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The Newsletter of the Forum for Social Studies
A Center for Research and Debate on Development and Public Policy

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From the Editor

March 2000 marked the second year of FSS's official existence. In a very modest way, we have embarked on our primary objective of creating public forums where informed discussions of various policy issues can take place. While the public at our symposia might be limited to a relatively small number of participants, we have made a concerted effort to reach a much larger audience by inviting the media as well as through targeted dissemination of our bilingual newsletter which carries lengthy coverage of the issues raised and the policy recommendations made at the various symposia. To borrow the advice of Amartya Sen, FSS forums albeit in a small way have facilitated the effective use of the participatory capabilities of the public. Our hope is that our efforts and

that of similar organizations will begin to influence the direction of public policy.

Another noteworthy lesson that we have drawn is that what might appear as disparate themes that have been discussed during the five symposia organized by FSS are in fact closely related. The principal lessons running through all the public debates include the need for public participation in the designation and scrutiny of all public policies, the vital role of information in policy making and accountability and the pivotal and unavoidable need of building capabilities be it through the revitalization and broadening of the formal educational system or through diverse forms of training. At the heart of Ethiopia's underdevelopment is the massive negligence of education and skills training.

The Year 2000 has been a busy year for FSS. In January, the organization held a conference on the theme of "Democratization and Development" in which a number of research papers was presented for discussion. In February, FSS participated in a public symposium entitled "Building a Livable City".

The symposium, which was organized by the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce, brought together diverse groups of stakeholders to discuss the problems and prospects of the city of Addis Ababa. FSS was one of the civic organizations commissioned to prepare a paper on "Social Problems in Addis Ababa" for presentation at the Symposium. At the end of the symposium, a Citizen's Forum was established to draw up programs for citizens participation in the improvement of urban services.

In this issue we report on a major symposium on "Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods" organized by FSS and held in March. We also have one article on an innovative way of building a library and two important book reviews. With these two reviews, we would like to launch one of the major objectives of FSS which is the inter-generational transfer of knowledge and experience. The two books under review are a treasure-trove of information on public life during the imperial regime. In the future, we hope to take up the challenge of transferring knowledge in a more systematic and regular manner.

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Structure of Governance

FSS is democratically governed, with decision-making shared by the General Assembly, the Board of Advisors, and the Management Committee. The General Assembly meets once a year to review and approve the broad policies of the organization. The Board, which meets more frequently, is responsible for drawing up the policies and strategies of FSS, monitoring the work of the executive and reviewing and approving the finances. Of the nine members in the Board, four are women. The Management Committee is the executive body of FSS. It is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Board and managing the activities of the organization.

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Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods in Ethiopia

Overview

The Forum for Social Studies (FSS) held its fifth Symposium on March 10-11, 2000 at the Ghion Hotel. The symposium, which was opened by H.E Dr Mengistu Huluka, Acting Minister of Agriculture, was on *Food Security and Sustainable Livelihoods*. It was funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) of the U.K. Government.

During the time leading up to the symposium, government figures revealed that 8 million Ethiopians were once again facing the threat of starvation. The general fear was that if the *belg* rains failed or were inadequate, the country would face a tragedy of immense proportions. Since the 1960s, recurrent food crises of various degrees of magnitude have claimed thousands of lives and involved large-scale destruction of property and environmental resources.

These tragedies have clearly revealed that the problem of food insecurity is very deep-rooted and cannot be explained by environmental factors alone.

Thus the major objective of the symposium was to take a fresh look at the country's recurrent food crises, and to explore new avenues for examining the root causes of the problem, and the measures needed to tackle it. The symposium was attended by a large audience of policy makers, researchers, public servants both from Addis Ababa and the regions, donors, NGOs, the business community and members of the media. It provided the opportunity for the exchange of a wide

diversity of viewpoints and experiences. Most of the 110 participants stayed both days of the symposium and participated in the lively debates.

In his welcoming address, Ato Dessalegn Rahmato, Manger of the Forum for Social Studies, recalled that food insecurity has frequently been attributed to environmental shocks, such as in particular drought and rainfall variability. The main response to food insecurity, he noted, has been to seek food aid and to undertake relief and rehabilitation activities. In his view, "there has not been sufficient attention paid to the adverse impact of food aid on sustainable livelihoods and resilience against vulnerability." He pointed out that the main objective of the symposium was not to examine the unfolding emergency but to explore the complex issues involved in food and livelihood security. He felt that a sustainable livelihood approach to food security would provide a better framework for dealing with the problem of dearth and crisis.

The concept of livelihood, which was explored in great detail during the two-day symposium, covers a broad area involving agriculture and food production, employment, economic institutions, social relations, environmental and demographic change, gender relations, governance policy issues.

H.E Dr. Mengistu Huluka expressed his appreciation to the organizers of the symposium for selecting an important and timely topic for discussion. He was hopeful that the debates will address the country's deep-rooted and challeng-

ing problems and draw constructive ideas for further consideration and for minimizing the food security situation in the country. Having explored the food security situation at the global level, Dr Mengistu highlighted the state of poverty and food security in Ethiopia. He noted that according to the most recent data of the government and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), undernourishment in Ethiopia affected 51% of the population between 1995-97, and about 28 million people were believed to live in chronic and transitory poverty in rural and urban areas. About 52% of the population who live in rural areas are food insecure while about 36% of the population in urban areas are unable to acquire their minimum food requirements.

The Acting Minister attributed the causes of food insecurity in Ethiopia to two major causes. The first was widespread poverty, which he thought gave rise to both chronic food deficiency and transitional food insecurity, including vulnerability to famine. The second factor he noted involved changes in weather patterns, and went on to highlight the numerous ways that a combination of natural calamities and man-made disasters have exacerbated the food availability gap in the country. These factors include the legacy of war, poorly developed agricultural technology and infras-

tructure, natural resource degradation, diminishing farm size, and lack of alternative employment opportunities. Having enumerated the complex causes, he then highlighted the various government policies promulgated since 1992 that are likely to have a positive impact on food security. Prominent among these is the five-year National Food Security Strategy, which is meant to address all food insecure social groups living in drought-prone area of the country.

The Strategy puts major emphasis on agriculture, crop and livestock production, small-scale irrigation, rural roads, market and credit services, clean water supply and capacity building. H.E Dr Mengistu also noted the civil service reform program, and the emerging role of the private sector as developments likely to have an impact on food security. In spite of the government's efforts to avert both chronic and transitory food insecurity, he concluded, there still remains a lot to be done to achieve food security in the country. In particular, he called attention to rapid population growth as the greatest difficulty, and the development of a network of irrigation schemes as having a great potential to increase agricultural production which in turn could support a growing population. He expressed his hopes that the delib-

erations will have an impact in shaping the future food security program in the country.

A total of nine papers and two oral presentations were given in five separate sessions over the two days. Each session was followed by a wide-ranging discussion from the floor that permitted scrutiny of past practices, assumptions informing current public policies as well as the nature of a variety of institutions.

FSS's symposiums do not attempt to draw formal resolutions or to arrive at a consensus. Nevertheless, the prevalent view was that past food-security interventions, particularly those that are predominantly premised on growing more food and the provision of food aid, have failed. The underlying consensus was that the food insecurity situation in Ethiopia is scaling up, that the number of destitute households is on the increase and that there is an urgent need for bold and new initiatives to address the growing challenge of food insecurity.

In what follows, we provide brief summaries of the papers. The edited version of the papers will be published as proceedings in the near future.

New FSS Publication

We are pleased to announce the launching of our Monograph Series.

FSS Monograph Series I

Survey of the Private Press in Ethiopia: 1991-1999

by Shimeles Bonsa

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FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES
Symposium on
FOOD SECURITY & SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS
10 - 11 March 2000



Summary of Papers Presented at the Symposium

Livelihood Strategies and Food Security Policy in Ethiopia

Yared Amare

Livelihood strategies refer to a variety of agricultural, economic, social or consumption-oriented activities that peasant households undertake to maintain the viability of their households in a sustainable fashion. Based on a close look at the livelihood strategies of peasant households in the food-deficit region of Ethiopia, it is argued that proper consideration of peasant livelihood strategies is important in order to design interventions that have the greatest impact on food security.

Substantial attention has been given to the patterns of decision-making that are part of peasants' livelihood strategies in diverse spheres of the household economy. These include cropping

patterns, grain and livestock transaction, non-agricultural income earning, involvement in agricultural wage labor, social support and management of expenditures and food consumption, as well as the mechanisms that the livelihood strategies that they implement in "normal times. Such a holistic treatment of peasant livelihood strategies reveals a number of factors that inform and condition their implementation. These factors include diversification, risk-aversion, resource and input availability, prices and the desire to maintain self-sufficiency as well as access to the market, and to maximize alternative sources of income; the close integration of agricultural and livestock production, agricultural and non-agricultural activities and income, and production and consumption; the considerable and interacting impact of seasonality and differ-

ences in access to resources and productivity between households; their vulnerability to risk as well as the effectiveness of their livelihood strategies. Policy interventions that give due consideration to and build on such dimensions of livelihood strategies in a comprehensive fashion are necessary if they are to enhance households' livelihood security in a sustainable and effective fashion.

The Continuing Problems of Chronic Food Insecurity in Ethiopia: Looking Through the Livelihood Lens

Abi Mansfield

Contrary to assumptions of its disappearance, food insecurity in Ethiopia might have been quietly scaling up in the latter half of the 1990s. Current estimates indicate that over half of the Ethiopian population may in fact be chronically

food insecure. Furthermore data on malnutrition reveals alarmingly high levels of stunting and wasting of children. Those who are mainly suffering are the landless, the elderly, and the disabled, female-headed, poor pastoral, non-farming or newly established households. In several areas of the country, the majority of the population are sliding from middle-wealth status to the lowest categories of well-being. There is a striking difference between normal deficit and surplus areas of the country.

Food insecurity persists because livelihood vulnerability involves a far greater range of factors than occasional drought induced shocks. Likewise, famine results from an accumulation of events that progressively erode the capacity of poor households to deal with macro shocks to the local economy. The continual threat of famine cannot be separated from the continual reality of poverty. Past policies and interventions are insensitive to local priorities, mistaken in their assumption, and wrong in their understanding of the key income sources of the poorest households. A contributory factor to the persistence or even the increase in food insecurity is the assumption that household food security might eventually be achieved by increased food production on farm plots. While cereal production is on the increase, the type of yield increase can not feed a population growing at 3% per annum. Moreover, while increased agricultural production adds to food availability and can increase income, it will be insufficient to ensure access. Declining farm size only leads to worsening food security, if the non-farm sector cannot compensate for livelihood stress. Similarly, while food aid may ameliorate the symptoms

of food insecurity but does little or nothing to address the underlying causes of food insecurity.

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework offers a new way of thinking about priorities for development through its focus on people, their assets, and their activities rather than on sectors and their performance: the conventional point of entry to policy. It departs from previous preoccupation with needs and focuses on the potential of the poor and hence on the removal of the constraints to the realization of the potential. The perspective is people-centred, holistic, dynamic, links micro-macro levels of policies, promotes cooperation between the public and private sectors and builds on the strengths of the poor. Famine prevention needs to involve a network of decisions relating to diverse policy areas such as income generations, health care, food price stabilization, labor markets and land reform

Government Policy on Food Security in Ethiopia: Some Strengths and Weaknesses *Senait Seyoum*

Despite the adoption of a national food security strategy, Ethiopia does not have a clearly articulated food security policy, with distinct objectives and instruments, integrated in its overall development-planning framework. To date, a variety of sectoral macro-economic and social policies have been pursued which have dealt with either single aspects of food security (for example, food imports/aid, consumption subsidies, relief distribution, nutritional interventions) or have had direct/indirect effects on food

security without being explicitly concerned with it. Not only is it essential to address food security directly and explicitly, but also requires an overall effort to clear out the existing confusions about the complementarity and trade-offs between food security and other development objectives.

The formulation in 1996 of a National Food Security Strategy, initially articulated at federal level, but with main responsibility for implementation resting at regional level, was mainly driven by the limited success of the smallholder-led agricultural development strategy in drought prone and vulnerable areas. While it may be too early to assess the impact of regional food security programmes, the continued and widespread prevalence of poverty, high rates of malnutrition, vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters, and fluctuations in food consumption, seems to suggest that policies pursued have largely been unsuccessful in resolving the problem of food security.

There are many contributory factors to the failure to design effective solutions to the problem of food security in Ethiopia. From a policy perspective, perhaps the most important factor has been a knowledge gap regarding the nature and scale of the complex, multi-dimensional and dynamic challenge posed by food security. Given that food insecurity is a component of a number of structural and interlocked problems, including extreme poverty, low resource endowments and income base, environmental degradation, vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters, limited access to productive or protective assets, low-cost technologies and public services, such a knowledge gap

constitutes a major drawback to achieving food security and sustainable growth.

The strengths of current policy consist of the rural-focus of the major development strategy, the importance accorded to infrastructure development, the promotion of natural resource conservation, the existence of institutional capacity for early warning and response to threats of famine as well as reorientation in agricultural policies. In addition to the aforementioned weaknesses of current policy, the others and related factors include the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding food security in Ethiopia and lack of appropriate institutional structures able to tackle rural and urban food security.

Food Aid and Peasant Livelihood Strategies

Debebe Habtewold

Ethiopia is still far from the goal of achieving food security, i.e. making food available both at national and household level. Despite a significant improvement in food supply in recent years, the food-sufficiency objectives of the country has not yet been met. A per capita food gap of 50-100 kg has been observed annually, indicating a worsening of the food security situation in the country. Recent surveys in the early and late 1990s estimated that the size of the food insecure lie between 20 to 30 million. In response to this situation, about 0.2 to 1.2 million metric tons of food aid, accounting for some 2% to 18% of domestic supply has entered in the country every year.

Given this scenario, the critical question is: does such vol-



umes of food aid import seriously discourage farmers' livelihood strategies? Most argue that food aid induces agricultural productivity, employment opportunities and income, while others consider it as an impediment to agricultural production and market development. This concern was tested on a data set of rural household survey collected in 1996.

As the response pattern and empirical relationship indicate, food aid does not have significant impact on farmers' production and marketing behaviors. Farmers' responses confirmed that the regular farm operations have not changed considerably as a result of food aid distribution. An empirical analysis further justified that the influence of food aid on farmers' production and marketing behavior is not statistically significant.

The result, however, does not produce conclusive evidence as the data refers only to a single year. Disincentive effects

of food aid may vary along the seasonal patterns of food crop production as well as the general economic settings of a given region or locality. Its effects would particularly be critical at micro levels where project food is highly concentrated and local markets are poorly developed. In such a situation, a disaggregated survey should be undertaken to trace the impact of food aid on the livelihood strategies of farmers. The impact should also be regularly assessed in order to develop threshold levels that can serve as indicators to monitor disincentive conditions at different levels.

Micro-Finance and Food Security: Reflections on the Amhara National Regional State Food Security Strategy

Yohannes Mekonnen & Peter Middlebrook

The Amhara Region is one of the most vulnerable regions in Ethiopia. Of the total of 97 rural woredas in the region, 48 are fre-

quently affected by food shortages. As significant portion of the population in these woredas is living on relief. The vulnerability of food insecure households has been exacerbated among other factors, by poor marketing and transport facilities. The region-specific food security strategy focuses on increasing the efficiency of financial and product markets for a sustained attack on increasing livelihood support mechanisms. The five strategic interventions include increasing the production capacities and productivity of the vulnerable households; promotion of diversified (on and off farm) income generating activities; harmonizing the rehabilitation and protection and development of natural resources in line with ensuring food security; development of human and institutional capacity; and promotion of efficient and rural financial markets.

Access to rural financial services plays a key role in rural development initiatives and recent studies have shown the importance of financial services in promoting economic growth and poverty alleviation. However, while the provision of rural finance services is not a straightforward process for reducing poverty it can be used as a vital and complimentary instrument to assist in stimulating productivity growth both within and outside the agricultural sector. Rural finance, if accompanied with the successful implementation of targeted interventions aimed at creating employment, such as the development of microwatersheds, and improved education and health services and practices, can assist in decreasing rural vulnerability.



Integrated Micro Watershed Development for Enhanced Food Security in Tigray: A Panacea?

***Peter Middlebrook
&
Mangasha Haile***

Since 1991, the Government of Tigray has targeted considerable financial investment to the rehabilitation of microwatersheds in an attempt to enhance rural livelihood support options in drought prone areas. The initial results have been encouraging although a more strategic approach to microwatershed development needs to be adopted. This conclusion is founded on the assessment that conservation alone, of common land does not significantly lead to productivity growth and enhance household livelihoods. Moreover, activities such as integrated land use planning, microwatershed rehabilitation and more appropriate waste extraction technologies need to develop to extract ground water increase-allowing a focus on increased production, be it cereal or preferably horticulture.

The strengthening of the current microwatershed development approach now being undertaken by the

region depends on a number of considerations. A pure conservation approach to enhancing livelihood will bear ‘little fruit’ unless it is linked with a more strategic approach including other rural development activities to enhance production. In order to maximize livelihood returns to drought prone areas a “Integrated Microwatershed Development Programme Guideline” needs to be urgently developed by the region to reflect the shifts in regional thinking. The guideline ought to delineate various phases of development to increase livelihood potentials. These phases could include integrated watershed planning based on land utilization; integrated microwatershed rehabilitation; productivity growth and productivity diversification; targeting of socio-economic support services; and further marketing support services. In addition to phasing the various activities, the micro watershed development approach needs to be institutionalised at regional, zonal and woreda levels and the new food security desks may be an appropriate vehicle to coordinate government, donor and NGO responses.

Local Level Food Security Initiatives: The Experience of Hundee

Zegeye Asfaw

Many rural households face critical food shortages and grain price variations during the 'hungry months' before and during the rainy season. Grain marketing structures reveal that there is considerable volume of grain which floods the markets during two to three months after the harvest season. Farmers sell large portion of their produce during the harvest period to discharge tax-related and other social obligations. Local grain traders siphon off a considerable volume of grain only to bring it back during the hungry months with a significant price hike. In order to replenish household grain deficits, households with livestock sell small ruminants and subsequently their large livestock. The remaining majority turn to moneylenders who charge exorbitant interest rates.

Hundee, a local NGO established in 1995 launched a pilot project aimed at maintaining a "grain reserve" scheme at the community level as one aspect of addressing transitory food insecurity in some areas of Oromo Region where it is operating. An important component of the initiative is the establishment of a "Cereal Bank Association", an association of poor farmers who will manage the grain reserve and to whom the ownership of the project will be transferred over a given period of time. The initial problem that faced the establishment of the project was the negative legacy of the past in the form of fresh memories of forced collectivization which had triggered a near rejection by the community of collective action to overcome common problems. Similarly, the establishment of

the project was threatened by open agitation by political cadres and others in an attempt to break up the association by alleging that it is a political grouping organized by individuals whose political loyalty was questionable.

Members of the association access grain on credit or cash basis at a lower price than the market rate during the rainy season. One unique feature of the scheme is continued capitalization of profits that may be employed for other economic or social enterprises that the associations desire to establish in the future. Beyond purchasing and selling grain, the associations have created a new forum where poor rural households come together to analyze common problems and find solutions. As part of a phasing out strategy, Hundee is presently contemplating the establishment of a cereal bank network, a sort of umbrella organization which will be able to provide skills training and to eventually provide the services that Hundee provides at present.

Gender Sustainable Livelihood and Food Security in Rural Ethiopia

Mulunesh WoldeMariam

Rural women play a pivotal role in sustaining the livelihood of the family and national food security. Both rural women and men participate in land preparation, seedling transplanting, weeding, harvesting, transporting

and storing grains and marketing of agricultural products. With the exception of a few cases, men carry out plowing and sowing. On the other hand, the responsibilities of women include grinding or pounding grain, fetching water and firewood. In most cases, men do not participate in reproductive work due to the prevailing gender division of labour. Hence women do most of the domestic work needed for the household to function.

Despite their multiple responsibilities, women have limited access to and control over the means of production. Although the land reform of 1975 entitled both men and women to use rights to land, married women have less access to and control over land. Women's access to improved farming practices, skill training and extension services, as well as information on marketing strategies and research outputs is also highly limited. Unlike men farmers, women farmers do not get credit provisions from the concerned institutes to promote food production and to initiate non-farm income generating activities.

Rural women and men, particularly those from resource poor households are involved in marketing food crops to subsidize the nutritional requirements of the household. The difference is that men market small and large livestock and grain that fetch high income while women focus on small animals, on selling processed food stuffs and drinks, vegetables that generate low incomes.

Our appreciation of the role of women in the provision of household and national food security is hampered by the scarcity of gen-

BAREFOOT LIBRARIANS

By John Medcalf

The Rural Library Network in northern Peru was inspired by a 12-year-old boy. In 1972, I was the new priest of the isolated and poverty-stricken parish of Bambamarca. Twenty thousand peasant families eked out a living from maize and potatoes harvested at heights of up to 12,000 feet above sea level.

One wet afternoon a poncho-clad boy, Leonardo Herrera, came to my office.

"Padre, our teacher says you have books," the boy said.

"Well of course I have books."

"But I've never seen a book and I want to."

"Well how do you learn to read without books?" I asked.

Leonardo then described how the teacher had a minuscule blackboard, and how the pupils would cut a cactus leaf on which they would carve letters and numbers with a nail, a key or a knife. So I selected from my bookshelf a history of Peru written in Spanish and handed it to Leonardo. "I will lend this to you for a week, Leo. Then perhaps I'll lend you another book if you've looked after this one."

Shortly before dawn of the next day, I was woken by loud knocking. Expecting a sick-call, I confronted Leonardo instead.

"I've finished the book!" he shouted triumphantly.

"You can't have done. There is no electricity in your village."

"Oh, I borrowed a few candles

from your church."

The lad had sat up reading all night. He had even made spidery notes on paper I had given him and he wanted the second volume of the history of Peru.

Three decades later there are nearly 600 village libraries spread over the length of this mountainous country. The three principal influences on the network are the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the barefoot doctors of China, and the British public library system. Freire taught that literacy programmes were pointless without the availability of suitable reading materials; China warned us against vehicles, which would be difficult and expensive to maintain (we have refused several offers of 'bibliobuses'); the British system encouraged us to give readers direct access to books.

The earliest rural libraries were attached to village schools, but when teachers failed to cooperate, village elders took over control. Librarians were proposed and elected by a show of hands. In addition to monthly visits to the City to exchange the books, rural librarians took on responsibility for all cultural activities and even the protection of archaeological sites from marauders and tomb-robbers. Our barefoot librarians walk up to 15 hours a day with a knapsack or -if they are lucky enough to have a pack animal- with a saddle-bag. These contain an average of 24 books. A typical

selection would include books on health and first aid; history; children's stories (which are read by adults as well); legislation (surprisingly popular, especially where the defence of their own interests is concerned); poetry, legends and folktales; a religious book or two; and perhaps a book about cooperatives and current affairs. We were at library coordinators' meeting one day when a peasant woman interrupted us. "*Senores librarians*, she said, *I am a simple illiterate woman but, thanks to one of your books, I have learned to make trousers and shirts. The men used to buy their clothes from a village called Hong Kong, but now they buy them from me.*" Her children, who went to the village school, were able to read to the mother books from the rural library.

The rural libraries continue to grow, in spite of government indifference and, in the past, open hostility. The network provides a cheap imitable model of adult education. Peasant families are encouraged not to migrate to the big cities. Leonardo is now a village schoolteacher, but libraries are still his first love.

John Medcalf spent 30 years as a priest in south and central America, founding the Rural Library Network in Peru in 1972. The article is taken from the magazine Index on Censorship, No. 2, 1999.

Book Reviews

ZEWDE RETTA. *The Eritrean Issue, 1941-1963*. [Amharic].
A Book Review by Mesfin Araya*

Most publications on the modern political history of Eritrea are not only written in the English language, but their major reference sources are largely external – e.g. U.N. or British sources. By way of contrast, Zewde Retta's book is original for two reasons: it is a book written in Amharic language, perhaps the first of its kind; the reference sources – especially regarding the Ethio-Eritrean federation and its collapse – are mainly local: Eritrean and Ethiopian government sources, interviews of major political actors of the period, letter of correspondence between government officials, and the author's own personal observations, as he was a journalist.

The book is well researched as it contains detailed and new information, apparently unavailable in the past to scholars of that region, it is also written in simple Amharic, free of jargon.

The current Eritrean nationalists have long been telling the world that the government of Haile Selassie dismantled the Ethio-Eritrean federation. The author of the book under review, on the contrary, advances a single and clear argument: the collapse of the federation was engineered by the Eritrean politicians themselves. The author has marshaled a maze of local information to advance that thesis. Although in English, based

on external sources, and not as detailed as Zewde Retta's work, Tekeste Negash has also made a similar argument.

The collapse of the federation underlined not so much the power of Haile Selassie but rather the fundamental weakness of the Eritrean political elite. No serious attempt had been made by the Eritrean political elite to create an all-embracing Eritrean national identity. Had the Eritrean politicians closed ranks, it would have indeed been difficult for any external force which had a desire to dismantle the federation.

As primarily a form of politics, nationalism is not – as most theoretical discussions about nation, nationhood, and nationalism would inform us – mechanically derived from enduring cultural or other socio-economic structural forces. It is rather mediated through the process of social interaction. Interestingly, the very contrasting historical events internal to Eritrean history – i.e. between the struggle especially of the older generation from the Eritrean highlands for Ethiopian nationalism and that of the recent history of their sons and daughters for independence – only underline the contingent character of nationalism.

For those, like the re-

viewer himself, who are engaged in theoretical investigation of nation, nationhood, and nationalism,

Zewde Retta's book – with its empirical richness – could not have been published at a better time. The book also informs us on the various ideas and discussions on the fate of Eritrea entertained within the Emperor's cabinet – information which, as far as I know, is new to my generation.

There are, however, some interpretations of the author that some readers may find difficult to accept.

Most of the literature on the modern political history of Eritrea tends to employ the conceptual term, federation, uncritically. Zewde Retta's book is not altogether different. In my opinion, the concept is misleading. The Ethio-Eritrean arrangement was essentially institutional rather than constitutional; Haile Selassie's government was the de facto federal government, and the so-called federal council was in practice merely an advisory group. The term, regional autonomy, therefore, seems much more preferable.

The author claims that there is no single tangible evidence indicating Haile Selassie's desire, or plan, to dismantle the Ethio-Eritrean "federation". To begin with, the relevance of that claim is not altogether clear.

What is more, by subjecting the historical and political contexts to critical inquiry, it is not that difficult to discern Haile Selassie's plan. Although the Ethio-Eritrean arrangement was institutional, it had, however, provided Eritrea with a measure of regional autonomy. The new regional autonomy and Haile Selassie's regime were, therefore, inherently incompatible; and one of them had to go.

Certainly, Haile Selassie must have been aware of the inherent difficulties entailed by the new arrangement. Interestingly, the author himself, albeit indirectly, amply informs us about Haile Selassie's consistent encouragement and support of Assfeha Wolde Michael, the leader of the hard line Eritrean politicians, who worked day and night to dismantle the so called federation. The primary responsibility might be attributed to the Eritrean political elite, nevertheless, Haile Selassie himself was also actively involved behind the scene.

Most of the literature on Eritrea tends to employ a conspiracy theory. Zewde Retta's book seems to show a similar problem. Let me cite two examples.

The author claims that the "federation" was an alien phenomenon, as it was a foreign [U.N.] imposition. Indeed it originated externally as an alternative solution, however, it also reflected the Eritrean domestic political situation. It

was essentially a compromise between the two competing local political factions: the Unionists and the pro-independence factions; and that was precisely why in the end that both of the political parties accepted it.

The Moslem dominated pro-independence faction of Ibrahim Sultan, according to the author, was organized and led by external enemies of Ethiopia. Indeed there was an external involvement, but the pro-independence factions was primarily a local phenomenon. The Moslem faction in Eritrea had historically rooted legitimate suspicion and fear toward Christian Ethiopia. Recalling the historical Moslem/Christian relations in that region, Ibrahim Sultan once commented:

"The brutality of the hyena devouring the donkey is nothing compared to what the Christians did to us [Moslems]."

The Moslem League's Memorandum to the U.N. is no less interesting for what it reveals regarding the perception of the Moslem faction towards Christian Ethiopia:

"The flag of the Federation must be far removed from any religious or racial symbol, whether Christian, Moslem or Hebrew.... The Ethiopian flag bears particular racial signs and religious symbols which made it unfit to be the flag of either the federation or Eritrea."

As the author and myself come from the Christian area, it is significant that we treat the Moslem question in Ethiopia with a multi-cultural perspective.

The book could also have been improved if it had specific formal citations, regarding the last three chapters that deal with the history of the Ethio-Eritrean "federation". The documents, interviews, and correspondence letters, that are extensively deployed in the book, appear to be in the private possession of the author. Since they do have public significance, it would be greatly beneficial if he were to make them available to public institutions such as the Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

Despite the shortcomings cited, the author has indeed produced an outstanding piece of research with important implications for understanding the Eritrean question in the modern history of Ethiopia. The book was not only based on local resources but was also written by a member of the older generation. It is an eventful example that ought to encourage the members of the older generation – who had been active in public life – to make their memoirs and historical recollections available to the Ethiopian public at large. Indeed, the very relevance of the empirical data in Zewde Retta's book for my own research in progress only goes to underline the necessity for generational link in the accumulation of knowledge and understanding regarding our own history.

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EMMANUEL ABRAHAM: *Reminiscences of My Life*. Oslo: Lunde Forlag og Bokandel A/S. 1995 343 pp. No price stated. A Book Review by Bahru Zewde*

Memoirs are not a common feature of Ethiopian intellectual and political life. Many Ethiopian public figures have gone down to their grave with their secrets. As a result, to reconstruct certain crucial aspects of the Ethiopian past, historians have oftentimes been forced to rely on conjectures, or on foreign observers who are not assailed by the same kind of diffidence when making pronouncements on Ethiopian development.

In this respect, students of Ethiopian history and politics are greatly indebted to Ato Emmanuel Abraham for having accomplished the invaluable task of writing down the reminiscences with remarkable detail and elegance. With Ato Getachew Bekele's memoirs, the long period of silence by former public servants was broken. Now Ato Emmanuel has given us an even more authoritative reconstruction of the imperial regime. Alas! The 1974 Revolution devoured many of the protagonists of that regime and Ethiopian historiography will remain that much poorer because of that tragedy. But it is a matter of some consolation that some at least of the survivors have started telling us the story from the inside. In so doing, they have contributed their share to the inter-generational transfer of experience that is so crucial to both the cumulative growth of knowledge and the formation of sound policy.

Having served Emperor Haile Selassie in various capacities for nearly four decades and a half (1931-1974), Ato Emmanuel is

eminently qualified to tell that story. The diversity of posts that he came to occupy during that period—headmaster, legation secretary, director-general, ambassador, and Minister—has given his story a richly variegated character. The conscientiousness with which he had kept records of his official correspondence gives his narrative a wealth of documentation that is uncommon in a work of this genre. His personal integrity and relatively independent character has also invested his account with a degree of detachment that is not often encountered among loyal public servants

Side by side with Ato Emmanuel's political career went his dedicated service to the Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Church, whose president he was from 1963-1985. The piety that permeates these memoirs emanate largely from this other side of Ato Emmanuel's life and career.

Ato Emmanuel's life story is remarkable from another angle as well. Born in Wellaga of Oromo parents, he rose to ministerial post in Haile Selassie's government, thereby underlying the integrative character of that regime. Unlike his Wallaga compatriot, Yilma Deressia, who managed to dominate the center stage of Ethiopian politics, however. Ato Emmanuel, although he managed to win the emperor's favour and respect, was kept at some distance. He was usually chosen to ambassadorial posts or second-rate ministerial positions. Indeed, it appears to have been

his destiny to be assigned to moribund ministries or government departments which he often converted into vibrant ones through his vision and industry.

Ato Emmanuel has thus been all along an insider who had managed or been forced to look from outside. An element of banishment pervades his career. Interestingly enough, he designates his final return to Addis Ababa in June 1959, after 10 years of diplomatic service abroad, as "the end of my diplomatic mission *and exile*" (pg. 170, emphasis added). Including his assignment to the Ethiopian Legation in London before, during and after the Italo-Ethiopian War, he spent a total of 18 years abroad. He blames this state of affairs, particularly after 1941 on the machinations of certain political figures, notably Tsahe Te'ezaz Aklilu. But, among other things, the former's delayed return to Ethiopia in 1943 appears to have cost him dearly. For by that time, the former and his supporters were sufficiently well entrenched to shunt Ato Emmanuel off to less consequential positions.

It is a brilliant testimony of the emperor's checks and balances system that, rather than discarding Ato Emmanuel he used him and others like him as a counterweight to the dominant "Shewan" contingent in his government. Thus, Ato Emmanuel occupied the important position of Director-General of the Ministry of Education, directly under the emperor, from 1943 to 1947. Also, when the emperor set up his Pri-

vate Cabinet in 1959 as a sort of rival institution to the formal ministerial bureaucracy, Ato Emmanuel was made chief of Political Affairs.

Indeed, one could not help being struck by the special rapport Ato Emmanuel had with the emperor throughout his political career. He served the emperor with diligence and unflagging loyalty. The sovereign reciprocated by protecting him against the intrigues of the better-placed ministers. A remarkable illustration of this was his handling of the accusations that were current in the early 1940s that Ato Emmanuel was favouring fellow Oromo in the award of educational opportunities. The emperor instructed the headmaster of the biggest school to prepare a statistical breakdown of students by ethnic origin. It became evident from the exercise that the accusations were baseless. To put the slanderers to shame the emperor ordered the findings be published in the papers. It was after the accusers, alarmed at the result, prostrated themselves in front of the emperor that he reversed his order.

Apparently, the emperor needed Ato Emmanuel as his conscience and was respectful of his opinions on domestic as well as foreign issues. Their differing religious affiliations did not seem to have presented any problem. Ato Emmanuel was scrupulous in making all his evangelical affairs and transparent to the emperor. The latter treated his other side of Ato Emmanuel with perfect understanding, going to the extent of sending messages or even addressing international conferences in which Ato Emmanuel often represented the Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Church. The height of this special rapport

between emperor and minister was attained in October 1967, when the former's grandson was wedded to the latter's daughter. The marriage proved tragically short-lived, but that did not seem to have had any negative impact on the relations between the sovereign and his loyal servant.

It is difficult to enumerate that many insights that Ato Emmanuel's memoirs offer for the reconstruction of the twentieth century history of Ethiopia. Two of the earlier chapters are of special value for an understanding of the first years of Tafari Makonnen School, of which the author was among the very first batch of students, and the remarkable personality of Hakim Warkenah, under whom he served as headmaster of the Asba Tafari School. Having been posted to London at a critical juncture in the country's history, Ato Emmanuel was in a position to offer us a useful record of Ethiopia's position in the international arena just before the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian War in 1935 as well as during the War and the five-year Italian occupation. While the merciless English weather left Ato Emmanuel with a permanent physical ailment, it apparently gave him his penchant for meticulous and throughout reporting as well as his impeccable English.

These qualities were put to good use during his decade-long diplomatic assignments abroad, from 1949 to 1959, when he served successively in India, Italy, and the United Kingdom. He was assigned to India two years after that country has thrown off the centuries-old British rule. Although the exuberance of independence must have been infectious, Ato Em-

manuel kept a cool enough head to advise his government against the settlement of Indians being expelled from South Africa, an option that was being considered seriously at the time. In Italy, he was at the center of the protracted negotiations for the conclusions of the peace treaty that was eventually signed by the two former belligerent states in March 1956. A matter of current interest in this respect was the issue of the return of the Kasumi obelisk which the Fascists had transferred to Rome in 1937. Finally, Ato Emmanuel was Ethiopian ambassador in London at a time when the Somali question was taxing Anglo-Ethiopian relations.

As interesting, if admittedly not as authoritative, as his reports on bilateral relations are those he wrote on important international events of the day. Thus, from Rome, he sent the empire two long reports on the 1952 revolution in Egypt. From London, he sent equally comprehensive reports on the Suez crisis of 1956, on Kashmir, and the bloody overthrow of the Nuri es Said regime in Iraq in 1958. Here is how he explains why he took trouble to complete detailed reports on the last one and what effect, if any, these had on the emperor.

I should state here that I reported in such detail not only for its news value but because I had the feeling that Nuri es Said's political-methods and the steps taken by the Iraqi people to overthrow his government and assassinate the king and himself together with their families arose from its loathing of his policy and the methods he used, and that it might serve as a grave warning to Ethiopia's leadership and governance. The fact that, there was no similarity of views between

us on this question. The impression was left on me that he did not wish to find fault with my views directly and in writing because he did not deign to reveal his feelings on the matter.

The assassination of a number of ministers in the course of the abortive coup d'état of 1960 appears to have finally given the long-marginalised Emmanuel the opportunity to be elevated to a proper cabinet post. Albeit it a minor one. From 1961 until the 1974 revolution, he assumed three ministerial positions in Aklilu Habtewald's cabinet: Posts, Telegraphs, and Telephone (1961-1966), Communications (1966-1969), and Mines (1969-1974). The major achievements of his cabinet career were the beginning of the construction of the Post Office Building, now a landmark in Addis Ababa, the proclamation of a number of key road transport regulation, and the reorganization and invigoration of the Ministry of Mines.

Although rather on the sketchy side, Ato Emmanuel's description of the eruption of the 1974 revolution and his own, mercifully brief (by Ethiopian standards!) detention is of considerable interest. Particularly striking is the almost fatalistic manner in which one minister after another surrendered himself to the mercy of the Darg only to discover the progressive tightening of the prison clutches the ministers who were first kept in preventive custody under relaxed circumstances soon become indistinguishable from ordinary convicts, to the point even of having their hair shaved, only the bishop Abba Habta

Maryam and the author were exempted, the latter because he "had no hair with shaving"! (Pg. 232)

Ato Emmanuel devotes just under a third of his memoirs to the Ethiopian Makane Yesus Church, with which he has been associated practically all his life. Given the importance of the Church in Ethiopian national life, the reminiscence are of considerable merit. Of particular interest are the author's account of the establishment of Radio Voice of the Gospel, which had arguably a more captive audience than the national radio station, the construction of the Youth Hostel at Amist Kilo, which, ironically become the hotbed of radical student politics, and finally, in 1981, the unceremonious, not to say piratical, confiscation of the Central Building of the Church for use by the Security Department. With this book, Ato Emmanuel has done great service to all students of history as well as the country and the church that he served with so much dedication. The absence of an index is a glaring handicap and one hope that this will be rectified in future editions of his work. The recent publication of the Amharic original (for the English version was a translation of the Amharic manuscript) has double value. On the one hand it succeeds in conveying in particular the original flavour of the author's correspondence with the emperor's as well as the latter's often cryptic remarks

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N.B An earlier version of this review was first published in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* XXIX,1 (June, 1996)

¹ Getachew Bekele (1993) *The Emperor's Clothes. A Personal Viewpoint on Politics and Administration in the Imperial Ethiopian Government*. East Lansing

Announcement

FSS in collaboration with Minority Rights Group International has undertaken the translation into Amharic, Oromifa and Tigrigna of *New Approaches to Minority Protection* by ASBJØRN EIDE, A Report of the Minority Rights Group International.

The translated documents are available for free distribution at the FSS office.

Forthcoming Activities

Environment and Development in Ethiopia: A Symposium

Environmental degradation has long been a major problem in Ethiopia but it was not seriously addressed until the latter half of the 1970s. Considerable loss of the country's forest cover, topsoil, water resources, and bio-diversity has been taking place in the last five to six decades due in part to lack of suitable conservation and land policies. Furthermore, ill-advised state programs having to do with agriculture and rural development have contributed to the acceleration of the degradation problem especially in the decades following the Revolution. At that time and before then, the government's environmental advisors were foreigners who had little knowledge of local land-use and farming practices and who thus blamed the land-user for the recur-

rent environmental crises that brought suffering to a large portion of the rural population.

The planned symposium will focus on the following areas, namely: a) indigenous environmental protection, its nature, effectiveness, and limitations. It will be important to make efforts to document the hitherto neglected area of women's contribution to indigenous environmental protection. b) The link between population growth and environmental change (does population pressure necessarily lead to environmental degradation?) c) Issues of common property resource management and how these should be incorporated into government environmental policy. d) An assessment of current environmental policy, its strengths and weaknesses; the link with other rural development policies (eg. land tenure). e) Public awareness and environmental conservation: the mass media's role in promoting

environmental awareness. f) Civil society and environmental advocacy. g) Issues of the urban environment.

It is hoped that the symposium will help stimulate greater public concern about the environment. The symposium will also enable FSS to identify key areas of research for further public debate on environmental policy. FSS hopes to initiate a program of *environmental advocacy*, and the research will serve the goals of this program. It also hopes to sensitize decision-makers about the complex nature of environmental change and the need for sound and sustainable conservation programs. The symposium is planned for mid-September 2000.

The symposium is undertaken in collaboration with SOS-Sahel, with funding from the JAPAN FUND FOR GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT (JFGE).

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