

Mission Report - East and West Hararghe

(Mission: 20 to 28 April 1999)

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Background and introduction

Objective of the mission

The primary objective of the UNDP-EUE mission was to familiarise with the particularities of the zone and contact and introduce myself to important governmental institutions, NGOs and other humanitarian and development organisations operating in Hararghe Zone of Oromyia Region. Besides picking up general overviews of activities performed by the various humanitarian and development organisations and institutions, special attention was paid to two specific issues of particular interest: *chat* and coffee, the two major cash crops grown in parts of the Hararghe highlands and exported to neighbouring countries, and the food security situation in drought affected lowland areas of East Hararghe.

General overview

Hararghe is situated in the eastern part of Ethiopia, bordering Somali Region as well as the urban administrative regions of Dire Dawa and Harari. In the sub-regional context of Djibouti, Northwest Somalia, and East Ethiopia, the highland area of Hararghe is the only place where climatic conditions allow rainfed agriculture. Hararghe comprises of three agroclimatic belts. Lowlands, the *kolla*, ~35% of the area, midlands, the *weyna dega*, ~40% and highlands, the *dega*, ~25%. There are two rainy seasons, the small *belg* and the main *meher*. *Belg* production is limited within the *dega* belt and part of the wetter *weyna dega*. *Belg* rains are widely used for land preparation for long-cycle *meher* crop production. The yearly rainfall variability and its frequently uneven distribution result in a wide range of climatic hazards farmers have to deal with.

While at lower altitudes crop cultivation is usually rather limited leading to a more livestock-based economy, at higher altitudes the economy is characterised by both food and cash crops. Main staple food include sorghum and maize, as well as sweet potatoes cultivated during difficult years to improve food security.

A good part of Hararghe Zone enjoys a privileged position for production and marketing of cash crops such as *chat*, a popular mild narcotic, with the trading potential still exceeding the actual production capacity. Besides *chat*, coffee, Irish potatoes and onions are produced for cash. These cash crops are mainly cultivated in the *weyna dega* and the lower *dega* and for *chat* exceptionally also in the *kolla*. The cash crop *chat* witnessed a tremendous boom over the last couple of years, followed by Irish potatoes, onion/shallots and some other vegetables. Coffee generally marked a downward trend except for some areas in West Hararghe. In the eastern lowlands of Babile, Gursum and to some extent the southern lowlands of Fedis groundnuts are cultivated as a cash crop.

Hence, while most of the actual farming systems are still characterised by a strong subsistence component, the trend is towards more cash crop production which may soon

bring the majority of Hararghe farmers to the cross-roads between subsistence and cash economy.

The vast majority of the rural population is living from agriculture, with some pastoralists and agropastoralists in the lowlands. Increasing population density coupled with the lack of alternative employment opportunities leads to progressive land pressure and subsequent shrinking of individual landholdings or migration and utilisation of marginal lowland areas for agriculture.

Climatic hazards are increasingly frequent, with pest infestations and crop diseases additionally hampering crop production. Coupled with high land pressure, the margin for farmers' agro-economic decisions is progressively narrowing. The shift to an increased and intensified *chat* production is one of the farmers' response to face some of the constraints. But those areas, especially the lowland pastoralist and agropastoralist areas, where agricultural substitutes such as *chat* cannot make up for prevailing constraints, are increasingly suffering from food insecurity.

Towards the end of last year the population of some of the lowland areas of Hararghe Zone, including the lowland parts of Fedis, Babile, Gursum, Girawa and Gola Odana weredas, faced major food shortages resulting in large scale migration movements towards urban centres such as Harar, Babile and also towards the areas in the east where some of UNHCR's Somali refugee camps are situated.

Food security situation in affected weredas of East Hararghe

In October 1998, a UNDP-EUE field mission to East Hararghe Zone (see Ahrens, 1998b) estimated the food security situation in Fedis wereda as 'very serious', resulting from three consecutive bad seasons and major crop losses since 1997. At the end of last year the East Hararghe Zonal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau, in collaboration with international NGOs, put a relief mechanism in place for relief food distributions, food-for-work activities (EGS) and seed distributions to the most needy areas and population. Most of the destitute Oromos who had migrated in search of food in 1998, were brought back to their respective home areas and food distribution resumed until early February. Some NGOs such as the German 'Menschen für Menschen' began also distributing seeds destined for *belg* and *meher* plantings. But since there was insufficient rain for *belg* cultivation and relief food distributions faced bottle necks in February and March, people began to consume their seeds instead of planting them. Now most organisations implicated in seed distributions stopped supplying seeds for the time being. Relief food distributions faced bottle necks due to lack of transport and sufficient amount of grain. Furthermore, in the most affected areas the so-much-awaited *belg* rains were far from sufficient.

Beginning of April, with the anticipation of another harvest failure and after two consecutive months without relief food, the most vulnerable and marginalised people began to leave their homes for the second time. In search of food and daily labour, they headed north towards the few urban centres of the Zone. Towns such as Harar faced once again significant influxes of destitute Oromos, mainly coming from the worst affected wereda of Fedis. DPPB estimates the number of needy people for East Hararghe Zone to be over 500,000 requiring over 50,000 MT relief food for a period of three to nine months. Beggars and other destitute people roaming around Harar town are periodically picked up and driven back by lorry to their home areas. Governmental authorities, international NGOs and other humanitarian institutions alike, generally agree that last year's situation in the affected weredas of Fedis, Babile, Gursum,

Girawa and Gola Odana has been aggravated by insufficient *belg* rains and significant relief food distribution shortages and inconsistencies.

Even with a major humanitarian crisis in the northern part of the country and a famine roaming in the Wollo Zones of Amhara Region, the Federal Government and the international community should take the necessary steps to bring sufficient and adequate relief for the needy population in East Hararghe Zone. According to a press statement (*The Ethiopian Herald, Friday 14 May 1999*) some relief assistance is being dispatched and distributed. But the assistance, roughly 650 MT of grain, remains far below the requested and required 50,000 MT.

Experts working for international relief and development organisations in West and East Hararghe Zones suggest that the early warning system in place is facing difficulties in timely predicting and reacting to disaster situations. Without the necessary food requirements being dispatched in time, Employment Generation Schemes (EGS) cannot be effectively implemented when people have already started to migrate due to lack of food. Furthermore, part of relief food allocations to East Hararghe Zone have recently been borrowed and temporarily allocated to the Wollo Zones in Amhara Region, where food shortages are acute and where the necessary international focus and pressure finally resulted in serious concern and in extraordinary food allocations.

Reporting and verification of food shortages works at wereda and zonal level. But there appears to be a gap in reporting between these levels and the regional and federal levels. Crisis and emergency awareness therefore often remains at zonal level not reaching regional and federal levels. This communication gap can hamper effective and timely action to deal with food shortages. The early warning system in place should be re-evaluated and management structures re-oriented towards a prevention and preparedness system which can react at all levels and deliver assistance in a timely fashion.

Some reflections on *chat* and coffee

Where climatic conditions are still estimated to be reliable enough to allow rainfed agriculture, a variety of crops are cultivated for cash and home consumption. *Chat* (*Catha edulis*) and coffee are the two major cash crops produced in Hararghe. Whereas *chat* witnessed a tremendous boom within the last five years, coffee is facing a major draw back due to unstable and decreasing prices at the international stock exchanges. Many farmers opted and are opting to cut down their coffee plantations and to replaced them with *chat* bushes. But *chat* is not only taking coffee's place, it is also planted in favour of staple crops. Many parts of the Hararghe highlands, East and West Hararghe alike, are beginning to turn into a monoculture landscape with *chat* being the dominant crop planted and seen everywhere.

Chat is mainly cultivated as a cash crop for its young leaves and tender stems which are chewed as a mild natural stimulant. *Chat* plays an important role in the social life of people in certain parts of Ethiopia, in particular Hararghe and Somali Region. *Chat* is exported into neighbouring countries of Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen. Its use in the Horn of Africa and the Arabic peninsula dates back to the 13th century.

Chat, compared to other crops, has many advantages for farmers. First of all chat provides the farmer with a permanent and regular income. The demand is still much higher then farmers' supply. Therefore also prices remain stable and high. Furthermore, once established it grows well under a wide range of soils and climatic conditions, having a better drought tolerance than coffee. It can be grown in dry areas with irrigation. *Chat* performs best in the midlands (*weyna dega*) between 1500msl and 2100msl. But in Hararghe *chat* is

cultivated up to the lower highlands (*dega*) until around 2400msl. *Chat* is also used for a variety of other purposes, e.g. the wood is suitable for carpentry and construction material. It is appreciated because of its termite resistance. The branches of the *chat* bush or tree makes also good fuel wood and finally different parts of the tree are used to produce local medicine. Also, until now *chat* has not been affected by pests and diseases. This situation may change in the near future with growing density and increased cultivation areas of *chat*.

Farmers plant *chat* intercropped with other crops such as maize or sorghum, but also vegetables such as onions. They use the plant as erosion control and plant it on plot borders for demarcation. *Chat* can also be seen in monoculture-like plantations of small to middle size. Once harvested, *chat* must be sold within 24 hours and consumed within 36 hours. This requires quick marketing procedures and a good and well maintained road and transport network, restricting *chat* production to areas relatively close to roads and markets. As *chat* is not only produced and traded for export purposes, but is also consumed locally, plantations can virtually be found everywhere conditions allow the plant to grow.

Chat seems to be a marvellous if not miraculous plant for the Hararghe farmers. A multipurpose plant which satisfies major necessities on farm, e.g. regular cash income and fire wood. It would be, from a scientific and development point of view, an ideal agroforestry tree species to be propagated especially among resource poor farmers. Unfortunately, its problematic main use and the side effect of physical dependency if consumed abusively (which many farmers do in Hararghe) remains questionable. Some people believe that sooner or later the hidden face of *chat* will emerge. Already today an often heard complaint is that farmers in Hararghe are becoming lazy due to excessive *chat* chewing. Students from Alem Mayo University, who chew *chat* regularly, have concentration difficulties. A good deal of the countless car and lorry accidents on Hararghe's roads are also said to be caused by excessive *chat* chewers behind the wheel as well as competition to get *chat* quickly to the market.

Scientists at Alem Maya University, one of the major agricultural research centres in Ethiopia, are looking for a substitute for *chat* with similar positive economic (i.e. regular and fixed income) and ecological (i.e. soil erosion control, soil fertility maintenance) advantages, without producing a product which some may be defined as a drug. But until now, no other known crop is able to substitute *chat* and its benefits for the farmer. There are several plants which may be able to make up for and substitute one of the advantages of *chat*, but none of the available agricultural plants can be a full substitute.

Coffee is a good value cash crop, but due to heavy pest infestation and a number of diseases, the establishment and maintenance is costly for farmers. Furthermore, coffee can only be harvested once a year and market prices are unstable, fluctuating from one year to another. Unlike *chat*, coffee is not drought resistant and needs relatively good and deep soils and cannot be grown in dry areas on irrigation.

Both *chat* and coffee are labour intensive crops which have to be maintained on a regular basis. But net gains are significantly higher for *chat* than for coffee production¹.

In Hararghe there is no other subject, no other crop which is discussed with so much passion and ardour like *chat*. Virtually every discussion with government officials, university

¹ For a more elaborate scientific description on both *chat* and coffee in East and West Hararghe, please refer to Klingele's (1998b) study on recent trends of cash crop versus staple food production and the trend's impact on the rural economy and on food security in Hararghe.

professors, administrators and NGO employees alike are heading at one point or another towards *chat*. Praise and condemnation are usually expressed within the same sentence. *Chat's* contradictory nature will raise many questions concerning its future and its benefits or negative effects on the population.

Literature list of referred papers and previous UN-EUE Wollo mission reports

Ahrens J D (1997) Poor Belg Season in West and East Hararghe, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 16 to 21 June, Addis Ababa

Ahrens J D (1998a) West and East Hararghe After the Meher Harvest: Significant Yield Reductions, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 20 to 25 January, Addis Ababa

Ahrens J D (1998b) Food Shortages Force Oromos of East Hararghe into Migration, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 19 to 27 October, Addis Ababa

DPPC (1998) Food Supply Prospect 1999, Report published by the Early Warning System Department, December, Addis Ababa

DPPC (1999) Emergency Relief Needs in Ethiopia, Inadequate Donors Response Against Increasing Needs, Report published by DPPC, 8 April, Addis Ababa

Klinge R (1998a) West & East Hararghe Zones at the End of the Belg Season, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 18 – 23 May, Addis Ababa

Klinge R (1998b) Hararghe Farmers on the Cross-Roads between Subsistence & Cash Economy, UN-EUE Study, Addis Ababa

Yesus A H (1996) Field Trip Report to East and West Hararghe Zones of the Oromiya Region (Region 4), UN-EUE Field Mission Report, April, Addis Ababa

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SOURCES:

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Annex

Participants of mission

Yves Guinand (UN-EUE)

Itinerary

Addis Ababa - Awash (20 April), Awash - Miso – Asbe Teferi (21 April) Asbe Teferi – Arba Reketi – Bedesa – Dire Dawa (22 April), Dire Dawa - Girawa (23 April), Girawa - Harar (24 April), Harar (25 April), Harar – Buko – Harar – Alem Maya University – Dire Dawa (26 April), Dire Dawa – Asbe Teferi – Miso – Awash (27 April), Awash – Addis Ababa (28 April)

Distances and time table

Addis Ababa – Awash Town	205 km	3h 30'
Awash Town – Asbe Teferi	105 km	2h
Asbe Teferi – Bedesa	34 km	40'
Asbe Teferi – Hirma	45 km	
Asbe Teferi – Boroda	80 km	1h 30'
Boroda – Karamile	11 km	
Karamile – Kulubi	43 km	50'
Kulubi – Dire Dawa	50 km	50'
Dire Dawa – Harar	50 km	1h
Dire Dawa – Addis Ababa	491 km	~ 8h
Harar – Buko (Fedis Wereda)	25 km	1h 15'
Dire Dawa – Girawa	81 km	1h 30'
Asbe Teferi – Addis Ababa	~ 300 km	~ 4h 30'

NGOs and other organisations operating in East and West Hararghe

CARE Ethiopia	Co-operative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CISP	Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (International Committee for the Development of People)
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (mostly at Regional level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (mostly at zonal level)
HCS	Hararghe Catholic Service
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MfM	Menschen für Menschen
OXFAM	
SCF/UK	Save the Children Fund United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

Contact Persons in and for East and West Hararghe**Addis Ababa**

Contact persons	Organisation	Contact
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Asbe Teferi:

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Mr. Milien Worku	Deputy Head, Bureau of Agriculture	
Mr. Edward J. Shea	Project Coordinator, CARE Asbe Teferi	
Ato Seyfou Tadesse	Data/Monitoring	
Ato Benko	Head DPPB West Hararghe	

Ato Fiseha	Early Warning Department
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Dire Dawa:

Contact persons	Organisation	Contact
Mr. Alemaya Syun	DPPB, Zonal Head DPPB	
Mr. Muhyedini Ali	DPPB, Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, Labour and Social Affairs Bureau Team Leader	
Mr. Samuel Mekonen	WFP Administrator	
Mr. Belaihu	HCS, Project Coordinator, HCS East Hararghe	
Mr. Yideg Girma Haile	LWF, Eastern Ethiopia Soil and Water Conservation Project Manager	Phone: 05 11 34 95 Fax: 05 11 11 25

Harar

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Ato Yeshitela Mamo	Early Warning	05 66 08 48
Ato Harun Ali Mohammed	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Acting Head of Department	
Ato Asseifa Tolosa	SCF/UK, Office Head Harar	
Ato Endalamaw	CISP, Administrator	
Ato Tesfai Berhane	CISP, Head Office Harar	

Girawa

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Alem Maya University

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Dr. Belay Kasa	Administrator, Alemaya University of Agriculture	