# Gelcha site-specific topic: The impact of the Metahara sugar factory on the community

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## Elders FGD

I couldn’t carry out a FGD with elders as many of them were busy facilitating different things for the Gada ceremony.

## Kebele official

The factory was established during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Now it has developed well and has taken a large plot of land that was used as a grazing area by the community. Job opportunities to a less extent and letting the community use post harvest crops are the two sole contributions of the factory to the community. Some community members are employed as guards (though not many compared with the great size of the factory) and the factory let the community members use post harvest crops for animal feed during the middle of the year, which is a great contribution of the factory. However, it is reluctant to let the community members use irrigation water from its outflow.

The factory does not assist or contribute to the development of the community. Since its establishment it has not contributed to construction and expansion of schools, health institutions, roads or other infrastructure in the kebele. The factory simply focuses on maximizing its own profit and does not give concern to community issues.

Sometimes there are disputes between the community and the factory. The community dispute with the factory over irrigation water. For instance, last year the factory tried to block the irrigation water that the community have used and the water users defended and got into conflict with the employees of the factory. Then, three of the water users were arrested for injuring the factory employees. Later, the conflict was resolved by elders and the wereda officials. Moreover, the disputes arise when the community let their livestock into the sugar plantation, particularly during the drought period. The factory makes the community members pay a fine of 50 birr per cattle when they let their cattle into the plantation.

Hence, to create a good relationship between the community and the factory, the factory should assist and also work for the development of the community alongside its own main business. It should assist in the construction of drinking water which is the critical problem for the community, expansion of school and health interventions and so on.

## Manager of sugar factory

The factory was first established by a Dutch company named Hangler Vondr Amsterdam (A.V.A) in 1965 and started production in 1969. Later on, in 1975, the factory was transferred to the Ethiopian Government. The factory started to operate with a land holding of 11,000 hectares and now it has a total of 14,733 hectares. Of this 10,300 hectares is currently under cultivation and covered with sugar cane plantation. The organization creates job opportunities for about 11,000 employees. Of these 7000 personnel (5000 are seasonal and 2000 permanent employees) are involved and work on farm related activities of the organization.

The organization lets some of the communities of the wereda use a limited amount of irrigation water. The factory pays more than 1 million birr per year for irrigation water for its consumption and lets some kebeles such as Fate-Ledy, Sara-Weba, Bodanota and Gelcha (very small amount) use irrigation from the water. Moreover, the factory creates job opportunities for the nearby communities including Gelcha community and lets them use post harvest crops for their livestock. The factory also contributes money for the development of the wereda on request. For instance, this year the factory contributed 100,000 birr for the Gada ceremony. However, we do not contribute for the development of the community at kebele level because the factory has no budget to assist each kebele around the sugar plantation. As with other kebeles, the factory does not assist the development activities of the community except creating job opportunities and letting them use irrigation water (in small amounts) and post harvest crops for their livestock.

The factory has a smooth relationship with the nearby community. There is an organized committee that include the community’s elders and the employees of the factory. The committee deals with different disputes that arise between the community and the factory which usually are created by letting livestock into the sugar cane plantation. Hence, there is no serous conflict between the community and the factory. Rather there is strong cooperation between them.

## Man who had benefited as a guard

The factory has no contribution to the community except letting us (the community) use postharvest crops for livestock and employing some members of the community. The members of the community dispute with the factor over irrigation water and for making them to pay fines for their livestock when they (livestock) pass the boundary of the sugar plantation.

I have been employed for twenty years. I and other individuals from Gelcha requested the factory for employment and the factory officials accepted our application. We signed temporary employment contracts and began the job for 5 birr per day. Now I am paid 23 birr per day. I have usually worked for 8 hours a day. In addition to the monthly salary, I have been given working shoes and clothes two times a year, get full medication for myself and my family members when we are sick, and get 10kg sugar per month. Only 5-20 birr for health and 20 birr for sugar are deducted monthly from my salary which is very small as compared to the benefit I and my family get from the organization. Hence, I get an income from the organization for being employed in the factory which enables me to cover some expenses of my household.

The problem is that the payment is too small as compared to the work burden. I am working as a guard which creates disputes with the community. Mostly, we (guards) are in conflict with the community when we protect the sugar plantation from livestock of the community. Moreover, when my shift is changed to the day time, it is difficult to keep my own cattle and to follow up other activities of my own.

## Woman who had benefited as a guard’s wife

The community is benefiting in way or another from the factory. Some of them are involving in plant guarding and are benefiting in many ways, such as: their wage labour is the source of income for the household; they get incentives like sugar, soap and clothes, and health service exemption for family members. They also have access to cut grass for sale and for animal feed and also they can collect more cane residue for animals or for sale. Thus a load of one cart cane residue can be sold for up to 100-120 birr to town people who have animals.

The husband’s salary and incentives are the main source of income for the household and of ten kg of sugar eight were sold. Her children get health service there which means expenditures on health services have been reduced.

The factory doesn’t have a negative impact on people as a whole and particularly not on her.

She suggested that the factory should allow much water to be used for irrigation as well. And also the water should be available and regular in the whole year for all purposes (for drinking, animals and plants). This would be important for all community members.

## Man who had been harmed

The factory has no advantage for the community. Its negative consequences outweigh its contributions to the community. The estate cut down many trees for the expansion of its plantation and took a large plot of land that was used for shade and grazing area in earlier time. Moreover, the factory makes us pay a fine of 50 Birr per cattle if our cattle graze on the boundary and enter the plantation. It also does not assist nor is willing to be involved in different development interventions in the community. The only contribution of the factory is that it creates job opportunities for some members of the community (the number of employees from the community is not high as compared to the great size of the factory and its negative consequences on the community) and lets community members use the post harvest crops and grass the from plantation, which is a greater advantage for the community particularly during the middle of the year.

The factory is reluctant to let the community use the outflow of water from the estate for irrigation, which creates disputes between the community and the factory. For instance, last year there was a conflict between the guard of the factory and the irrigation water users. The representative employee from the factory tried to block the irrigation channel that the community members were using. Then I and other irrigation users peacefully requested the employees not to block the channel. However, they refused and kept on blocking the channel. Then I and other irrigation users defended ourselves and got into conflict with the employees about blocking it. In that conflict one of the factory guards had his leg broken and the other guard lost three of his teeth. Soon, the federal police from the sugar factory arrested me and two other community members who were involved in the conflict. Then we were jailed for seven days and made to pay 9000 birr for compensation to the injured individuals. To pay the compensation, the irrigation users contributed 200 birr each and paid the money on behalf of us. Since then the dispute has been settled by the community elders and we are using the irrigation water.

## Woman who had been harmed

Some people are benefiting from the factory as they are cane plant guards and daily workers in the factory compound. The channel water helps people and animals of the community, the plant residue is important for animal feed during the dry season and also the water helps a few people for irrigation work. Guards’ families’ are benefiting from grass of the factory that they could easily cut for sale or animal feed.

On the other hand the community is harmed because of loss of pasture land and a better water source (Awash River); even though it happened long years ago, the effect is going on though time.

She said that it is difficult to guess that the situation will be changed in favour of the community in relation to the factory administration. The community may have hope the new irrigation scheme and pure drinking water will be established, instead of waiting for something fair from the factory.

As the case was mentioned in the previous field work (FW1) report, about 31 shoat were sold by the factory manager because they entered into the sugar cane. She was asked to pay 100 birr for each as a fine, unlike the normal punishment rules. She refused the request and went to the wereda court, and then the case was passed to the zonal court at Nazreth where they decided that the factory manager should have to repay to her about 9600 birr depending on the wereda pastoralist and rural development office’s judgement of the value of the shoats as it was asked to do that by the court. But the manager refused the verdict and asks ‘yigbagn’ and the appointment has not yet happened. Because of this she lost a lot of money and sold a cow with a calf.

This indicates how people are harmed because of the sugar factory intervention, even if there was another interrelated factor of the kebele officials’ bias.