



Social Capital, Assets and Responses to Drought:

Preliminary Observations from Interviews, South Wello and Oromiya Zones, Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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I. INTRODUCTION

Stephen Devereux and Simon Maxwell (2001: 2) convincingly argue that hunger and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa “must now be seen as the most urgent and intractable problem facing those concerned with development in the twenty-first century.” Much of Ethiopia’s population continues to be vulnerable to severe shortfalls in their ability to produce or purchase sufficient food to feed themselves throughout the year. The country’s Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission in January 2002 reported that, “Chronic food insecurity is still a significant, if not worse, problem in 2002 after consecutive years of asset depletion due to attempts to compensate for crop losses” (DPPC 2002: 3). The Commission estimated that more than five million Ethiopians need food assistance in 2002, with nearly another two million people requiring close monitoring. More than one-tenth of them reside in South Wello Zone of Amhara Region. Among this needy population, female-headed households are recognized as especially vulnerable, given social, cultural, and legal constraints in their access to, and use of, productive resources (Yigremew Adal 2001; Stone 2001).

The BASIS-CRSP¹ Greater Horn of Africa Program, in collaboration with the Institute for Development Research (IDR) at Addis Ababa University, has been carrying out an integrated study of the causes and consequences of food insecurity at the regional to intra-household level in South Wello and Oromiya Zones. The project is using a multi-methods approach, including a large-scale household survey, rapid community assessments, and case studies to investigate the role of such key variables as livelihood strategies, income entitlement, social capital, gender, market linkages, agro-ecological zonation, and drought. The BASIS/IDR research team has been also able to examine processes of asset deaccumulation and, more recently, reaccumulation in the wake of the severe food crisis of 1999 (see BASIS 2001; and the BASIS Greater Horn of Africa web site for further details and project publications).

This report continues the qualitative research on the differential experience of drought and recovery among households in South Wello and Oromiya Zones of Amhara Region, Ethiopia, initiated by Priscilla Stone and Mengistu Dessalegn Debela in May 2002. They had interviewed 15 households at that time. As with their original fieldwork, this round of interviews sought to: (1) complement the quantitative information already collected by the BASIS/IDR project household survey; (2) gather more detailed and diachronic data on the differential experience of drought and recovery; (3) better understand the nature and behavior of female headed households. We implemented these goals by carrying out qualitative interviews with 27 households in South Wello and Oromiya Zones, almost all (25) of them participants in the BASIS/IDR survey. We largely followed the sampling methods and interview guidelines developed by Stone and Mengistu. The few differences in our approaches are discussed below.

Several conclusions emerge from this field study. Households headed by women are usually associated with one or more of the following characteristics: widows or divorcees who find remarriage undesirable or difficult because they have children from their previous marriage

¹ Broadening and Strengthening Input Market Systems—Collaborative Research Support Program, which is supported by the United States Agency for International Development.

(or other liaison); they possess regular non-farm income from brewing or trading; and they live in a town or peri-urban settlement, or a distant locale such as Djibouti. As Stone observed in her June 2002 report, the status of female head of household tends to be an impermanent and variable one. Marital histories showed that people's lives were often marked by a number of transitions and events: separations, divorces, spouse's deaths, remarriages, or extra-marital sexual relations. During one or more times in a woman's life, she may face situations where she exercises a high degree of independence and self-sufficiency, only to have these diminish as a husband, adult offspring, or other kinsmen assumes the role of household head.

Women usually obtain their access to land through marriage, whereas men tend to acquire at least some land from their parents. But significant variations occur: women can also inherit land from their parents (they usually cite their fathers as provider of property), their siblings, or through redistribution. Female heads of households engage in a variety of plowing arrangements (family aid, sharecropping, rental) with males, including both kin and non-kin. Sharecropping is less desirable than directly cultivating one's own land. Renting or having a male relative who can do the plowing and cultivation without requiring a specific share in the harvest is seen as much more favorable to the interests of the woman landowner.

Experiences and memories about hunger and food insecurity varied among interviewees, reflecting both inter- and intra-community differences in circumstances. Key variables included the area's agro-ecological zone, the availability of irrigation, and the availability of food aid or other assistance. Although the lowlands are the most drought-prone area, its households do not universally share the experience of food insecurity. This is because of wealth differences among households within the same community. As one interviewee noted about the 1984 famine—known locally as “77” after its date in the Ethiopian calendar, 1977 EC²: “Everyone was not equally poor—some people were rich.” In most places, particularly the lowlands, the drought of 1977 EC (1984) served as the reference point for the “worse experience” of hunger. Yet, it was evident that people sometimes cited it “in general terms,” even when they themselves did not directly experience dire problems. Some informants, particularly in Temu, contended that other severe episodes of hunger and food insecurity have occurred in their area since 1977 EC (1988), particularly the drought in 1991 EC (1999) and the current crop failure. The difference is that 1977 EC (1984) continues to receive publicity; it continues to be talked about by those interested in such subjects (dramatic accounts of the 1999 drought are contained in Castro et al. 1999; Yared et al. 2000).

II. RESEARCH SITES AND METHODOLOGY

As with the earlier study, research sites were selected that reflected the diverse characteristics found in the wider BASIS/IDR survey: agro-ecological variation from lowlands to highlands, differential experience of major food insecurity episodes, differences in local livelihood strategies (especially regarding remittances, livestock, cropping systems, and trading), ethnicity (Amharic and Oromo), and residence (rural area versus urban/peri-urban locales). Table 1 summarizes some key characteristics of the research site: their administrative jurisdictions and agro-ecological zones.

²The Ethiopia calendar is seven years and eight months ‘behind’ the one used in the West. Dates in the text that refer to the Ethiopian calendar will be indicated with the abbreviation EC.

Table 1: Field Sites Visited August 11-16, 2002

Inter- view no.	Admin Zone	Wereda	Kebele	Community (or Sub- kebele)	Agro- Eco Zone	Road Type	Access to Households
1	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Endod Ber	Midlands	Secondary	Short walk
2	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Agala	Midlands	Secondary	Roadside
3, 5	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Goroch	Midlands	Secondary	Roadside
4	So. Wello	Dessie Zuria	Gerado	Werteya	Midlands	Secondary	Roadside
6-7	Oromiy a	Bati	Chachato	Qorma	Lowlands	Seasonal	Short walk
8-9	Oromiy a	Bati	Chachato	Hinsesie	Lowlands	Seasonal	Roadside/short walk
10- 13	Oromiy a	Bati	Kamme	Lay Kamme	Lowlands	Seasonal	Short walk
14, 16	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach- Akesta	Sirt	Highlands	Secondary*	Short walk
15	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach- Akesta	Sirt/Wurgo	Highlands	Secondary*	Roadside
17	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach- Akesta	Firge Ager (Akesta)	Highlands	Secondary*	Roadside
18- 20	So. Wello	Legambo	Temu	Temu/Bulish	Highlands	Secondary*	Roadside/short walk
21	So. Wello	Legambo	Temu	Chiru	Highlands	Secondary*	Roadside
22- 24	So. Wello	Legambo	Temu	Amora Agar	Highlands	Secondary*	Long walk
25, 27	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach- Akesta	Akesta	Highlands	Secondary*	Short walk
26	So. Wello	Legambo	Tach- Akesta	Akesta (Watiya)	Highlands	Secondary*	Roadside

*Note: The Akesta-Temu road is not listed as “all weather” in the BASIS/IDR market center survey (see Gaile et al. 1999)

Stone and Mengistu carried out interviews in three of the kebeles included in our fieldwork: Gerado in Dessie Zuria Wereda in South Wello, and Chachato and Kamme in Bati Wereda in Oromiya. We revisited them to bring each kebele's total number of interviews to seven households. Temu and Tach-Akesta in Legambo were selected because of their high percentage of female-headed households included in the survey and their apparently greater incidence of poverty. About one-third of the BASIS/IDR survey's households in Legambo are identified as female headed. Less than one-third of Legambo's survey households own oxen, whereas nearly half (or more) of the families in the other weredas have oxen.

All the interviews were conducted at the homes of the interviewees. Table 1 identifies how we obtained access to their homes: by driving directly to it from a secondary road or seasonal track ('roadside' interview), by taking a 'short walk' (usually less than 20 minutes from the parked car) to the home, or by taking a 'long walk'—more than 40 minutes of uphill walking—to reach village of Amora Agar in Legambo. The term 'roadside' may convey a false impression of easy accessibility. Chachato and Kamme in Bati, for example, were reached by rough seasonal tracks whose condition had not been improved by the rains. The gravel-covered secondary roads that provided access to the other research sites varied in their quality, with the rains sometimes making an already bad road even more bumpy and muddy. Except for Amora Agar, interviews were carried out without any involvement by the kebele administration or other officials. In Amora Agar the village chairman served as a guide to the households but otherwise did not interfere with the interviews. Most of the interviews took about an hour. Perhaps two or three exceeded an hour, while two were considerably shorter (one of the informants was ill; in another case we were exhausted after a long day of interviewing).

When qualitative interviews were initially considered, it was hoped that the households might be stratified by economic criteria based on landholding, land use, and livestock ownership (for example, see Stone 2002). This proved an impossible task to implement in the initial round of interviews due to logistical and other constraints. For this round, we made clear to the enumerators or development agents who helped us identify households for interviewing that we wanted to see a range of situations among households. However, we did not pre-select households ahead of time on any criterion except for the gender of the nominal household head. It has not been possible in this draft to compare the detailed data compiled by the household survey with the information obtained in our interviews. Fortunately, other members of the BASIS Greater Horn of Africa research team will be carrying out such an exercise shortly (Peter Little, personal communication).

We largely followed the question format used by Stone and Mengistu, given our similar purpose and goals. Questions centered on topics of hunger/food insecurity (particularly the experience of the 1977 EC drought), marital history, social capital, differential access to productive assets such as oxen and land, economic diversification, food aid, and the social definition of households. Some changes did occur in terms of questioning. Instead of opening with the 1977 EC drought, for example, we asked what was the interviewee's worst personal experience with drought/food insecurity. This change was based on Castro's fieldwork in 2001, which indicated that some areas had not experienced the 1977 EC drought as sharply as others had. We also asked the informants how they met their spouse (or spouses). That question proved to be our icebreaker—even the most skeptical, or scared, person seemed to open up with a smile when asked it. The question was not only the source of amusement, it

indicated that to the interviewee that she or he was truly the expert in the information that we sought. A telling example is our last interview in Gerado (interview #5). The elderly woman's grandson told us that she was physically unable to speak due to a health problem, and that he had answered previous questions asked by the enumerator. We nevertheless asked if she could try to answer the questions, and she agreed. The first question about her worst experience with drought clearly failed to resonate, and the interview seemed to come to a crashing halt. But we moved into her marital history, which she was more willing to discuss. When we asked how she met her husband, she smiled, and even her grandson was taken back by her loquacious mood.

III. FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Stone and Mengistu pursued three major questions regarding the nature of female-headed households:

- A. Are these truly female headed households?
- B. How have these female headed households emerged and do they persist?
- C. Do they pursue different economic strategies than male household heads? Does this change in times of drought?

Related to the issue of differential economic strategies are three additional questions:

- 1. Since agriculture in this area requires oxen and male plowmen, how do these female headed households cultivate?
- 2. How do they gain access to land?
- 3. Do they diversify more or in different ways than male household heads?

Using the BASIS survey master list, we selected 12 female-headed households and 13 male-headed households for interviews. One of the two non-surveys selected for interviewing was self-identified as a female headed household. Therefore, women nominally headed 13 of 27 households chosen for interviews.

A. Are these truly female headed households?

Our findings reinforce the notion that 'female headed household' represent a dynamic if sometimes elusive analytical category. As with the previous round of the interviewing, some nominally female headed households were clearly parts of social units whose titular or practical heads were males, whether husbands, sons, grandsons, or other relatives. But some women clearly exercised the chief decision-making authority in their households—including a couple of cases when the women were married. In general, households under the managerial control of women are usually associated with one or more of the following characteristics: widows or divorcees who find remarriage undesirable or difficult because they have children from their previous marriage (or other liaison); they possess regular nonfarm income from brewing or trading; and they live in a town or small settlements.

Table 2 summarizes key socioeconomic attributes of all the interviewed households, including the marital status and marital history of the head of household. It shows that of the 13 female heads of households:

1. Five of the women were currently married (“Category 1” in Stone’s report: linked to resident males through bonds of marriage), though the nature of their conjugal relationship was sometimes complex due to labor migration or their personal circumstances:

Box 1: Married ‘Female Heads of Households’

Interview #1 (Gerado): She lived separately from her husband for many years, as he worked as a laborer in Jimma and Tepe. When the 1977 EC (1984) drought hit, he let his family largely fend for itself, disappointing her. However, she did not divorce him for the sake of the children. Recently he moved back home, contributing to chores such as plowing.

Interviews #6 (Chachato) and #16 (Tach-Akesta): These women, both widows, had remarried since the survey started. Their husbands plow their land.

Interview #18 (Temu): The husband migrated for a short period to Borana during the 1991 EC drought in search of employment. He plows their land.

Interview #25 (Tach-Akesta): A town-based divorcee remarried a man who had been one of her traditional beverage customers. He has another wife, who lives with him in the countryside on their farm. He plows her land. The interviewee, who is a third-generation town resident, refuses to live in the rural area.

If interviewees #6, #16, and #18 appear to be similar to other rural households, the situation is very different with interviewees #1 and #25. Despite their married status, both women made it clear that they are the heads of their homes. Interviewee #1 stated in no uncertain terms that, “She is the one who decides what is to be done.” Her husband was away for many years, and she is not prepared to hand over control over household assets and decision-making to him. Indeed, towards the end of the interview, her husband called her from the farm land where he had been plowing, seeking some sort of help. She replied that she was busy and that he ought to do his work himself. She added that she had worked very hard during his absence, and now it was his turn “to do the job.”

Interviewee #25’s marriage arrangement—she lives in Akesta town, her husband resides with his other wife on a farm in the countryside—gave her tremendous personal independence. He helped her with plowing but made no claims to her harvest (she also made no claims to his surplus from his other land). The interviewee stated that her husband was not the sort of man to demand the money she earned from selling traditional beverages in Akesta. Even if he did, she would not give it to him. That money “is not to see the hand of a man.” Her past marriage shaped her attitude: “While I live with my [first husband], to get one cloth, I had to struggle by begging him.” Nowadays, if she wants something: “If I get money, and I want clothes, I can buy it for myself.” She added that she buys such things “once I feed my children.” Overall, the choice was clear to her: “Whether I get something or not, I prefer to live by myself. If I get money.” Living in Akesta town provided a congenial setting for her to pursue her independent lifestyle. Her identity is as a third generation Akesta town dweller.

Table 2: Key Socioeconomic Characteristics of Interviewed Households

Inter-view #	Place	HH #	Type HH*	Marital status of HH head	Marital history	Current plowing arrangement	Labor migration & livelihood
1	Gerado	08	FHH	Married	Married once, long separation	HU plows; borrows ox	HU in Jimma & Teppe for years
2	Gerado	52	FHH	Widow	Married once	Sharecrops w/ FA's kin; hopes GRISO will do it	HU traded
3	Gerado	05	MHH (WI, HU)	Married	WI married 2X (divorced); HU married once	HU plows w/ FA's oxen	WI in Addis as divorcee; HU in Dessie in drought
4	Gerado	06	MHH	Married	Married once	HU plows w/ own oxen; plow's MO land, sharecrops w/ WI's kin	HU works for non-governmental organization; equub member
5	Gerado	20	FHH	Divorced (former HU now dead)	No remarriage b/c children	GRISO plows, borrows ox	In Kombolcha as divorcee w/ FA's kin; BRs support; sold bread, tela
6	Chachato	02	FHH	Married	Widowed; remarried HU married once (1st HU's uncle's son)	HU plows using oxen of another (HU plows the person's land first)	As a widow, sold firewood, rented camel transport; SO in Djibouti
7	Chachato	06	MHH (WI)	Married	WI married 2X (divorced), HU married once	HU plows with own oxen	WI in Djibouti as divorcee
8	Chachato	39	MHH	Married	Married once	Hu plows, borrows ox from neighbor	DA in Djibouti
9	Chachato	44	MHH	Married	WI married 2X (divorced), HU married once	HU plows with own oxen	1977 EC (1984) not too bad b/c traded grain; DA in Djibouti
10	Kamme	NA	MHH (WI)	Married	WI married 2X (divorced); HU?	HU plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	Sells firewood
11	Kamme	NA	FHH	Widow	She married 3X (divorced, widowed 2X)	Pays man w/ oxen two quintals to plow land	Sells firewood; SO in Djibouti has disappeared
12	Kamme	13	MHH	Married	HU married 2X (divorced); WI?	HU plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	HU worked in Dufti & Assaita, now irrigates land in Bati; met WI in Assaita; DA near Djibouti/Afar
13	Kamme	16	FHH	Widow	No remarriage b/c children	SO plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	In 1977 EC (1984) in food camp, then begged in Bati
14	Tach-Akesta	46	MHH (WI)	Married	Married once	HU plows, borrows BR ox (maqanajo)	HU does some grain trading
15	Tach-Akesta	49	MHH (HU)	Married	Married once	HU plows, borrows FA oxen	
16	Tach-Akesta	50	FHH	Married	WI married 3X (divorced, widowed); HU married 2X (widower)	HU plows, borrows ox (maqanajo)	WI inherited land; as a widow, sharecropped out with 2 nd HU's kin

17	Tach-Akesta	23	FHH	Widow	No remarriage b/c children	SO plows her land	Sells tela; one SO supports family of BR who died in the war
18	Temu	09	FHH	Married (HU, WI)	Married once, HU migrated in 1991 EC (1999)	HU plows with horse, borrows another (maqanajo)	HU migrated to Borana in 1991 EC (1999) drought
19	Temu	06	MHH	Married (HU)	Married once	HU plows with own horse & cow	Oxen lost in 1991 EC (1999) drought
20	Temu	08	MHH	Married (HU)	HU married 2X (& child w/ unmarried woman), WI married 2X	HU plows w/ borrowed oxen	Oxen lost in 1991 EC (1999) drought
21	Temu	04	MHH	Married (HU, WI, HUs FA)	HU married 3X (divorced). WI married 2X (divorced)	HU plows w/ own horses or borrows FA's oxen	Lost livestock in 1991 EC (1999) drought
22	Temu	53	MHH	Married	Married once	HU plows w/ horse, borrows another (maqanajo)	Oxen lost in 1991 EC (1999) drought; served in military
23	Temu	20	FHH	Widow	WI married 2X (divorced, widow), no remarriage b/c children; HU?	Two SO plow for her	
24	Temu	54	MHH (WI)	Married	WI married 2X, HU married 2X	HU plows w/ horse, borrows another (maqanajo)	HU in kebeles militia
25	Tach-Akesta	51	FHH	Married	WI married 2X (divorced), HU 3X (divorced, polygynous), other wife in rural area where he resides	HU plows her land, brings the entire harvest to her; he has one ox, borrows other from her BR	WI sells tela & karibo. Both her mother and grandmother lived in the town
26	Tach-Akesta	20	FHH	Widow	Married twice (divorced & widow), plus a child with another man	Sharecrops out land with a distant relative, getting 50%	Sells tela; hosts equub meeting where she also sells beverages
27	Tach-Akesta	27	FHH	Divorced	Married twice (divorced, plus a child from a now deceased man). No remarriage b/c her child ("A husband is useless")	Sharecrops out land with a distant relative, getting 50%	Worked as a maid in Akesta as a divorcee. Now she trades in the market; borrows from big traders, resells it.

*Parenthesis indicates interviewee if more than one person interviewed or if household-head not present.

EC: Ethiopian Calendar; HH: Household; HH#: Household number in the survey; FHH: Female head of household, MHH: Male head of household, BR: Brother; DA: Daughter; FA: Father; GRSO: Grandson; HU: Husband; MO: Mother; SI: Sister; SO: Son; WI: Wife

2. Three elderly women reported that much of the practical leadership of their households had passed to male kinfolk ("Category 2" in Stone's report: linked to resident males through motherhood or other kinship connections):

Box 2: 'Females Headed Households' Actually Headed by Sons or Grandsons

Interview #5 (Gerado): An elderly divorcee's grandson assumed many of the responsibilities for her, including plowing. Earlier her brothers and other kin folk had provided assistance. She has health problems. In the past, she engaged in selling beverages, bread, and other item.

Interview #17 (Tach-Akesta): This elderly widow reported that her son plows her land and provides other support, but she also maintains a tela house on the edge of town, selling traditional beverages.

Interview # 23 (Temu): A widow reported that her two sons and other male kinfolk provided substantial help, though she had maintained key leadership role such as recently picking a wife for one of her sons.

In addition, another elderly woman (Interview #2, Gerardo) expressed the hope that her grandson would soon be able to plow her land, so that she would no longer have to sharecrop-out her land. Thus, she would no longer have to forfeit half of the harvest from her land.

3. Five women, excluding the two married heads of households (Interviews #1 and #25) covered in Box 1, have been on their own with dependents for sustained periods. They fit into Stone's category 3: women who seem to be on their own and who "have adopted a more or less permanent female head status marked by a high dependency ration and the unlikelihood of remarriage" (Stone 2002: 6). Their situations were as follows:

Box 3: Women Who Have Been on Their Own for Extended Periods

Interview #2 (Gerado): She has been a widow for five years, and now she is "sick and weak." She had land taken for a forestry project but feels she is too sick to approach officials to complain, and she has no one to speak on her behalf.

Interview #11 (Kamme): Once divorced and twice widowed, this woman felt that her prospects for remarriage were poor because she had children and she now is sick. She hires a man from Bati with a pair of oxen to plow her land, paying a flat rate of two quintals of grain.

Interview #13 (Kamme): She has been a widow for five years, with three children. She reported that: "I do not want to remarry. I want to look after myself. If I remarry, what would I do with my children... It is difficult to live with a second husband." Her son plows her land.

Interview #26 (Tach-Akesta): First divorced, then widowed in her second marriage, she runs a tela house, selling traditional beverages, to earn a living for herself and her children. She is also active in equub, hosting the rotating credit association's meeting in her house. She sharecrops out her land. This woman reported that she has not remarried because she has small children: "If I marry another, how could he farm the land and feed the child of another?" She has had a child out of wedlock.

Interview #27 (Tach-Akesta): This twice-divorced woman had a child outside marriage with a policeman who now is dead. Her reasons for not remarrying reflect both her concern about the tension between a new husband and children from another man, as well as her disappointment with her prior marriages: "What is the use of a husband? I want to raise my daughter. A husband is useless. I look after my daughter." She engages in trading in Akesta market, selling salt, coffee, and spice, while sharecropping out her land.

The fear of tension between a new husband and his stepchildren clearly serves as a barrier against remarriage, as does poor health. Having off-farm income (selling beverages or trading) appears to contribute significantly to the livelihood of women who have access to such sources. As will be explored further below, living in urban areas and settlements also appears to contribute to women's ability to live independently.

B. How have these female-headed households emerged and do they persist?

Stone's (2002: 8) report provides a key insight: "The status of female head of household seems to be an impermanent and variable one that women typically move in and out of, perhaps several times during their adult life, and shows considerable variation in degrees of independence and self-sufficiency" (emphasis in the original). The marital histories indicated that people's lives were often marked by a number of transitions and events: separations, divorces, spouse's deaths, remarriages, or extra-marital sexual relations. During one or more times in a woman's life, she may face situations where she exercises a high degree of independence and self-sufficiency, only to have these diminish as a husband, adult offspring, or other kinsmen assumes the role of household head.

In examining the marital histories, what is especially striking is how enormous variety in marriage and divorce patterns emerge from a nearly homogeneous starting point in terms of custom. Interviews and the wider literature³ indicated that the cultural ideal for marriage and family in the survey areas goes as follows:

Parents arrange the marriage of their offspring, occasionally with, but often without, the input of the young people. Attributes such as prospective newlywed's beauty and character, as well as the family's reputation and its wealth (especially in land and livestock), are taken into consideration. Some bridewealth payment occurs, with variation about its form and amount, between the marrying families. Both the groom and bride are quite young, especially the latter.

After the marriage ceremony, which is attended and supported by kin and neighbors, the young couple will stay initially within the groom's family home. The husband is likely to receive access to land from his father; less typically, the bride may bring land that she has inherited. They may borrow oxen from one or both of their families (or neighbors), while gradually building up their own livestock and land assets. Within two or more years, the couple receives support from family and friends to help construct its own home, furnished with utensils and other items. Their own family grows through the arrival of their children, while meanwhile assorted relatives (uncles, aunts, and others) may come to live with them for varying periods. If tensions occur in the marriage, both families try

³ For example, see Allen Hoben, "Ethiopian Land Tenure Revisited: Continuity, Change and Contradictions," pp. 5-38 in Workneh Negatu, Yared Amare and Yigremew Adal (eds.), *Proceedings of the Workshop on Current Land Issues on Land Tenure in Ethiopia: Access, Food Production and Natural Resource Management*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, Institute for Development Research, 2002.

to maintain an active role; for example, convincing an upset wife to return home, or a straying husband to return to the fold.

Although the husband is the head of household, with the authority and respect conveyed by that status, decision-making is a consultative process between the married couple, who try to balance their needs and obligations with their wants and ambitions. Eventually, the couple will arrange the marriage of their own children, continuing the eternal circle.

If that is the cultural ideal, how does this pattern play out in the real world? Social reality is clouded by the gradient of prosperity to poverty that exists among households, by differences in individual human capabilities, by the complexity of human emotions, by the sweep of historical currents (including episodes of food insecurity and political upheaval), and by random chance (or cosmic justice).

Table 3 summarizes patterns from the interviewees' marital histories. It must be noted that all the people interviewed initially experienced the cultural ideal—undergoing a marriage arranged by their parents, usually without their input regarding spouse selection. These unions were usually sealed by bridewealth payments in different forms (clothing, jewelry, or cash transfer) and marked by wedding ceremonies witnessed by kinfolk, friends, and neighbors. In some cases, the couples immediately established emotional and social bonds. As the husband in Interview #8 (Chachato) stated, “When he saw [his wife], he loved her.” Despite the cultural norms about marriage and familial pressures to keep married couples together, however, less than one third of the households (eight of twenty-seven) consisted of men and women who had stayed married to their original spouse. In another family (Interview #1), the couple had been separated for years, and the wife had considered herself divorced in a *de facto*, though not a *de jure*, sense. However, she accepted the recent return of her wayward spouse.

What interrupted the other marriages? Death always stalks the land, and nearly one-third (eight) of the interviewees reported that they had at least one marriage that ended with their spouse's death. Five of the women interviewees—#11 (Kamme), #13 (Kamme), #17 (Tach-Akesta), #20 (Temu), and #26 (Tach-Akesta)—reported that they felt constrained in remarrying because they had children. Indeed, being a widow with children seemed the main circumstance resulting in the emergence of the female-headed households that we interviewed. But having young children is not an absolute barrier to remarriage. For example, interviewee #11 (Kamme) had two surviving children from her second marriage when she married her third husband, a *kalicha*, a Muslim religious leader. Emotions also mattered in the decision to remarry after the death of a spouse. A widower took five years to remarry, waiting until he “could forget the memory of his first wife” (interview #16, Tach-Akesta).

Table 3: Summary of Marital Histories

Pattern of Marital History	N
Married, each spouse only married once	7
Married, only married once but often separated	1
Wife married twice (divorced), husband married only once	3
Wife married twice, husband's data unclear	1
Wife married twice (widowed), husband married only once	1
Wife married thrice (divorced, widowed), husband married twice	1
Wife married twice, husband married twice (divorces)	2
Wife married twice, husband married thrice (divorces)	2
Husband married twice, wife's data unclear	1
Woman married thrice (divorced and twice widowed), now unmarried	1
Woman divorced once, now unmarried	1
Woman married twice (divorced, widowed), now unmarried	2
Woman married twice (divorced), now unmarried	1
Woman widowed once, now unmarried	3

Divorce is the most common reason for the termination of marriages. Although families discourage it, people know that divorce is an option if a marriage is not working out. A woman in Chachato stated, “If one does not like the husband, one can divorce him. A woman would go to her father’s place and say that she wants a divorce. The father will tell the husband that you have to divorce my daughter if she does not want to stay with you” (interview #7). A woman from Tach-Akesta pointed out that it the “right” of parents to give away their children in marriage without first seeking permission, but that it was the “right” of a bride to divorce without her parents’ permission if she wished (interview #25). In Temu, a woman reported that when she left her first husband, her family initially advised her to go back; she “won over her family by repeatedly saying no” (interview #20). Many times, it was the husband who sought the divorce.

The self-reported reasons for divorce were numerous. Incompatibility (including in decision-making about household affairs), lack of children, sickness, and martial infidelity were commonly mentioned. Box 4 highlights the circumstances given by women regarding their divorces.

Box 4: Why Women Divorced and Subsequent Livelihood Strategy

Interview #3, Gerado: She was sick at the time. Her first husband had a large plot of land. She was compelled to do several work activities, and she was getting sicker. She did not want to stay in the situation. They had one child. After staying in the rural area for two years supporting herself by spinning and weaving, she moved to Addis Ababa with her aunt, working as a maid. She stayed for three years before remarrying.

Interview #5, Gerado: Her husband was not a suitable man. "He wanted to be with many women." She soon went to live with her brother in Kombolcha with her father's sister's daughter. She returned to Gerado because her brother built her a house there. She sold tela, roasted grain, and bread.

Interview #7, Chachato: Her first husband had divorced his wife to marry the interviewee. She had not known him, as her family arranged the marriage. She felt that he "was not her type" (that is, he was too old). Her brother helped arrange for her to migrate to Djibouti, where she worked as a maid. She eventually returned home because she wanted to marry and have children. "I was made foolish by the longing for children."

Interview #10, Kamme: "We reached a point where we could not be with one another any more." Her father arranged her second marriage.

Interview #11, Kamme: She divorced her first husband because they were not on good terms. She did not have any children with him. Her inability to have children created the bad terms, but it was Allah who decided [whether one gives birth]. She lived alone for two years before remarrying.

Interview #16, Tach-Akesta: She divorced her first husband because they did not have any children after six years of marriage. She remarried within months in another arranged marriage.

Interview #20, Temu: She divorced her first husband because they were not able to come to terms: "He was not okay for me, so I ran away." They had lived together only one year and had no children. Her second (and current) marriage was arranged directly with her spouse. She and he settled the matter themselves.

Interview #23, Temu: She divorced her first husband after two years because the situation "was not comfortable" for her. She felt too young to manage the household. The couple was unable to stay together: "No, I do not want to live with this man." Her parents arranged another marriage for her almost immediately.

Interview #24, Temu: "He loved another woman, so we were not on good terms and divorced... It was not me who divorced him. He divorced me. He got someone better. " They had stayed together for five years and had three children when the divorce occurred. After a year, she remarried. Her new husband had faced a similar situation with his first wife, who had left him for another man.

Interview #25, Tach-Akesta: She divorced her first husband because she did not want to move from the town to the countryside. After inheriting his father's farm, he wanted to move back to the rural area with his mother. She preferred to stay in Akesta town. Six months passed before she remarried. During that time she obtained land from the Peasant Association, which her father and brother farmed for her.

Interview #26, Tach-Akesta: They divorced after 10 years of marriage because they had no children. His parent said to divorce her. She ran back to her parents, staying there for a short time. Her husband's parents told her mother and father, "You should have brought her back; now it is too long a time." Her husband divorced her. She moved to the town, where she eventually remarried, arranging the marriage herself.

Interview #27, Tach-Akesta: She was unhappy living in the Gimba area with her first husband. Longing to see her mother in Akesta, she ran away. "My mother told me to go back. I said the marriage was not good, so I stayed." She worked in Akesta as a maid in a government employee's house. She remarried but it ended in divorce. "I did not know the problem." Her second husband took their child away with him.

Their trajectories varied considerably once they divorced. Some women sought new surroundings in distant places, working as maids or in other employment in Addis Ababa, Kombolcha, or Djibouti. Others lived with their parents, who often tried to arrange another marriage as soon as possible. Some people used divorce as an opportunity for selecting their own spouses. In a few cases, the women had land of their own, usually inherited from their parents. When divorcing, these parcels usually remained under the control of the woman, but farmed by relatives or sharecropped out.

As noted above, female headed households that persist are associated with one or more of the following characteristics: widows or divorcees who find remarriage undesirable or difficult because they have children from their previous marriage (or other liaison); they possess regular nonfarm income from brewing or trading; and they live in a town or peri-urban settings.

Residing in towns and settlements appears to contribute to women's ability to live independently. Although most of South Wello's and Oromiya's populations reside in rural homesteads, some urban and peri-urban areas exist in the region. Indeed, the region has an "urban hierarchy" of cities, towns, and settlements based on population size and levels of public services, businesses, and other amenities (see Gaile et al., 1999). This hierarchy is dominated by the cities of Dessie and Kombolcha, followed by towns such as Bati, settlements such as Akesta, and peri-urban sites such as Chiro and Tullu-Awolia serving to differentiate the cultural landscape. The growth of these settlements is a widespread and sustained trend in South Wello and Oromiya zones (see Castro 2001; Pankhurst 2001). Several factors appear to make these places focal points for the emergence or attraction of female-headed household. Urban areas and settlements furnish diverse income generation opportunities for women through small business (beverage selling, shops), trading, wage labor, and the informal sector. These sites may provide a large enough customer base for enterprises such as tela houses to operate. Income might also be generated through the housing market. For example, we missed interviewing a female head of household from Chiro peri-urban center in Temu, Legambo, but we did meet a young woman who rents a room from her. Another possibility is that the urban or peri-urban setting may be less socially or culturally constraining than village or rural life. In addition, urban areas and settlements may be better places to be during times of food shortages or other trouble. Clearly several of the women in Akesta town preferred their urban residence to homes in the countryside. It should be noted that these female heads of households retain their connections to agriculture through land ownership, plowing arrangements, and usually by involvement in farm tasks such as weeding or harvesting (see below for further discussion).

The relationship between marital trajectories and the external environment—including critical long-term trends, shocks, and seasonal fluctuations (what are called the "vulnerability context" in the sustainable livelihoods framework, see DFID 2002)—is direct yet complex. The interviews indicated that the hard times experienced during the 1984 (1977 EC) and 1999 (1991 EC) droughts placed enormous stress on families. In 1984 people reported the deaths of spouses and children, as well as separation as family members went to feeding camps or went elsewhere in search of employment and food. A woman in Kamme (interview #11), for example, stated that her husband and two of her children died at the Bati feeding camp during that time. A husband and wife in Temu (interview #18) reported the substantial stress that they faced during the 1999 drought. The husband left for Borana to seek work as a day

laborer. Asked if he feared going, he responded: “As far as fear is concerned, going there was not more frightening than the hunger we were experiencing.” Nonetheless, his wife was left, as she put it, “Struggling to feed my children.” However, they had planned their efforts together, and hope for good fortune in his journey. The husband stated: “She knew how long I was going to stay away. It was her responsibility to save as much of the grain as possible for the children. I was also going to do my best. I knew I must come back within 15 to 20 days for my children to survive.” Anger, disappointment, resentment, and separation were outcomes for spouses who were not seen as ‘doing his or her best’ in such difficult times. A woman in Gerado (interview #1) spoke of how she pleaded with her husband, who had migrated Jimma and Teppe, to help the family during the 1984 drought. She sent him messages: “Be strong, support us.” But he did not do so. She was explicit about her anger and sought divorce, though her family dissuaded her from doing so for the sake of their children.

Given the tremendous strain that shocks such as prolonged drought and food shortages place on households and individuals, it is not surprising that Legambo, the area most hard-hit by the 1999 drought and food crises (see Table 4; also see Castro et al. 1999; Castro 2001) has the highest percentage of female-headed households in the BASIS/IDR survey. It bears mentioning, however, that in interviews people attributed their divorces and similar marital problems to the personal qualities of their spouse. No one said, ‘the drought caused our marriage to fall apart.’ Rather, as in the case of interview #1, the husband was seen as lazy and lacking a sense of responsibility. The food crises provided the setting for these flaws to be demonstrated. In less direct or less explicit ways, though, it was evident that poverty and constant vulnerability placed a general strain on households. As noted above, sickness and physical weakness were also cited as the cause of divorce in a few cases.

C. Do they pursue different economic strategies than male household heads? Does this change in times of drought?

A key issue regarding households is the extent to which they operate as unitary or centralized units in terms of decision-making and management of their assets. Hoben (2002: 11) observes regarding household ideology: “The rules and etiquette of intra-household relationships emphasize the authority of the household head, underlining the pivotal role he plays in the formation, organization, and management of the household enterprise.” While there was ample evidence of the presence of this ideology, the interviews also indicated that the assumption that rural household consist of “centralized units under the control of a single individual” (cited from Fafchamps and Quisumbing, no date), may be too simplistic. Although it may be true for some cases, numerous interviewees suggested that household decision-making were based on more collaborative or consultative styles. Being too controlling or authoritarian appeared to be a point of friction in some marriages, for example, resulting in divorce.

Whatever the decision-making model faced by male-headed households, it is important to recognize that female-headed households face some unique challenges due to their socio-cultural setting. Women are prohibited by cultural traditions from engaging in plowing, compelling them to make arrangements with males for it to be done. They also often face cultural constraints in inheriting or otherwise obtaining land. Their overall situation regarding land, labor, and capital (in livestock and other forms) also pose special concerns in terms of their ability to cope with, and recover from, shocks such as recurrent crop failure due to

severe drought or frost damage. This section explores how the interviewees responded to these situations and issues.

1. Plowing arrangements

As noted in the earlier Stone report, female-headed households must accommodate for their lack of male labor for plowing. In addition, they often lack their own oxen, though a substantial number of the interviewees reported that they needed to borrow or otherwise obtain one or more oxen or other draft animal. In examining the current plowing arrangements, as shown in Table 2, what is notable is a marked difference between the female and male-headed households:

Sharecropping-out land is practiced by interviewees #2 (Gerado), #26 (Tach-Akesta), #27 (Tach-Akesta)—all female headed households

Rental of oxen is reportedly practiced by the non-survey female headed household from Kamme (interview #11). She pays two quintals to a man from Bati for the plowing service

Sons or grandsons plow the land for interviewees #5 (Gerado), #13 (Kamme), #17 (Tach-Akesta), #23 (Temu)—again, all female headed households

Husbands reportedly did the plowing in the other cases.

Quite clearly, the cultural prohibition on women plowing compels them to make different arrangements from males who are capable of plowing. Some of the women noted that sharecropping is less desirable than directly cultivating one's own land. Renting or having a male relative who can do the plowing and cultivation without requiring a specific share in the harvest is seen as much more favorable to the interests of the landowner (see Box 5)

Box 5: Sharecropping versus Rental or Having a Relative Plow

Interview #11, Kamme: In sharecropping out arrangements, “you will never reach the place of your own farmland.” The sharecropper decides everything. The landowner even gets no access to crop residues and crop stocks. If you keep your own sorghum stocks, you can eat it like sugar cane. In sharecropping, you are denied all these things even though it is your own farmland.

Interview #16, Tach-Akesta [an elderly woman who recently remarried]: If she had a husband, she would not have to sharecrop and receive the full product of her land. Now [her husband] is farming the land

Interview #2, Gerado: She hopes in the future that her grandson will plow the land. If that happens, she will get all the harvest.

2. Responses to drought and recovery

Table 4 summarizes the interviewees' self-reports on severe food insecurity episodes and asset recovery, focusing on their "worse" experience. We also usually probed their recent experience. The interviews revealed a range in historical experience, cultural memory, and individual recall regarding famine and hunger across and even within communities. This finding reinforces the conclusions drawn by Stone, and by Castro and Yigremew (see Castro 2001), that experiences and memories are influenced by agro-ecological zone, by the availability of irrigation (particularly in Gerado and Tach-Akesta), and by the availability of food aid or other assistance. Although the lowlands are the most drought-prone area, its households do not universally share the experience of drought. A man in Chachato (interview #9) recalled that he "did not have much trouble" in 1977 EC. A woman in the same kebele (though different village) stated about the same era: "Everyone was not equally poor—some people were rich" (interview #6).

In most places, particularly the lowlands the drought of 1977 EC served as the reference point for the "worse experience" of hunger. Yet, it was evident that people sometimes cited it "in general terms," even when they themselves did not directly experience dire problems (such as interview #9). A man in Temu (interview # 22) contended that other, perhaps more severe episodes of hunger and food insecurity have occurred in his area since 1977 EC, particularly the drought in 1991 EC and the current crop failure. The difference is that 1977 EC continues to receive publicity; it continues to be talked about by those interested in such subjects. "But," he stated, "No one has taken notice of this time of drought as an issue." Other informants from Temu also cited the 1991 EC drought as the worst period of food insecurity that they have encountered.

As noted by Stone, household often reported the "classic responses" to crop failure: livestock sales, seeking wage labor in towns or other regions, diversifying into activities such as wood fuel sales or grain trading, and relying on help from their social networks. People also reported sending highly vulnerable family members to feeding camps and relying on food aid. These responses clearly had gendered and other social dimensions: women and children were the ones who mainly went to the food camps; men were the ones who engaged in migration and wage labor.

The information on recovery underscored the importance of social capital in obtaining access to draft animals. Diversified activities, including trading, selling wood fuel, labor migration, livestock share-raising, food aid, and handicraft sales help foster recovery (which can take several years to occur).

It should be noted that some of the Akesta-based female heads of households specifically stated that it is better to live in urban areas during times of drought and food scarcity. Wage labor jobs may be easier to find (though it was observed in interview #27 that Akesta now is flooded with job seekers). There may be better access to assistance, and it is easier to sell food aid in the town than in the countryside.

Table 4: Experiences of Hunger, Food Insecurity, and Recovery*

Inter-view #	Place	HHN	Type HH*	Worst experience w/ hunger	Other memories of 1977 EC (1984) or recent drought/s	Recovery
1	Gerado	08	FHH	January 2002, crop failure b/c/ frost	In '77EC dismantled house to sell wood; stayed on land	Missed season farming b/c no oxen; irrigated land in producer coop; three years to recover; husband away
2	Gerado	52	FHH	1977 EC drought	Children scrambled to find help; sold livestock; married daughter in food camp	HU borrowed ox from relatives; irrigated land; WI sold handicrafts in Dessie; food aid
3	Gerado	05	MHH (WI, HU)	1977 EC was the worse	In '77EC no food aid but resettlement; in '92-'93 EC (1999-2000) food aid	HU did construction day labor in Dessie; food for work
4	Gerado	06	MHH	1976-78 EC, no harvest, lost livestock	Sold their oxen and other livestock; people from rural areas came here	Traded in livestock; irrigated land in producer coop,
5	Gerado	20	FHH	[1977 EC?]	She was sick, as were a lot of people	In droughts she spun cloth, weaved, sold things to get income
6	Chachato	02	FHH	Always face a problem	'77EC went to the Bati food camp with her children; baby died, forced to leave camp	People were not equally poor—some were rich. She borrowed oxen from a relative from another area. Sold firewood
7	Chachato	06	MHH (WI)	1977 EC: nothing to eat; in recent years problems because drought and insects	Father died in '77EC; livestock died; family in Bati food camp for 7-8 months; BR went to Djibouti	BR sent money from Djibouti; shared oxen with uncle; food aid
8	Chachato	39	MHH	April 2002 to recent	'77EC survived through Red Cross food aid, selling firewood, charcoal	Food aid; he had oxen that survived '77EC; he helped others plow
9	Chachato	44	MHH	1977 EC in general terms, but his family did not much trouble	In '77EC others went to the food camps but his family managed to stay	He earned money by trading grain, providing for his family
10	Kamme	NA	MHH (WI)	This year they lost livestock and had no harvest	No difference between '77EC and this year; livestock died and people are next	Sells firewood in Bati; her children go to Afar areas to chop wood (Afar oppose); used hoes to farm in '78 EC (1985); then shared harvest with person who lent oxen; bought livestock
11	Kamme	NA	FHH	1977 EC: her HU and 2 children died in food camps	Went to resettlement area but escaped; returned and reclaimed land from relative	Sharecropped with someone from another clan; sold firewood
12	Kamme	13	MHH	1977 EC: no rainfall, his family in the food camp	This year a problem was developing but it was curbed by July rains	His family went to the food camp in 77EC; had irrigated land; eventually got livestock for plowing
13	Kamme	16	FHH	1977 EC: nothing to eat; went to food camps; begged in Bati	Stayed away from home about a year in '77EC in the camps and begging; lost livestock	Sold firewood and got food aid. Resumed farming with horses, eventually got an ox and borrowed another

14	Tach-Akesta	46	MHH (WI)	1977 EC: no harvest	Lost a lot of livestock	Members of the producer coop, able to require sheep and other animals through livestock share-raising
15	Tach-Akesta	49	MHH (HU)	1977 EC: people & livestock died	One oxen died and he sold another;	Member of the producer coop, he also had a backyard plot for farming
16	Tach-Akesta	50	FHH	Very recently but also 1977 EC	She was able to support others at that time; now there is problem whenever a drought	Received food aid in the past but no longer
17	Tach-Akesta	23	FHH	1977 EC, also known as Liquas	It is difficult for me to say this year or that year is severe because I do not remember	Government assistance and help from her children in buying food and clothes have helped her survived
18	Temu	09	FHH	1977 EC: starved, ate weeds; two children stayed at the Akesta food camp	A fearful drought hit in 1991 EC. The HU went to Borana, seeking work as an agricultural day laborer	Food aid, combined with farming. First, they sharecropped out their land; then plowed with a horse, borrowing one from a neighbor.
19	Temu	06	MHH	1991-92 EC: crop failure, lost livestock	In the past they were able to sell livestock but this time their animals died	Plowing with a horse, borrowing one. Did food for work when available.
20	Temu	08	MHH	1991 EC: food shortage b/c drought, but 1977 EC most severe b/c no grain in market	In '77 EC, he lost a cow and calves. In '91 EC he sold his livestock, including two oxen	In '77 he traded grain, and plowed his fields with help from relatives; he got a calf through livestock share-raising, eventually selling it and buying two bulls; got food aid
21	Temu	04	MHH	1991 EC drought, little harvest, relied on food aid	Droughts in 1986 EC and 1977 EC resulted in livestock deaths	Managed to retain some livestock, which he sold, while keeping some to get offspring; plowing with horses or his FA's oxen
22	Temu	53	MHH	Since 1991 EC problems; last year livestock & people died	This year there is a poor barley crop due to late rains, frost and ice. There is no difference between 1977 EC and today, except that '77 is talked about a lot	Last year he tried to trade in coffee and salt. Others contributed money for the enterprise and he contributed the labor
23	Temu	20	FHH	1977 EC & 1991 EC were the same in severity		
24	Temu	54	MHH (WI)	Extreme case in 1991 EC, lost livestock	They are still under a food shortage.	They depended on food aid. They plow with a horse, borrowing one from a relative
25	Tach-Akesta	51	FHH	1991 EC: nothing to sell	She survived by asking people for help. Better to be in town during times of drought.	She did food for work in the countryside until she became weak. She borrowed grain from her brother, repaying him the next harvest. She sells tela and other beverages.

26	Tach-Akesta	20	FHH	Around 1991 EC: there was nothing to feed the children; she had no customers for her tela	She received 150 birr payment for relief from the government; they got food aid and food for work.	When food aid started, her customers began returning. She sharecrops out her land.
27	Tach-Akesta	27	FHH	Sometime since the EPRDF came to power. Things are better now	If there are problems, it is better to be in the town. When they get food aid, it is possible to sell it	For the past four years she has been selling spice, coffee and salt in Akesta market

*Calendar conversion: 1977 EC is 1984 in the Western calendar; 1991-1992 EC includes 1998-2000 in the Western calendar (which is seven years and eight months ‘ahead’ of the Ethiopian calendar)

3. Access to land

As shown in Table 5, there are significant differences between men and women, and among communities, in how people obtain access to land. In all places, women are most likely to obtain their access to land through marriage, whereas men tend to acquire at least some land from their parents. But significant variations occur: women can also inherit land from their parents (they usually cite their fathers as provider of property), their siblings, or obtain it through government-organized land redistribution. In general, the interviews support Yigremew’s (2001) contention that women often do not have the same access as men to institutions—both governmental and social—that would allow them to augment their landholdings. He states: “For example, despite the traditional and legal conception of daughter’s equality to sons in terms of resource access from the family and other sources, inheritance and gifts are more often channeled to boys than girls” (Yigremew 2001: 37). Both Yigremew (2001) and Stone (2002) noted that women’s rights are sometimes less secure, and this idea was reinforced by reports of women who lost land in redistribution or had land taken without compensation for projects.

Table 5: Access to Land by Households

Inter-view #	Place	HHN	Infor-mant	Access to land	Adjustments to land access	Other information
1	Gerado	08	FHH	HU got land from FA when they married	Irrigated land included into Derg producer cooperative; lost some land when it collapsed and land redistributed	In 1977 EC drought she stayed on her farm to defend their rights
2	Gerado	52	FHH (widow)	WI got irrigated plot from her FA, she still controls it; HU got land from his FA	She lost land to a government seed station and a Finnish forestry project around 1986	Her DA inherited her HU's land. When HU alive he controlled both her and his plots
3	Gerado	05	MHH & WI	Both HU & WI inherited land	WI had inherited land from her FA	
4	Gerado	06	MHH	Obtains land by sharecropping with his WI's kinfolk (he is not registered on PA tax rolls)	He plows his MO's land for her, but he does not have land from his family	His family got an irrigated plot in the Producer Coop in 1976 EC (among the first to join)
5	Gerado	20	FHH	When she divorced, her BRs bought her land from FA's plot	She received no land from her HU when she divorced (he got land from his FA)	Her FA had sold his land to someone else; her BRs repurchased the land
6	Chachato	02	FHH (married)	WI inherited her first HU's land when he died		Her first HU got land from his FA; second HU is her first HU's uncle's son
7	Chachato	06	WI in a MHH	HU has land	She received no land from her first HU when she divorced	
8	Chachato	39	MHH	HU got land from his FA		
9	Chachato	44	MHH	Rented land from neighbor in imperial era. Received land during redistribution		
10	Kamme	NA	WI in a MHH	Current HU has land	She received no land from her first HU when she divorced	EPRDF distributed land to her son, who lives at home
11	Kamme	NA	FHH (widow)	She inherited land from her second and third HUs	She received no land from her first HU when she divorced	Third HU gave land to their son and shared some with his ex-WI
12	Kamme	13	MHH	Obtained land by inheritance & redistribution	When engaged in labor migration, his FA's BR s sharecropped his land	
13	Kamme	16	FHH (widow)	She inherited land from her HU		
14	Tach-Akesta	46	WI in a MHH	HU received land in the redistribution		Their home's within a compound with her HU's BR's homes
15	Tach-Akesta	49	MHH	HU got land from his FA	HU's SI has nearby house and land	Their farm part of Production Coop; land reclaimed when it disbanded
16	Tach-Akesta	50	WI & HU in FHH	WI inherited land from FA; when divorced she lost access to the plot but received another from ex-husband	WI lost access to her FA's plot b/c Derg would not allow DAs to inherit land from FAs. Her FA's BR's SO took control, denied her access	First HU received land from his FA as well.

17	Tach-Akesta	23	FHH	Inherited land from her HU, who got it from his FA	She lost land during redistribution	Identified her HU's FA as "her father"
18	Temu	09	WI & HU in FHH	Both HU & WI got land from their FAs ; they receive land at redistribution		"Common practice for a WI's parents to give her land when she marries"
19	Temu	06	MHH	When married, they stayed with HU's parents; got land at redistribution		
20	Temu	08	HU & WI in MHH	When married, they stayed with HU's parents; got land at redistribution		
21	Temu	04	HU, WI, HU's FA in MHH	Received land in two redistributions and from FA	WI received land through EPRDF redistribution as part of the family	
22	Temu	53	MHH	Received land from PA after marrying; HU inherited MO's land		
23	Temu	20	MO, SO & SO in FHH	Second HU had land from his family; she got additional land from the EPRDF		
24	Temu	54	WI in MHH	Second HU got land from family; also got land in EPRDF redistribution	She received no land from her first HU when she divorced	
25	Tach-Akesta	51	FHH	When divorced, she asked the PA for land	She received no land from her first HU when she divorced	
26	Tach-Akesta	20	FHH (widow)	Inherited land from her second HU	She received no land from her first HU when she divorced	
27	Tach-Akesta	27	FHH	She got land during the EPRDF redistribution	She received no land from her two divorces	

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions to emerge from this field study are as follows:

1. Households under the managerial control of women are usually associated with one or more of the following characteristics: widows or divorcees who find remarriage undesirable or difficult because they have children from their previous marriage (or other liaison); they possess regular non-farm income from brewing or trading; and they live in a city, town or settlement (or a distant locale such as Addis Ababa or Djibouti).
2. As Stone observed in her June 2002 report, the status of female head of household tends to be an impermanent and variable one. Marital histories indicated that people's lives were often marked by a number of transitions and events: separations, divorces, spouse's deaths, remarriages, or extra-marital sexual relations. During one or more times in a woman's life, she may face situations where she exercises a high degree of

independence and self-sufficiency, only to have these diminish as a husband, adult offspring, or other kinsmen assumes the role of household head.

3. In examining the marital histories, what is especially striking is how enormous variety in marriage and divorce patterns emerge from a nearly homogeneous starting point in terms of customary practice: marriages arranged by parents. Reasons for divorce are numerous: incompatibility (including in terms of household decision-making), lack of children, sickness, and martial infidelity were commonly cited.
4. The urban hierarchy within South Wello and Oromiya—ranging from cities (Dessie, Kombolcha), to towns (such as Bati), to settlements (for example, Akesta) to emergent peri-urban sites (Chiro)—may possess important income generation opportunities for women through small business (beverage selling, shops), trading, wage labor, rentals, and other means. With the continued growth of urban and peri-urban centers, these sites may become focal points for the emergence or the attraction of female-headed households.
5. Overall, the interviews suggested that the assumption that these rural households consisted of “centralized units under the control of a single individual” (cited from Fafchamps and Quisumbing, no date) might be too simplistic. While it may be true for some cases, other interviewees suggested that household decision-making might be based on more collaborative or consultative styles.
6. Women usually obtain their access to land through marriage, whereas men tend to acquire at least some land from their parents. But significant variations occur: women can also inherit land from their parents (they usually cite their fathers as provider of property), their siblings, or through redistribution.
7. Female heads of households engage in a variety of plowing arrangements (family aid, sharecropping, rental) with males, including both kin and non-kin. Sharecropping is less desirable than directly cultivating one’s own land. Renting or having a male relative who can do the plowing and cultivation without requiring a specific share in the harvest is seen as much more favorable to the interests of the woman landowner.
8. Experiences and memories concerning hunger and food insecurity are influenced by agro-ecological zone, by the availability of irrigation (particularly in Gerado and Tach-Akesta), and by the availability of food aid or other assistance. Although the lowlands are the most drought-prone area, its households do not universally share the experience of drought. This is because of economic differences among households within different locations. As one interviewee noted about the 1977 EC (1984) famine: “Everyone was not equally poor—some people were rich.”
9. In most places, particularly the lowlands the drought of 1977 EC (1984) served as the reference point for the “worse experience” of hunger. Yet, it was evident that people sometimes cited it “in general terms,” even when they themselves did not directly experience dire problems. Some informants, particularly in Temu, contended that other, perhaps more severe episodes of hunger and food insecurity have occurred in their area since 1977 EC (1984), particularly the drought in 1991 EC (1999) and the current crop failure. The difference is that 1977 EC continues to receive publicity; it continues to be talked about by those interested in such subjects

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