

Shumsheha in 2011

Shumsheha lies on a hot low/middle altitude plain and rugged hills with little vegetation left. Shumsheha *got* near Lalibela airport is a small town around the *kebele* administration with electricity (25-30 TVs) and piped water; in more distant *gots* people still rely on unsafe water. The mobile network reached in 2007/8 and was improved in 2010/11. The *kebele* centre is 9 km distant from Lalibela through an unpaved road, abandoned when a new Lalibela-airport road was built which is 24 km. There is no public transport. The population is Amhara and Orthodox Christian in majority with about 80 Muslim families (6%). A third of the households are female-headed and 384 are landless (28%). Communal land is dwindling due to reallocation and illegal encroachment.

Shumsheha is in one of the most drought-prone areas of the country. Rains are said to have become more erratic although there was no serious drought since 2005. In 2011 28% people (40% families) benefited from PSNP. Graduation (meant to reach half of the public works beneficiaries in 2011) has started. While officially most are voluntary people reportedly are 'being convinced' or made to sign without knowing. Irrigation has been a major positive development in the recent years. 10-27% households, including entrepreneurial sharecroppers, grow irrigated cash crops alongside subsistence crops. There is (unevenly distributed) potential for more, but actual capacity depends on the weather. Farmers strongly resent the heavy coercion exerted for them to take fertiliser that even DAs reckon is unsuitable to the local soil. Honey production also has potential. High market prices are an additional and important factor in explaining better agricultural incomes in the community. Government and NGOs have actively supported the development of youth and women production groups (sand and cobblestone, honey, cotton spinning, stove production), some of which are fairly successful. But there is a large number of un(der)employed youth with very little to do, said to be a 'burden' for the *kebele*. The airport took away some of the *kebele's* most fertile land when it was modernised (2004/5). But it is a driver of local non-farm economic activity: jobs, customers for the shops, cafés and bars and other services offered in Shumsheha *got*, and 40-50 people who learned skills and have engaged in construction-related businesses. Daily labour and agricultural migration are options too. There are a few successful businessmen, four of whom have paid employees (wholesale/retail grain/goods trade, grain mills). All local activities would greatly benefit from better access to markets. The taxation policy may be discouraging some of the non-farm activity. Given the poor debt recovery record of the multiservice cooperative formal credit is now available only through ACSI, which people strongly dislike (group modality, harsh debt recovery practices, case of embezzlement which had people having to repay loans twice).

There is a Health Post and a health centre though the latter does not offer full service, for which people have to go to Lalibela. There is much better access and a fundamental change with regard to education, with a full-cycle, a Gr1-4 and 2 satellite primary schools. However, the wereda failed to open a Gr9-10 school for which the community built classrooms so students continue to have to go to Lalibela, where there also is a TVET. 4-5 students reached university in 2010/11. But people see that even university graduates may not find jobs or only after several years. The community appreciates some of the government interventions but has major grievances too (coercion with fertiliser, inaction about road, transport and secondary school, multiple contributions decided from above, zero-grazing policy, insufficient support to irrigation, ban on underage marriage leading to premarital pregnancies, and long meetings bringing 'a perfect plan but zero implementation').