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*Richard Agyemang*

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*Consultation Papers on Poverty No. 1*

**The Social Dimensions of Poverty**

*Edited by  
Meheret Ayenew*

**Addis Ababa  
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**The opinions expressed in this Consultation Papers Series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FSS or its Board of Advisors.**

## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>i</b>
Dessalegn Rahmato Forum for Social Studies	
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Meheret Ayenew Coordinator, Poverty Dialogue Forum	
<b>The Social Dimensions of Poverty</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Minas Hiruy HOPE Enterprises	
<b>Poverty in Addis Ababa</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Abebe Kebede Addis Ababa City Administration	
<b>The Gender Dimensions of Poverty</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Zenebework Tadesse Forum for Social Studies	

## PREFACE

The Forum for Social Studies has planned a series of public debates and consultations on the problem of poverty and poverty reduction as part of its Poverty Dialogue Forum, which will be undertaken all through 2001. FSS hopes to involve civil society groups, the poor themselves, the business community, and government officials and donors in this Dialogue. The aim is to examine the nature of poverty and its multifaceted manifestations in this country and to discuss what policy options are available that best address the needs of the poor. While the program is being undertaken as part of our intervention in the Government's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP) initiative, FSS has always considered poverty to be one of the most critical problems facing Ethiopia, requiring extended public debate and a strong pro-poor commitment on the part of policy-makers. The I-PRSP has now passed its first hurdle, having been accepted by the IMF and World Bank, and the Government is in the process of preparing a final PRSP. We feel it is important that the views of civil society and the public are not neglected and that on the contrary they are used to enrich the country's poverty reduction program.

As part of the Poverty Dialogue program, FSS will publish a series of short *Consultation Papers* containing the papers presented by the

panelists and reflecting the general discussion at each public forum. These *Papers* will be distributed widely and will hopefully serve as a stimulus for further debate and deliberation. While the aim is not to offer an alternative PRSP, FSS feels that the *Papers* provide valuable insights and experiences and should be taken into account when the final PRSP is prepared. This publication, entitled the *Social Dimensions of Poverty*, is the first in the series and contains the papers presented and discussions held at the first Poverty Dialogue Forum held on 22 December 2000.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the panelists for their effort and participation. Financial support for the forum was provided by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung to which we convey our appreciation.

Dessalegn Rahmato  
Manager  
Forum for Social Studies

## Introduction

This is the first issue of the *Consultation Papers Series* that the Forum for Social Studies (FSS) will publish on the problems of poverty and poverty reduction in Ethiopia. FSS has scheduled a series of public discussions and consultations as part of its **Poverty Dialogue Forum** which will be undertaken all through the year. This kind of public debate is innovative to the extent that it will bring together representatives from the government, the business community, NGOs, trade unions, the academia professional associations, donor organizations and the poor to share experiences on reducing poverty. The papers presented at the workshops and main issues raised in the public discussions will be published and disseminated to government decision-makers and other stakeholders who are engaged in fighting poverty.

The focus of discussion of the Poverty Dialogue Forum is the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP), which the Government of Ethiopia has submitted to the IMF and the World Bank. The I-PRSP has outlined the poverty reduction measures that the government plans to implement and the policy reform programs and institutional changes that must be put in place to achieve poverty reduction. A preliminary assessment of the policy document reveals shortcomings that need to be addressed and core issues that must be incorporated as part of an effective poverty alleviation strategy. Some of these critical policy elements are discussed below in this maiden issue of the *Consultation Papers Series* to stimulate further debate on the policy and generate suggestions for its improvement.

- **The Need to Focus on Rural and Urban Dimensions to Poverty**

Poverty in Ethiopia has both a rural and urban dimension. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that a national poverty eradication strategy should capture the depth and magnitude of poverty both in rural and urban areas. Available data indicate that 85 percent of all Ethiopians live in rural areas and 15 percent in urban and peri-urban areas. The extent and severity of destitution has different causes and manifestations in these two sectors. As a result, different alternatives that take into consideration the special nature and characteristics of poverty in the rural and urban areas need to be employed to mitigate poverty in this country.

The I-PRSP does not provide a proper diagnosis of the level and magnitude of poverty in rural Ethiopia. In addition, the fact that rural poverty has different causes and manifestations is also glossed over in the policy document. For the vast majority of Ethiopians living in rural areas, the manifestations of abject poverty include lack of income, pervasive disease and malnutrition, and lack of access to basic socio-economic amenities, such as decent health care, basic primary education and clean drinkable water. All these woes are exacerbated by high rural unemployment/underemployment, fast depletion of natural resources, the increasing shrinking of cultivable land, and a general stagnation of the agricultural economy. Unless these fundamental concerns are fully addressed, it will be difficult to steer a realistic strategy to improve the lives of Ethiopia's rural poor.

A key ingredient in any policy consideration to alleviate rural poverty in Ethiopia is the need to revisit the current policy of state ownership of rural land on which the I-PRSP is unfortunately silent. There are several studies that suggest that the existing rural land policy has not worked well in motivating the peasant farmer to raise production and increase investment on the land, and its substitution by a land tenure policy that will help protect natural resources and the fertility of the land has become a foregone recommendation. One would have hoped that a policy to alleviate rural poverty will have considered land as the most critical resource affecting the lives of millions of Ethiopians and suggested policy options for its use and management. I-PRSP's silence on this critical issue stands out as a major omission.

From a different perspective, the I-PRSP has not addressed the full extent and nature of poverty in urban Ethiopia. It is estimated that 45.5 percent of Ethiopians living in urban areas can be categorized as poor. For cities like Addis Ababa the figure is staggering because 60 percent or 1,500,000 of its residents are considered to live below the poverty line (Abebe, 2001). As hinted earlier, the manifestations of poverty in urban and semi-urban Ethiopia are different from those in rural areas. Some of the manifestations of urban poverty are a fast-growing population of street children, homelessness, prostitution, beggary, a rising army of unemployed, overcrowding and congested living conditions that serve as breeding grounds for diseases and crime. All these social ills can threaten the very fabric of society and thus should be given sufficient atten-

tion in the government's strategy to produce an appreciable effect on reducing poverty.

What contributes to the general deterioration in the urban environment is the fast crumbling infrastructure and the abysmal record of many municipalities in delivering and sustaining services to the residents. The general crisis in urban services and facilities evidenced by the sordid state of affairs in urban sanitation and hygiene, inadequate public housing and the awfully inadequate provision of essential services, including limited access to clean water and electricity, all work to exacerbate the level of urban poverty. It is only logical, therefore, that a strategy aimed at alleviating urban poverty in Ethiopia must bring out these problems and devise appropriate policies to tackle them. The I-PRSP has not fared well in this regard because it has failed to mention that urban management capacity is critical for the efficient provision of services and facilities as a means to reduce poverty in cities and towns.

- **The Need for a Food Security Strategy**

The I-PRSP has very little to say on one of Ethiopia's chronic nightmares, i.e. food insecurity affecting millions of its citizens every year. As a practical matter, a credible poverty reduction strategy for Ethiopia must include food self-sufficiency and security as the foremost priority concern for two principal reasons. First, the country has an unenviable record of being perennially hit by recurrent famines and starvation during the past four or five decades. Second, it is a matter of public record that about 10 percent of the population is always exposed to the horrors of starvation and thus seek food assistance even during years of good harvest. In this kind of grim socio-economic reality, food security and self-sufficiency need to be on top of an agenda to fight poverty. Unfortunately, however, except for scanty remarks here and there, Ethiopia's first anti-poverty policy document fails to identify short-term and long-term concrete action plans to guarantee adequate food security and thus overcome the stigma of famine and starvation that this country has been associated with for long.

- **The Link between Eradication of Poverty and Prudent Environment Management**

By saying little or nothing, the I-PRSP falls short of underscoring the importance of prudent management of the environment and natural resources on the one hand and poverty reduction on

the other. Ethiopia suffers immense resource loss due to poor management of the environment and natural resources, and this has made the country vulnerable to persistent and widespread poverty. The incessant degradation of the natural resource base and the deterioration of the environment mainly caused by deforestation, over-utilization of farmland and the loss of natural vegetation and precious soil cover due to growing population pressure all combine to exasperate poverty in this country. Hence, it is only imperative that the national I-PRSP place judicious management of the fragile environment and precarious natural resources at the center of any attempt to ease poverty and its attendant consequences of disease, hunger and general human deprivation. This will make it a credible and effective poverty eradication program.

- **The Need to Corroborate Statements on Poverty with Empirical Evidence**

On page 10 of the I-PRSP, it is pointed out that there has been a 'significant' decline in poverty in Ethiopia during the 1990s. By taking increasing school enrollment for selected years and marginal improvements in food consumption for limited areas as proxy variables, it is asserted that the level of poverty has indeed gone down. Such generalizations can be misleading when weighed against a large body of available evidence that can prove the contrary. The best one can say about the poverty situation in this country is that the jury is still out as to whether poverty is declining or increasing.

It can be speculated that poverty in Ethiopia might have got worse judging by policy measures that the government implemented during the past decade. Indeed, it can be argued that the retrenchment policy within the public sector, the Structural Adjustment Policy of the 1990s (SAP) and the massive demobilization of members of the armed forces that served under the Derg will only exacerbate the level of rural and urban poverty rather than mitigate it. In my judgment, statements on poverty that cannot be fully supported by empirical evidence can be sources of complacency or serve propaganda purposes. Neither is a desirable nor a tenable trend in a country where 28 million people (45 percent) out of a total population of 62 million are categorized below the poverty line. In sum, the best that we can say about the level and magnitude of poverty in this country is that we need much more solid empirical evidence than is so far available to pass a credible and acceptable verdict.

◆ **The Need to Focus on Education and Health as Key Sectors in Eradicating Poverty**

Everyone agrees that education is the key to development and general human improvement; and a country that fails in its education program will inevitably fail in its endeavor in fighting poverty. The I-PRSP informs us about the quantitative increase in student enrollment, schools and teachers over the years. Unfortunately, it says very little about the precipitous decline in the quality of education in this country. According to the findings of the Education Sector Development (ESD) Mid-Term Review conducted by the World Bank, the quality of schooling has gone down, made worse by overcrowded schools, insufficient school supplies, crumbling school buildings and facilities, demoralized and demotivated teachers and lack of general discipline in the public school system. We all live in an increasingly globalized world where a country's place in the international marketplace is determined by its ability to produce a highly competitive and productive workforce. Such a crucial national asset can be generated only by a sound educational policy and practice. The I-PRSP has not given this vital national agenda the attention that it deserves and thus has failed to map out strategies to reverse the decline in the educational system of this country. Reversing the educational decline is a precursor to reducing nation-wide poverty in urban and rural Ethiopia.

The I-PRSP leaves much to be desired as regards the state of health in Ethiopia and its impact on poverty. More importantly, it has very little to offer on what needs to be done in the health sector. By all accounts, Ethiopia's national health system is in a state of crisis, characterized by crumbling hospitals built many years ago, shortage of medicines and demoralized and demotivated public health personnel. While the public/government sector is in a dilapidated state, the private sector has made some progress in opening hospitals and clinics mainly concentrated in the capital cities. But, most of these are beyond the reach of the vast majority of Ethiopians thanks due to exorbitant charges for hospitalization and medicine. In addition, the lack of proper monitoring and supervision of the quality of medical services by the Ministry of Public Health has given rise to problems of widespread but unreported malpractice.

The I-PRSP makes a reference to the Health Sector Development Program (HSDP) whose primary

goal is to expand health coverage from 45 to 60 percent of the population. It promises to train a large number of medical personnel to serve the people through an integrated health delivery system. While all these are lofty goals, the crux of the matter is that many public hospitals, health stations and clinics in the country are in a state of disrepair and face severe shortages of trained medical personnel; and as a result the quality of service has never been so poor. These problems should be given sufficient attention and appropriate plans of action suggested in the I-PRSP in order to render the document an effective program of health service delivery and poverty alleviation.

As earlier hinted, the I-PRSP is bent upon assessing the quality of national medical service and coverage mainly by the number of projected medical personnel to be trained or the number of health stations and clinics planned to be built in a given period. Needless to say, such an approach says very little about the state of public health of the society or the quality of service that the people receive. From a policy perspective, a health strategy for Ethiopia should focus on the day-to-day health needs of the people on the one hand and a strategy to effectively respond to the frequent outbreaks of epidemics on the other. The national medical establishment leaves much to be desired in adequately responding to the two challenges, and there is little to indicate that these two concerns have been sufficiently addressed in the I-PRSP. The gist of the matter is that the formal medical establishment has failed in fully responding to the demands of the people for a reasonable quality of medical care. The disillusionment with poor medical service has compelled a significant segment of the population to increasingly resort to alternative forms of medicine, including traditional medicine. On the other hand, there is limited capacity and preparation to deal with the outbreaks of diseases, including cholera, meningitis and malaria (presently affecting 45 percent of the country) and their devastating effect on the life of the vast majority of Ethiopians continues unabated. All told, the I-PRSP should have taken this grim reality into full account and suggested short-term and long-term solutions to the most serious public health challenges in Ethiopia.

◆ **The Need to Link Good Governance and Poverty Alleviation**

Last but by no means least, there is now increasing recognition that good governance is a *sine qua non* for poverty alleviation and sustainable develop-



ment. Unfortunately, the I-PRSP has not fully addressed the concept and scope of good governance as embodying the rule of law, transparency and accountability in the administration of public policy, the sanctity of individual rights and civil liberties, adequate government guarantees and protection for life, property and liberty, etc. as crucial elements for successful poverty alleviation. Indeed, the document makes scanty references to decentralization and empowerment, capacity building and judiciary and civil service reform and appears to argue that these were enough to alleviate poverty. But, these by themselves are inadequate to guarantee good governance that can be accountable and responsive to the needs and desires of the electorate. At a minimum, the I-PRSP should recognize the most important principles of good governance, including transparency in government operations, accountability of public officials to the citizenry, an independent judiciary, popular participation in democratic politics, citizens' unimpeded access to public information, equality before the law, unfettered functioning of robust civil society institutions and the equitable and fair treatment of the citizenry

by the political system as indispensable to the overall strategy to fight poverty. All these elements must constitute part and parcel of Ethiopia's good governance agenda and the I-PRSP needs to forward concrete suggestions to make the inter-relationship of democratic governance and successful poverty alleviation a reality in this country.

In conclusion, the preceding are preliminary observations on the I-PRSP by the editor. The hope is that these and other observations by readers of this **Consultation Paper Series** and participants in the **Poverty Dialogue Forum** will be taken into account in the final PRSP to be finalized by the Government of Ethiopia in December, 2001 for submission to the IMF and the World Bank. Therefore, FSS welcomes suggestions and ideas for further debate and discussion that can enrich the final PRSP and make it a more effective and acceptable program of poverty alleviation in this country.

Meheret Ayenew  
Editor



# The Social Dimensions of Poverty

Minas Hiruy, Ph.D.

HOPE Enterprises

## The Viciousness of Poverty

Working with many of the poor of our country through one of the oldest local NGOs, I may approach the subject of the social dimensions of poverty with biased spectacles. Leaving that as it may, allow me to address the issue rather strategically. I have been fortunate in living through three epochal periods of our modern history. From the feudal era to the current phase, life has not been kind to us all as we have been tossed and turned by one crisis or another. For many of a religious bent, it looks as if we are under a cosmic judgment being punished for our shortcomings. For those with a secular outlook, much blame is placed on a number of situational factors within and outside of us.

Those of us who have worked with the poor have realized that poverty is essentially hell on earth. Confronting the ugly face of poverty on our streets, neighborhoods, yards of faith and even homes, one learns a lot about poverty. I remember one day asking the names of the father and mother of a little street girl of age four in our soup kitchen and getting the grim reply of "I do not know." Poverty has no answers and it is this dead-end that I believe is the challenge for all of us to face.

In our country as in others, poverty has forced many to defy principle and to lose vision. With poverty engendering a fatalistic thinking, our games have often shied away from a win-win resolution. Poverty has left no room for accommodation. Betrayal, jealousy, double talk, hidden agendas and aggression seemed to be the orders of the day in the much beneath the façade of our pretentious interaction as poverty presses us to our brutish selves as all pushed to their limit would naturally react. For the heartlessness of it all, that outcome of a mature society called generativity is restrained from blossoming as our doggy existence stole our humaneness and humanity.

To many including myself, poverty is not a result of unemployment or some anomaly of economic reordering. The root causes lie in what is social. I do not know where we picked up the ghosts that impeded our development but they are here full with their horns and pitchforks. Our achievement orientation slowly but steadily sub-

sided and a sort of a herd mentality developed. Instead of excellence, preference for simplistic and dogmatic formulas took over. Instead of risk taking, comfort was taken in security. Instead of exploiting the creativity in each individual, we relied on the conformism of groupthink seeing the former as something selfish. Sharing in our collective poverty became more comforting than benefiting from the never-ending fruits of success of a competitive culture. Juxtaposed on this is the clenching fist of globalization that prizes the strong and marginalizes the weak. In the objectification of globalization, we have been pushed out of the competition unable to play its game and to speak its language. Failing in our efforts of social reform, our stature as the hungry bunch has become our report card with the international community denying us the status that we used to enjoy.

What is worse is it looks as if we could not see the rather apocalyptic onslaught of poverty coming against us down the road. But, let us make no mistake about it. Hard times are ahead unless we work hard to be ahead of the flood and win the war against poverty. In all seriousness, at this crossroad, we as a people are like sheep going to the slaughterhouse. Should we fail to take the necessary steps to reverse this deadly course, we will certainly put much at risk.

## What then shall we do?

I am one that believes that we have made the paradigmatic shift to make a difference in our march against poverty. The introduction of the democratic order for the first time in our history is a gigantic step. What remains for us is to fine-tune and fully utilize this gain in reversing poverty. Some of the areas that we need to pay close attention in this process are as follows:

### 1. Advancement of a Civic Culture

Though one notes that we have a democratic system, the democratic culture has not permeated in fullness. Without a deep seated and internalized attitudinal change in what we call a civic culture, what dominates is formalism. In this experience, one can say we have our hands on the

plough but are looking back to what we had abandoned. Indeed, our development has a long way to go to be called a people led-development. In this regard, a number of thoughts and actions need to be reworked to restore people's confidence so that they can attend to their own problems without waiting for the State, the voluntary sector or anyone else. The much dependency that we see in our society is a reflection of how much people are conditioned by the many pre-emptive forces. And we know a lot about dependency's tendency to breed poverty rather than to redress it. In the campaign against poverty, all in society have to have a say and an action.

In this exercise, the individual matters. Just as St Francis of Assisi said, "peace begins with me", so should the anti-poverty effort begin with each and every one of us? But, to galvanize individual input with community objective, our democratic order needs to elevate the individual. To date, much that is gained has tended to have a society bias glossing over the individual as if he or she does not exist. In many ways, our democracy looks at the forest and not at the tree. This has had the effect of estranging the citizen, the very building block of a civic society. And if apathy comes from this level for the neglect exercised, no matter how hard we try, our efforts will not behold. We need commitment from common citizens to join us in development. We need initiative from the same to add to the bright ideas that need to figure in this enterprise of poverty reduction. This emanates from a civic spirit that yields the necessary senses of interest, commitment, identification, ownership and action. The crucial question is then how is a civic spirit advanced and sustained.

This comes by empowering the citizen so that he or she can be the means of his or her own solutions through a determined effort of devolution. For essentially this reason, the role of government the world over is changing from one that thinks and acts for others to one that encourages and facilitates self-responsibility.

## **2. Strategic Partnership**

Development has come to be every one's business. One can contend that apart from the public itself there are basically three actors that are behind the initiation and the attainment of development. These are the public sector, the private sector and the NGO sector. These actors have their parts to play with each contributing to the success

of the other and with all having a cumulative advance against poverty. Both the private and the NGO sectors work best in an environment wherein government is facilitative. The government lays out the legal and policy framework for the other two sectors to operate well. With this enablement, the two sectors do their part to bring about the good life making the public sector and themselves look good. The scenario among the three is certainly, "united we stand and divided we fall." However, both the private and the NGO sectors continue to complain about the climate within which they have been operating.

### **2.1. The Private Sector**

The private sector is the engine of development to the degree that virtually all original thinking and innovation is rooted in this sector. This is the sector that recognizes the worth of a man/woman as a problem solver and rewards pathfinders abundantly. The abundant reward in turn raises the level of motivation for people to constantly be on the move to excel achieving and making breakthroughs that are said to advantage society more than any other system to date. In the end, individual achievement becomes collective achievement, as individuals could not be the sole bearers of the fruits that come from their own labors and entrepreneurial exercises. In this way, poverty is cornered even to a point of eradication. Our country has started a good journey in this regard as well.

My concern is whether or not we are applying the rules of the game of free enterprise in its socialized form. Indications have been that though there have been very good signs of improvements in our economic performance, what has followed could not really count as a post-war boom. For the much untapped resources and opportunities in our big country, one can say that the serious investors have not taken us seriously. After a decade of a market economy, we have neither industrialized nor expanded the service sector in a way that significantly has changed our standards and the status of the nation as one of the poorest in the world. The investment community continues to voice its concerns. At the same time, our bureaucracies at all levels continue to give hardship to the sector. The process and affordability of lease continues to be a point of contention. Tax laws are said to be cumbersome with the investor not being clear about his duty and privileges in this regard and having to account to a number of governments and agencies.

Value assessments are said to be open to the discouraging practice of negotiation. In rural investment, there continues to be a level of insecurity over one's land holdings with unanticipated counter claims and changes in the rules of the game post agreements and contracts. Both from the business and consumer standpoints, little is said to have been done to facilitate fair competition and better business practices via the law. Illicit trade has also discouraged formal businesses to the degree that the system has not been able to police such development and to distribute the tax burden to all in the business of business. The customs regime is said to have much that is outright unreasonable like retroactive application of a directive in addition to its slowness. Banking procedures are said to continue to be out of date. The informal sector is said to lack encouragement and streamlining. Finally is the little attention given to infrastructure and services to lure investment.

## **2.2. The NGO Sector**

Though NGOs have been very active members of civil society in almost all parts of the world, the place of NGOs has not been as widely recognized in Ethiopia as one would have liked. This is not to say that they have not had an impact in the country. In both the 1973 and 1984 famines, the NGOs responded to the needs of millions of people and rescued untold number of people from perishing. Soon after these cataclysmic events, efforts of rehabilitation and development have been undertaken reaching out to about 13-15 per cent of the country's population.

However, NGOs, having no reference to a law or to an act about their identity, rights and even obligations, their operation as well as role in the civil society have been rather tenuous. This legal gap has denied them the stability and security of due process. With no routines of relationship derived from defining laws, the contacts of NGOs from central ministries all the way down to local authorities have been a troublesome one being victims of constant changes, which have adversely affected their workings as well as relations with their donors and beneficiaries. For essentially this reason, the number of NGOs operating in the country has been miniscule compared to that of other countries and the kind of considerable contribution registered by the voluntary sector in other countries is said to be badly missing in Ethiopia.

The NGO community needs a supportive legal climate in Ethiopia if much that can be volunteered to nation building is to be exploited. The legislation needed should address issues such as NGO legal personality, rights, roles and functions, tax exemptions, income generation, government relations, registration and project agreements, transfer and sale of NGO assets, NGO networking, NGOs and community relations, government obligations towards NGOs and adjudication of the NGO sector.

## **3. The Urban Factor**

The city has become both a resource center and a powerhouse of development. From the city have come creativity, experimentation, production and growth. In this importance, the global economy has made the city its beachhead or command center of what it can do in the world of development and virtually all efforts of poverty reduction have banked on the strength of cities to advance their cause. Cities are also going to be the homes of almost all of the world's population if the trend of urbanization continues with the pace that it has. To the degree cities have gained importance, governments the world over have given them considerable legal recognition, authority and financial backing to advance development initiatives.

For all the importance of cities, however, Ethiopia has not given cities neither credit or due attention. For essentially this reason, no constitution to date save one regional constitution has recognized cities as legal personalities with aims and powers of their own. In fact, cities have lost the relative autonomy given to them in previous regimes. Many recent legislative attempts revolving around cities have impersonated cities along state structures, manners of working and symbolism. Some residents of older cities aware of this tampering, are saying, "Give us back our city."

The de-emphasis on urban development has definitely hurt investment possibilities as urban services and infrastructure have deteriorated and no Ethiopian city to date could attract an investor on the merits of its standards. The neglect of cities is also said to retard rural development to the degree rural development is said to hinge on urban development. It is realized that cities serve not only as market and remarket centers for rural products but also as sources of new ideas and ways to raise farm productivity. New information also indicates that peasant agriculture is being increasingly threatened

by agribusiness to a point of making peasant production a loss-ridden initiative. This has come about particularly ever since genetic engineering started to do wonders in both plant and animal science. Here, the issue is not primitive technology and inputs as even farmers using sophisticated means over a bigger acreage in the west are facing the same problem and abandoning ship.

In the need to re-examine the role of cities in Ethiopia's development, it will certainly help to have an urban policy that is flexible, enabling and that corrects the shortfalls of carry over policies that have deterred urban development in a detrimental way. In this focus, particular attention needs to be given to the extra houses proclamation that continued to freeze up sizable public space in kebele hands. Similarly, ways and means need to be found out to ease access to land to for both investment and housing.

#### **4. The Rural Factor**

The targeting of the farmer household through ADLI initiative is a tremendous intervention. But, here as well, the rural household is too boxed in by many state programs to be responsible for one's future. Furthermore and more importantly, I am not sure if the farmer is secure about his or her holdings. Granted, the farmer is given use rights to the land that he or she tills. But, this is more in the books than in application with no farmer being given a certificate of land use to date and with land holdings changing on the strength of what one has during negotiation. For the much uncertainty in holdings, the farmer is said to refrain from long-term investments like planting trees, embankments, water harvesting and fencing and from efforts that enhance higher yields. Whatever the reasons, in the rural sector, achievements so far have not gone beyond hand to mouth existence and have not cushioned the farmer against the onslaughts of periodic setbacks.

The rural sector is in deep trouble battered by ominous soil fertility, land fragmentation, drought, and the minimization of farmable space on one hand and improper handling on the other. We should not be content seeing sizable populations of ours displaced because of hunger. Nor should we count on food assistance as a safety net for our persistent food deficit and insecurity. We have to overcome this problem and overcome it for good.

We indeed need to see a revolution in our

rural community and this can be so if the whole agricultural development is farmer-led. The whole issue revolves on what demand and felt needs could do. The farmer can organize himself to meet his needs. The state can facilitate a number of supportive activities without being the vendor. The state can also be involved in major projects like the construction of dams for irrigation purposes and roads. It can work on rural electrification and information dissemination. It can advice on the latest techniques and on inputs and raise awareness about a whole range of farm issues. It can involve itself in research and best practices and through demonstration or experimentation, share with the farmer the new findings for better performance.

#### **5. The Management of the Environment**

I think that we all have to acknowledge that the current status quo of land management has been asking for an environmental disaster. Tree felling goes on ferociously even with the state looking. The much charcoal making in broad day light and the brisk business of charcoal sales on roadsides and in open markets with no one saying no has been all too clear. In this incursion is also so the case of wildlife, which has been cruelly decimated by deforestation, traditional forest burning and illegal hunting. Many regions are reporting about the uncontrollable invasion of areas that were zoned for grazing and for protection. Grazing land continues to be squeezed out of existence and the advance of deforestation is reaching mountaintops.

In fact, using the assets of public land is becoming a source of easy livelihood for a number of farmers and predators of all sorts including smart businessmen who are joining in the loot. Owing to this naked stripping of the country and the inability of the state to stop it, the soil erosion of the country is increasing at an alarming rate taking not only the important topsoil but also much farmable land. With the disappearance of greeneries, a whole number of life support systems have been falling apart in our hinterlands. Call it the desertification of Ethiopia, that is what we have, and we do not know where all of us will be when the job is completed.

Now it is interesting to note that all the havoc in the eco system came when we developed policies that tried to control the environment and made a poor showing of this control. Our country is too big for any government to guard and care for it. But, the forceful claim was made under the slo-

gan “we will be in control of nature” and look what we have: an unprotected land being looted by anyone including by foreigners who get its juices of not only water but also of precious top soil without losing a bullet. I believe we have the right to be the managers of our natural resources provided that all of us come up with the right guideline and make every one living on the land including the animals the rightful stakeholders in the whole process of restoration and rejuvenation. The continued push and emphasis to reinforce exclusive state role with a number of projects can only be deceptive. We have a number of environmental projects that faltered and as miniscule as they were they could not make a difference apart from the fund raising value that they may have served. The issue is not capacity as often placated. The State cannot cover all public land with its efforts of husbandry. The richest countries have not done this.

The issue is the absence of vested interest and the kind of drive that this results in better care and utilization. Again here, I like to apply the ultimate logic of people-led development that our paradigm has equipped us with. That is, individuals and communities need to be allowed to care for the land and for what grows on it with certain stipulations that guarantee the restoration of devastated flora and fauna and overall recycling. The experiences of the Nordic countries as well as Canada and the US would be good sources of lessons for steps in this direction.

## **6. The Management of Human Resources**

We can all agree that the professional community of Ethiopia has been short changed for some years now. As indispensable as human resource has been, Ethiopia has not been fortunate to reap the benefits of her investment in this regard. Since about the turn of the 70s, professionals have not had a proper job context and content to be of utmost use to society. During this time, the merit system that fed their career ladder fell apart as political operatives defied it under a new norm of spoils politics. With the failure to separate politics and management, little was delegated to them. Seeing all kinds of ineptness, they could not say anything nor could they count on better opportunities. In as much as their job content was whittled down so was their pay. It was in view of this misfortune, the saying, “instead of a master’s degree, one cassette” became a telling sign of the times.

To professionals, it all looked as if their

country let them down. And for this misfortune, they could not be motivated to excel and be forthright. Unable to be influential and to benefit from one’s knowledge and seasoned experience, they then began to be demoralized and to search for other opportunities outside of the public service. In this search, many could not help making the decision to go to countries where they were appreciated. A sizable number abandoned the public service at the sound of better job offers within country.

Obviously this matter of enabling climate for our professionals needs to be ironed out. Professionals are indispensable engineers of development. Ever since this brunt of the brain drain has been felt, the loss of the country has been incalculable. Some of the critical gaps could be accounted in terms of contract management, supervision and implementation of projects, negotiations, public relations, business promotion, strategic planning, research and development, feedback, advice to policy makers and the elevation and maintenance of high standards in all professions. With the deficit in trained manpower, a number of critical institutions have been complaining of being abandoned.

Quite a few among these are trying to head off the impasse by importing expatriate staff while at the same time sending junior professionals for further studies. The dependence on expatriate staff could only be temporary as the staff members cost an arm and a leg and their commitment is short lived. Sending people abroad in great numbers has had the disadvantage of most who were sent not returning after they completed their education. This points to the need to examine the issue of manpower development and to come up with a strategy that not only replenishes the lost stock but also feeds the country to the demand required on a permanent basis.

First and foremost, we need to reestablish the prominent place of the professional with due credit, status and benefits. This pertains to the strengthening of the merit principle in a strong and unqualified career system in the public service. In this reform, politics needs to be in its proper place ceasing to interfere in the way that it had and the pay plan as well as the benefit package need to be competitive. Second is the issue of manpower development. Here, the issue needs to be seen holistically. The frequently spoken problem of the employing community has been that those who graduate as professionals are not prepared enough to as-

sume professional roles. And when centers of higher learning are asked about this, they blame it on elementary and secondary education.

Upon a close look of what happens in childhood education, it is not difficult to see the many disadvantages of educational attainment. I believe creative efforts need to be exercised to better develop children for professional futures. Then, at the tertiary level, more needs to be invested than what has already been inputted. Overall, since a long time, the practice of sending people abroad has essentially been an investment for receiving countries to the degree most that are sent abroad for study end up not returning. Hence, my view is to use the fund being applied for foreign education for the establishment of quality professional institutions here at home.

### **Conclusion**

The social dimensions of poverty underscore the viciousness in poverty. To pull out of this

quagmire, poverty reduction strategies in the country need to speed up the application of what is embodied in the paradigmatic shift of social reform adopted over the last decade. Critical in this shift is distributing the responsibility of poverty eradication to the citizenry via an aggressive devolution of both political and economic power. In this effort, the role of cities in development needs to be appreciated with them being given the legal and policy environment to be development actors. Better partnership with the private and voluntary sectors need to be struck to get the most out of their inputs. Rural reform needs to be farmer-led in line with citizen empowerment. And the state needs to open up possibilities for individuals and communities to be the vanguards of the management of public lands and the environment to the degree that past state led approaches have failed both in the protection and care of the environment and continued failure stands to desiccate the whole country leaving nothing viable for all that we cherish in our country. Finally is the important need to develop our manpower resource given the ominous depletion of the



# **Poverty in Addis Ababa**

Abebe Kebede  
Addis Ababa City Administration

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Paradoxical as it may sound, Addis Ababa as the capital city of the country and seat of a good number of international, continental, regional and national organizations, is a city showing two contrasting urban features. On the one hand, it is a city enjoying the privileges of modernization by housing a higher concentration of economic and social facilities per population than similar centers elsewhere in the country. On the contrary, it is a city whose healthy urban development is hampered by too many spatial and sectoral structural impediments. Hence, poverty has become rampant and widespread in the city. According to the 1992 World Bank findings, about 60 percent of the urban dwellers were found to have fallen below the poverty line (World Bank, 1992). Recent estimates do not seem to show significant improvement in the overall poverty situation. The aim of this paper is to depict the poverty profile of the city in brief and propose alternative measures which may merit closer consideration in the preparation of the forthcoming poverty reduction strategy designed to address the problem at the city/municipal and local levels.

## **2. Poverty Issues in Addis Ababa**

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon whose underlying causes are varied, complex and quite cumbersome to quantitatively measure. Globally, poverty as a phenomenon has a variety of political, economic and social meanings and manifestations. In the economic sense, poverty is a by-product of an inequitable distribution and use of resources. If seen socially, it is a reflection of inadequacies in the realm of basic needs and facilities. Politically, it is regarded as an articulation of insufficient participation in the decision-making processes and inadequate translation of competing societal interests. In the context of Addis Ababa, it is a phenomenon involving issues related to income, labor market, public infrastructure and services, shelter, social exclusion, etc. In this regard, a comprehensive view of these dimensions is a requisite for obtaining a better understanding about the magnitude of poverty in the city.

## **2.1. Income and Employment**

The household income and expenditure survey conducted by CSA reveals that 41.5 percent of the households in Addis Ababa earn income less than Birr 4100 per year (about Birr 342 per month). 19.6 percent falls in the range of Birr 4200-6,599 per year (350-550 Birr per month) bringing the total of those earning less than Birr 550 per month to 61 percent. According to the same source, a little over one-third or 34.5 percent of the households spend less than Birr 550 a month. Even though distribution of income does have its own limitation in measuring the sufficiency of one's own income of meeting the expected standard of living, several attempts have been made to compute the family poverty line of Addis Ababa. Regardless of differences in their respective estimations all sources indicate that the magnitude of the problem is increasing rather than decreasing. According to a recent national labor force survey made in 1999, due to luring facilities and seemingly 'vibrant' employment opportunity the number of migrants in Addis Ababa is said to account for about 46.9 percent of the population resulting in an unemployment rate of 34.7 percent. For this reason, unemployment nowadays has become one of the critical challenges confronting the City Administration.

## **2.2. Housing**

Another area whereby the severity of the poverty situation is vividly reflected is in the production and provision of shelter. Due to the misguided policy of the ex-military regime the housing supply has fallen far too short of the demand. For a potential demand of 460,000 housing units what is currently available for residential purposes is about 238,000 leaving a deficit of 222,000 houses. (Addis Ababa City Government, 1997). Out of this stock, about 82 percent of the houses are constructed of wood and mud. About 60 percent of the units have no more than two rooms per unit. Besides, replication of similar 'chica' units is estimated to cost a minimum of Birr 30,520, which in effect is far beyond the affordability of 85 percent of the city population. Furthermore, due to the commercialization of the formal financial institutions, the chances of securing loans even at a subsi-



dized rate at the prevailing market interest of 10.5 percent is becoming a remote possibility. Moreover, due to the inability of the bulk of the city residents to pay frozen rents for government-owned houses in time the interest of the private sector to vigorously enter into the construction of rental houses has turned out to be extremely minimal. In effect, such a shelter condition is generating a state of homelessness in the city whose precise figure is beyond any one's reach.

### **2.3. Municipal Services and Social Infrastructure**

The annual water production of the city is about 64 million cubic meters (A.A. Water and Sewerage Authority, 1998). This actual supply represents about 69 percent of the demand. The remaining is unaccounted for. Given the imbalances in the fairness of the existing water distribution system, 61 percent of the households, who do not have stand pipes of their own, are being charged more than the 0.50 cents per m<sup>3</sup> subsidized rate that the water vendors are presently paying to the city administration in the form of user fees.

The sewer infrastructure is too far undeveloped. As a result, about 98.7 percent of the city's population is not connected to the modern system. In other words, the majority of the population is using alternative means of sanitation. The attempts at meeting liquid waste disposal requirements via suction trucks is equally inadequate. In addition, the charges are beyond the reach of the poor.

The solid waste collection situation is another deplorable area requiring urgent attention. Heaps of garbage are becoming common scenes all over the city. Due to budgetary constraints, the city's collection capacity could not go beyond 65 percent. Nevertheless, the limited infrastructure available has become a source of livelihood to the scavenging urban poor. Quite a good number of this section of city residents is said to engage in a kind of informal waste recycling.

Among the available urban transport modes what is becoming accessible is bus transport service, which is currently being heavily subsidized by the city administration. Despite such an accessibility, a chunk of the demand is not yet met due to too many constraints built into the service.

The education profile is no different from what has been read so far. In spite of high percent-

age gross enrollment achievements registered in the city, many of the schools in Addis Ababa are discovered to be over crowded and much below the recommended standards. The attrition rate, which is increasing due to lack of financial assistance, child labor at home and lack of closer parental supervision call for urgent attention. As regards the health status of the city residents, Addis Ababa doesn't seem to fare well. In a 1996 Welfare Monitoring Survey, it was discovered that about 5.1 percent of the children were classified as wasted, 21 percent under weight and 49 percent stunted. Hence, malnutrition has become a chronic problem of concern.

Environmentally, the city suffers from pollution and emissions. Most of the pollutants come from human excreta, overflowing of latrines, stagnant water, industrial and commercial wastes and urban-based dairy farms. Among the environmental hazards what is affecting the poor is flooding. A survey conducted on the riparian people revealed that 79 percent of riparian households earn a monthly income of Birr 300 or less a month.

In almost all cities across the world there undoubtedly are people who are excluded from enjoying the benefits of urban life, because of either their physical, social or economic conditions. In this respect, Addis Ababa is no exception. Like cities of a similar spatial and sectoral configurations elsewhere, there are several groups, which are socially excluded. These are street children, prostitutes and beggars, who are engaged in the 'trade' as a consequence of economic problems that they faced back at home and former places of residence in other urban and rural areas in the country.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Approximately, half of the city's population is leading its life under the poverty line. And this number is not expected to decline in the near future either. Among the major factors contributing towards swelling poverty in the city unemployment ranks first.

Urban unemployment is an outcome of the interplay of structurally induced economic and social dynamics shaping the urban space. Indeed, it is a social phenomenon often engendered as an 'unintended' product of multifarious sectoral decisions made by a multitude of economic agents interlinked with urban-based economic activities. Hence, any policy against urban poverty is likely to

succeed if and only if it is initially designed with the strategic aim of transforming society. It has to focus on the poor as well as the non-poor. It shall also call for an increased integration of intervention at all territorial levels. In this regard, any new urban poverty reduction strategy aimed at eradicating poverty in Addis Ababa critically needs an in depth assessment of the existing and potential opportunities built into the city's urban structure and their employment implications.

Unarguably, due the availability of relatively modern infrastructural set ups and an estimated 25% contribution to the national GDP, Addis Ababa:-

- is and will continue to be a strategic national economic gateway to the rest of the progressively urbanizing world. In this respect, given its paramount comparative advantages, its likelihood of attracting a chunk of the urban-oriented hi-tech and service centered direct foreign investment, which is being expected to flow into the country, remains enormously high.
- continues to benefit most from the share of the domestic accumulation (In the form of savings) and investment of the national capital until such a time that the ongoing polarization process is reversed by some kind of deliberate massive interregional transfer of public resources----an unlikely scenario in the era of private sector-led globalization.
- as the single largest national market will keep on pulling the most talented, enterprising and able-bodied prospective migrants from the rest of the country.

But such opportunities do not come without corresponding costs. Firstly, globalization sharpens competitiveness by demanding radical restructuring in the economy, which in turn is believed to cause the current level of unemployment to steadily rise. Secondly, inefficient and cost-ineffective techniques of production are either partially automated or abandoned altogether aggravating the intensity of the problem further. Last but not least, the phenomenon has the potential of eroding the already weakened urban-urban as well as urban-rural linkage by encouraging indiscriminate imports of foreign made finished commodities and intermediate factor inputs. Thus, globalization in the context of Addis Ababa is anticipated to result in the evolution of two contradictory urban

configurations. On the one hand, Addis Ababa may turn into becoming a hub of an ever-thriving modern sector. Conversely, the metropolis may possibly be confronted by a rising rate of unemployment prompted in the main by the countervailing forces of the urbanization process, which of course compounds the magnitude of urban poverty at an unprecedented scale.

In conclusion, the plausibility of any policy initiative thus depends on the correct conceptualization of the phenomenon intended to be directly dealt with as well as the authenticity of its implementation strategies. Evidently, feasible strategies rely heavily on the proper identification of the interplaying forces that engender the decision/intervention space. In the case of Addis Ababa, these forces are presumed to be urbanization and economic development. Hence, a poverty reduction strategy geared toward tackling urban poverty, amongst all other things, shall enter into the terrain through a thorough analysis of recent global urbanization trends and their concomitant spatial and sectoral articulations. Concurrently, the existing national urban-rural linkage has to be closely studied . And its inadequacies in terms of not generating a strong and organized national urban network must be brought into the spotlight for citywide policy debate. Based upon the ensuing conceptual framework:

1. A Poverty Reduction Strategy which is organically integrated into the objectives, strategies and targets of National Development Plans and clearly indicating the strategic stakeholders and their respective resource commitments needs to be prepared at the Federal, Regional and Municipal levels.
2. An operational mechanism designed at monitoring the various implementation phases and assessing the poverty reduction impacts of interventions has to also be drawn and be effected; and
3. Poverty reduction interventions currently in use, such as supporting a variety of community initiated activities like extending access to land, basic infrastructures, credit, etc. must be integral activities of the overall development endeavor.

To facilitate the expedition of the above set of proposals, the following arrangements are suggested.

On the institutional front :

- 1) A nation-wide urban Development Forum com-

prising the Prime Minister's office, relevant Federal Ministries, Heads of Regional states and Urban Managers of Regional Capitals must be established at a federal level with a mandate to:

- a) Formulate national urban development guide lines defining the hierarchy, functional roles and status of urban centers;
- b) Prepare a poverty reduction strategy in the context of urban development targets; and
- c) Design a monitoring and evaluating mechanism to facilitate the synchronization of urbanization and economic development synergies with that of poverty reduction measures

But the preceding moves will lead nowhere unless:

- 2) An urban development Fund that will be earmarked for financing strategic urban infrastructural investments whose multiplier effects proliferate across the spatial and economic structures of national urban settings is pooled centrally and the competitive edges of the Ethiopian urban centers are enhanced accordingly.

Subsequently, through the pursuance of such an approach, sustainability of pro-poor actions are assured. And poverty reduction interventions, which have often been viewed as short-term welfare-type humanitarian engagements, are going to be considered credible alternative development strategies with far reaching societal transformational impacts.



# The Gender Dimensions of Poverty

Zenebework Tadesse  
Forum for Social Studies

## Introduction

Men and women have differential roles and responsibilities most of which are socially constructed. As a result of these different roles and responsibilities of women and men, the causes and experience of poverty differ by gender. Socio-cultural and ideological norms about appropriate roles and behavior for women and men constrain women's scope for independent activity. e.g. in Ethiopia the taboo against women and ploughing and planting, a practice which puts significant constraint on women's role in agriculture. Likewise, the rigidity in the gender division of labor confines women to certain tasks and locks them in a narrower range of income-earning or employment opportunities. Cultural constraints reinforce generalized socio-economic disadvantages in restricting women's participation in the labor market and in governance.

There is ample evidence that shows that women and men experience poverty differently and that they become poor through gender differentiated processes. Poor women in Ethiopia have very little access to land, credit and other productive resources and experience myriad forms of other deprivations such as longer working days, women specific ill health, much lighter rates of illiteracy and low levels of education relative to men. Women's access to productive resources is highly constrained both in terms of legal rights and in the application of laws, and operation of institutions of resources allocation (e.g. Peasant Associations or land allocation committees in Ethiopia). Both the market and public institutions, such as extension services and the market through financial institutions, exhibit explicit and implicit gender bias by ignoring the need of women farmers or refusing loans to women. In addition to material deprivation, poor women experience the qualitative dimensions of poverty such as lack of free time, poor self-esteem and dependency much more than poor men.

A gender-aware poverty eradication program is one that provides a through analysis of the multidimensional links between gender and poverty followed by a multipronged approach which is tailored to address existing gender differentials. In this short piece, we argue that the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Ethiopia (hereafter

referred as I-PRSP or the document) is a good example of a program that has neglected to include gender as a category in the analysis of poverty and in the formulation of appropriate economic, political and social policies. The I-PRSP identifies four building blocks which in combination are believed to lead to poverty reduction. These include the Agricultural-Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI), judicial and civil service reforms, and decentralization and empowerment. There is only a brief reference to gender concerns in only one of these four building blocks.

## Profiles of Poverty in Ethiopia

Concepts of poverty are geographically, historically and culturally specific. The anti-poverty policy that countries adopt depends on the specific way in which poverty is defined. The official figure for poverty in Ethiopia estimates that in 1995/1996, 45.5% of the population was below the poverty line. However, this figure only refers to absolute poverty and not to relative poverty. Further, the I-PRSP tells us that although poverty is prevalent in rural and urban areas, it is primarily a rural phenomenon. While the predominant focus of poverty reduction strategy should be on rural areas, it would be shortsighted to neglect urban poverty in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, most of the existing data on poverty is not gender-desegregated. Income poverty measures are typically based on household income/expenditure data that cannot be divided in terms of the differential control of men and women over such income. As a result, we are unable to know whether and to what extent women and female children may be relatively poorer in the households that are below the poverty line.

In fact, if the poverty data were comprehensively desegregated, we may find that even in households that are not below the poverty line, women and female children might be faced with unequal distribution of resources and thus might be victims of relative poverty. Poverty assessment has to encompass other dimensions of poverty besides personal consumption. Other elements include the enjoyment of common property resources, such as forests and rivers; state-provided commodities, such as health care and education; and assets, such as land and equipment, with due attention to the differential access of men and women to these resources. The I-PRSP hardly addresses these quali-

tative dimensions of poverty and pays highly inadequate attention to the role of ideologies and institutions in causing and perpetuating poverty.

Given all these lacunae and the magnitude of poverty in Ethiopia, the assertion by the I-PRSP that “availability of data on poverty in Ethiopia is relatively satisfactory” is at best exaggerated and clearly gender-blind. From a gender perspective, the failure to address intra-household power and poverty results in a poverty-reduction program that fails to strengthen women’s bargaining position within households and hence fails to reduce poverty significantly. Similarly, while the interim I-PRSP addresses some of the state-provided commodities, it fails to take adequate account of common property resources and provides a false and partial picture of assets. A case in point is the assertion that “there is no landlessness as all farmers have landholdings.” While this is false regarding even male farmers, the assertion completely ignores the majority of women who have no access to or control over land.

The account given by the I-PRSP under socio-economic indicators provides a glimpse of the level of material deprivation faced by large sectors of the population. More specifically, the program refers to the low life expectancy at birth, extremely high infant, child and maternal mortality rates, as well as the unacceptably high illiteracy rate and the extremely low gross enrollment ratio at the primary level of education. Here the gender disadvantages are very clear. Although the data on life expectancy and the infant and child mortality rate are not desegregated by gender, we can discern from the other indicators that women and girls are disadvantaged in terms of access to health, education and training. As we shall show below one of the major underlying causes of child mortality and morbidity is directly related to the gender disadvantages faced by women.

Having provided a fairly bleak picture of poverty, the document goes on to tell us that there is a significant decline in the magnitude of poverty in the 1990s. If it was true, this would make Ethiopia an exceptionally low-income country as most countries even those with no conflict indicate an increase in poverty due to a number of factors including the implementation of structural adjustment programs. The proof given for this decline of absolute poverty is once again in terms of food consumption and ‘a steep improvement in primary education’. The reference to increased food con-

sumption is based on two surveys of ‘six below average villages’ at two different periods. Clearly, surveys of this nature can not tell us much about the processes of poverty and much less about the gender dimensions of poverty in Ethiopia as a whole.

The second indicator of declining poverty is said to be a steep improvement in primary education but the data only provide gross enrollment ratio. Such a ratio fails to reveal unequal access to education opportunities between boys and girls as well as high dropout, absenteeism and repetition rates for boys and especially girls. The first and most recent Demographic and Health Survey which has covered a broad sample of households throughout the country clearly contradicts the assertion regarding the decline in poverty. It indicates that one in two Ethiopian children under age five are stunted and more than one in four are severely stunted. 52 percent of rural children compared with 42 percent of urban children are stunted. 11 percent of Ethiopian children are moderately wasted. One in three urban children are underweight compared with nearly one in two rural children. Had there been a nation wide nutritional survey of women in their reproductive years, we would be able to discern a much higher magnitude of malnutrition which results from inadequate food as well as other factors most of which are related to deepening poverty. We will return to the issue of school enrollment in the section addressing the social sector.

### **A Glance at the Gender Components of ADLI**

The major ‘building bloc’ of the poverty reduction strategy is perceived as agricultural-led growth resulting from ADLI. The I-PRSP tells us that small holder family farming is made the focus of economic development. The document goes on to elaborate the reorientation in public expenditure towards social and economic development with a substantive increase in primary education and health care, the acquisition of skills that has been made possible through extension and capital through credit resulting in growth in savings and investment. While there have been numerous studies that contradict the existence of agricultural-led growth in the country, those working on gender issues will have to be given clear empirical evidence on the following critical factors:

⇒ Male and female ownership and control of critical household assets i.e. land, animals, farm and

- irrigation equipment and other assets;
- ⇒ Social and physical infrastructure which support rural livelihoods and male and female access to their benefits;
- ⇒ The number of men and women in smallholder farming families that have benefited from land redistribution, extension packages and agricultural credit both in male headed and female-headed households;
- ⇒ The type of skills that men and women have acquired through extension;
- ⇒ The types of market information and new production incentives that men and women farmers have access to;
- ⇒ Male and female access to off-farm employment;
- ⇒ The magnitude of savings that men and women farmers have been able to make as well as the type of investments that each of them are making;
- ⇒ Control of production decisions and the income generated by male and female employment in the agricultural sector;
- ⇒ Male and female expenditure patterns in male-headed households and female-headed households;
- ⇒ The net increase in male and female enrollment in primary education.

Gender-desegregated analysis offers insights that might enrich our understanding of the process of economic growth and poverty-reduction in rural areas and their implication for more effective policies to address these goals. The I-PRSP informs us even less about the impact of industrialization on poverty reduction. At the very least, information on the number of male and female share of employment in the various industrial sub-sectors as well as male and female shares of wages and incomes would have been most useful.

### **Poverty, Growth and Diversification**

Given the current global reality on the one hand and the numerous problems facing Ethiopian agriculture on the other, perceiving agriculture as the main solution to the problem of poverty is a highly questionable strategy. Perhaps the biggest weakness in the ADLI strategy is its failure to address the links between poverty, growth and diversification in the rural areas. Diversification refers to the expansion into off-farm activities and away from a reliance on farming as the sole or primary means of livelihood. In order to make a sizable

dent in poverty in Ethiopia, it is imperative to devise a strategy that would create the necessary conditions for off-farm entrepreneurial activities in both surplus and drought-prone regions. Poor households in Ethiopia rarely specialize in a single income-earning activity. Poverty is often found to be highest among households who rely solely on farming. While poor households, especially women members of households, spend a considerable amount of time on off-farm employment (e.g. *tella*, *areke*, craft making and selling), the returns to their labor remain very low. This suggests substantial barriers to entry into high-return activities. Some of the barriers include lack of information, skills, lack of working capital and transportation costs.

The I-PRSP does not differentiate between the extreme poor and the moderate poor. The strategy failed to include convincing policies for generating employment for low-skilled citizens. Without productive income-generating activities and employment opportunities for the rural poor, I-PRSP's success in terms of sustainable poverty reduction will be negligible. The government believes that sustained economic growth will result from its ADLI strategy and that growth will benefit all these sectors of the population. As a result of these shortsighted beliefs, it has failed to implement policies directed at creating employment opportunities for unskilled workers, including most women or promoting productive activities in low-income urban and rural areas.

### **Gender, Judicial and civil Service Reforms**

According to the I-PRSP, the second and third building blocs of reducing poverty consist of judicial and civil service reforms which are perceived as second generation reforms following the establishment of a market economy and attainment of macro-economic stability. Both these reforms provide critical entry points for gender justice. Unfortunately this opportunity has been missed as both reforms as currently envisaged completely omit any reference to gender issues. It would seem that the major problem emanates from the fact that the judicial reform is limited to legal issues that would facilitate the establishment of a market economy and does not concern itself with people's right. In terms of gender rights, this government has made significant constitutional and legal reforms such as the recently promulgated Family Law despite concessions that both the constitution and the new law have made to cultural and

religious norms. However, in order to be effective, these reforms have to be supplemented with measures to support women's capacity to claim their rights. Such measures include legal literacy and education, legal aid and social mobilization. Training and reform of the judiciary are other crucial measures. It is true that some of these measures are being addressed by the Ethiopian, legal aid and social mobilization. Training and reform of the judiciary are other crucial measures. It is true that some of these measures are being addressed by the Ethiopian Women's Lawyer's Association and other NGOs, but given the magnitude of legal and social problems faced by women especially poor women, the effort is far from adequate.

Much more disturbing is the failure to include gender concerns in the civil service reform. The Ethiopian civil service exhibits nominal, substantive and organizational gender biases. a well-known and common example of a nominal and organizational gender bias includes the provision of home economics training for women rather than support to increase their agricultural productivity. Without a particular attention to gender biases, the proposed reforms are most likely to perpetuate existing structures. Presently, women are absent from higher levels of the civil service and the proposed reform fails to indicate any measures that respond to the aspirations of women and the existing gender bias in public administration.

The I-PRSP identifies five components of civil service reform. These include expenditure management and control, human resource management, service delivery, top management systems and the ethics component. A strategy committed to gender equality is one that makes a concerted effort to ensure women in the civil service as well as women beneficiaries of service delivery are not disadvantaged by the current process of civil service reform. In other words, we need to know how women will benefit from expenditure management and control. Would the human resource management component make a concerted effort to promote gender sensitive reform performance appraisal and job classification with a view to transforming gender-biased structures and incentive systems which give greater rewards to men and prevent women from advancing within the hierarchy?

### **Gender Accountability**

Finally to what extent would the proposed reforms be able to bring about qualitative change in

governance transparency and which ensures gender accountability in the public sector? In this context, gender accountability refers to the chasm between government commitments to gender-equitable development and the lack of implementation of these commitments. Gender accountability requires the formulation of gender-specific quantitative and qualitative goals and targets and measurable indicators and benchmarks. This would permit monitoring of gender-based outcomes as well as the total and proportional expenditure on gender. The transparent dissemination of goals, targets and the achievement of the stated gender equitable goals would make it possible for women in Ethiopia to hold their government accountable.

### **Decentralization and Empowerment.**

The fourth building bloc in the government poverty reduction strategy is said to be 'decentralization and empowerment'. It is in this component that the strategy has included some gender concerns. Having noted the types of decentralization taking place in the country, the document states, "another major area of empowerment has been the institutionalized incorporation of women in the development process." The document then goes on to inform us about the national Policy on Ethiopian Women which has been reinforced by other subsequent sectoral and regional policies as well as the equal rights enshrined in the Constitution of 1995. It also makes reference to structures in charge of gender issues set up at the national, sectoral, regional and zonal levels.

In reality, most of the constitutional and national and sectoral policy commitments have remained trapped on paper. Despite a national policy on women, there have been no strategy in place that addresses women's gender specific constraints. The available data including those generated by the government indicate very little progress in women's access to and control of valued resources, education and skills training, paid employment, health and in decision-making. The document refers to mainstreaming gender but as we have argued above gender concerns have been omitted from the mainstream development agenda. The document does not tell us of measures which would bring about gender sensitive institutional policy and operational changes across the public sector. At the very least, mainstreaming efforts have to be accompanied by context-specific tools such as gender project guidelines and monitoring checklists with benchmarks against which all development

activities can be assessed. To date, such tools have not been devised in Ethiopia and we therefore do not know the gender differentiated impacts of most mainstream development programs and projects. Nor do we know the extent to which government spending actually reaches women.

The I-PRSP informs us that public expenditure has been re-oriented towards social and economic development. In this regard, a critical concern that the document fails to indicate is the proportion of the national budget which has been allocated to ensure national policy commitments to gender-equitable development. Nor does it tell us the extent to which those who have been made in charge of gender issues at various levels of the decentralized government structures have been able to re-orient institutional approaches towards gender sensitivity. What provisions have been made to provide these personnel with technical skills in gender and policy analysis, project design, implementation and evaluation? To our knowledge most of these units are highly under resourced both in terms of personnel and requisite skills and materials.

Turning to poverty reduction and gender, the I-PRSP makes a reference to the Grassroots Initiative Fund which will ‘operate as a financing window providing women groups with technical assistance, training and grant to collectively undertake productive activities.’ It is important to underscore that this recently formulated, donor-driven initiative is only being implemented in selected Woredas of four regions of the country. Promotion of micro-finance programs for women may indicate a desire to enhance women’s access to financial services. It is true that credit is a key input through which policy makers could assist women in diversifying into off-farm entrepreneurial activities.

Women can engage in a much wider range of productive activities and are likely to make larger contribution to the household economy. But emphasis on income generation for women without addressing the underlying constraint women face often results in minimal outcomes. Women face a plethora of constraints when attempting to engage in income earning activities both in rural and urban areas. A gender aware poverty reduction program will have to give sufficient attention to resolving women’s heavier work burdens and longer working days. Moreover, to be effective in terms of gender equity concerns, micro-finance programs for women will have to address the legal obstacles,

popular stereotypes, gender division of labor, and power relations and cultural norms that pattern women’s access to financial markets.

The I-PRSP does not tell us about the potential of the initiative to promote sustainable livelihoods, the types of skills that are likely to develop nor about the likely impact on household welfare and decision-making processes. A gender aware-financial service is one that creates more flexible service alongside the provision of credit, such as a supporting infrastructure of skills development, management, marketing and transport. But the skills development should be able to provide a range of skills training to women beyond ‘typically female activities’ into activities with greater market demand and higher profit margins. Such an effort would have to be accompanied by measures to encourage women to train in areas not traditionally seen as female skills.

In terms of decentralization and empowerment, the I-PRSP does not provide us with any evidence regarding the enhanced participation of women in articulating their gender specific needs or in decision-making. In order to appreciate the empowering potential of decentralization in Ethiopia, we would need to know the number of women in the various levels of the decentralized government structures, efforts that are being made to make local government more responsive to women and gender concerns and to help enhance women’s participation in governance.

### **Gender and Capacity Building**

Yet another crucial intervention for poverty reduction that has completely neglected to incorporate gender concerns is that of capacity building. In terms of ensuring gender-equitable development, at least three areas of capacity building that are of strategic importance can be identified. One entails the provision of training opportunities and confidence building of women with a long-term view of creating a gender-balanced civil service and private sector. Secondly, concerted effort ought to be made to foster gender awareness and competence among both men and women in the civil service, the policy process and in planning practices. Thirdly, a much more committed effort ought to be invested to substantially increase the number of women in the tertiary level of education. These types of measures can result in increasing the representation of women in government decision-making and managerial positions. These



types of new roles for women have the potential of changing societal perceptions of women's capabilities and options. In turn, these types of changes can positively influence ideologies and opportunities for poor women.

### **The Social Sectors**

Following the major building blocks, the I-PRSP provides a more focused attention to the social sectors where it highlights the need for the "creation of a healthy, literate and active labor force". Accordingly, "education and health are given top priority in the national strategy to eradicate poverty." Without denying the importance of these two priorities, we would like to argue that a fundamental component of any national effort to create a healthy, literate and active labor force is the 'care economy' which provides labor and maintains the well-being of the population through such activities as care of children and adults, housework which includes water and fuel collection as well as food preparation and serving. In Ethiopia, women and female children undertake most of these activities.

The inadequacy of government expenditure on the reproductive economy translates into very long working days for women especially rural women and becomes a major stumbling block of efforts to create a literate and healthy society. Gender disadvantages faced by women have intergenerational repercussions. Women's multiple responsibilities and heavy workload in a context of poverty limits the resources available for child care leading to high rates of child morbidity and mortality. It also translates into low educational enrollment, achievement as well as the dropout rates of girls. Easing the burden of women's multiple responsibilities through increased investment in infrastructure i.e. water, energy, is probably one of the most promising strategies to enhance girls enrollment and achievement, especially in the rural areas.

The earlier cited Demographic and Health Survey highlights the importance of female literacy and education in relation to child health and survival. Mothers' education appears to work primarily through the effectiveness of child care practices. The survey found that children born to illiterate mothers suffer the highest mortality. The DHS points out that even children of educated mothers are stunted, wasted and underweight although children of educated mothers are relatively less so than

uneducated mothers. Data on net enrollment contradict the optimism of the I-PRSP and reveal a declining and disturbing trend in education. For example, the Ethiopian Human Development Report of 1998 shows that in 1994 more than 87 percent of the primary school age population was out of school and that the net enrollment in primary school has declined from 32.5 percent in 1984 to 12.99 percent in 1994.

The I-PRSP states that girl's participation in elementary education is expected to increase from 36 per cent in 1995/96 to 45 percent by the end of 2002. And yet, the most recent nationwide and official data clearly reveal alarming gender disparities in education. The DHS, which was released in the year 2000, notes, "Men are more educated than women. Three in four women and one in two men have never been to school. Sixteen percent of women and 33 percent of men had primary education and 9 percent of women and 15 percent of men had secondary education and higher." The document also indicates that enrollment ratios varied considerably between regions and that the lower levels of enrollment also reflect a wider gender gap. Given this grim reality and the type of measures that are enumerated by the strategy document, the 45 percent target will not be reached within a year. There is an urgent need for a much more sober reflection on the resistant barriers that keep girls out of school including family poverty, social and cultural norms and issues related to physical safety and security emanating from the distances girls must travel to and from school.

### **Health**

Under the health sector, the I-PRSP states that the long-range aim of the Health Sector Development Program (HSDP) is to develop a comprehensive and integrated primary health care delivery system. Accordingly, the goals include training of health workers and expanding primary health care service coverage. In the context of preventive care, the document informs us that the overall focus has been on communicable diseases, common nutritional disorders, environmental health and hygiene. All these are laudable and much needed services. However, the focus neglects reproductive health, a major health challenge facing adults and adolescents in the country as evidenced by the alarming prevalence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Women suffer more from the diseases

highlighted by the I-PRSP due to the fact that these diseases are aggravated by pregnancy. The I-PRSP reports that maternal mortality rate in Ethiopia was 700 per 100,000. In many countries data on maternal mortality are under-estimated and given the poor quality of data on women's life in Ethiopia, it is safe to cast doubt on the accuracy of the reported data. Despite the neglect of reproductive health services in the poverty reduction program indicators and targets, the I-PRSP hopes to provide universal access to reproductive health services and to reduce maternal mortality by 3/4th by the year 2015. We are not informed how and with what resources these targets will be achieved.

According to the DHS, at present, the majority of women in Ethiopia lack proper antenatal, delivery and postpartum care. The contraceptive prevalence rate in 2000 was only 6 percent. Most causes of maternal death are preventable. Health practitioners have identified a set of integrated services that should be provided in order to ensure safe motherhood. Often missing are the commitment and the necessary resources. Reaching the internationally set targets requires taking additional measures beyond the medical services most of which challenge the pervasive and insidious patterns of gender discrimination, which perpetuate the social powerlessness of women. Risk factors such as the widely practiced female genital mutilation, early marriage as well as early, closely spaced and frequent pregnancies and widespread violence against women require social mobilization and gender-equitable development.

## **HIV/AIDS**

The I-PRSP states that the number of peo-

ple living in HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia is the third largest in the world. However, this daunting pandemic that has become a great threat to the country is given short shrift in the document. The absence of an analysis of the macro-demographic, macro-economic and gender-differentiated impact of the HIV/AIDS is indicative of the national denial and insignificant official attention given to the pandemic. In a document focused on poverty reduction, there is no reflection on the complex relationships between HIV and poverty without a thoroughgoing public discussion on the root causes and consequences of the wider challenge to the country's development, it is impossible to design innovative strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention. A major topic of such public discussion should be the different socio-cultural beliefs and norms and capacities for negotiating around sexuality. Gender analysis with its relevance to sexual behavior is critical to a comprehensive understanding of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention.

What the alarming prevalence rate indicates is the imperative of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS prevention, care and mitigation into the regular process of planning, budgeting and implementation of development programs. Finally, the pandemic as well as the overall challenge of poverty requires the mobilization of the skills, resources, knowledge and initiatives of all groups in this country: all sectors of the government, the private sector, civil society as well as social and cultural groups.

It is hoped that the newly initiated dialogue on poverty reduction by the Forum for Social Studies will engage in this type of gender-desegregated analysis and will be able to contribute to amore inclusive and gender sensitive Poverty Reduction



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1. *The View from Below: Democratization and Governance in Ethiopia*. Edited by Bahru Zewde and Siegfried Pausewang. Forthcoming (Co-published by FSS)

### Special Publications

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### **Address**

Forum for Social Studies  
P.O.Box 3089  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel. (251-1) 55 61 21/12 95 79/55 20 25  
E-mail: [fss@telecom.net.et](mailto:fss@telecom.net.et)

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