

FSS Discussion Paper No. 3

LISTENING TO THE POOR:

**A Study Based on Selected Rural and Urban
Sites in Ethiopia**

*Aklilu Kidanu
Miz-Hasab Research Center*

*Dessalegn Rahmato
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**FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
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**LISTENING TO THE POOR:
A Study Based on Selected Rural and Urban Sites in Ethiopia**

*Aklilu Kidanu
Dessalegn Rahmato*

Summary

This study was conducted in the context of major economic and political developments that took place in the country recently. In less than twenty years, the country transformed (or tried to) from a feudal regime to a Marxist-Leninist regime and finally to the present free market economy. Each one of these state systems had introduced new policy measures whose effects are reflected through out this report.

One of the main findings of this study is that the majority of the population is drifting from the middle category ten years ago to the lowest category of well-being today. Parallel to this, the proportion of the households in the highest category of well-being have shown a drastic decline. This finding is strikingly consistent not only among the focus groups but also between urban and rural communities. The criteria used to classify households in the different well-being categories vary in rural and urban communities. In rural communities, well-being has a lot to do with having farm land, cattle, farm input and implements. In urban communities, well-being has to do with owning large businesses and permanent employment with pension. The poor, on the other hand are described in terms of their struggle for subsistence which includes daily labor or selling fire-wood and cow-dung. Over the last ten years, the category of the poorest has been added. This group includes not only the landless but also the physically disabled and the elderly.

Rural communities face different types of problems than urban communities. Leading problems in rural communities include drought and the problem of access to farm land. The latter is aggravated by two main sub-problems: (i) the rapidly increasing number of landless peasants, and (ii) the shrinking farm plots either due to deforestation and erosion or to the fragmentation of farm lands. Other priority problems include the *quota* system of the previous government, the *Derg*, pests and the high price of fertilizers. The main problem in urban communities is chronic unemployment.

A related set of sub-problems are (i) layoffs of government employees, (ii) the removal of subsidies, and (iii) demobilization of the *Derg* soldiers. These are blamed on the current government's free-market economy. Rapid population growth and the absence of vital services such as health, water, electricity, housing and sanitation are also mentioned as priority problems.

The impact of poverty in these communities is seen in the form of hunger, the increasing number of beggars on the streets, the high rates of morbidity and mortality, and the overall unhealthy and dangerous sanitation conditions in the neighborhoods. This is not to speak of the less obvious signs of hopelessness and desperation among the urban population, particularly the youth.

Communities both in rural and urban areas, at a time of distress, rely more on informal local institutions than on formal governmental and/or non-governmental institutions. *Idir* stands out as one the most important local and informal institutions. *Idir* is a burial society where the number one concern is that a deceased member (or members of a family) receive 'proper' burial. Other important institutions are the Church, for Christians, and the Mosque, for Muslims. They provide spiritual comfort and are the place of burial, the last place of rest. Such institutions have secured strong cultural or religious backing for many years and have survived (in fact, thrived) through harsh economic conditions. Among the formal governmental institutions, the *kebele* is mentioned as the most important one. *Kebele*, which is the lowest unit of administration in both rural and urban areas, is considered important because it links the community residents with the government, and that is where community residents go to receive ID cards or any other kind of official document that is considered essential for residents. Not that they do much about them, but *kebeles* also provide the forum for discussions of public concerns and problems.

Gender relations are very much influenced by the dominating culture in the area. The typical responsibilities of women in the household include preparing food, taking care of the children, and fetching water and fire-wood. Men believe that these tasks are delegated to women because they are 'physically weak'. Women, on the other hand believe that they do these because they do not want to be labeled 'lazy' or 'unfit' to be a wife. They argue that unlike

what men think, some of their routine tasks such as carrying water on their back for hours require a lot of physical strength.

At the community level, women are limited to preparing food and drink at social gatherings. There are signs, however, that females are claiming more and more of their legitimate rights. They are now elected as *idir* or association chairs. It is not certain whether this is mostly a reflection of the change in the culture which, in itself, could have many reasons. Or, whether it is a poverty-induced deterioration of males' control over females. Males, on the other hand, assume all the major responsibilities of decision making on matters that affect the well-being of the community. They are almost always the chair of the peasant associations or *kebele* and/or *idir*. They are also the judges, members of the police, the security and all other prestigious positions. These are positions of power, not shared with women, that give men a lot of influence on decision making at the community level.

Violence against women, both in rural and urban areas, has been going on for a long time without inhibition. The most common household violence against women include beatings and forced acceptance of marriage. Women are beaten in the house for any reason that may include failure to prepare lunch or dinner for the husband. Women are also forced to stay in a marriage that they do not like for many good reasons. This particular type of violence is enforced by putting economic and/or cultural pressure on women. At the community level, the most common violence against women is the *telefa*. This refers to abducting women against their will or consent. *Telefa* is a serious crime which involves rape.

In the last few decades, and probably mostly as a result of poverty, gender relations are showing clear signs of change in favor of females.

'The child cried because he was hungry. The father, hoping to keep him from crying, whispered to the child, "Keep quite, the hyena is just around the corner." The child kept on crying any way, convinced that the hyena would not be any worse than hunger'

(An expression of poverty and hunger, Dessei Zuria Wereda Rural Site)

'We Oromos are farmers. Our livelihood is based on water, and, hence, we believe in wet things. The farmers' crops and cattle depend on wetness. Once in a year, the first Sunday after Meskel, we go to this warka tree by Lake Hora. We pray to God as follows [literal translation]

*Dear God our creator
You made us pass the night peacefully
May you also make us pass the day peacefully
Save us from the kicks of horses
And the eyes of wicked people
Please listen to what we are begging from you
Oh God, the creator of land, mountain and the Warka tree
Make a good rain for us
Make our land wet for us
Like this straw we are carrying in our hands
Since these are your creations too
Make the rain come down in peace
Please don't give us bad things with the rain
Like the pests and the hail and lightening*

(An elderly man describing how much the community believes in a local informal institution known as *Eretcha*, Ada Liben Rural site)

1. Purpose and Methodology

This is a revised version of a report prepared for the global research effort entitled 'Consultations with the Poor'. The study was designed to inform the *World Development Report 2000/01 on Poverty and Development*. We have included a new section which presents a brief review of the poverty literature in Ethiopia and removed several sections from the original study¹. The research was undertaken in mid-1999.

1.1 The Purpose of the Study

The study documents the views of poor people in different locations of Ethiopia on four major themes: (i) how they defined and perceived well-being (good or bad quality of life), (ii) how they prioritized problems and whether they changed over the years, (iii) what institutions (formal or informal) were important in their lives and how they related to them, and (iv) their perceptions of gender differences in terms of tasks and responsibilities.

1.2 The Methodology

This is a qualitative study that avoids measurements of poverty indicators as much as possible—there are no calculations or statistical analyses. The study simply documents the views and perceptions of the poor, individually or focus groups on the themes noted above. There was no attempt to interpret or evaluate respondents' views or the findings of the investigation. Basically, the study followed the approach suggested in the Process Guide prepared by the Poverty Group, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, The World Bank. There were, however, some modifications made in the guidelines depending on local conditions at the study sites.

¹ For the complete version of this study, see 'Ethiopia: Consultations with the Poor.' Prepared for Global Synthesis Workshop. September 22-23, 1999. Poverty Group, PREM, World Bank, Washington D.C.

The selection of the ten sites where the study was conducted, was purposeful. The main criteria included: (i) the agro-ecology of the area; (ii) the proximity of the site to a main road, and (iii) whether the area was urban or rural. It was assumed that the experience as well as the understanding of poverty differed according to these characteristics. Accordingly, ten sites (6 rural and 4 urban) in three different regions of the country were selected (See Annex 1). The leaders of *kebele*/peasant associations were key actors in organizing the focus groups and providing information on community characteristics.

The study team was composed of 15 people, 5 of them female. Most of the team members had some experience in qualitative data collection and analysis. The team members took a 3-day orientation on the objectives and methodology of the study prior to fieldwork.

1.2.1 The Process

All the team members traveled to all sites together. Once at a given site, the study team talked to the participants in an informal manner to introduce the study and each other. When possible, members of the team walked around the community with some of the participants. After a while, the team, with the help of the kebele or peasant association chairs, divided the participants into various groups to get a mix of male and female participants by different age and occupations groups.

At separate locations within the community, the team members consulted with individual focus groups for as long as three to four hours. Women focus groups consulted with female team members when possible. Some members of the team talked to individuals. Some others talked to the elderly or community leaders to learn about the community as a whole. Coffee and bread (arranged in advance) was served in the middle of the consultations, at the team's expense and this worked very well as an energizer. At the end of the focus group discussions, the team members thanked the participants and headed to their hotels. Each evening, the team met to discuss the day's experience and to prepare for the next site. Usually, one day was enough to do one site: 8 focus groups, 5 individual case studies;

1 institutional profile and 1 community profile. (For samples of individual and institutional case studies, please see Annex 2). When necessary, the team went back to the sites to gather additional information. In the evening discussions, the team members talked about cross-cutting issues to be included in the reports.

1.2.2 The Limitations of the Study

As indicated earlier, the study used the topics suggested in the Process Guide prepared by the Poverty Group of the World Bank in order to allow comparative analyses between different countries. Nevertheless, the following limitations of the study are identified.

First, some of the questions were not appropriate in the Ethiopian context. For example: in the rural areas questions having to do with husband-wife relations, violence against women, and conflict in the family are very sensitive and most women were reluctant to provide information to strangers.

Second, the questions in the Process Guide were drafted with the South Asian experience in mind. The rural experience in Ethiopia and much of Africa is different from that of Asia. Third, the time allocated for the study was very short. The study was a quick one-shot affair but many of the questions required knowing the community more closely. Fourth, the participants came to the consultations with certain expectations. They would have been happy to get some kind of assistance and support which the study could not provide. Fifth, the literacy level of peasant farmers in the rural areas is quite low. There were too many complex topics for them to handle.

Finally, certain questions in the methodology were included without careful consideration. For example, for the poor in this country there is very little distinction between risk and vulnerability. The issue of social exclusion has not been integrated with poverty. There are in most societies people who are socially excluded, or who do not socially mix with others. The reasons may be religious, cultural, historical, class, geographical, economic. The issue would have been interesting if the attempt was to see whether or not greater poverty induces or promotes social exclusion.

2. Poverty Studies

2.1 A Review of the Literature

The general debate on poverty in the Third World, involving economists and social scientists, national governments and multilateral bodies, goes back to the close of the 1960s. Initially, the literature was heavily influenced by the experiences of Asian countries and reflected the concerns and expectations of policy planners in these countries and their backers in the international donor community. Even today, the Asian voice is quite prevalent, though the earlier imbalance has been overcome to some extent. In Ethiopia, in contrast, poverty studies were initiated in the early 1990s and their findings presented for public discussion in the second half of the decade². Prior to that, while there was a good deal of concern regarding the poverty situation in the country, there was very little sustained debate on the subject and very limited documentation on it. As is to be expected, there is a huge gap between the general and the Ethiopian literature, and it will be quite some time before the latter will attain the depth and sophistication of the former.

Initially, the stimulus for the poverty debate was the economic reform program that the transitional government committed itself to earlier and that was keenly promoted by the major donor agencies, in particular the IMF and the World Bank. The World Bank and other donor agencies provided both the initiative and the finance for poverty studies as part of their support to the economic reform program. One outcome of this was the establishment of the welfare monitoring system in 1994 which enjoined the Central Statistical Authority to collect information and monitor changes in the poverty situation in the country. All this helped to anchor the debate within the framework of structural adjustment and in the context of a social action program to alleviate poverty. It may be worth noting that after more than two decades of poverty reduction experiments in

² For the general literature see references in IDS Bulletin 1996; also Dessalegn 1992. There is an on-going on-line debate on poverty; see World Bank and other websites. For the Ethiopian literature see Bibliography at the end of this section. For a discussion of the Ethiopian economy see Befekadu and Berhanu (eds.).

Africa supported by the IMF and the World Bank, there are few success stories and that on the contrary the evidence suggests that the condition of the poor in the continent continues to deteriorate. Another characteristic of the local debate is that it has been dominated by the work of economists, most of whom are Ethiopians. The result has been an almost exclusive concern with the quantitative *measurement* and distribution of poverty (see Abdulhamid, Abebe, Dercon, Getahun, and Mekonen et al.). This is of course a legitimate and laudable endeavor given the paucity of basic information on the subject, nevertheless it does tend to suggest that poverty studies is nothing more than measurement and number crunching, which of course it is not. The approach adopted by the existing studies only measures what we wish to call "economic poverty", but poverty goes beyond low income and the shortage of economic goods and includes the totality of livelihood deprivation, powerlessness, and socio-cultural marginalization, all of which are hard to capture by means of the standard instruments often employed by the economists. To be fair to the economists one must hasten to note that their prominence in the debate is attributable to the absence or limited participation of students from the other disciplines. We should point here that a major study initiated in 1994 and undertaken jointly by the Economics Department of Addis Ababa University and the Universities of Oxford and Gothenberg (Sweden) has served as an important source of information for some of the studies in this period (see Abebe and Bereket).

One result of the government's welfare monitoring system is the publication of several surveys by CSA (1998, 1999) and a bench mark document by the Welfare Monitoring Unit of MEDAC (MEDAC 1999) both of which provide valuable information on living standards, income levels, and the extent and distribution of poverty. According to the latter document, which is based on the CSA surveys, 45.5 percent of the country's population lives in absolute poverty and that poverty is much more widespread and more severe in the rural areas than in the urban. Per capita income is put at 167 USD per annum, and the rural population has a much lower level of income than the urban while, as the CSA welfare survey shows, the latter contain more female-headed households than the former. For comparative purposes it is worth noting that the average per capita income for Sub-Saharan African countries in 1998 was

480 USD. The document also shows that if poverty is measured in terms of the cost of the minimum food requirements per adult per year, 50 percent of the population falls into the food poverty category. It is interesting that the rural population, which is the sole food producer in the country, suffers a higher level of food poverty (52 percent) than the urban population (36 percent) which has no role in food production. It is unfortunate that the MEDAC document does not disaggregate the data by gender, though it is understandable in that its poverty measure was based on CSA's income and consumption survey which was collected at the household level and does not contain information on the intra-household distribution of income and consumption. We think it would have provided readers with a more in-depth picture of poverty if the study had incorporated a gender dimension to the subject (for the general debate on the gender dimension of poverty see references in Kabeer 1996).

There is controversy over the issue of whether poverty in Ethiopia is increasing or declining and what the underlying causes for it are. However, the information available for comparative purposes covers only a few years and thus to make a judgement one way or the other will be to stretch the argument. To complicate matters, the rural areas have suffered severe environmental stress and food shortages in 1994/95 and again in 1999/2000; in contrast, 1997/98 was a year of good rains and a bumper harvest. One study argues that poverty "registered an increase for urban and rural households between 1994 and 1995" but there was a slight decline in 1997 (Mekonen et al. 1997). A new finding by two of the authors in this study indicates that poverty showed a declining trend in both rural and urban areas between 1994 and 1997 although there was a sharp increase in income inequality in these years (Abebe and Bereket). A World Bank participatory poverty assessment undertaken in 1997 found that there was a rise in well-being in a majority of rural sites and a decline in urban ones in the last five years (World Bank 1998). Dercon and Krishnan (1998) maintain that there has been a decline in poverty since 1989, however questions have been raised about their use of data sets for the earlier years which their critics argue are not comparable with later ones. Our own findings are different from all these: there was unanimous agreement among our respondents both in the rural and urban sites that there has been a decline in well-being in the last ten years and that a great number of households in the

well-to-do and middle income categories have been thrown into the ranks of the poor. Among the reasons given by respondents are environmental crisis, insufficient or lack of farm land, a policy environment unfavorable to the poor, the economic reform program, and growing unemployment. The details are discussed in the text.

There have been few state-sponsored development interventions specifically targeting the poor in the past. On the other hand, since the latter part of the 1980s, a number of NGOs have made efforts to implement programs aimed at improving the conditions of the poor. However, given the limited reach of NGOs and their resource constraints, the impact has not all been very satisfactory. While today, the policy environment regarding poverty reduction has improved to some extent, there is still *no comprehensive poverty reduction strategy*. In line with the thinking of the IMF and the World Bank, the government believes that economic growth will serve as the chief engine to propel improvements in living standards among all sectors of the population including the poor. Supporters of this approach point to the government's Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) and, in particular, the extension program as significant initiatives for poverty reduction. While this is not the place to examine the debate, it is important to point out that this economic doctrine, i.e. growth as a solution to poverty, has been widely challenged by economists and social analysts in the literature (see *IDS Bulletin* 1999 for the critical debate). It is questionable whether economic growth by itself (and assuming it can be sustained at a respectable level) will have a positive impact on the well-being of the poor. On the contrary, it may be argued that growth without a sound poverty policy enabling its benefits to be channeled to the poor will only serve to widen income inequalities and to make the poor much poorer.

Another government initiative, which falls within the World Bank's favored social action program for poverty alleviation, centers on programs undertaken by the Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund. ESRDF, which was launched through World Bank and other donor support, and which initially focused on rehabilitating displaced people and demobilized soldiers, undertakes community level infrastructure work and promotes income generating activities for the poor. A third initiative is micro-finance, a scheme

launched in the last three years which provides small loans and financial services to the poor mostly in the rural areas. The disparate and unregulated credit and savings schemes formerly undertaken by NGOs have been replaced by a micro-finance delivery system regulated by law and with uniform operational guidelines. The scheme does not extend credit to all the poor but only to what the industry calls the "economically active" poor, which leaves out a large number of poor households. Nevertheless, this is an encouraging measure, and while the approach employed by the industry leaves much to be desired, it does provide the opportunity for savings and access to micro-credit to a good number of poor people who need it and who otherwise would have been ignored. At present, the evidence suggests that nearly half a million clients in several parts of the country have benefited and the industry is expected to extend its services to a larger client population in the coming years (Wolday). Both these initiatives, ie. ESRDF activities and micro-credit are steps in the right direction, but they are disparate programs and do not constitute an integrated poverty strategy.

As the figures above and other human development indicators show, Ethiopia is just about the poorest country in the world and millions of its population are leading the most wretched existence (*vid.* UNDP reports). The studies noted above measure at best the magnitude of poverty but few discuss the depth of destitution and the intensity of misery inflicted upon masses of people on account of social and economic want and the crisis of livelihood. We believe that poverty, with all its attendant ills, is the most pressing problem facing this country, and what is therefore urgently required is a sound and *integrated poverty reduction strategy* with a firm and abiding commitment by government to ensure its successful implementation. If we fail to address this deep-rooted problem, and poverty continues to grow throughout society, as we believe it is doing at present, it may lead to profound social dislocation and unrest, and may eventually threaten the survival of the country itself.

What is presented in these pages is a qualitative or "perception" study of poverty based on a limited number of rural and urban sites. We do not claim that our findings are conclusive or our study definitive. The work is obviously incomplete in many respects; it

does not, for example, discuss access to education and health services or to water and sanitation facilities in the sites concerned. Nevertheless, we hope the study will serve first to present the voice of the poor, and second to stimulate debate and to encourage further investigation of the complex dynamics of poverty in this country. It is telling that the debate on poverty in Ethiopia, which by all accounts is one of the most destitute countries in the world, started only recently and does not appear to be progressing rapidly. We believe it is important to involve not just economists, but sociologists, anthropologists, demographers, gender specialists, development analysts, historians, people in the cultural and legal professions, and others; it is only in this way that we will be able to broaden the emerging debate and to give it a more comprehensive dimension.

2.2 Current Bibliography on Poverty in Ethiopia

[Note: The bibliography, which does not claim to be exhaustive, does not include works on food security. Many of the works listed here are unpublished papers and not easily accessible.]

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3. Background

3.1 Introduction

A majority of the respondents interviewed for this report have experiences of three radically different state systems, the last of which is the present federal government. Many of them may well remember the distinct policies that defined the structure of the political and economic systems of the last two governments and the major officials and personalities who were in the limelight at each particular occasion. Memories of the conditions of life and the opportunities that were or were not open to the average person in the period between the late 1960s through the 1980s will probably be fresh in the minds of those in their forties and older.

The two earlier governments, each of which in its own way has left a significant legacy still visible today, were the imperial regime (1941-1974), and the *Derg* regime (1974-1991). Following is a brief description of some of the distinct characteristics of these regimes.

3.2 The Imperial Regime

The imperial state has frequently been described as a feudal state, although there has been considerable controversy over the issue. Certainly there were elements in the political and class structure of the state that may very well be described as *feudal*. At the top of the state structure was a powerful monarch, Emperor Haile Selassie, who legitimized his authority on grounds of divine rights. The Emperor never considered delegating authority, and all officials owed their positions to him. Haile Selassie's power was greatly inflated as a consequence of the centralization of the state and the modernization of the apparatus of government.

Below the monarchy was a class of landed nobility, which had extensive property holdings, especially agricultural land, throughout the country. The nobility was an absentee landlord: it did not reside in the countryside but exercised ownership rights over its property through a system of surrogate agents. In the countryside itself, the local gentry, which owned considerable land in its own right, served

as the chief government agent, serving as administrator and judge at the level of the sub-province and district. Most farming peasants did not own the land they tilled but were tenants of the landed classes or the state.

Under a variety of classifications, the state held vast tracts of agricultural land in the country. Some of this land was given to persons who had rendered or were expected to render loyal service to the state. The offer was conditional and could be withdrawn at any time. Other holdings of the state were farmed by tenant farmers who handed over a portion of their produce to the state agent in the form of rent. In theory, all the land in the country belonged to the state, and under the ancient principle of eminent domain the state had the right to claim land held under private ownership and to dispossess any person or institution.

Tenant farming was most widespread on land owned by the landed classes. It was the main form of tenure for farming peasants in the southern part of the country. The landed nobility were not only absentee owners but were for the most part northerners whose rights to land in the southern regions was based ultimately on conquest and political domination. For the peasant, tenancy was onerous and exploitative. The farmer not only paid rent, usually in kind, for the use of the land, but had to render a variety of services including labor to his landlord. While frequent evictions of tenants was not a regular practice, most tenants had no sense of secure holdings. In the latter part of the 1960s and the early 1970s, a good deal of tenant evictions did take place due to the expansion of large-scale mechanized agriculture.

The imperial regime refused to seriously consider reforming the land system, which was a target of criticism by radicals and liberals in the country and by a number of international donors. The period from the 1950s to the early 1970s was a period of relative peace. There were no major regional or class conflicts, though short-lived uprisings flared up here and there. The Eritrean struggle, which broke out in the 1960s, was successfully contained and was hardly noticed by most people in Eritrea itself. This is in sharp contrast to the post-imperial and post-Derg periods when civil war and regional insurgencies brought death and destruction to a large portion of the

rural population. In both these periods, there was large-scale military conscription; in the *Derg* period, young people were actually pressed into military service. At the time of its collapse in 1991, the *Derg* may have had a military force of well over a quarter of a million men. In contrast, the imperial state maintained a military force of about 45,000 men.

3.3 The Derg Regime

The imperial regime was overthrown by the *Derg*, a committee of non-commissioned and middle level military officers, in 1974. While initially the *Derg* did command widespread support, it soon alienated itself from the public by its dictatorial and unpopular policies. In the late 1970s, the *Derg* unleashed a reign of terror, and thousands of people were rounded up and executed for alleged counter-revolutionary activities. A few years after its seizure of power, the *Derg* called itself a Marxist-Leninist state and adopted hard-line, Soviet style communist programs. In typical Soviet fashion, the state became a highly centralized one-party state and power was concentrated in the hands of Mengistu Haile Mariam and a small number of his close cohorts. All major economic resources and industrial and commercial enterprises were placed under state ownership, and the private sector, which was not a major force even under the imperial regime, was highly marginalized.

One of the most important policy initiatives of the *Derg* was the radical land reform of 1975. The reform nationalized all agricultural land and the peasant cultivator had only usufruct rights to the land he or she was allocated through redistribution. Farm plots could not be sold, mortgaged or transferred in any way except to one's children in special circumstances. The countryside was divided into what were known as *kebeles*, localities with a given area and population of resident farmers. Peasant Associations (PAs) were formed in each *kebele*, and the responsibility of the PAs was to redistribute land, to settle disputes and, later, to collect taxes and act as the last tier of local administration. The land reform dispossessed, without compensation, all landlords, and abolished tenancy. Initially, the reform was received with a good deal of support; it appeared as an emancipatory reform designed to enable the peasantry to become an

independent class. But subsequent policies aimed at the socialization of agriculture alienated the peasantry and soured the relations between it and the *Derg*. Moreover, the reform gave rise to frequent redistribution of land and as a result created a high degree of tenure insecurity.

The major rural policies that followed the land reform placed heavy emphasis on agricultural cooperatives and state farms. Collectivization was seen as an important vehicle for rapid agricultural transformation. Through a variety of largely coercive measures, the state promoted cooperatives in the countryside; these cooperatives were entitled the best land, tax incentives and generous subsidies. There were also urban co-operatives, involving mostly craftsmen and women, which also enjoyed similar benefits. While the *Derg's* priorities was mainly on collectivization and state agriculture, it did try to provide some support to private peasant farms. It was during the 1980s that large-scale dissemination of fertilizers was undertaken. Attempts were made to keep the price of fertilizer low through a program of state subsidies.

In 1984-85, a devastating famine spread throughout the rural areas. The response to the famine was massive food aid to the country by Western donors. The food was distributed to the affected population in part through free distribution and in part through food-for-work programs. At the same time, all through the 1980s, the government undertook an extensive program of environmental rehabilitation through food- for-work, thanks to the food aid supplied by the World Food Program, the E.U., Canada and other Western countries.

Following the famine of the 1980s, the *Derg* embarked on forced resettlement and villagization. Resettlement relocated over half a million peasant farmers, the victims of drought and famine, in areas which were considered to have better agricultural potential. These were areas in the south and southwest of the country. An earlier program to resettle drought victims on irrigated land in the Ogaden area in the eastern lowlands was not very successful. Most of the resettlement schemes were maintained by heavy government support. Villagization also involved moving several million peasant households from their traditional localities to new areas. This was also undertaken through coercion and intimidation.

Another unpopular rural policy was food requisitioning. Every peasant had to deliver a *quota* of grain to the government at prices set well below the market. Grain *quotas* were set arbitrarily by a government agency and *quota* deliveries were enforced by the PAs. Initially, the rationale behind the measure was to keep the price of food low for the urban population, in particular the urban poor.

While the supply of food and other consumer products became increasingly short in the 1980s, the *Derg's* system of public distribution of consumer goods at controlled prices did benefit the urban poor to some extent.

In 1990, following a series of military defeats, the *Derg* initiated a radical economic reform. The policy of Mixed Economy, which was hastily announced, liberalized the grain trade, terminated grain requisitioning, encouraged the participation of the private sector and allowed peasants and others to opt out of the cooperative schemes if they so wished. In the space of less than six months, the great majority of cooperatives were dismantled, and millions of peasants abandoned the villages and returned to their previous homes. In addition, many thousand settler peasants left resettlement and headed to their original birth place.

3.4 The Present Government

Immediately after the overthrow of the *Derg* in May 1991, the transitional government undertook a policy of administrative decentralization along ethnic lines. However, the setting up ethnic-based regional governments has been followed by greater bureaucratization. The new government also demobilized the *Derg* army, and attempts were made through some donor initiatives to integrate the soldiers into civilian life.

Initially, the new government refrained from announcing a comprehensive new land policy, stating that this will be undertaken following a new constitution and popular elections. However, in 1993 it proclaimed that land would remain, as previously, under state ownership and the peasant farmer would continue to hold usufruct rights. A slight improvement from before is that now land-holders

can transfer their land to others through short-term rent or contract, though holders are still prohibited from selling or mortgaging their holdings. The resettlement program has been suspended but there are still tens of thousands resettlers in the south and southwest of the country. There has been one major land redistribution in the north of the country in 1996, and peasants in other parts of the country suspect that there will be more to come later. The sense of tenure insecurity created by the policies of the *Derg* has not been allayed.

Further market liberalization, currency devaluation, and the termination of all state subsidies were carried in the mid-1990s. Fertilizer subsidies were phased out over a period of three years, however this coincided with sharp increases in world fertilizers prices. The new economic policy initiated by the government was to effect a shift from a command economy to a market-based economy. Barriers to private investment were to be removed and incentives were to be provided to encourage both domestic and foreign capital. As part of its acceptance of the IMF/World Bank's structural adjustment program (SAP), the government undertook a retrenchment program involving the laying-off of a large number of civil servants from all branches of administration. While the termination of the long civil war was welcomed by society at large, it does not appear to the average Ethiopian, least of all to the poor, that they have benefited by the peace dividend. Moreover, the period of peace proved to be short-lived, and the country is at present at war with its neighbor Eritrea. The conflict has led to large-scale military conscription and the allocation of considerable resources to the war effort.

While sufficient investigation has not yet been carried out, there is evidence to indicate that SAP has hurt the poor, both rural and urban. According to some of the reports of the joint study undertaken by the Economics Department of Addis Ababa University and Oxford University, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened since the mid-1990s, and that the size of the population of the poor has increased, especially in the urban areas. The new private-oriented, market-led economy has created some job opportunities but they have not been sufficient to reduce the high level of unemployment.

3.5 The Human Condition

Drought and famine have been persistent problems over the last four decades. There have been severe food shortages in 1964-66, 1973-74, 1984-85, and 1999; a food crisis is looming in the north and east of the country as these lines are being written. These two factors have been major causes of poverty in the rural areas in this period. Other causes that have exacerbated poverty have been civil war and social conflict, especially in the post-imperial period, exploitative and insecure land tenure regimes, damaging economic policies, and population pressure. As a result of the long civil war of the 1980s, and the communal conflicts following the ethnic decentralization of the country, large numbers of people fled to the cities, in particular to Addis Ababa, the capital. The number of indigents and the homeless has increased significantly in most urban areas in the 1990s.

The first population census in the country was carried out in 1984. This provided, for the first time, an accurate population count, though, at the time, only 80 percent of the country was covered by the census on account of the civil war. The second population census was undertaken in 1994 and involved a full coverage. The latter census shows that Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa, behind only Nigeria. The country's rate of population growth is put at 3 percent per year. In 1995, Ethiopia had a population of 55 million, of which 14 percent was urban and the rest rural. Ethiopia is one of the least urbanized countries in Africa. By the year 2000, the population is expected to grow to 63.5 million. The age composition of the population shows a high percentage of young men and women. About 44 percent of the population is below 15 years of age while another 44 percent is between the ages of 15 and 49 years.

Ethiopia is predominantly an agricultural country whose economy is based on land and other renewable natural resources. More than 75 percent of the population is engaged in subsistence farming, but food insecurity has been a dominant problem for the peasantry for at least over a century. The country's per capita income is estimated to be US \$167 per annum, making it one of the poorest countries in the world. The per capita income of urban residents is put at U.S. \$217 while that of rural residents is U.S. \$159. The country has considerable

potential for hydropower and mineral resources, and has one of the largest livestock populations in Africa. On the other hand, much of the country's forest and woodland has been removed with serious environmental consequences.

The pressure on agricultural land is high, and per capita land holdings are small and getting smaller. The possibility for expanding the cultivable land for rain-fed agriculture is very limited. While the irrigable potential of the country is optimistically put at about 3 million hectares, less than 5 percent of this land is under irrigation at present. Agriculture's contribution to GDP is quite high and has averaged 51 percent in the last seven years. The performance of the agricultural sector, which is highly dependent on rainfall conditions, has been quite poor, and productivity has not kept pace with population growth. The main reasons for the poor performance of agriculture are insecurity of land tenure, diminishing size of farm plots, and lack of sufficient investment in the rural economy by government and the private sector.

4. Perceptions of Poverty

In this section we discuss poor people's perceptions of well-being and its opposite, the causes and consequences of poverty and trends in well-being over a period of a decade. But first a short discussion of well-being terminology employed by the poor themselves.

4.1 Well-being Terminology

The issue here is the ways in which the participants of this study express their current state of affairs in their own way. All focus groups in this study, regardless of place of residence or gender, used similar terminology. As one can see below, the terminology describes the state of ill-being rather than well-being. All members of the focus groups responded in terminology that expresses difficult times, hopelessness and desperation.

Hence, the terminology may be classified into three related categories: (a) those that indicate no future, (b) those that depict desperation and hopelessness, and (c) those that indicate hunger and food insecurity. The following is a literal translation and brief description/definition of the most common terminology used by the participants according to these categories (See Annex 3 for a list of the most common terminology by sites). It should be noted that the 'power' of the terms to express the user's state of affairs may have been 'lost' in the process of translation from the local language into English.

(i) Terminology indicating no future:

'Life is from hand to mouth.' This is a common expression used by all focus groups. It refers to the state where a person eats all what he/she produces without having anything to spare. This could be in the context of a farm household where the farmer produces just enough to keep his/her family alive, or in the context of a daily laborer or petty trader where whatever is gained does not go beyond consumption.

'We live only for today' portrays a life style based only on the present. There is no planning ahead or thinking about the future. It is a clear indication that people have given up on life, and just don't know or don't want to think about what will happen tomorrow. It describes the state that people are reduced to living a day to day life with no future .

'It is a life of no thought for tomorrow' is a common expression, particularly in urban areas, to indicate that whatever is 'found' today is for today and whatever will be 'found' tomorrow will be for tomorrow.

'We envy the dead' is an expression that has two meanings : (i) it refers to the thinking that the good days are over and that those who lived before were lucky, and (ii) it indicates that some are so desperate that they prefer death to living under the current conditions.

(ii) Terminology indicating hopelessness and desperation:

'We are between life and death' is an expression that describes the participants' view of life as being above the dead and below the living. There is a lot of hopelessness in this expression since it doesn't show any vitality or aspiration left in the lives of many people. For many life is as good as dead.

'Waiting to die while seated' expresses the state of being that hinges on giving up on life altogether. In the absence of alternatives, impending death is seen as solution to the problems people are facing.

'We are full of debt' is an expression, mostly in rural areas, where people find themselves in debt that they did not choose to be in. This situation dominates their thinking and has become a major impediment for their improvement.

'We have neither dreams nor imagination' is another common term used to state desperation and hopelessness. This expression reveals that people are reduced to watching others eat.

(iii) Terminology indicating hunger and food insecurity:

'We eat when we have the means, and we go to bed hungry when we don't' states a way of life in which one is used to sleeping with an empty stomach. Eating is no more a right but an opportunity.

'We live on coffee' Coffee is the traditional drink of Ethiopians, in both rural and urban areas, which is consumed in a social setting involving immediate neighbors. The significance of this terminology is that coffee is the only food available for the poor; coffee dulls the hunger sensation.

'We live as dependents on others' expresses the life style of mostly the elderly and the disabled who have no means of livelihood. They depend on the charity of others to provide them with food and shelter.

'We are pitiful' describes the life of those empty-handed and empty-stomached people who sell cow-dung or fire-wood for a living. They are not in any position to eat, cloth and wash adequately.

'Life of hunger is as bad as the hyena' is a powerful way of relating hunger to hyena. The story goes that when the hungry child cried, the father tried to keep him quiet by mentioning the hyena; but the child continued crying because it figured that hunger was as bad as the hyena.

4.2 Categories and Criteria of Well-being

The categories of well being do not show major differences by place of residence or by gender. The categories themselves have not changed much over the last ten years. Usually, there are 3 or 4 different categories that reflect the dominant occupations in a given area. There are, however, some rural-urban differences in the criteria used to put households in the different categories of well-being.

Rural Sites

In the rural sites, participants identified three major categories of well-being: (i) the rich/wealthy/graceful farmers, (ii) those in the middle who are getting by, and, (iii) the poor (lower class) farmers or/and the daily laborers. Some focus groups identified 'the disabled' as the last well-being category. The rich households are defined by the participants in terms of their land size which may range from two to 12 *kerts*³; the number of livestock including plough oxen, cows, sheep and donkeys which they own; their ability to feed the family throughout the year; and their ability to buy fertilizers and lend money to the poor. Those in the middle well-being category, also known as 'those who have just enough', may or may not have land or oxen. But at least they can rent land from others (because they have the farm tools) and share the produce. That way, they can feed their families although they may not get enough food to save or sell.

³ A unit of measurement used in some localities. 4 kerts make up 1 hectare.

The third category, for most of the focus groups, comprises the poor or low class farmers, and the laborers. They symbolize ill-being. These groups definitely have no land, oxen or farm tools. They work for food on farms (when they can) or they are engaged in daily labor mostly in nearby towns. These groups live 'hand to mouth' and barely manage to stay alive. The last category of well-being (mentioned only by some focus groups) is that of the physically disabled. This group includes the elderly, the sick and those who lost a limb or two during the civil war which lasted over a decade. The members of this category live by begging or on whatever support they get from their relatives.

Urban Sites

In the urban sites, participants identified four well-being categories: (i) the well to do, (ii) those with middle income, (iii) the poor, and (iv) the very poor. The well to do are said to be those who own commercial trucks, and stores, hotels or bars. They operate grain mills, and live in nicely furnished houses that they own. Ill-being is the state of affairs as seen among the lowest category of well-being. This group includes the elderly, the disabled, and the homeless. They are those who cannot afford to pay the lowest rent, those who subsist by selling fire-wood or by doing odd jobs to make ends meet, who depend on others, or those who turn to begging. Many of these sleep on the streets or churchyards, and spend days without food. In between these two categories are households which can just manage to feed and cloth their family. They consist of low level government employees, retailers, *gulit* traders of local drinks, and pensioners. Households in this group can feed their family at least once a day and can send their children to school. They buy used clothing and cannot afford medical expenses if they get sick.

4.3 Changes or Trends in Well-being Categories

Looking at the changes in well-being categories and the proportion of households in each category over the last ten years, we find that the direction of change, without exception, has been from a higher category to a lower category of well-being. In other words, there has been a general decline in the quality of life in all sites under study. Let us look at the findings in some detail.

Rural Sites

According to rural participants of the study, there has not been major changes in the categories themselves but the proportion of households in the categories has changed markedly in the last ten years. The most noticeable changes are (i) the sharp decline in the proportion of households in the highest category of well-being, (ie. rich households), and (ii) the sharp increase in the proportion of households in the lowest category (poor and very households). Essentially, what used to be a large middle class category ten years ago has disappeared. In its place is created a large group of disabled and weak farmers who can hardly support themselves. While the actual categories remain the same, the proportion of people in the highest well-being category has decreased as much as by half in comparison to ten years ago. This change, according to respondents, has been caused by drought and the decline of fertility of the land. Respondents were of the opinion that chronic natural crisis would eliminate households in this category in the near future.

When we look at the lowest well being category the picture is different. Its size has tripled compared to that of 10 years ago. The dry face of nature in addition to the lack of access to farm assets and fertilizer debt have jointly pushed them out of the land. It is getting impossible to wait even one cycle of harvest these days. Hunger is eminent. Men are compelled to wander to the nearest towns in search of work. The rest are cutting fire woods to sell. Women are trying vainly to support their family by selling cow-dung. Dry leaves, tree branches, grass, even stones for house construction are carried long distances (7-10 km) to sell for cash. Some of the poor are considering migrating once and for all to unknown destinations.

In general, the change in well-being classification in the community is from bad to worse. There is a very clear trend of households declining in their well being measured by what they own, eat, wear or how much they can do for their children's education.

Urban Sites

In the urban sites, focus groups noted some major changes in the last ten years: there is now a new government with new policies; unemployment has increased; there is a population explosion (though they did not use that term); more and more children are not going to school; and the number of beggars has greatly increased. Some of the main causes contributing to the general decline in well-being were said to be the following:

- Ten years ago, the *Derg* recruited large numbers of soldiers, but these have now been demobilized, without jobs and without any source of income. There have also been mass layoffs of government employees. These two developments have tremendously increased the number of unemployed people in the *kebele*.
- Ten years ago, *kebele* stores sold food and other goods at affordable prices to community residents. These cooperatives also created jobs in the community. Today there are no such stores.
- Ten years ago, there was a lot of construction activity going on in the neighborhood. These created employment opportunities to plumbers, brick layers and also unskilled daily laborers. Today there is very little construction activity, and a lot of people are out of work.
- Ten years ago stores and small retail shops had enough business to pay their taxes. Today, there are few people who can afford to pay the high prices of commodities. Shops do not generate enough income to pay taxes and, hence, many have closed - further exacerbating the unemployment problem.

In brief, the growing unemployment problem is making life difficult. As a result many people cannot pay their monthly *idir* fees or buy uniforms for their school children, or pay taxes.

4.4 Main Causes and Impact of Poverty

Generally speaking, in the rural communities, the three major causes of poverty are **drought**, **declining productivity**, and **landlessness**.

According to the participants of the study, drought is caused by erratic and/or poor rains. Declining productivity is induced, among other things, by the *quota* system, lack of fertilizers and pest infestation. Landlessness, is created by land tenure policy, population increase and environmental degradation.

In urban communities, the three major causes of poverty are unemployment, lack of health and sanitation services, and inflation. Unemployment is blamed on a number of factors ranging from excessive in-migration to government's lay-off policies. Lack of health and sanitation service, according to the participants, is the result of lack of municipal services and the lack of concern of poor people's by the city administration. Inflation is one of the outcomes of government economic policies.

The main impact of poverty, according to the participants in both rural and urban communities, is deprived livelihood. When a person has no livelihood she/he is exposed to malnutrition and disease, and resorts to crime (in urban areas) or leaves the area to an unknown future (in rural areas), usually in urban areas. These, in turn, lead to the break-up of families, and the increased instances of street children and prostitution.

Rural Sites

For male participants of the study in Ada Liben Werda sites, poverty is related to all types of on-farm activities. The farmer that cannot feed himself and his family, and spare some crops for emergency purposes feels impoverished; so does the farmer who has no seeds to plant. The farmer who cannot protect his animals from diseases feels that he is heading down the path of poverty. Farmers also feel that having a piece of land to plough is no more a guarantee against poverty. They ask: 'What about pesticides, fertilizers, oxen and seedlings? Where and how do you buy them?'

Four of the five most important reasons that lead to poverty in this farming community are related to current and/or past government policies. They, are (1) price increase for agricultural inputs, (2) the settlement program, (3) the *quota* system, and (4) landlessness. The other main reason of poverty is declining production caused by drought and pests.

Price increases for agricultural inputs (particularly of fertilizers) is the direct result of the current government's decision to phase out subsidies. In an area where the land is used to fertilizers, farmers cannot produce enough to feed their families unless they use fertilizer. Farmers bitterly complain that fertilizers are now beyond their means. They are forced to buy fertilizers on debt and they have to pay their debt whether there is a harvest or not. Some farmers point out: 'to pay the debt of fertilizers we have sold our cattle. Now we have nothing to sell and we don't know what will happen to us if we don't pay our debts.'

The settlement program and *quota* system that farmers repeatedly cited were policies imposed at the time of the *Derg* regime. In the 1980s the *Derg* forced thousands of farmers from the northern part of the country to settle in the south and west. The *quota* refers to the requirement imposed on farmers to deliver a *quota* of grain to the government at below market prices. The damage caused by these two policies is still felt among the peasants in these communities.

Landlessness, according to respondents, is the result of a number of factors. The main one is the existing land tenure policy, which began during the *Derg* and has been continued by the current government, and which makes the government the sole owner of land. Peasants believe that this policy has the effect of discouraging farmers to invest all their energy and resources on the land. The result is that those who have land do not have the sense of ownership, and newly formed peasant households are destined to be landless.

There is also the pest problem. There is a type of pest locally known as '*kishikish*' which greatly damages crops. The pesticide for this dangerous pest is very costly and is beyond the reach of the poor farmer. 'One little cup of pesticide costs Birr 80 and we cannot afford to buy it', they said.

For female participants of the study in the same community, many of whom subsist by collecting and selling cow dung and fire wood, the causes of poverty have a different twist. Some of the participants came from other parts of the country eleven years ago during the forced settlement program of the previous government. Some of them were given land initially but lost the land because they were not able to pay the *quota* imposed on them by the government. Now they have lost all, save the *tukuls* they built when they arrived in the area. They are not members of the peasant association since they do not have land. They now live a life of 'dependency'.

In their eyes, poverty is the state of 'dying while seated' or 'when water becomes a big thing'. The main reasons for this state of affairs in their community, according to these women, is 'sometimes it doesn't rain when it should and there is no harvest' or 'the pests eat up the crops and there isn't much we can do'. All people here suffer equally since 'this is God's will and there is no poor or rich, all are equally exposed.

Women also described how poverty had changed their livelihoods: 'we sell cow-dung for a living', 'fertilizer is becoming very expensive', 'the flood took the peas and the chickpeas', 'we don't even have chicken to chase', 'we are left empty-handed', 'it was better last year, today is worse', 'we still have to see happiness'. 'We are just hopeless people who are waiting for God to bring miracle unto us.'

Initially not all people were equally affected by hardship. Those with some animals sell their animals to cope with poverty.

'Those who have cattle, start selling their cattle. If it is a woman and she happens to have 50 Birr, then she starts making and selling tella and areke. Many gather and sell cow-dung and leaves and twigs to make money. Even those who have donkeys use them to transport water and wood for some money. Those who suffer the most are the elderly and the children. They don't have anything to sell or exchange; they don't have labor to rent.'

In the rural sites of Dessei Zuria Wereda, the problem of declining land fertility and access to fertilizers was brought out sharply by respondents. Here is what one farmer said:

The land is not fit without fertilizer. We don't know how to protect the land from frost and flooding. Government is not responding to our problems. We have to cut down trees: we can't just die, we have to survive. We can't die while the trees are standing.

The issue of fertilizer and the debt incurred in obtaining it came up repeatedly. Many farmers are bitter about the distribution of fertilizer. Here is what one farmer said:

We are forced to buy fertilizers on credit and pay the money whether there is harvest or not. Usually we sell our cattle to pay the debt to escape arrest. Our land is measured in our absence by the authorities in order to determine the amount of fertilizer we need to use and we are summoned to take the predetermined amount of fertilizer. If one refuses to take the fertilizer, he is forced to sign an agreement forfeiting his land. We accept the fertilizer so as not to lose the land. Even if the weather is good, the yield of grain with fertilizers is less than what we used to produce by the use of manure or own traditional methods. Fertilizer burns the soil and the land is no longer productive as it used to be. Moreover the price of fertilizer has increased tenfold.

This view is shared by many farmers in the area. For female participants, the main causes of poverty are absence of irrigation and the shortage of rain.

'Our life is based on land and rain. Now both betrayed us. Due to this all of us are forced to face problems. These factors chased the rich from the community and the poor lost the means to get something from them in loan or in charity.'

Other causes of poverty also mentioned here were increasing population pressure and the continual decrease family plots. At the time of the survey many people were suffering hunger and malnutrition. A respondent noted:

'Life in the area is so precarious that the youth and every able person has to migrate to the towns or join the army at the war front in order to escape the hazards of hunger escalating over here.'

Urban Sites

Poverty, among the residents of the urban site in Ada Liben Werda, is spreading beyond control. The main causes are numerous. First, there is recurrent drought in the area in general, and this . The site, being close to a highly cultivated agricultural area, has forced a lot of residents to eat less or divert their resources including those allocated to the education of their children. The result is that less and less children are enrolled in schools. Secondly, government policies since 1991, the year the current government took over, have drastically changed peoples lives for the worse. The three main policies that were cited by respondents again and again were (1) demobilization of *Derg* soldiers (2) massive lay off of government employees, and (3) the consequences of the free-market economic policy which, in this case, is symbolized by the dissolution of the weavers cooperatives in the area. The immediate effect of these policies is that a lot of people who used to be in the middle income category have been thrown into the ranks of the poor.

Third and related to the previous two factors and increasing landlessness is the migration of rural residents to urban areas. Rural migrants move to the already crowded urban neighborhoods and stretch the already tight social services to the breaking point. They come with few or no skills or capital and in large numbers, thus swelling the ranks of the unemployed, and this often leads to increases in petty crime and social conflict.

The male participants relate poverty to agricultural activities, indicating perhaps that they were once farmers themselves. They are well aware that the rural farmers are suffering from successive droughts and pest problems. They know what this could mean for urban residents like themselves. They talk about price of goods increasing sharply, more and more people being thrown out of their livelihoods and young people resorting to unacceptable behavior like theft and prostitution. This group of people see no relief in the near future, on the contrary, they expect things to get worse before they improve. They blame the government for not coming to their rescue.

For **female** respondents the main cause of poverty is the loss of earning power of their husbands. As a matter of fact, many consider their husbands' loss of hope is the same as the loss of their husbands altogether. They argue that they suffer directly when their spouses lose their jobs. This is because they themselves have no skills or means of support the family. Many say that they have tried to sell local drinks (like tella and areke) to earn some money. But not too many people in the community have money to buy drinks any more. So these women see a very a bleak future. They believe hunger and disease have consumed a majority of the community residents.

In the studies sites in Addis Ababa, the factor that was frequently cited as the main cause of poverty is unemployment, which is said to have been increasing over the last ten years. The causes of unemployment are given as growing population pressure and increased competition for jobs, the disbanding of the Derg army, migration, and economic slowdown. Not enough jobs are being created to satisfy demand. Other causes mentioned were lack of medical services, illiteracy or poor education. The consequences of poverty were identified as hunger and starvation, greater health hazard, prostitution, theft and street crime, and lack of access to education.

According to informants in the run-down neighborhoods in northern Addis Ababa, where the majority of people are either weavers or related to those involved in the weaving industry, poverty was exacerbated by the government's economic reform program which paved the way for the dissolution of the cooperative shops, and the constant increase in the cost of living. Following the change of government in May 1991, and the introduction of the free-market economy, cooperative societies were dismantled. The subsidies of the previous government to cooperatives which, in the eyes of the participants, had an equalizing effect on the rich and the poor, were withdrawn. The immediate effect was that the price of raw material used by the cooperators skyrocketed, and income from the sale of woven products fell sharply. The high rate of unemployment in the city (over 35 percent according to officials sources) made matters worse for the weaving industry.

In general, the main factors that were cited in all urban sites as causing poverty were by in large similar. However there are some differences of emphasis among male and female respondents. By and large, while unemployment was cited as the major cause of poverty by most male groups, lack of health services and illiteracy were emphasized as important causes of poverty by female groups. For females, government regulations enforcing school uniforms has contributed to illiteracy and, hence, to poverty. For these women, poverty meant the lack of the means to cover basic needs such as paying their monthly *idir* fees. At the community level, poverty has meant high living costs, the lack of adequate sanitary facilities, inadequate housing, and the closing down of small businesses (small shops, etc) that would have provided some employment opportunities.

4.5 Perception of Security, Risk and Vulnerability

The participants of the study did not as such distinguish between risk, security and vulnerability. They used the three terms interchangeably, indicating no difference in perception and understanding. For the participants, insecurity is linked to the main resource of production and the factors that impede production. In general, people are insecure because they see no bright future. They are insecure because, from experience, they have seen nothing improving. On the contrary, a unanimous view among all the focus groups covered in this study is that life is getting from bad to worse. In *Dessie Zuria Werda sites*, respondents clearly stated that life has been declining since the great famine of 1985. As the elders recall,

'The famine killed innumerable people; but as it was heard by the world community, there were so many helping hands around us. To-day the situation is similar to the eve of that great famine, but it seems that the government authorities are not yet aware of it or even if they know about it, they have chosen to remain silent and passive.'

Community residents understand security as being healthy, having something to eat and wear, to own oxen for farming and to produce enough to live on, to have milk cows and also children who provide help to their parents. Those who have some money can go to the clinic or hospital to get medical care, while the poor, who are more vulnerable to ill health are more likely to die of even minor health hazards.

In the Addis Ababa sites, most respondents associated the term security with peaceful life. According to them, food, clothing, shelter, and employment opportunities are the basis of peaceful life. Generally, transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and typhoid make the community insecure. Such diseases are a serious hazard because of the dense settlement pattern the community, and all families irrespective of their well-being status are equally exposed to such health risks. Insecurity among female-headed households is more severe compared to that of other families in the community. Only those families which have some assets and which are engaged in business activities can cope with risks.

In the Dessie, people of different focus groups associated insecurity with war and conflict; in such situations where people are asked either to fight or to contribute money that they cannot afford to the war effort. Participants lamented that 'our children go to the warfront and die rather than help us improve our sense of security.' They explained that continuous war adds to the feeling of insecurity.

4.6 Social and Economic Mobility

In general, in rural areas, people think that upward economic and social mobility are better for those who have land, farm oxen and other farm assets. For those in urban areas, mobility may come in the form of job opportunities, access to credit and start-up capital.

In the rural sites of Ada Liben, peasants think the opportunity for upward mobility could come in three different forms: agricultural extension programs, rain, and government intervention. The following is a typical observation:

'We could have produced 25 quintals of grain with extension programs, but the price of fertilizer has gone up. When we fail to produce enough we sell our cattle. The rain also plays a major role in our livelihood. If we had enough rain, our cattle would not have died; the ploughing season would not have passed; when we should have ploughed the land by now, we haven't.'

If we had received government assistance, farmers say, in the areas of water and electricity, it would have created a great deal of opportunity for us to improve our lives.

In the urban areas, the chances for mobility are associated with employment opportunities, improved economic climate and access to credit, and the opportunity to send one's children to school. Craftsmen here complain that there is no market for their products, and they face too much competition due to the fact that too many people have become engaged in the same activity. This is of course the result of limited livelihood diversification and the inability of the modern sector of the economy to offer sufficient employment. Another important point that was noted by urban respondents was that the fortunate few who were able to go into business have a good chance of upward mobility.

4.7 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion for us means sharing ideas, helping each other, praying together, sharing the good and bad together, sing together at marriages and crying together at funerals. As our problems increase so does the social cohesion.

Male respondent in Ada Liben Wereda rural site.

In all rural sites of Ada Liben Wereda, there are many occasions for people to meet and interact with each other. Some are religious (*Eretcha, Tabot, Tebel*), some are social (*Idir* or *Kire, Baltina, Senbete, Tsiwa*) and some are economic (*Ikub*). These are all informal local institutions that in one way or another bring people together. They serve as social lubricants and have contributed to the enhancement of social cohesion within the community. The only problem is that few of them are not development oriented.

Crime and conflict seem to be infrequent in the rural community. Time and again, respondents were surprised that we asked questions about crime in their communities. All the discussion groups indicated that there are no serious crimes known in the community except for minor personal conflicts which are easily rectified by the involvement of elders. Elders are highly respected and listened to in the community and whenever conflicts between individuals or groups arise they are called upon to mediate and resolve them.

In general, the consensus among members of the focus groups is that social cohesion within the community residents increasing as compared to the last 10 years. This is because of two main events that took place in the last few years. First, the settlement program of the Derg brought a lot of people from different parts of the country to the area. Second, the Derg instituted the quota system. The result was that the area got crowded, land size decreased, and a lot of peasants became landless. In spite of these problems, and in the absence of any other source, people looked towards each other for help. The neighbor was the immediate source of help when some one was sick and had to be taken to the hospital (like pregnant women), when different natural disasters take place, or when drought hits. People needed each other and prayed together.

There is, however, a strong sign that due to chronic poverty, many people are being forced to quit voluntary social institutions such as *idir* because they cannot afford to pay their monthly contributions. Poverty is bringing about social disintegration:

Children cry when they cannot get their meals in time. The wife quarrels with her husband when he fails to bring in the necessary money and grain for the family. The young ones migrate to the cities. This way many families have dispersed and marriages have been broken.

Female participants in Dessie Zuria Werda rural site.

In the urban areas on the other hand, matters are somewhat different. While crime and social conflict are not over-riding problems, they do exist in almost all communities. Petty thefts, burglary and harassment of women by rogue elements are not infrequent. There

are also family conflict arising directly out of poverty. Respondents attribute the existence of these forms of crime to growing unemployment. Many believe that there are too many young and adult men and women who have no jobs and no source of livelihood, and who feel highly embittered. Such individuals are not bound by the norms of local institutions like those noted above and pose a threat to the cohesion of the community. Conflicts among individuals arise due to competition for resources and jobs. Respondents noted that there is hostility directed at recent migrants because they are thought to be competitors for jobs and other income earning activities. Family conflicts are caused by the frustration and distress arising out of lack of basic necessities and inadequate livelihood.

4.8 Coping with Crisis

The overall consensus among many members of focus groups was that they cannot cope with the crisis anymore. Governmental or non-governmental institutions are either resourceless or uninterested in the plight of the poor. In their absence, community residents rely on local social institutions. The most important are religious institutions such as *Eretcha* on which people have considerable confidence. *Idir* and *Ikub* are also important institutions at times of crisis: they help people meet their social, and to some extent financial obligations. Other coping strategies include migration in search of employment

for the young and able bodied males. Women, on the other hand, collect cow-dung and fire wood to sell in order to meet their food needs. In the worst cases, they go to the extent of selling household and personal belongings. Reducing the number of meals a day and changing the type of food eaten is also very common both in the rural and urban communities.

In the rural areas, coping with crisis takes a variety of forms. Men and women abandon their farms and migrate elsewhere in search of work. Men may offer themselves for hire by the well-to-do to work as shepherds or farm laborers. Selling oxen and other property and giving up farming for a life in the towns is also a coping strategy for some. A number of respondents, both male and female, reported that they were forced to cut down trees to sell as fire-wood even though

they knew that this was damaging to the environment and was illegal. In extreme cases, people may be reduced to begging, or to prostitution in the case of young women. A few respondents stated that they go to the local money lender to borrow money to feed their families. Asked to compare their livelihood today with that of ten years ago, some members of focus groups answered as follows:

With the past regime, the main problem was forced military recruitment and forced settlement. At present forced military recruitment is non-existent though the youth are joining the army willingly for they have no other alternative. In the past the driving force to join the army was the might of government whereas these days it is hunger and lack of any alternative.

5. Institutions

This study confirms that communities both in rural and urban areas rely more on informal local institutions than on formal government or non-government institutions. The reasons for this may be two-fold. First, there are few formal institutions, particularly in the rural communities, that provide support to community residents. Second, there is a close relationship between cultural and religious beliefs on the one hand and informal institutions on the other. The latter have secured a strong cultural or religious backing and have survived (in fact, thrived) even under harsh economic conditions.

Our findings also indicate that although there are definite local and gender based differences, for the most part *idir* stands out as the most important institution in all the sites in the study. *Idir* is a burial society where the main concern is that a deceased member receives proper burial. This means that during the three-day mourning period all the necessary arrangements ranging from digging the grave to feeding the mourners (and the members of the society) is taken care of by the society. For many, proper burial and support during the difficult days of mourning takes higher priority than anything else. Membership fees, unlike other payments, are paid for the most part regularly and on time.

The second most important institution is the church for Christians and the mosque for Muslims. In both rural and urban communities and among males and females, the church and the mosque have been very important institutions because they provide spiritual comfort. They are also the place of burial, the last place of rest. These are very important issues for a majority of poor people, especially the elderly. These days, however, the youth are showing as much interest in religion as the adults. An increasing number of young males and females crowd the churches and mosques for religious lessons and to participate in the service. This may very well be related to poverty - particularly the absence of jobs and the ensuing frustration and hopelessness.

The third most important institution for Christians are those semi-religious observances common everywhere, such as *mahiber/senbete* and *tsebel* (see below). Among Muslims, in the absence of a Mosque in the community, worshipers go to a *zawiya* to pray. At a *zawiya* ceremony, there is usually a *qadi*, a Moslem religious leader, who leads the prayer. It is clear from the discussions with the Muslim community that these religious ceremonies provide them with a great deal of comfort and satisfaction, despite the economic hardships.

Among the formal governmental institutions, the *kebele* and *Gibrina Biro* are mentioned as important to community residents. The *Kebele* is the lowest unit of administration in both rural and urban areas. It is considered important because (i) it links community residents with the government, and (ii) that is where community residents go to receive ID cards or any other kind of official document that is considered essential for their needs. On occasions the *kebeles* also provide the forum for the discussion of issues of public concern.

Gibrina Biro refers to the office at the Ministry of Agriculture where agricultural support is provided to farmers in the form of extension programs. These may include training in modern agricultural methods, distribution of fertilizers, or vaccination of cattle. For many farmers, however, such support has been declining over the years to the point where they rely on them only occasionally.

In the rural sites of Ada Liben Wereda, there doesn't seem to be formal institutions to speak of, save for some government institutions at a distance of 8 km. There are no NGOs operating either. The people in the area have developed their own institutions, some religious and some social and others financial, to get together and address their needs. Although ranking institutions is not easy the three most important institutions for the community are *Tabot* (church), *Eretcha* and *Idir*, all of them informal institutions. In addition, there is a prayer ceremony known locally as *Gara Boru*, which is actually the name of a nearby mountain. It is not as significant as *eretcha* where people go to pray only once a year. In this case, there is no limit as to how many times a person can go to the mountain but the main purpose is to pray for rain and relief of hardships.

In the Shiromeda neighbourhood of Addis Ababa, one of the research sites of this study, many residents make a living as weavers, petty traders and craftsmen. There are also quite a few who are unemployed and disabled. The residents of this community are bitter about their present condition. There is they say no institution that has the potential to affect their lives in a positive way. When pressed, they identify the *kebele* as the most important institution for community residents. This is not because the *kebele* is involved in welfare or development activity, but because it facilitates free medical care or provides identification cards. The other social institutions they recognized were *idir* and the church. They are very clear about the importance of *idir* but they are also aware about its limitations. Because *idir* is not involved in any type of development activity, residents here were hesitant to identify it as an important institution.

Residents of the neighborhood fondly talk about their cooperatives and community organizations that were disbanded when the present government came to power. There was the Weavers Cooperative, Consumers Organization, the Youth Club and the Cart Drivers Organization. Through these organizations members used to get loans and raw material at affordable prices. There was price control and regulation of membership. Informants stated emphatically that weavers, cart drivers and consumers were all happy and relatively well-off. Residents would like to see the re-establishment of their cooperatives and community organizations.

6. Gender Relations

There are two major issues here: First, there seems to be a consensus that gender relations are very much influenced by the dominant culture in the area. Second, in the last few decades, and probably mostly as a result of poverty, gender relations are showing clear signs of change in favor of females.

The typical responsibilities of women at the household level include preparing food, taking care of the children, and fetching water and fire-wood. These are responsibilities that women as well as men agree belong to women, although there are differences by gender as to the reasons. Men believe that these tasks are delegated to women because they are 'physically weak' and the tasks do not require a lot of physical effort. Women, on the other hand believe that they carry out these chores, which they consider physically demanding, because they do not want to be labeled 'lazy' or 'unfit to be a wife'. They strongly argue, contrary to males, that some of their routine tasks such as carrying water on their back for hours require a lot of physical strength. There are only a few women in positions of leadership or with decision-making roles in the communities under study.

There are signs, however, that women are claiming more and more of their legitimate rights. A few of them have now elected as *idir* or association leaders. It is not quite clear whether this is mostly a reflection of the change in the culture which in itself could have many reasons. Or, whether it is a poverty-induced deterioration of males' control over females. Informants indicated that men realize that they cannot force their wives out of the house as easily as before during divorce or marital conflict.

The role of men in the household is kept to a minimum because it is supposed that men spend a lot of time and energy outside the household. However, men make decisions in the home on matters that have to do with household finances or matters that have to do with disciplining of the children. In addition, men are expected to do the physically demanding tasks of cutting wood, repairing the home or protecting the household from intruders. Males also assume all the major responsibilities of decision making on matters that affect the

well-being of the community. They are almost always leaders of the peasant associations, *kebeles* or *idirs*. They are also appointed to all prestigious positions and positions of power from most of which women are excluded.

Violence against women, both in rural and urban areas, has been going on for a long time without inhibition. Although there are some signs, particularly in urban areas, that women are gradually asserting their rights, violence against women, which occurs in the household as well as in public and the community, is still widespread and unattended. The most common form of household violence includes beatings and forced acceptance of marriage. Women are beaten in the house for any reason that may include failure to prepare lunch or dinner for the husband. They are also beaten if the husband comes home drunk or if he simply feels like doing it.

Women are also forced to stay in a marriage that they do not like. This particular form of violence is frequently enforced by putting economic or cultural pressure on women. In the former case, at a time of divorce, women get very little, if any, of the property they commonly produced with their husbands. In fact, women might end up with the additional burden of raising the children alone and without support in case of divorce. In the latter case, if a woman leaves her husband her parents (or other supposedly concerned relatives) make her return to her husband 'for the sake of making peace'. This leaves women with no choice but to live in a marriage that they not happy with. In the rural areas the most common form of violence against women is *telefa*, that is abducting women and frequently though not in all cases forcing them into marriage against their will. *Telefa* is a serious crime which involves rape and abuse of women.

6.1 Men's and Women's Responsibilities

The following are some of the views of men and women on gender relations in their communities. Men in the rural areas regard the responsibilities of women to be the following:

'Women, bake injera, make wet, prepare tella and purify the butter we use. In addition it is their responsibility to bear and raise our children, wash our clothes. There is nothing that women can help the men with; that is how it was all the time. We inherited this.'

Men believe that there is a natural division of labor between males and females:

'Breast-feeding, for instance, is natural and is left for women. We men are mostly farmers, as you can see. We stay out and get tired since we toil the whole day. Women support us in this way.'

'It is Allah who has differentiated women's and men's responsibilities. It will culturally be out of the way and shameful if a man does any of women's responsibilities.'

They also see the role of women in society as supplementary:

'They, after all, become members of peasant associations when we die and they might as well learn how to farm. There are natural things they have to do too. Like breast feeding. But, they can't become community leaders since they don't get into elections because they are not educated. We don't think they want to be elected, anyway.'

Men believe they have the upper hand as a matter of course:

'We are listened to by society; we control our lives and children. It is men who participate in elections - for peasant administration or for local institutions. The one area where women have the upper hand in society is when their skills (Baltina) are needed - this is true always when they are needed to cook at weddings or at mourning. Men are responsible for the household income. The family mostly depends on this income and hence men decide every thing. There are exceptions; those women who have no husband can decide fully on themselves regarding their children and property that they have'

Women accept that there is a cultural and not natural division of labor.

'Women are not educated and hence these are their obligations. Women also do not want to be labeled lazy. They make and sell local drinks because they need some money to buy household consumer items such as oil, salt or firewood. The men do not supply these.'

They point out that they just as much if not more than men.

'We work more than men. We help men on the farm - nobody acknowledges that. We cook and wash, fetch water, go to the market and take care of the children. In spite of these, we still do not get what we want - not at home, not in the community. The only

thing that we organize for is to participate in baltina where we prepare food and drinks for various reasons. This has been going on for years, and it goes on now.'

In all the urban sites of the study the consensus is that men are committed to be the source of the family income, whereas women manage household affairs. Due to cultural and other reasons men are expected to have some source of income before they get married, but after marriage women are not confined to the home preparing food for the family. When the means of livelihood become inadequate they try to support the family by engaging in a variety of income generating activities such as *gulit* retailing trading, selling home-made food and drinks, and daily labor. The more the men become jobless, the heavier the burden on the women. There is now growing unemployment in the urban areas and this has meant that women are spending more time in activities outside the household. The conventional belief of men as the only source of family income and the confinement of women to the home is changing rapidly.

Women's responsibilities within the community on the other hand is limited. These activities revolve around the informal institutions noted above and religious meetings and holidays. In these social and religious gatherings women are responsible for decorations and preparing food and drinks. They feed all the people who come to attend the occasions. Men's responsibilities within the community in contrast tend to be more predominant and 'important.' They literally run the community either as *kebele* leaders, *idir* leaders or religious

leaders. Looking at the traditional leadership, the elderly (almost always males) have a lot of influence over the community. They are highly regarded and respected because they resolve potential contradiction between community groups, reconcile split families, and advise young people against improper behavior. Their authority in these regards is not challenged by women at all. Men also have other responsibilities at the community level: they represent the household at most community meetings, they officiate at weddings, religious and social ceremonies, and take the overall responsibility for maintaining security in the community.

Things, however, are changing these days. Women have more say now as compared to the past. Women used to submit to men's wishes within a marriage and many still do, but if they are not happy some are willing to abandon the marriage contract and live alone. In the past, marriages were arranged, today a good number of women in the urban areas marry the men they chose, though arranged marriages are still practiced. As noted above, poverty has driven more and more women to engage in income-generating activities; they are no longer confined to the home. Further, women are also becoming visible in leadership roles in formal and informal institutions though their number is very small. A number of informants pointed out that due to spread of education among women and the influence of the mass media women have improved their status and achieved positions of responsibility. They noted that the extent of women's power in decision-making in the household depends on the educational and class status of the household.

7. Summary and Recommendations

7.1 Summary

Well-being:

1. *The categories of well-being show that there are many more households in the lowest categories than in the middle or upper categories.*

2. *The criteria used for categorizing households as well-to-do or poor depends on whether there is enough land and cattle (in rural communities) or whether there is good business or permanent employment (in urban areas)*
3. *The changes in the proportion of households from one category to another show that in the last ten years (i) a lot of households have moved from the middle to the lowest category and (ii) a new category of the weak and disabled has been added.*

Problems and Priorities:

1. *The problems and priorities do not show major differences by gender, but they do by place of residence.*
2. *In rural areas the most serious problems are (i) access to land, (ii) drought, and (iii) the quota system.*
3. *In urban areas the most serious problems are (i) unemployment, (i) rapid population growth, and (ii) the absence of health and sanitation services.*
4. *In both rural and urban areas participants believe that most of these problems were caused by government policies which include demobilization of soldiers, lay-off, and removal of subsidies.*
5. *The effect of these problems has been wide-spread malnutrition, mortality and morbidity, migration, crime and prostitution.*
6. *Women on the whole show better coping strategies than men.*

Institutions:

1. *The most important institutions, both in rural and urban areas as well as for males and females, are informal local institutions.*

2. *Idir, followed by the church/mosque and semi-religious institutions (such as tsebel and zawiya) are the most important social institution for all people.*
3. *Government institutions are seen as important only in so far as they provide official document (such as ID cards); they are not directly related to well-being.*
4. *For the most part males control and influence these institutions although females are gaining some ground lately.*

Gender Relations:

1. *Both in rural and urban areas, gender relations are defined mostly by the influences of culture and religion.*
2. *Culture dictates that women engage only in household activities (cooking and washing) while men are responsible for maintaining the household.*
3. *At the community level, men tend to hold all the key positions that give them the edge in controlling and influencing events.*
4. *In the past few years, particularly in urban areas, gender relations are showing clear signs of change in favor of women.*
5. *It seems that poverty is one of the factors that brought about these changes.*

7.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to stimulate debate and should not be taken as a blue-print for policy change.

1. *Public policy should play an important role in poverty reduction. The government cannot simply abandon the poor. It is clear from this report that the participants of*

the study do not consider the present government to be a friend of the poor.

2. *Public policy should be "poverty sensitive". Policy makers should carefully weigh the impact of economic and social legislation on the poor and their livelihoods.*
3. *The needs of the rural poor are different from those of the urban poor. Within these two broad groups are sub-groups based on occupation, gender and age. The poor are thus not an undifferentiated mass but rather consist of a diverse group of distinct interests and priorities. For the rural poor, the priorities are land, agricultural inputs, extension programs, and the problems of food security caused, as they see it, by drought and rainfall variability. For the urban poor, they are unemployment, and municipal services.*
4. *As is clear from the views expressed by respondents what the poor need is not charity but programs to help them help themselves.*
5. *There is an urgent need to reconsider some of the public policies that the poor identified as having had a damaging effect on their livelihoods. These include land tenure policy, the policy of economic liberalization, and policies having to do with farm subsidies and economic support to farmers.*
6. *The economy should be stimulated to create large-scale employment opportunities which will offer jobs to the poor. This is the task of government, the private sector and international donor agencies.*
7. *Equally important is the formulation and implementation of sound food security programs, especially for the drought prone areas of the country. The problem of food security is the problem of poverty.*

8. *Some of the poor can easily support themselves if they are given the opportunity. Such opportunity includes providing them credit and financial assistance, improving the tax burden of small and micro-enterprises, etc. Micro-finance programs geared to the needs of the poor should be given serious consideration.*
9. *The poor are in great need of basic social services such as education, health and water and sanitation. There should be a concerted effort to provide such services to them.*
10. *The poor in urban areas believe that they have been poorly served by the municipal authorities. They need better housing, lighting, and water and sanitation services. The lack of municipal services has exposed poor neighborhoods to serious health hazards.*
11. *The most significant institutions in the lives of the poor are informal self-managed associations and religious institutions. This is a clear indication of the alienation of the poor from the state and their lack of confidence in public officials.*
12. *While traditional gender relations and gender division of labor have remained unchanged in all the communities selected for this study, there are indications that poverty has given women a greater say in household affairs. Support programs to the poor should therefore build on this positive outcome.*

Annex 1: Brief Profile of Study Sites

As indicated earlier, the consultations with the poor were conducted in three different regions of the country: Ada Liben Wereda in Eastern Ethiopia, Dessie Zuria Wereda in Northern Ethiopia, and in Addis Ababa which is centrally located. On the basis of the discussion with the various focus groups as well as the data collected using the 'Site Community Characteristics' format and field observations, brief profiles of each site are given below.

(i) Ada Liben Wereda Sites

Site 1: Kajima Peasant Association (PA), one of the 138 peasant associations in Ada Liben Wereda is located about 55 km east of Addis Ababa, in Oromia Region and mostly inhabited by Oromos. The nearest major town (about 8 kms) to this site is Debre Zeit, with a population of 73,372 in 1994 - the last national census. Kajima had a total of 282 peasant households, and a total of 1,640 people, according to the 1994 census. The majority of the male population are engaged in subsistent farming; about a third have no land and, hence, no livelihood; the remaining live as daily laborers. The women, for the most part are housewives. There are some who sell local drinks like *tella* and *areke* for a living; there are also those who work as daily laborers. The population of the peasant association has changed quite a bit in the last ten years or so, according to the residents. There are no telephone, postal or health and school services in this community. The economy, the way the residents put it, has 'fallen to its lowest level ever.' In the Winter, heavy rain (including hail), followed by heavy flooding, destroys their crops and sweeps the top soil away. In the Summer, there is a severe shortage of water. Everything dries up. That is when there is food shortage and the men look for work in nearby towns; the females fetch and sell fire-wood and/or cow-dung for a living. The price of consumption items such as oil and coffee has also gone up sharply in the last ten years.

Site 2: Kurkura Dembi Peasant Association is about 55 km east of Addis Ababa and about 10 km from the nearest main town of Debre Zeit. Kurkura Dembi had a total of 2,912 people living in 528 households, according to the 1994 census. The peasant association

was formed 13 years ago when the socialist settlement program was undertaken throughout the country. Most of the people are Oromos and Orthodox Christian. Mixed agriculture (crop and livestock production) is the mainstay of the people. The majority of the residents of the community are farmers and produce crops once a year based on the *meher* rain. The main crops produced are *teff*, beans, peas, wheat and barely. Some members of the community work as daily laborers and fewer people are involved in selling local drinks, mostly *tella* and *areke*. Despite the location of the PA which is only 8 km from the main road, there are no telephone, postal, electric or water services in the community. There are no schools or any health services available to the farmers, unless they walk to Debre Zeit.

Site 3: Dibdibe Wajtu Peasant Association There about 800 peasant households (and a total of 5000 people) living in this farm community. The nearest main road from the community is about 8 Kms away, near a small town called Dukem. Community residents walk to this town (about 2 hours) to get access to telephones, post offices or clinics. Although there is a power line that passes nearby, only about 5% of the community residents have electricity service. There is no agricultural extension office at the site, but there is at Dukem. The main source of livelihood for the males in this community are agriculture and petty trade. Females, for the most part, are housewives although some are engaged in selling local drinks such as *tella* to supplement the family's income. Virtually all community residents are Orthodox Christians. Hence, the main social groups are religious in nature. These include *mahiber* and *tsiwa*. There are no social groups based on ethnicity, race or caste. Over the last ten years the local economy has gotten worse, and will continue to decline for the foreseeable future. Occasional natural disasters such as drought and flood have contributed to this decline. There has also been occasional food crisis which has driven the price of food above the purchasing power of community residents.

Site 4: Kebele 11, founded in 1978, is one of the 15 kebeles located in Debre Zeit, a town with a population of 72,000 about 45 km east of Addis Ababa. The town is surrounded by seven crater lakes, and fertile farm land suitable for *teff*. Lakes *Hora* and *Bishoftu* are literally within the city limits, attracting a lot of tourists mostly from

the Addis Ababa area. The *kebele* itself had a 1994 population of 4,623 living in 1,073 households. The youth age group (below 16) amounts to almost half of the population. There is a large group of unemployed in the *kebele*. A majority of those males who work are engaged in semi-professional jobs like weaving, carpentry, and brick laying. Most do not have permanent jobs, and a few are civil servants. Most women are housewives, but many are engaged in petty trade at *gulits*, or in selling local drinks like *tella* and *areke*. Despite the hazardous sanitary conditions, there are no health services within the community. People either walk or take the carts to go to the nearest clinic on the other side of the town. A lot of people are concerned about the health of their children. Many are victims of typhoid and diarrhea.

It is widely believed in this area that the local economy has greatly deteriorated in the last ten years, particularly since the advent of the new government in 1991. The reasons given by the residents of the community are numerous. Some of them include: demobilization of soldiers which suddenly created a class of large unemployed youth; in-migration from the surrounding rural and semi-urban areas as a result of the ethnic politics initiated by the current government; and the dissolution of the cooperatives which destroyed the livelihoods of many crafts people, especially weavers.

(ii) Addis Ababa Sites

Site 5: Kebele 30 (also known as Pensioners' Area), is one of the 300 or so *kebeles* in Addis Ababa located in the middle of the most commercialized portion of the city. The 1994 national census shows that there were 1,913 households and 9,428 people living in this *kebele*. Almost half of them are aged 15 and below. There are telephone, electric and water services in the community. However, most households share these services in common. There is no hospital or clinic in the *kebele*. The residents of four *kebeles*, including this one, share one clinic. There are severe problems of latrines, kitchens and waste disposal. Housing and crowded living are also major problems in the *kebele*. The main NGO in the area which has attempted to address some of these issues is Inter-wholistic Approach for Urban Development Project (IWAUDP). It is also known as

Sister Jember's NGO. This NGO has been involved in constructing roads, latrines, housing units and recreational centers for the youth. It is said that the NGO is not now as active as it used to be. Some of the men in the *kebele* work as plumbers, brick layers, masons, carpenters, etc. The majority of the adult men in the *kebele* are daily laborers or petty traders. There are large groups of unemployed and beggars. Women also work as daily laborers and petty traders (*gulit*) although a majority call themselves housewives and are totally dependent on their husbands. There is a consensus that the community is not only hard hit with poverty but also that it has shown a major decline in well-being in the last ten years. One main reason, according to the residents, is the demobilization of the *Derg* soldiers. A majority of the residents of this *kebele* are Orthodox Christians, although there is a large Muslim population too. The ethnic background of the residents is so mixed that it could be called the ethnic melting pot of the entire country.

Site 6: Kebele 23 (Wereda 11, Zone 4) commonly known as Shiromeda is situated in the northern part of the capital bounded by Entoto Mountains to the north. With a total population of about 20,000, it is one of the most densely populated *Kebeles* in Addis Ababa. There are telephone services in the neighborhood, although most are not privately owned. There are no postal or health services in the community, and people have to go to other parts of the city to get services. The area is mostly settled by the Dorze ethnic group whose main occupation is weaving traditional dresses. It is estimated that about half of the males are engaged in weaving while about a third are engaged as carpenters. The remaining are engaged in all types of odd jobs including begging. More than half of the female residents of the neighborhood are engaged in selling *tella* and *areke*, while about a third sell tree leaves to support themselves. Like most neighborhoods in the city, *Kebele* 23 has seen a major increase in the population, mostly due to immigration. The residents believe the economy is deteriorating as a result of the lack of employment and increasing prices of consumer goods.

(iii) Dessie Zuria Wereda Sites

Site 7: Kebele 11 (also known as Membere Tsehaye Neighborhood) is one of the 20 Urban Dwellers' Associations (UDA) in Dessie Town surrounded by mountains and Borkena and Gerado rivers. According to the Chair of the UDA, about 2,500 households or about 10,000 people live in this urban community. The residents of this urban community have access to public telephones and a post office located at the UDA's office. A vast majority of the households also have electric service, either in private or in common. There is also a clinic run by the Red Cross in the community. Residents also utilize the main clinic of the town which is located in another UDA. There are no NGOs operating in this community. The main sources of livelihood of most males here are daily labor, retailing, and selling of wood and handicrafts. Most females, on the other hand, are engaged in retailing (at *gulits*), selling of fire wood, *tella* and *areke*. Some of the women are house-wives and depend on their husbands' income. The most common social groups in this community are religious in nature. They include *mahiber* and *senbete*. There are no groups based on ethnicity, race or caste. Although, in general, the people in the community get along with each other quite well, there is no time for them to get together socially. Each person is busy trying to make a living.

Site 8: Gerado (or 01) Peasant Association is one of the peasants' associations, located in Dessie Zuria Wereda, formed during the settlement program of the *Derg*. People who now live in this area came from different corners of the country. It is located about 7 Kms from Dessie Town, surrounded by mountains, and there is the Gerado river that goes across the community's farm land when it is not dry. Gerado is a farm community of about 4000 people who are predominantly Amhara and Muslims. About 80 percent of the males and half of the females are literate. There are no telephone or postal services in the community; there are agricultural extension programs and primary health care services. The main source of livelihood for men is farming, although a lot are having second thoughts because of the decline in production due to recurrent drought. Most women in the community are engaged in selling fire wood, cow-dung and cotton threads. The population of the community has been rapidly increasing over the years while the economy has been

declining sharply. The main causes for the latter is frequent droughts and political crises at the national level. The frequent changes of governments have had its toll in this area. In spite of the hard times, residents get on with each other very well and no tension is seen because of ethnic or religious differences.

Site 9: Kalina (02) Peasant Association (PA) was formed in the 1977 settlement program. The peasant association itself is about 7 Kms from the nearby town of Dessie. There are about 2000 households and up to 15,000 people living in this PA. Almost of the community members are farmers many of whom are keen to move elsewhere to earn a living because of frequent drought in the area. The women for the most part are housewives. Three devastating cycles of drought have taken place in the area in the last 30 years. Every cycle seems to be stronger than the previous one in area coverage and number of people affected. There is no infrastructure worth mentioning in the PA which is inaccessible. There is an elementary school that holds about 1,000 students. If there is any significant change recently in this particular peasant association, it is only the sadly intensified drought that has squeezed the last hope of every household. And, of course, there are the new-comers, returnees from the resettlement program.

Site 10: Mitti Kolo Peasant Association is located about 25 Km from Dessie and about 3 Kms from Kombolcha on the main road to Assab. This predominantly Muslim community has a total of 2000 households and 10,000 people. The area has been hit hard by famine and successive droughts for a long time. More and more people are leaving farming for daily labor in the towns near by. A lot of people have resorted to selling fire wood and cow-dung as an alternative way of life. These practices have further exacerbated the situation since they affect the environment negatively. This year has been particularly difficult. The farmer cannot support the family any longer because of declining productivity caused mainly by drought, pests and lack of fertilizers. The community is located near a main road but the residents have no access to public telephones or postal service. There is an agricultural extension office where seedlings and fertilizers are offered for sale but few farmers can afford them. There is no health clinic in the community, and residents bitterly complain about malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS. The main source of livelihood for

men is farming although more and more men are now engaged in daily laborer and cutting trees. Most women are housewives. There are also some who sell firewood for a living. In the last ten years the population of the community has increased dramatically. This is because of high birth rates as well as the dislocated people from the nearby part of Assab. During the same time, the local economy has become much worse. Some of the main contributing factors include drought, pests and the increased price of fertilizers. This is also an area hit hard by occasional flooding during the rainy season. The heavy rains have also been the main reason for productivity decline because of eroded soil and washed crops. There are no NGOs operating in the area.

Annex 2: Samples of Individual and Institutional Case Studies

(i) A Male Farmer (Ada Liben Wereda Rural Site)

Ato Birra Gabre is a Christian member of this peasant association. He is married and a father of four children, 2 males and 2 females. His oldest child is living with his older brother and is going to school. The remaining three are living with him but are not going to school because he can't afford to send them to school.

How is life? 'I was a good farmer 14 years ago when I was forced to leave the area where I was born. Due to the settlement program I came here without my consent. The land given to me was by far less than what I used to have before the settlement uprooted me. I wasn't able to pay the amount of crop assigned by the government. The government fixed the price of our products. Eventually I lost my farmland to the government. I became landless and a daily laborer.

Life as a laborer is not reliable. Sometimes days pass without work and coins to buy bread for the family. We live in poverty. Besides this, what is more depressing is the health condition of my wife. She is blind now. Since there are no health institutions in the area, I took her to Debre Zeit and then to Nazareth and Addis Ababa for treatment. Even though medical treatment is free in government hospitals because we have the poverty certificate from our peasant association, we couldn't afford to pay the transportation expense from here to Addis.

On appointment dates we somehow manage to go but don't have the money to buy the prescribed medicine from pharmacies as free medication doesn't include the supply of medicine. So she is now at home and suffering from the pains. Currently I have a small house and a garden area around it which is about 200 square meters. When I was a farmer I was able to feed myself and my family. We also had animals and some money saved for unforeseen needs. Now every thing is gone and we live in misery.'

What changes will improve your life? *Ato Bira* explains that people like him who are able and healthy can work and improve their lives if they could get some thing to work and some amount of money to

start business. He tried many times to save money from his small income in order to start life again, with different profession other than farming. He wasn't able to make it because the money he was able to save was too small.

What are the major problems in the community? Pest and drought are the two major disasters that repeatedly devastate the life of the farmers in the area. It is not only farmers that suffer from the consequences, but every one in the community as the price of crops goes up and people go hungry.

Who helps you in time of trouble? He pointed his fore finger to the sky and said the only reliable support is '*Waaq*' (the local word for God). I go to church and to the *wouqabi*. I also go to *Erecha* with the community at times of crisis. We pray there and our problems get better.

Any inequalities in the community? There are very few rich and many poor people in this area, he said. The rich have land and cattle while those in the middle have land but no cattle. The poor are those like me who have no land or cattle.

(ii) A Divorced Woman (Ada Liben Wereda Rural Site)

This is *Woizero* Alemenesh Gudeta, age 34 and literate. She is married, and a mother of four children, 2 males and 2 females. She lives in a small house which she inherited from her mother who died five years ago. She rents out the small plot of land around her house to farmers for some return. That is her source of livelihood.

How is life? 'It is miserable; from hand to mouth. I married a retail trader who lives in Zewai, a town some 120 km south of Debre Zeit. I married him without my consent [forced by my parents] at the age of 15. I lived with him for ten years and we had four children until he chased me away from the house. He had loved another woman whom he later married. The three children are with him, one is with me. After the separation, I moved here and lived with my mother and supported ourselves selling *tella*. My mother died five years ago and since then I stopped selling *tella*.'

Why? 'It is not safe in this community for a single woman to sell tella, or else she will be taken as a loose woman or a prostitute. Life has become very difficult for me since my mother died.'

What about the other people? 'There are only two types of people here. Those who live selling cow dung and those who are rich farmers. In between there may be poor farmers and daily laborers. Most live hand to mouth.'

Who lives a good life here? 'We don't have people who live a good life any more. The groups that had a good life within the community were those who owned vast farming lands. But now, the farm land decreased as it was divided among the children whose only source of livelihood is farming. Small traders used to also live a good life selling goods to the soldiers [the Air Force near by]. But when the soldiers dispersed [the current government had dismantled the Air Force in 1991], they didn't have people to buy from them anymore. Many traders became unemployed and poor.'

What about the farmers? 'I think they could not meet the wide-ranging demands of government, like the quota to give so much of their produce in the form of taxes. Their land was confiscated. Many of whom I knew as rich before are poor and people cannot help each other anymore.'

What changes do you want to see? 'People should have something to work and live on. Nowadays very few people may be getting richer, but many are getting poorer and poorer. They don't even have enough to eat. People do not have the money to buy pesticides, their crops are ruined and they face hunger.'

What about the future? 'I don't see any bright future as my health is deteriorating and my life is declining. However, if I could somehow get some money, I would start a small business. And this could still happen if it is the will of God. Right now, I have nothing in my hand to plan for my future. But, I am an Orthodox Christian and I tell all my problems to God. I always go either to St. Michael's or St. George's church to tell my problems to God. When there are other social problems, I go to the peasant association's office. The church is the best type of institution to go to for miserable people like me.'

Does anybody help you at all? No. There are no health institutions nearby, we have to go to Debre Zeit to get to a clinic. There is also shortage of drinking water. We have to buy water from far away at a price of 0.15 cents per pot. I have heard about one organization [NGO] that is assisting poor people. I don't know more.'

Any people who are excluded here? any conflicts? 'Why? There is no such thing in the area. Many people here are settlers who came here from dispersed settlements during the *Derg* regime. They all have strengthened their social relations. As there are no secluded groups of people, there exists no conflict between groups because of exclusion.'

(iii) A Disabled Man (Debre Zeit Town)

His name is Corporal Zenebe Degefe. He lost his right leg in the civil war and walks with the help of a crutch. He has also lost his left eye and arm. He lives on a disability pension of 93 Birr a month. He is married and has three children. All these happened when he was just 26 years old. He was recruited in the army about eight years earlier when he was just 18. He served in the army, got married and had two children when he was sent to Eritrea to fight for the *Derg*. After he was injured he was released and sent back to his community. He has added one more child since his return.

Corporal Zenebe's wife is not employed, because there is no employment opportunity in the area. She can't start her own business selling local drinks because there is no fund to start it. Besides, there is nobody to take care of the children, one of whom is 2 years old. Hence, they have to survive on his pension only. He explains life as very hard. He cannot send his children to school any more. The 93 Birr he gets cannot be stretched beyond just buying essential foodstuff. In fact he had sent his oldest son to his grandparents in the countryside, but he had to come back because he was sick and there were no health services in the rural areas. Once in town, his son was unable to afford the medication since it involved a serious problem, puncture of the ear-drums. So the boy is staying at home.

Corporal Zenebe tries to get extra income to support his family. He goes to the market place everyday to try his luck as a dealer. In his lucky days, which are few, he makes 3 or 4 Birr. This money goes a long way in helping buy necessities at home. He knows he can't go on like this for long. He says, in spite of his disability, he can do a lot of things if he had the start-up capital. For instance, if he had a sewing machine he could make good money. But, where will this money come from? The corporal feels hurt that he is dependent on pension and charity. He expresses outburst of pride and independence, and then gets depressed as he remembers that he is severely disabled.

The most serious concern for him is the future direction of his children. He is scared that they will end up on the streets. He will do his utmost to spare them from this. He will contact humanitarian organizations all over the country to ask for help. He says this with a lot of reluctance, because there isn't much he can do.

Corporal Zenebe thinks that there aren't enough rich people in the community to bring it out of poverty. The rich are not so motivated to help the poor. Even if they tried it would be too much for them. It is the government that he saves all his hope for. Corporal Zenebe doesn't believe that there is serious crime or conflict in the community. People are just too busy running up and down to pick quarrels with each other. There is the likelihood of violence in the future unless something is done about the growing unemployment. This, he says, is the government's responsibility. He doesn't believe that there is social exclusion in the community, not because of religion or ethnicity. He doesn't feel excluded because of his disability either. In fact, he is a regular member of the neighborhood *idir* and as long as he pays his monthly fees he is entitled to all the services. He feels part of the community.

(iv) A Mason (Addis Ababa)

Ato Negash Yadete is a 38 year old married man. He has a wife and 5 children. Though he is responsible for 7 persons (including himself), he has no regular income. He is a daily laborer; he is a mason by profession. The following are his answer to the lead questions posed to him.

What is bad life for you? 'I consider I live a bad life. I don't have a permanent job. I am a mason who works only when there is something to do. So, I don't have regular income. Whatever little money I get, I spend it on food, my children's education and my idir payment. My wife doesn't work. The children are too small to work. So, they all depend on me. Life is therefore running here and there to secure the means of survival. We eat when we have the means, and go to bed with an empty stomach when we don't. Our life is between life and death. Life is bad when we get stuck or when it is insecure. It is bad when it feels like dying on our feet, or begging from benevolent persons or agencies.'

What is good life for you? 'A good life is when you live happily with your family. This requires a regular and secure job where you make enough money to feed and cloth your family and also to save some. For instance, if you are a civil servant (a government employee) then you have income all the time and you need not worry about job security. This is even better than being a merchant because, a merchant has no income guarantee. He may get money today but is not sure about tomorrow. A government employee also has pension money when he is old.'

What are the changes needed to bring about the good life? 'I don't believe you can change things here anymore. This is really a bad situation. A lot of people are wasted away when they have hands and the skills to make a living. We can't start business in this house because it is not a good location for business. Neither could we engage in carrying on "air by air" business (i.e. illegal business conducted with the complicity of corrupt civil servants) because it is unreliable. Business without a license is illegal. To get a license requires capital, which is impossible for me. Therefore, the only way left to bring about changes in this community is if the government could create job opportunities to enable us to change our lives.'

Any major shocks in your life? 'I haven't been working for the last 12 months or so. The only source of income for the family is my wife's activity buying and selling pepper. I have virtually become a cripple both physically and emotionally. I worry about my children's well-being. I cannot cope with the increase in population and the number of people competing for the same job. I am reduced to

waiting for others to help me (begging). The result is mental disorder, besides other problems.'

How do you cope with these problems? 'People just do not watch others die. Neighbors help neighbors. We try to help each other as much as we can. I have, for instance, a neighbor. When my family has nothing to eat we borrow some food from her. If she could not help us, I borrow some money from a friend and will pay him later when I get a job. If my house burns, my neighbor is the first to come to help. That is how we cope. Besides this, the *idir* is the only institution we have to rely on. I know this is true only when somebody dies. But, it would even have been worse without *idir*. Otherwise, even the *kebele* does nothing for us.'

Any hopes and aspirations? 'Our hope is for the government or NGOs to create job opportunities. If I can work again, I believe my life as well as my family's will be renewed. I will work hard and support my family, and even put some money aside.'

Are all people equal in the community? 'No! There are exporters and importers, mini-shop owners, civil servants, and us, empty-handed daily laborers. There are also beggars. Nevertheless, nobody is excluded in this community for any reason. We live together by sharing what we have. There are no conflicts because everybody is running to make ends meet.'

(v) Institutional Profile in Ada Liben Rural Site: *Eretcha*

By far the most important institution for the residents of these communities (which includes the peasant associations in sites 1, 2, and 3) is *Eretcha*. This is an Oromifa word which means 'wet straw'. Oromifa is the main language in the area. We spoke to an elderly man about *eretcha*, and the following is how he described it.

'We Oromos are farmers. Our livelihood is based on water, and hence, we believe in wet things. The farmers' crops and cattle depend on wetness. Once in a year, the first Sunday after *Meskel*, we go to this *warka* tree by Lake Hora. We pray to God as follows [literal translation]:

*Dear God our creator
You made us pass the night peacefully
May you also make us pass the day peacefully
Save us from the kicks of horses
And the eyes of wicked people
Please listen to what we are begging from you
Oh God, the creator of land, mountain and the Warka tree
Make a good rain for us
Make our land wet for us
Like this straw we are carrying in our hands
Since these are your creations too
Make the rain come down in peace
Please don't give us bad things with the rain
Like the pests and the hail and lightening*

We celebrate *Eretcha* once a year, the Sunday after the *Meskal* celebrations. Men women and children go to the *Warka* tree by Lake Hora to pray and to vow to God. The tree stands tall by the lake - which used to be just a small river. God made it a big lake now. We walk 2-3 hours to get there. The area is green and beautiful at that time. There are a lot of people. They come from all over the country. There are many people from Addis. They all carry *eretcha*. The elderly bless the people gathered one by one. We pray to our God, our *Ayani*, who created the river, the tree and who was there before and who is here now. We pray for rain, we pray for wetness - like the straw in our hands. Then we kill oxen - 3 of them. We raise money to buy the oxen. Everybody contributes what they have. We make coffee. We eat and drink. It is a day-long celebrations.

How is this related to you livelihood?

You see, as soon as we go back home, the rain starts coming down. No pests no hail, no lightening. Just pure water. We get what we prayed for. It is directly related to our life, our chance to eat, raise cattle, drink water. It means the health of our children. It means no pests or hail that would destroy our crops. You know, our livelihood depends on rain. Our prayers at *Eretcha* work. Some people [the Amharas] laugh at us. They say 'can the Oromos bring rain here?' But our prayers do work. Even the *ferenjjs* come here to see. It gets so crowded there isn't enough place to park for those who come from Addis Ababa.

How much do people trust in Eretcha?

If you come on that day you will see with your own eyes. People very strongly believe in Eretcha. They believe it protects them from bad things. They believe it gives them what they prayed for. They feel insecure if they don't make the yearly trip to Lake Hora. They feel they must do what their forefathers did for years - they don't know for how many years. It is, they say, like joining their spirits. There is no exclusion if some people chose not to go. But people need to go if they want to live peacefully. Especially, if they have promised to do some thing, they must do it. The young people go too. But it is because they want to watch when we pray. Or they go there to play. But we pray for all.

Do people live equally here?

Look at my fingers. Are they equal?

(vi) Institutional Profile in Addis Ababa: Sister Jembere's NGO

(An interview with a resident of Site 5)

In your view, what is the most important institution in the community?

The most important institution in this community is the one known as Sister Jember's NGO. I think many will agree with me.

Why do you say that?

There are many reasons for saying that: First, as a result of the effort of this institution, children who never would have had the chance to go to school have received schooling free of charge. Second, virtually all the houses of the disabled and weak people in this community have been renovated free of charge by the same institution. Third, all the poor and mostly weak people have received food and clothing from Sister's NGO. In addition to these, the NGO has contributed a lot by training people to help themselves and become self-sufficient.

What other institutions are you comparing it with?

There are no other NGOs here. Even if they existed here or in other areas, other NGOs do not compare with Sister's NGO in any way. There are local traditional institutions like *idir* in the community. But idir doesn't help us while we are alive. It is non-developmental.

How does this NGO influence people's life?

It is mostly geared to help the most vulnerable section of the community like those who are old and disabled. They feed and give them hope. They educate their children in technical know how so that they can compete in the job market. These children, in turn, help their parents. This brings a big change to the better in the well-being of families.

Is the approach effective?

There is no other NGO that I know of that has been more effective. Its activities have had positive effects over a broad cross section of the community residents.

How do you feel the impacts?

We see a lot of young people supporting themselves after having gone through the training. We see a lot of old and poor people living in much better housing conditions than before. We see the sanitation

conditions of our neighborhoods improve because of the latrines built by Sister's the NGO. We also see people with no means of buying food eating because of the food program of the NGO. As far as we know there is no body in our community who has been negatively affected by the activities of the NGO.

How else does the NGO support people in times of difficulty?

The NGO helps sick people get medication. It covers their funeral expenses when they die, if they don't happen to be members of *idir*.

Who has influence over the NGO?

The founder of the NGO, Sister Jember, is the director of the NGO. However, if the residents have some complaints of grievances, there is a mechanism to voice them. For instance, last Easter there was no meat available for those beneficiaries of the feeding program. They voiced this concern and an ox was slaughtered for them. There is some say by the community residents in the NGO's activities.

How is the NGO linked to well-being?

This is a very poor community. There are a lot of young and old people who need help. The community itself is falling apart and dirty. The NGO interferes in many ways. Those important ones that

are linked to well-being are the skills training workshops, the feeding programs and the construction of houses, roads and latrines. All these are strongly and positively linked to the residents well-being.

(vii) Institutional Profile from Gerado Peasant Association, Dessei Zuria Werda Rural Site: *Jimet*

The informant chosen to explain the most important institution in the community, the *Jimet*, is an elderly man who is 67 years old, Muslim, married and a father of 8 children. The following is the way he described it.

'The most important institution in the community is the *Jimet*, also known as the *Juma*. When literally translated into English it means Friday which is the most important day of the week for Muslims as Sunday is for Christians. The *Jimet* is a social control mechanism that tries to bring peace and harmony among the community residents. It is religious in nature but also includes social aspects as well. This institution is very important because it plays an important role in the social cohesion of the community.

'If one is hurt by another in the community and if the two parties cannot settle their problems, the case comes before the *Jimet*. The accused is called upon to be present and asked if he has committed the wrongful act. If he confesses the truth, verdict shall be given to rectify the wrong doing. If he denies the act, he will be asked to hold a spear pinned to the ground and swear that he did not commit such an act. If the concerned individual has sworn falsely, it is believed that misfortunes will happen to him. His animals may die and danger may come to himself or family members. He may fall sick and may even die. But, if he regrets and confesses the truth at a later time, he may save himself from misfortune.

'The *Jimet* also serves Muslims as the church serves Christians in time of trouble. In the *Jimet* service, however, there is no religious boundary. Many Christians use it too. Just like the Christian holy water, here also we have a holy spring which cures sick people when they drink it or bath in it. The *Jimet* in this kebele is the only such institution for the residents of Dessie and the surrounding area. Until

some years ago it was led by a *Sheik*, a religious leader who got very old and died later. Today his descendants and committee members, elected by the people, lead the *Jimet*. The members are elected because of their ability, honesty and acceptability. The community has the right to inspect the earnings of the *Jimet* and chase out irresponsible committee members when they come across such people and in so doing the community ascertains the healthy continuation of the institution. It is, however, rare to find any dishonest act because everyone is afraid of being cursed.

'*Jimet* is not merely a ground for complaints and accusations. Many people, Muslims and Christians alike, come with their promised gifts for fulfilled wishes. The sick regain health, those who have no child get one, those who have other problems find solutions. The money and variety of gifts thus collected are handled by the committee and are used for the celebrations, which includes feasts, during the *Mewleed* or the birthday of Mohammed every year. For this occasion, three or more oxen are killed, *chat* is chewed, prayers are said and blessings are made.

'The *Jimet* is very effective. It takes no time for prayers to be answered and for curses to come true. People refrain from doing bad things to others in fear of what may happen to them through the *Jimet*. In this way the *Jimet* helps the community to live peacefully. It is, therefore, an institution of social control. It is highly feared and respected by the community. On days of difficulty prayers are held accompanied by chewing *chat*. This process is known as *dua* which is practiced in groups or individually. People believe that it works.

'Because of the *Jimet* people do not commit crimes and every one respects the rights of others. It creates a healthy atmosphere for people to work and live. Therefore, it is very important for the well-being of the community.

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