

Yetmen in 2010

Rural Yetmen is one of three gots in a kebele surrounding 'urban Yetmen', a small town with a separate kebele administration, founded around a Swedish-funded school established in the 1960s, in Enemya wereda in Amhara. All the rural residents are Amhara and Orthodox Christians. Yetmen is along an all-weather road going in one direction to Bichena, the wereda capital (17 kms and good transport), and in the other to Dejen, another town (same distance, transport) and from there to Debre Markos and Addis Ababa. There is good mobile network coverage everywhere, which is a big plus for the traders.

Yetmen has fertile farm land and good grazing land though with high population pressure landholdings are small and there are many landless households (more than average in the wereda). Land scarcity led the farmers in the community to refuse to give communal land, notably to youth groups and for the construction of a secondary school for the area. There is ample water, with two rivers of which one is perennial, and ground water; there are communal water points (as there is a borehole and a piped water system also serving the town of Yetmen) and people use these, or wells in their compound. A few residents from rural Yetmen access to electricity through extending lines to urban Yetmen which is connected, but some stopped using it as the light was not strong and others were said to have been cut off as a result of a dispute over where the school should be sited. There is no major environmental issue in the area. In 2004 it was estimated that over half of the population was under 20, equally divided between the sexes.

Thanks to its fertile soil and thus far reasonably reliable rainfall pattern, and good access to markets, Yetmen is and has been for a long time a teff surplus producing community, with some other crops being cultivated too and many residents engaged in grain trade. This is complemented by irrigated horticulture for an increasing number of households (wereda officials say there is a lot of potential). Farmers also started using new technologies such as the broad-bed making plough and alternating crops to get two harvests in a year. Different types of households and people benefit from this intense, market-oriented agricultural activity, including: rich farmers able to engage in diversification, young landless household heads renting-in or share-cropping land from labour-short households, households leasing irrigable land for a good price, daily labourers working on others' farms or in loading/unloading farmers' products taken to the market, women retailing irrigated products on the market, and traders. Fertiliser and improved seeds are no longer available through government-guaranteed credit so poorer farmers were using less or none. Harvests in 2008 and 2010 were very good. The wereda and DAs have supported farmers' efforts in various ways (facilitating credit for new technologies, training and advice on productivity-enhancing technologies) although farmers are selective in what they adopt from the advice given.

Farmers in Yetmen also keep livestock and a number of them try to increase their income through bull fattening and dairy production with foreign or hybrid breed. More than 70% of farmers have breed cows by using their own or other farmer's bulls. However, although this too is quite well supported by the government (credit, relatively good vet services though shortage of drugs) the community's remaining grazing land is small and indoor feeding requires forage which has been insufficient – although kebele officials believe that more forage could be produced with irrigation. Marketing the dairy products has also been problematic so there are only 12 farmers still benefiting from the Dairy Co-operative.

Farmers have access to credit through ACSI (that they use for accessing new technologies and for trade). They also started a farmers' savings and credit association which gives loans to its members, including for fertiliser and seeds, which is said to be important as the service co-op has stopped doing this. Savings are much larger than credit and not bringing in any interest. However, lack of access to credit at a reasonable interest rate is said to be a constraint for poor farmers (not all farmers are members of the farmers' association, and ACSI requires collateral or the use of group-based modalities).

Women are engaged in farm activities (including tending the household's irrigated production for those concerned). Other activities include alcoholic drink preparation and sale, daily labour, petty trade and activities on the market (e.g. ironing clothes), and retail sale of irrigated products. A women's co-op was recently established: it spun cotton and sold it with a small profit, and got land from the kebele to engage in grain production, but this has uncertain support from the community and it is too early to say whether the co-op will succeed and benefit its members. Women are also not much involved in local politics and administration, seen as male issues.

Some young people (children of Derg bureaucrats) got small plots of land in 2004 (this was to compensate for the 1997 land re-distribution that had reduced their fathers' land). Today there are disputes around this land, following a change in the regional land law. Young people who do have some land, like these ones or others who got some from their family, and who stay with their parents, can save money and reinvest it and some do quite well in this way.

But a large number of youth and younger households are landless. Those who cannot pursue their education or get access to land through renting-in or sharecropping engage in various daily labour activities or migrate looking for work elsewhere. Following advice from the wereda they also try to engage in productive activities in groups. However, this was not very successful in Yetmen. The community refused to give land to land-seeking youth groups as was suggested by kebele officials, not trusting the government which, they said, could easily accuse the groups to work inefficiently and take the land and give it to investors. Youth themselves are not keen and prefer individual activities so that the other types of association that had been started in urban Yetmen, have now stopped due to mismanagement or disagreements among members.

Residents of rural Yetmen have access to a health post in one of the kebele's other villages. It was initially planned to be a clinic so a nurse has been posted there as a compromise following people's complaints about the downgrading. There is a recently built health centre in urban Yetmen as well as a private clinic. The government facilities provide the usual services under the health extension programme and other government policies. Officials say that there is a problem of acceptance and that few people use the prevention and sanitation measures that are taught, and that people are not happy with the health post/clinic focusing almost exclusively on these things and not on curative services. Yet, with the health centre in urban Yetmen residents of rural Yetmen have better access to health services than average in the wereda. Moreover, many people go to the private clinic which some say has better drugs. Young children are regularly vaccinated. Contraception is widely used and access became better with the health centre, although resistance still exists including among women. Half the women go for pregnancy check-up but few deliver at a health facility. HIV/AIDS is prevalent in urban Yetmen, but community members think it is not an issue in rural Yetmen, though some health personnel disagree with this. It is also not clear whether malaria is prevalent in Yetmen; there was a widespread outbreak in 2005 but has not been much since. Activities to address malaria and HIV/AIDS have been neither very intense nor very successful.

There is a full cycle primary school. Commitment to education is growing as a result of landlessness and the need for other sources of income, and thanks to role models – people from the community who reached a higher level of education and whilst not having land, support their parents. Girls outnumber boys in the primary school. Yet, apparently putting some pressure on parents to enrol children and send them to school regularly is still considered necessary, which teachers say they have to do even though they dislike this role. The community successfully resisted full day education and automatic promotion. A secondary school is to be built once the siting issue is resolved to everyone's satisfaction. At the moment to continue after primary school level Yetmen's children have to go to Bichena, where a brand new TVET is also found (construction financed by the Region, the wereda and the community). Only richer farmers can afford this. Some are even able to send children to Debre Markos where there is an older and better TVET with more attractive technical options, or to universities (there is a new university in Debre Markos), but only clever children with

good marks can get there; for the others, the costs of private college education are even higher. So, there are many dropouts who, except when they can get access to some land, become the unemployed landless youth talked about earlier.

Yetmen is a tightly knitted community where customary social and governance systems are strong and the Orthodox Church is important. There is a special form of funeral society, the Dësh, which have been established for a long time and are very influential in the community. Almost everyone is a member, and members misbehaving can be excluded which is considered as a very serious issue. The Dësh ostracised one kebele leader who had tried to enforce the banning of big mourning ceremonies by arresting people, also forcing him out of office. He was pardoned and readmitted in the Dësh after apologies and heavy penalties. The Dësh also mobilised the community against the construction of the secondary school on grazing land. Since then, wereda officials prevented the kebele administration from working again with the Dësh or with iddir. This serious incident (with a mother and baby hit by gunfire which killed the baby) provoked a souring of relations between the rural and urban communities. There is also a quite high level of theft, banditry and male fighting, though it is hard to get community members to participate in community policing activities.

In its relationship with the government Yetmen is a bolshy community, able to mobilise strongly against what people do not like (e.g. the provision of land to youth groups) whilst taking what suits them (e.g. some of the DAs' advice). Wereda officials complain about the community's low level of participation in development activities. However, they find it difficult to do anything about this since the good governance package means that people can no longer be coerced into doing things. That is people's democratic rights, as community members say. This builds on the community's history of rebellion against the government going back to the 1960s and earlier. Following the 2005 election the EPRDF included the 'Derg bureaucrats', who had been banned from political participation, in its campaign to recruit new members amongst the rich and influential group in the community. EPRDF structures closely match the government ones at kebele and sub-kebele levels and the membership has increased since 2005. But participation is loose and for many, membership is nothing more than a way of avoiding problems. This context makes it hard for those involved in kebele leadership, who feel 'sandwiched between two fires' (wereda/party instructions and the community's will). The Women and Youth Associations are also weak, in spite of the help that the kebele administration was supposed to give them since 2005.