and poorer.

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

### *Villages and Regions*

Fagy and Bokafya is relatively better off in comparison with other villages in the area. This is because they get a side income from the sale of milk. Compared to other villages in the area the people sell more milk because they have crossbreed cows.

### *Relationships to Wider Ethiopia*

The relationship of the peasants who live in Fagy and surrounding areas to the outside world is an issue which does not lend itself to generalisation. However, the peoples' participation in the political life of the country, as already described above, is restricted to the use of the PA structure.

### *Effects of Government Policies*

Like the prices of industrial goods, prices of agricultural products have been increasing since 1991, particularly after the devaluation of the currency. This situation seems more favourable for peasants, because they are mostly sellers, than any other segment of the population. Yet farmers around Debre Berhan have not benefited from this condition owing to the poor harvests of the last three years. If one stands at the outskirts of Debre Berhan on Saturdays and observes what farmers transport to and from the town, one can easily substantiate the aforementioned statement made by farmers in this area. Most farmers bring either dung cakes, straw or firewood to the market for sale and in turn buy cereals and other goods to supplement the yield shortage of the household.

It is not rare to hear farmers saying 'For how long will the government leave the price of goods and agricultural products free?' Some suggested that the interim government should set the price of products like the past regime. Farmers used to pay 71.30 *birr* for 50kg of fertilizer, but now they have to pay between 98 and 105 *birr*. The farmer no longer has a co-operative shop.

One respondent said that community members agreed they were better off during Mengistu's rule, economically, politically and culturally. The elites work hard to get richer but the government oppresses them and they are bitter about it. The elites could not say anything against the government because they fear them. Because the elites are listened to by the people the government watches them closely. So they hide themselves from government agents. The people in the area do not support any of the current economic and political policies. There are people who have returned to the area after giving up their livelihoods elsewhere. This happened to many Amharas and Amharic-speakers as a result of regionalization. Many migrants from this area have been pushed out of other places, their property taken and some have even been

killed. He said they know nothing about the Constitution. The government did not care to explain and the people were led like a blind person. The people do not know anything about democracy. This is because the government does not want them to know, so there is no effort to educate them. He said the question about whether there was a security problem in the area was too sensitive. The same was true about a question about how economic and social changes are affecting the poorest members of the community and a request for suggestions as to how policies or development programmes might support growth, development and poverty reduction in the community. Another said people do not know a great deal about the Constitution. They did not want to elect anyone to draft the Constitution but they were threatened that if they did not they would not get any land in the future. They think good and positive things about democracy but know that it serves those in power or who have money. The *Derg* as well as the current leaders are not democrats. Only they and their supporters exercise freedom of speech and writing and only because they are protected by the State. There used to be security problems in the area. There were factions waging armed struggle against the government and agitating people by speaking to them when they are gathered for church services. Now the government is in control. Another said that only some people know about the Constitution and the bit they know is "self-determination up to secession". Almost all are against this phrase because this article will "bring the time of Tewedros back to Ethiopia for the second time".

Another respondent said that the community is better off today than before 1991. Farmers and their sons no longer have to go to the war front and this has led to more labour for farming and production in excess of needs. Farmers do not like regionalization because it leads to division and conflict among the various peoples of Ethiopia. In such a situation the country is not going to develop and different nationalities might want to secede. People think democracy is good because they know they have got the right to express their feelings freely. There are no worrying security problems in the locality. Economic and social changes have affected the poorest members of the community. In these areas farmers have been using fertilizers obtained on credit since the *Derg's* period and now they have been asked to repay their debts. However, they are not in a position to do so, nor to buy fertilizer to put on their crops now. As a result their harvest has been reduced. Only those who are better off are able to buy fertilizers and use them. These farmers have large herds of cattle and can afford to sell some of them to buy fertilizers.

A third respondent said that the community is worse off than it was before 1991 because of the high prices of fertilizers and other goods. People are opposed to regionalization because they believe it creates divisions. The question about the Constitution was too sensitive. The people have a good view of democracy and understand it. Because there is an opposition group in the Debre Berhan area there are sometimes problems of security. New changes in the economy have badly affected the poorest members of the community. This is because the free market policy allows competition in which the poor gets poorer and the rich richer.

A fourth respondent said he believes the local economy is weakening as a result of the high prices for household goods and agricultural inputs. The farmer has some advantages today: his children are not recruited forcefully to fight a war and he does not have to make contributions to the government as he did in Mengistu's time. Another respondent said that people support the new policies because they give them hope. However, the people who are very keen on them are Tigrayans because the political policies give them more advantages than anyone anywhere else. Although there is democracy people are still imprisoned, beaten and killed. However, things are relatively more peaceful than they were. Another said that there are bandits in the area who stop cars and rob properties. They have broken into prisons in Debre Berhan and released prisoners. The farmers also said that the clergy have been agitating them to rise up against the TGE. Regionalization has caused misery to the Oromo who have lived in the area for many years and now fear they will be told to leave and to those forced to return from other regions. There are many people who have returned from the war zones in Tigray and Eritrea who have not been allocated land. The government does not see them as loyal and peaceful members of the community, so they face hardship every day.

Another respondent said that farmers are worse off now because they mostly live on food bought from the market and they cannot afford to buy enough because free market policies have made prices higher. Mengistu used to give subsidies. These days farmers are forced to sell their cattle to buy food. The farmer is also facing shortage of labour time since he or she is

frequently called to attend meetings and demonstrations. Another said they do not go to the meetings and get fined. They come if they are told there is aid for them. In the meeting they are told what Constitutional rules have been passed, express their support by clapping, and leave. There are no security problems in the area. This may be because the site is close to Addis Ababa and there is an Army camp only 5km away. Another said that the farmers know very little about democracy but do not believe what they are told. They do not even like the word. The poorest in the community have no-one to help them. There are no organizations to assist them, especially when the rains fail. They need relief and long-term development programmes.

Another respondent said that there are security problems in the area because the Debre Berhan area is highly suspected by the government as a place where opposition groups are organized. In addition, the local people have showed that they do not support this government. Besides, the opposition militant groups once controlled the town for an hour and a half and released very important political prisoners. After this incident the TG sent more soldiers to the area and ordered a curfew so that no-one could be on the streets after 8 pm, particularly young people. They put a lot of suspected people in prison and even killed some ex-soldiers with the opposition forces when they controlled the town. Soldiers patrol the town constantly and intimidate people they suspect of membership of the All Amhara People Organization. The suspect is immediately put in prison and tortured. Sometimes these people are killed or taken somewhere far from the Debre Berhan area.

Sometimes opposition group forces go to farmers' houses, spend the night there, and tell the people the weak side of this government. They preach to the farmers that they should oppose the government. Since the TG has this information they come to the farmers' houses and torture them to give information about the people who came. If the farmers resist they will be killed after being tortured.

#### *Government activities in the community*

Government activities in the community include supplying fertilizer and seeds and school and health services: a group from the community ranked them in that order in terms of their usefulness to the community.

The Haile Selassie regime constructed a gravel road connecting Addis Ababa to Asmara. The method of construction was traditional. However, it did not last long before the Italian invasion. The Italians constructed a tarred road. In the 1970's the government established a school and a health clinic. And in 1975 the Ministry of Agriculture introduced the use of fertilizer and special seeds.

#### *NGO activities in the community*

In the 1970s some *fereng* came and taught their children how to read and write. They used to teach them in the field under the shade of the big trees.

In 1975 ILCA introduced cross-breed cows and gave the farmers high quality seeds for vegetables. ILCA has been teaching local people how to increase agricultural productivity through water and soil conservation techniques. ILCA has been active in the area for the last 20 years. They provided the pond and sometimes provide treatment for livestock when they are sick

#### *Future provision to the community*

The people would like the government to construct irrigation schemes and to supply drugs to the clinic, if possible free of charge, and if not, at a cheap price. They also need to have access to credit facilities so that they can borrow money for buying artificial fertiliser and seeds (only at times of crop failure). The fieldworker attended a meeting of members of 6 PAs (Karafino, Milki, Fagy Bokafiya, Aloberet, Kormargefiya and Tebasie) where they discussed the need to repay their debt to the government. In 1991 almost all the members of the aforementioned PAs were given fertiliser on credit. The agricultural extension worker from the regional office of the MoA at Debre Berhan informed the meeting that every farmer who has taken fertiliser from the

government on credit is urged to pay the debt this year. Otherwise no-one would be given fertiliser on a credit basis this year. Farmers discussed the issue at length and agreed to set up a committee (one for each PA) which will appeal to government authorities at Debre Berhan stating that due to the last year's poor harvest they are not able to pay the debt this year. Most farmers informed the fieldworker that last year's harvest was particularly poor because of ice during the *meher* and *qech* or *ameday* (frost) during the *belg* season.

An observer said that the most important services that would encourage development in the Debre Berhan area were: (1) a veterinary centre; (2) availability of fertilizers on credit; and (3) other projects that help development and economic growth. Another observer suggested (1) the establishment of handicraft centres and cooperatives based on their skills; (2) encouraging irrigation and tree-planting; (3) provision and supply of farm inputs; (4) teaching the farmer skills in agronomy and livestock innovation; (5) management to ensure that smallscale industries and modern farming methods are well-coordinated to increase yields and productivity.

---

## Appendix

**Case No. 2**                      Sex: Female                      Age: estimated late 30's

She and her spouse have never gone to school. According to her, women participate in all agricultural activities except holding the ox-drawn plough and tilling land. Her household rarely hires daily labourers even at the peak agricultural labour time. The main reason she gives is shortage of money to pay the labourers. This household has 3 oxen, 3 cows, a heifer, 5 sheep and a donkey.

She has 6 children of which 3 are girls. None of them goes to school. Some of them assist their parents by tending cattle, fetching water, etc. Though she does not know when she got married, she is quite sure of the fact that she married at early age. Her marriage was arranged by her parents. She never saw her spouse before the marriage feast day. At marriage she brought an ox and a heifer as did her husband. Even if she doesn't know the exact size of their arable and grazing land, in her own eyes the main problem that prevents them from producing more is frost rather than scarcity of land. Both she and her husband sell dung cakes to buy coffee, salt and other spices. Making dung cakes is her responsibility alone. Activities defined and categorized in the domestic domain are mainly left to her. When she gives birth however, her husband assists in pounding grain and fetching water. The house of this married couple is found next to the husband's parents' house and his elder brother's house. They came back to their homestead a year and half ago from the villagization site. They are members of Saint George's *mehber*. Her husband is a member of an *idir*. They have 2 houses - stone walled with roofs covered with thatch.

**Case No.3**                      Sex: Male                      Age: 79

He got married at the age of 17. He has 6 children of which 1 is male and 5 are female. His parents, who died during Haile Selassie's time, were landless. During the time of Haile Selassie he himself was a tenant. During the *Derg* regime he was given 6 *timad* of arable and 6 to 8 *timad* of grazing land. He also had a pair of oxen. He had 3 houses before he moved to a new village because of the villagization program. Now except for a few of his neighbours most of them have moved back to their original homesteads. This man too wanted to go back to his homestead yet he is unable to do so since he is not capable of constructing a new house.

At present he has only 1 horse. His main source of income is the grain he obtains from the produce of his land under a sharecropping arrangement and from the sale of his grazing land. Last year he obtained only 2 quintals of grain. His wife died 3 years ago. He lives alone. Some of his neighbours assist him by cooking his daily meal. Some of his daughters live in neighbouring PAs while others live in Debre Berhan town. He prefers to live alone in his place of origin. When I asked him why he doesn't want to go to one of his daughters place and live with them he replied "*Endiyaw yamatch fit kemayet ltagelew biye new engi sidekimima yet yiqeral*". Lit. Instead of seeing the face of my son-in-law, I strive alone for my livelihood,

otherwise when I become very weak as a last resort it will be a must.

A father takes care of his children in their early years. However, the care given to a father from his children is negligible. For instance, my son sends me sometimes only clothes. His son is an ex-soldier who lives in Harar town. When I asked him the reason why he didn't beg others to till his land for him he replied that these days, when everything is expensive, begging has become an act of foolishness. He is not member of an *idir* or *mehber* either. He served for several years in the Army before the reign of Haile Selassie. Yet he does not get a pension or any form of payment at present.

**Case No. 4**                      Sex: Female                      Age: 75

She got married in 1927 at the age of 15. She was brought up by her grand father who was *balerist*. Her grand father gave her one fourth of *gasha* of land. Now she has only 7 *timad* of land of which 5 is arable and 2 grazing land. She gave birth to 10 children of which only 5 are alive. All of them are married. Three of them are living in Shashemene (South Ethiopia) and engaged in business while two of them live in Addis Ababa. During public holidays some of these children send her money. At present her grand-daughter, 18 years of age and grade 11, lives with her. She prefers boys to girls since the former are said to be good at times of crisis. During the time of the *Derg* land redistribution she lost a large proportion of her plots. This she believes would not have happened if one of her sons had been and elected and served in the PA leadership.

She used to brew and sell *tella* after the death of her husband. She stopped this practice three years ago since she contracted asthma and diabetes.

A young boy, whose mother died some time ago, also lives with her. He is hired by her for tending livestock at an annual salary of 40 *birr*. The reason she gave for his low salary is the fact that he has a heifer which consumes grass from her grazing land. During the dry season he works as a daily labourer (collecting stones). He earns 4 *birr* per day and he gives the money to the woman.

This woman has a milking cow, a heifer and 10 sheep. Since she has neither a pair of oxen nor a capable boy at home she enters into a sharecropping agreement called *megazo*. In the past, when the size of her livestock was better than today, she used to sell dung cakes to buy coffee, salt and other spices. Now she sells eggs and chickens to buy the aforementioned items. From the last *meher* she obtained 3 quintals of grain. Her husband died 20 years ago. She is member of an *idir*. This is a special *idir* in the sense that it is meant for assistance at times of loss of a milking cow or an ox. There are 90 members of this *idir*. If a cow or an ox of any of the members dies the member will be given some amount of money. Members of this *idir* are expected to contribute 5 and 2.50 *birr* each when an ox and a cow dies respectively.

---

### Bibliography

- Aspen, H, "Present Forms of Traditional Associations and Institutions in Mafud, Northern Shewa" in (ed) Ege, 1990
- Ege, S, "Chiefs and Peasants: the Socio-political Structure of the Kingdom of Shewa about 1840", MA thesis, University of Bergen, Norway, 1978
- Ege, S (ed), *Ethiopia: Problems of Sustainable Development*, Dragvoll, University of Trondheim, 1990
- Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, *Suffering Under God's Environment: A Vertical Study of the Predicament of Peasants in North-Central Ethiopia*, Missouri, Walsworth Publishing Company, 1991
- Tefere Abate, "Farmers' Experiences of Land Tenure and the Management of Local Resources: a Case Study of Wayu and Anget Mewgiya PA, 1974-94", (forthcoming)

## Glossary

<i>Awraja:</i>	An administrative division before 1991.
<i>Balerist:</i>	Landlord.
<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>Derg:</i>	The name of the military government which ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991.
<i>Equb:</i>	A rotating credit and savings association.
<i>Fereng</i>	Foreigner; Caucasian.
<i>Idir:</i>	A burial society.
<i>Injera:</i>	Ethiopian flat bread.
<i>Kaleecha:</i>	Witch or witch doctor.
<i>Kebele:</i>	A local administrative division or an urban-dwellers' association.
<i>Kiremt:</i>	The main rainy season. See <i>meher</i> .
<i>Mehber:</i>	A religious society which meets monthly on a Saint's day. Each member takes a turn hosting the group, providing food and drink.
<i>Meher:</i>	The main rainy season - in most places from June to mid-September. Crops sown during this period are harvested from October to December.
<i>Mengistu:</i>	The leader of the <i>Derg</i> government which ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991.
<i>Qech:</i>	Frostbite.
<i>Senbete:</i>	A Sunday association which meets on the grounds of a church. Members take turns providing refreshments.
<i>Wot:</i>	Stew.

## ACRONYMS

AMC:	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
EC:	Ethiopian Calendar
EPRDF:	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
MoA:	Ministry of Agriculture
SC:	Service Cooperative
SIDA:	Swedish International Development Association
TG:	Transitional Government
TGE:	Transitional Government of Ethiopia







