

HD

The Dynamics of Rural Poverty: Case Studies from a District in Southern Ethiopia

Dessalegn Rahmato

Monograph Series 2/92



CODESRIA

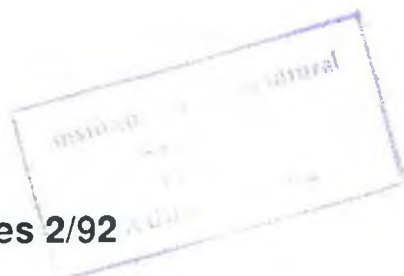
362.5
DES
1992
AC. 731B

362.85
Des
1992
Ac. 7318

The Dynamics of Rural Poverty: Case Studies from a District in Southern Ethiopia

Dessalegn Rahmato

Institute of Development Research
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia



Monograph Series 2/92

The CODESRIA Monograph Series is published to stimulate debate, comments, and further research on the subjects covered. The Series will serve as a forum for works based on the findings of original research, which however are too long for academic journals but not long enough to be published as books, and which deserve to be accessible to the research community in Africa and elsewhere. Such works may be case studies, theoretical debates or both, but they incorporate significant findings, analyses, and critical evaluations of the current literature on the subjects in question.

**The Dynamics of Rural Poverty:
Case Studies from a District in Southern Ethiopia**

Copyright © 1992 CODESRIA

Typeset and printed by CODESRIA

CODESRIA Monograph Series is distributed free of charge to African research institutes and to other institutes within our exchange programme. Single copies can be obtained at US\$8. For information, please contact:

**CODESRIA,
P.O. Box 3304,
Dakar/Senegal**

CODESRIA Monograph Series

ISSN: 0850-2633

CODESRIA gratefully acknowledges the support of the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation (SAREC), the International Development Research Center (IDRC), the Ford Foundation, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Preface

The two essays in this study¹ are part of a larger work on coping with rural poverty which I hope to complete in the near future. The dearth of material in Ethiopia on rural poverty in general, and peasants' responses to it in particular was one reason I was first drawn to the subject. In the course of my investigations, however, I came to realize that coping with poverty is far more complex than just "making ends meet". True, the response to poverty is the stuff of everyday struggles for existence and viability, nevertheless, the economic struggle to make ends meet employs such a wide variety of social and cultural idioms, and is such an important element of human and social relationships that to separate the economic from the social, cultural or "ideological" is quite difficult. Coping with poverty draws on both the natural and socio-cultural resources of the community as well as on individual peasant initiative. It may be said that the history of rural Ethiopia is, at least in good part, the history of the struggle of peasants against poverty and vulnerability, and the legacy of this history is evidenced in the social and value systems of rural communities today. Coping with poverty, like coping with calamity, thus offers us greater insights into the workings of peasant society, and reveals to us in sharper relief the dynamics of social relationships, community values and human loyalties.

Rural poverty and the dynamic responses to it are important in our particular case for reasons having to do with policy choices and reform management. The subject is however too involved for us to deal with here, but the critical problem that has enfeebled reform measures and distorted government policies for the last half century in this country lies in the perception of state authorities and policy executors regarding peasants and their endeavours. All too often, the image of the peasant that emerges from policy documents, official pronouncements, and even academic research is very negative, and on occasions down-right insulting. Peasants are believed to be ignorant, backward, lacking in initiative, and often given to indolence. It is hoped that this study will help put to rest unfounded perceptions such as these, and help counter the heavy urban bias and petty bourgeois prejudices that so frequently inform government attitudes and even 'public' opinion about rural producers, their day to day struggles and their value systems.

The material for this study was collected in Bolosso *woreda*, Wollaita awraja², southern Ethiopia in the period 1989-1990. Both Bolosso and Wollaita are in the heart of what is known as the *ensete* culture complex which is the dominant agro-ecology in central and south-central Ethiopia, and which involves some 6 million people. A detailed description of my field research

method is given in Annex 1, Essay 1. This is a micro-level study, and while I recognize its limitations I believe the conclusions I have drawn have wider implications. In particular, peasants in the ensete zone are faced in the main with similar problems and weighed down with similar burdens, hence micro-level studies of this kind are useful as comparative tools. The central arguments briefly sketched here have not been fully teased out due mainly to the pressure of time and the shortage of funds. However, I hope to debate the issues and analyze my findings soon, and in the meantime I present this short study for discussion and criticism.

Some Theoretical Issues

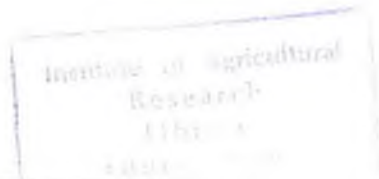
Coping with poverty assumes that the poor are active agents responding to their life conditions in ways calculated to ensure their survival and their esteem in their communities. In the context of Wollaita, the poor are all those who are considered poor by their fellow peasants, who have insufficient means of livelihood (land, livestock, capital), who depend greatly on the traditional cooperative institutions of their community for a great part of their sustenance, and who are involved in elaborate ties of social and economic dependency. The poor are also culturally identifiable: a poor head of a household in Bolosso, for example, is often forced to let his wife work (a mark of poverty among peasants here), is more likely to be polygamous, and tends to devote a considerable portion of his labour and income on cultural and esteem-oriented investments as opposed to 'productive' investments bearing immediate material benefits (see Essay 2). For purposes of this study, we have excluded from the discussion persons at the lowest level of the scale of destitution, viz., beggars, the homeless, the handicapped and in general the absolutely destitute. Such people are not only wholly dependent on others for their survival but have lost their social esteem, and have dropped out of society as a consequence.

It is significant that while the general literature on rural poverty is fairly extensive the subject of coping with poverty has been largely ignored (for the general literature see El-Ghonemy 1990, FAO 1986, Lipton 1985, Saith 1990). Coping with crisis brought on by social, political and environmental disaster has attracted considerable attention (see Dessalegn 1991), but peasant responses to poverty and the strategies of everyday survival have not been seriously explored. This is surprising considering that the subject of rural poverty in Africa began to attract attention, albeit as an element of rural modernization initiatives, as far back as the early 1970s, and one would thus have expected a closer examination of everyday peasant strategies both as a subject in itself as well as an issue relevant to development choices. However, this has not been

the case to date, although the works of some economic anthropologists (eg. Polly Hill 1972) and agricultural historians (Palmer and Parsons 1977) stand out as exceptions, even though neither one or the other covers the subject in full.

The general literature on rural poverty – I would have liked to add "in Africa" but as the references cited here show, the works in question are not exclusively on Africa, and many of the specialized studies are in fact on Asia – suffers from several inter-related shortcomings. First, many of the works in question were, or appear to have been prepared either to satisfy the demands of donor agencies or to attract their attention. Such works often reflect, or generally conform to, the concerns, assumptions and outlooks of the institutions which hold the purse-strings of international development assistance. Such donor bias continues to inform research choices and priorities, often determining or influencing in subtle ways what subjects, issues and frames of investigation will be promoted, funded or in other ways rewarded.

Secondly, the dominant approach in much of the literature, particularly the donor-supported literature, may be termed the "head-count" approach, i.e. it reduces poverty to quantifiable dimensions often on a broad aggregate scale. This approach lays heavy emphasis on measurement, statistical comparison, and quantitative "history", all based mostly on what are considered to be valid universal indicators such as assets, income, nutrition/consumption, and employment. (ILO 1988, Lipton 1985, 1983, Srinivasan and Bardhan 1988, World Bank 1986). Essentially, the head-count approach views the poor in their aggregate, and considers them as statistical inputs to be employed for argumentation and policy prescription. The underlying assumptions here are: a) that the poor have the same needs and motivations whether they are in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, and b) that they all respond to the same "benefits" or "incentives" in the same way regardless of their individual experiences and socio-cultural environments – assumptions which are difficult to sustain as evidenced by the failure of a large number of internationally supported development programmes in rural Africa and elsewhere. Moreover, as the focus of measurement is the primary household, the head-count approach ignores or hides intra-household variations in hardship arising out of gender or age-specific relationships. It should also be noted that many of the works in question depend for their basic information on sources whose reliability and accuracy is questionable. The information often comes from FAO, other UN institutions, or World Bank data banks whose original sources are surveys and censuses prepared and published by individual member countries. Obviously, the standard of data collection, and the accuracy of the data so collected differ



from country to country, and comparative analysis based on such information is always suspect.

The foregoing criticism is not meant to be a total rejection of the quantitative approach, on the contrary, I believe analysis of this sort, carried out with care and with the aim of supporting other forms of inquiry, is necessary and cannot be done without. My objection is that the head-count approach by itself obscures more than it reveals, gives rise to gross simplifications, and is an insufficient tool for understanding the dynamics of rural poverty, and for preparing policy alternatives to deal with it.

Thirdly, and more significantly for our purposes, the existing literature views the rural poor as passive and at times lifeless agents, silently waiting to be rescued from their fate by the benevolence of the state or philanthropic organizations. The poor are the object of investigation, analysis, argumentation and policy prescription. They are talked about and examined as if they have no life of their own. They are the target of welfare or other policies which are often based on what the policy makers and their external advisors consider to be good for them. Such policies are often packaged as poverty-alleviation programmes, or programmes aimed at ensuring basic needs, both involving a redistribution of resources and services (health, education, housing, etc.) deemed essential not by the poor themselves but by state bureaucrats, their advisors and financial donors³. With a few exceptions, the poor are not considered as active agents, and such questions as what do the poor do for themselves? how do they cope with poverty on an everyday basis? are not frequently raised.

The conventional definition of the poor refers to all those persons who subsist below a given level of income. The poverty line is often taken to mean (and the standard is frequently set by government policy) access to purchasing power sufficient (at least) to cover the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet. A variation of this view has it that poverty should be measured solely on the basis of a nutritional norm: the undernourished are poor regardless of whether their lack of access to their nutritional requirements is a consequence of low income, low consumption or other factors (Lipton 1988, 1983). In India, for example, the official nutritional norm is set at 2400 calories per person per day, and a person is assumed to be undernourished and hence poor if he/she is unable to have access to the required energy intake on a regular basis. But this view has been criticized because the assumptions implicit in the estimation of energy requirements are considered to be questionable. A person's caloric requirements – i.e. energy necessary for normal work and health needs – vary among individuals and over time, as well as among regions or populations due to factors having to do with environmental and genetic adaptation (Srinivasan and Bardhan: Ch. 11). In brief, the distinction between the poor and the non-poor

based on income/nutrition is debatable, first because what constitutes the poverty line as well as the criteria defining income distribution are often contested, and second because nutritional norms are imprecise and thus improper tools of measurement. Moreover, both the poverty-line and nutritional approaches hide differential levels of vulnerability within the household, since both tacitly assume that the pooling of income and consumption goods within the household ensures that the burden of hardship is equally shared; an assumption which is now being challenged (Kabeer 1991).

The poor have also been identified as those with low assets (insufficient land, livestock and possessions), and low earned income due to limited employment opportunities (El-Ghonemy, Griffith 1977, ILO, Lipton, Sender and Smith 1990). The usefulness of these indicators is however limited, because we do not as yet have an accurate and valid standard of measurement, and because in each particular case environmental factors, and factors having to do with agricultural experience and human initiative tend to be left out of account.

Let us take the question of assets as a case in point: what is meant by insufficient assets? In land rich societies, ie. societies where land is relatively not a scarce resource as in parts of western and southern Africa, low production and hence destitution may arise due to lack of access to labour, and not to land, whereas in land poor societies the opposite may be true. In the latter case, the key asset is labour, which for many households can only be available through high birth rates or complicated arrangements with kinfolk or the extended family. Further, both land and labour may be available in sufficient quantities but not of the kind eagerly sought. As Polly Hill has shown, landlessness per se was not a problem in rural Hausaland, but rather the poor were those who lacked access to manured land (Hill 1972: Ch. X). Similarly, agricultural labour may be in great demand even when general labour is not in short supply. It should be remembered that in much of rural Africa women are the main cultivators, and the shortage of agricultural labour is a far more serious handicap than the shortage of land (Moock 1986). In Wollaita, on the other hand, the critical constraint is the shortage of farm oxen and land (in that order) rather than that of labour. As we shall see later, however, due to the specific agro-ecology of the area, and the specific cropping strategies employed by the peasantry, a plot of land here provides more food security to the family than it does in other parts of the country.

Moreover, the significance of land assets to production will be dependent on a variety of factors of which the class and political are quite critical. A given piece of land may provide a higher or lower harvest depending on, among other things, its quality and location, the form of tenure in which it is held (i.e. the

class relations in force and the rate of surplus extraction), and agricultural policies having to do with pricing, marketing, etc.

Lipton (1988) has made a distinction between the poor, and what he calls the 'ultra poor', describing the latter as those who spend 80% or more of their income on food and yet fulfilling less than 80% of their caloric requirements. The 'ultras', he says, are both hungry and malnourished, while the poor are unlikely to be malnourished but may be hungry occasionally. For practical purposes – and this was the main object of Lipton's work – the task of measuring the line dividing the one from the other is a difficult one, and so the usefulness of this line of thinking is highly questionable. Illife (1987), on the other hand, distinguishes between what he calls the structurally poor, meaning those who suffer from long term poverty due to their personal and social circumstances, and the conjuncturely poor, i.e. those made destitute by crises such as famine, pandemics, natural disaster, and so forth. The latter have the chance to reverse their fortunes while the former do not. I have attempted what I consider to be a more practical method of making distinctions among the poor in Essay 1.

One may add here that a distinction could also be made between the long-term or chronically poor, and the short-term or temporary poor. The advantage here is identifying poverty over a period of time rather than at a given moment in time. This then raises a number of questions: who are the poorest in this instance? Are the chronically poor also the 'ultra' poor? How temporary are the conditions of the temporary poor? Persistent poverty, specially if it is also 'ultra' poverty, may present far more difficulties than transient poverty for welfare and related policy initiatives.

Of late, students of rural society have pointed to the significance of seasonal changes to the dynamics of rural poverty (Chambers et al., IDS Bulletin 1986, Gill 1990). The seasonal approach opens up new lines of inquiry by suggesting new dimensions to the problem of vulnerability. But seasonality is perceived primarily in climatic terms, and the burden of seasonal changes is believed to fall only or mainly on the poor. This is a partial view, for seasonality affects, in varying degrees of severity of course, many sectors of rural society, and impinges upon class relations, determining at the moment at hand the range of social, non-economic opportunities available to the poor; the nature of the social nexus binding the community together changes as a result of seasonal factors.

Rural poverty, particularly in the context of land scarcity and high population density, which is typical of Wollaita, is said to promote abusive landuse practices, giving rise to environmental degradation. The poor are seen to be caught in a vicious trap, often largely of their own making: population pressure means more micro-holdings, which leads to mis-use of the land and other resources, which in turn leads to natural degradation and impoverishment. This

view or some version of it was popularized in the 1980s by journalists, academics and others whose knowledge of rural Africa, and in particular peasant farming expertise was superficial (Berg and Whitaker 1980, Timberlake 1985). In Ethiopia itself, a series of FAO sponsored studies highlighted the nature and magnitude of the degradation of resources in the country, and warned of the catastrophic dangers lying in wait in the near future (MoA/FAO 1984-87; see also Campbell 1991). While there is an element of alarmism in the reports, there is no denying the severity of the problems and impending consequences involved. Nevertheless, the studies ignore the appreciable efforts made by peasants on their own to conserve resources and to control their own micro-environments. Indeed, the studies suggest, at least by omission, that improper traditional agricultural practices are as much to blame as government neglect for the problems in question.

I hope to show more fully in subsequent studies that intensive cultivation and micro-holdings do not by themselves – not necessarily anyway – promote natural degradation and environmental instability. Intensive cultivation is compatible with environmentally responsible resource use and agricultural practices. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of peasant agronomy in the *ensete* ecology, in contrast to the cereal complex of northern or western Ethiopia, is its greater sensitivity to the environment and its more refined approach to natural resource use. Wollaita is not the best illustrative proof of this, although what peasants here lack by way of sophistication in soil control they more than make up by their skilled cropping practices. Some of the peasants in the southern parts of the *ensete* zone have long practiced sophisticated irrigation and water conservation techniques, skillful terracing and effective natural yield improvement methods; these, together with their broad botanical knowledge have enabled them to exploit their environment to its full extent without exhausting its potential. Some have in fact argued that scarcity of land and high population pressure in the Gamo highlands, the site of their study, was a stimulus to the development of greater environmental sensitivity and higher conservation skills among the peasantry (Hallpike 1970, Jackson 1970, Jackson et al. 1969). Experiences in other parts of Africa show too that scarcity of resources and unfavourable environmental conditions stimulate peasant adaptive capabilities (Johnson and Anderson 1988).

Robert Chambers (1983) has forcefully pointed out that the rural poor are invisible, but I find some of his arguments not quite convincing. The question to ask is: invisible to whom? to their fellow peasants? to rural researchers? to visiting agents of donor organizations? or to functionaries of the state? It is true that the poor may not be visible, not all of them at least, to over-night tourists or slick city boys. It may also be true that state bureaucrats or donor agents,

who are not keen to find out what the real conditions in the countryside are in the first place, will certainly not see the poor. But to say this is to say the obvious. To the keen observer, poverty is conspicuous. To begin with, the absolutely destitute, those on the perilous margins of subsistence, make it their business to be visible: beggars, the homeless, and those who live by charity and alms forcefully present themselves to any visitor because this is their mode of earning a living. Secondly, a brief visit to a rural village is enough to reveal wealth differences at a glance: there are those who live in fine houses (fine by the standard of the community) and those who live in hovels. A little closer examination of the everyday life conditions of the same village will show that poverty is there for all to see. In Wollaita for example, as in many other rural communities, to own and maintain a horse is prestigious, and horses are frequently decked out and displayed on festive, ritual or ceremonial occasions (see Essay 2). A horse owner here is much like the owner of an expensive car in the West, and a display of horses on these or other occasions in front of a person's home will tell a lot about the status of that person. These examples could be multiplied, but the point in brief is this: poverty is hidden only from those who do not wish to see it.

There is a sense in which Chambers' point is valid, however. The poor are not often organized, least of all around issues central to their needs. They are far less equipped to articulate their grievances and their interests, and for that reason development initiatives may often make their condition worse than it was before. In a survey of formal rural organizations in sixteen countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, FAO found that the rural poor are the least involved in farmers' unions, cooperatives and community development organizations (FAO 1979). My own findings and those of others on the other hand show that the poor are active in informal grass-roots structures such as mutual support networks, welfare associations and savings and loan clubs (March and Taqqu 1986). These, however, are the least likely to attract support programmes from government or donor agencies. But these are picayune matters, the real issue in the final analysis is not really visibility or invisibility but rather class interest and class bias which inform development planning and reform management, and which relegate the needs of the poor to a marginal status (see Kohli 1987 for the Indian experience on this).

I propose to argue – partially in this study, more fully later – that the rural poor are both resilient and vulnerable. The vulnerability of the poor is obvious, and some of the factors which exacerbate this condition are discussed in the essays in this study. The resilience of the poor stems from three sources: their greater self-exploitation through a more active engagement in economic and income generating activities; their greater exploitation of social relationships

(both inter- and intra-class), and of the ethic of communal cooperation; and, their greater investment in custom and tradition. I shall view poverty in an active setting (and the poor as active agents), and coping with it not just as an economic struggle but as a social and cultural one as well.

Let me briefly sketch some of the concepts and problems I hope to examine more fully in my later work. I shall begin with the nature of economic relations in Wollaita and my conceptualization of these relations.

There has been considerable debate among students of Third World peasantries about the nature and logic of peasant production, and the underlying relationships among groups or individuals in rural communities. The major controversy has centered around the question of whether peasants operate within a *market* economy, *political* economy or *moral* economy. The market economy school argues that economic relations in rural communities today are based on impersonal market forces, on individual decision-making and risk-taking, and on the logic of maximizing material gains and benefits. Peasants in other words are said to operate within a capitalist framework and are subject to the same laws as those governing capitalist enterprises. A variant of this approach views peasants as commodity producers engaged primarily in *commodity* economy and subordinated to the forces of international capital that operate in the wider world. Peasants are petty capitalists who exploit others as well as themselves (Bernstein 1979).

The political economy school accepts the capitalist nature of peasant economy but goes on further to examine agrarian class relations and state/peasant interactions. Popkin (1979), a strong advocate of this school, has insisted that peasants are rational decision-makers, in the capitalist sense of the term, and are far more likely to be guided by "precise and well-defined" contractual relationships in all their economic activities. Each peasant is primarily engaged in the task of raising and improving his/her standard of well-being, and peasant villages, he contends, are "best viewed as (capitalist) corporations, not communes" (Popkin, 1979 : 4).

Popkin has been quite critical of the moral economy approach associated, for example, with the early works of James C. Scott (1976). The moral economists stress that social and economic relationships among peasants do not often follow the capitalist logic and are instead informed by a strong sense of reciprocity, mutual support and cooperation. While they accept social differentiation within peasant communities they contend that class relations are frequently mediated by socially-accepted norms and moral values which stress common welfare and the minimization of risk and hardship to community members. Communities also have mechanisms – some effective and some not–

for the redistribution of wealth which operate through traditional systems of labour exchange, pooling of capital and support to the poor and the needy.

I contend that in the context of Wollaita, the concept of 'village as corporation' or 'capitalist peasant' is hard to sustain. Peasants in fact are not tied exclusively to the logic of one form of economy or another; in practice they are more flexible and more opportunistic, making use of market or non-market opportunities depending on their needs and the benefits involved at each particular occasion. At the same time, however, and in contrast to the proponents of market economy, I consider peasant villages more like communes, and the economic interests of individuals, far from being independent, are intertwined with the social, cultural and moral. Economic decisions, I shall argue, are frequently informed by socio-cultural values. Peasants operate within a broadly conceived dual economy without this duality being dichotomous or mutually exclusive.

I shall view rural poverty in Wollaita in the framework of what I wish to call *cultural economy*, as well as market economy, the latter significantly modified by the former. Cultural economy is similar in several respects to the concept of moral economy – it recognizes reciprocal relations and interactions as important elements – but contends that it is not morality alone but also mutual self-interest which is the binding force in economic relations. Cultural economy refers to those norms (some moral and some not) which create inter-dependency among peasants and which are embedded in the tradition, communal ethic and social institutions of peasant society. These norms inform economic interaction and provide the poor opportunities for survival and viability. Cultural economy recognizes social differentiation but views relations among the groups involved both as a relation of 'exploitation' (in the narrow sense of the word) and of mutual benefit.

In rural Wollaita reciprocal relations based on mutual self interest often bind the rich and the poor, creating a form of symbiosis allowing for shared benefits. In Bolosso, prosperity is gained not only through access to more land but frequently through the acquisition of more livestock. Someone is considered wealthy if he (rarely she) has a large herd of cattle, and such a person is expected to hold public rites when the size of his herd reaches such magical numbers as one hundred or one thousand. Nowadays a person with a hundred head of cattle is considered exceptional, and I met only one peasant in Bolosso who had recently reached this figure and who had held a ceremonial to mark the occasion. Given the shortage of land and pasture in the district, an owner with more than six to ten head of cattle has no choice but to redistribute his animals among peasants (often poor peasants) who agree to their upkeep for certain benefits. The benefits may include manure (an important asset), and a share of the milk,

dairy products or off-spring from the cattle under their care, depending on the original agreement. Such 'contract' arrangements are eagerly sought by the poor since they stand to gain and to make up critical deficiencies. More examples of such reciprocal interactions, including among women, the poorest sector of rural society here, are given in Essay 1.

I noted earlier that in Wollaita poverty may be identified in part by insufficiency of assets, especially traction power and land. I now wish to suggest that endowment may be a better measure of poverty. By endowment I include not just physical assets but also labour, and such intangibles as skill, initiative and industriousness. The profile of a household will often indicate at a glance how well or badly it is endowed. A household headed by a woman, or one consisting solely of the elderly, will often be seriously constrained even if it has access to sufficient land. As discussed below, there are a variety of cooperative arrangements for acquiring access to farm oxen and land in Bolosso, and while the poor in general may not always be the most to benefit by it, the industrious poor have greater opportunities here than their less active colleagues. One may thus say that a condition for escaping chronic poverty in Wollaita is favourable endowments in intangible assets.

One of the questions we discussed with peasants in several parts of Bolosso was their attitude to the rich and the poor, and what came out of the discussions was significant because it revealed peasants' own valuations of personal endowment. The lucky few who were thought to be prosperous were viewed with respect tinged with envy; they were admired for having attained material security which was ranked high above everything else, but also feared and resented for the power they were believed to have acquired along with personal wealth. Power here meant more influence over others, more of whom were drawn to them for a variety of economic reasons. The poor, on the other hand, elicited peasants' sympathies for their hardship but not their respect. Indeed, they were frequently looked down upon, and considered unworthy because of their condition. A poor man is blamed for having brought hardship on his children and his family, and is scorned for being chronically dependent on others, and for being engaged in activities of low esteem. Many peasants were quick to point out disapprovingly that a poor peasant is one who sends his wife out to work. The often unexpressed sentiment was that the poor were failures because they lacked not so much material assets, although this was not considered unimportant, as human/moral virtues such as initiative, frugality, steadfastness, and shrewd manipulation of available opportunities.

In a poor household every one works (everyone, that is, capable of working) to support the family, whereas in more prosperous homes women (and on occasions children because they are sent to school) are relieved of all but

domestic labour. The most frequent sources of cash income for the poor come from petty trade, gathering and selling firewood and grass, and such items of home industry as craft products, and food and beverages. Poor women are active in all these activities. In recent years, Food for Work (FFW) has provided employment opportunities for the needy in many parts of Wollaita. In Bolosso, about half the daily labourers employed on FFW schemes were at one time women. FFW has been well received by women who often argue that more of them and fewer men should be employed in the schemes. In short, poor women are active in all areas of income generation, and provide an independent source of income for the family and for themselves. In consequence, they are more assertive and have a greater say in the home than their more prosperous counter-parts. It may seem paradoxical, but poverty in this setting appears to promote some degree of women's independence and of gender equality. While the evidence is not quite complete, there is reason to believe that men's disapproval of working wives stems from what they regard as the danger of women assuming a stronger position in the household.

On the other hand, a poor male peasant is more likely to seek another woman for a second (or sometimes a third) wife, and if this woman is a widow owning land in her own right, the new marriage will augment the family income. While not always the case, polygyny in circumstances such as this may serve as a mechanism for coping with poverty, and may be considered an element of cultural economy (but see Essay 2 for a different interpretation).

Does coping with destitution give rise to loss of self-esteem on the part of the poor, as is sometimes claimed in the literature? This is a question that should be considered carefully, because the subjective and emotive nature of the issue leaves a good deal of room for misconceptions and misunderstandings. There is of course nothing ennobling or uplifting about destitution, and the poor are more conscious of this than others. Moreover, survival strategies may lead the poor to engage in income earning activities which may be viewed with low esteem by their fellow peasants, but that does not necessarily translate into loss of self-respect on the part of the lowly. In fact, the poor frequently make up for their poverty in their imagination by means of positive and occasionally highly flattering self-valuations (see Dessalegn 1990). One should therefore make a distinction between loss of self-esteem and loss of social esteem, the latter occasioned by the response of one's neighbours to one's acts of survival. It is in the latter sense that the question is significant to this study. In Wollaita, poverty brings with it the threat of loss of social esteem, and the poor seek to reassert their worth through greater cultural integration (Essay 2).

Notes

1. The first essay is a revised version of a consultancy report prepared in 1990 for Redd Barna-Ethiopia (Addis Ababa), the Norwegian Save the Children Foundation which has been engaged in relief and rehabilitation activities in Bolosso since 1984.
I would like to thank Redd Barna, Oslo, for providing me funds for a research visit to the U.S. in the summer of 1991.
Here and in Essay 1 Ethiopian authors are listed by first name.
2. Until it was abolished in 1986, the administrative division of the country was three-tiered. The lowest administrative unit was the woreda, which I have rendered here as district; several woredas made up an awraja (sub-province), and several awrajas in turn made up a kifle-hagger or province. Thus Bolosso was a woreda in Wollaita awraja which was a part of Sidamo province. In this study I shall keep to the old administrative boundaries for convenience and to avoid confusing the reader.
3. The basic needs approach to poverty, which was a fad for a short while in the 1980s, now seems to have run out of steam. It was to begin with an unworkable model because it lacked, among many other things, precision and consistency (see Wisner 1989 for the literature).

References

- Berg, R. and J. Whitaker (eds.) 1986, *Strategies for African Development*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bernstein, H. 1979, African Peasantries: A Theoretical Framework, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6, 4:421-43.
- Campbell, J. 1991, Land or Peasants? The Dilemma Confronting Ethiopian Resource Conservation, *African Affairs*, 90: 5-21.
- Chambers, Robert 1983, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. London: Heinemann.
- _____ et al. (eds.) 1981, *Seasonal Dimensions to Rural Poverty*. London: Francis Pinter.
- Dessalegn Rahmato 1991, *Famine and Survival Strategies: A Case Study from Northeast Ethiopia*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.
- _____ 1990, Famine in Peasant Consciousness. In Proceedings of the Fifth Seminar of the History Department, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa.
- El-Ghonemy, M.R. 1990, *The Political Economy of Rural Poverty. The Case of Land Reform*. London: Routledge.
- FAO 1986, *The Dynamics of Rural Poverty*. Rome: FAO.
- _____ 1979, *Participation of the Poor in Rural Organizations*. Prepared by B. van Heck. Rome: FAO.
- Gill, G.J. 1991, *Seasonality and Agriculture in the Developing World. A Problem of the Poor and Powerless*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Griffith, K. 1977, *Land Concentration and Rural Poverty*. London: Macmillan.
- Hallpike, C.R. 1970, Konso Agriculture, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, VIII, 1: 31-43.
- Hill, Polly 1972, *Rural Hausa: A Village and a Setting*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- IDS Bulletin 1986, *Seasonality and Poverty*, 17, 3.
- Illife, John 1987, *The African Poor, A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ILO 1988, *Rural Employment Promotion*. Geneva: ILO.

- Johnson, D.H. and D.M. Anderson (eds.) 1988, *The Ecology of Survival: Case Studies from Northeast African History*. London: Lester Crook.
- Kabeer, Naila 1991, Gender Dimensions of Rural Poverty: Analysis from Bangladesh. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18, 2: 241-62.
- Kohli, Atul 1987, *The State and Poverty in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipton, Michael 1988, The Poor and the Poorest. *World Bank Discussion Paper 25*. Washington, D.C., World Bank.
- _____ 1985, Land Assets and Rural Poverty. *Staff Working Paper 744*, Washington, D.C., World Bank.
- _____ 1983, Poverty, Undernutrition and Hunger. *Staff Working Paper 597*, Washington, D.C., World Bank.
- March, K. and R. Taqqu 1986, *Women's Informal Associations in Developing Countries*. Boulder: Westview.
- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)/FAO 1984-1987, *Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Studies (series)*. Addis Ababa: MoA.
- Mook, Joyce (ed.) 1986, *Understanding Africa's Rural Households and Farming Systems*. Boulder: Westview.
- Palmer, R. and N. Parsons (eds.) 1977, *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*. London: Heinemann.
- Popkin, Samuel 1979, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Saith, A. 1990, Development Strategies and the Rural Poor, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 17,2: 171-204.
- Scott, James 1976, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sender, J. and S. Smith 1990, *Poverty, Class, and Gender in Rural Africa*. London: Routledge.
- Srinivasan, T.N. and P.K. Bardhan (eds.) 1988, *Rural Poverty in South Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Timberlake, L. 1985, *Africa in Crisis: The Causes, the Cures of Environmental Bankruptcy*. London: Earthscan.
- Wisner, B. 1989, *Power and Need in Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- World Bank 1986, *Poverty and Hunger: Issues and Options for Food Security in Developing Countries*. Washington, D.C., World Bank.

Essay 1: The Framework of Rural Poverty

The Framework: Resource Flow System

The framework we have chosen for the study attempts to provide a systemic picture of peasant society's struggle for existence. The resource flow system's approach regards everyday forms of peasant survival as essential to the understanding of the socio-economic condition and potential of rural society. The flow of resources among peasant households, and between peasant households and outsiders, goes on all the time, and in each case some lose and others gain. On the other hand, the peasant household itself is both a production and consumption unit, and what it produces, allocates and consumes constitutes on a micro level a resource flow system, also involving losses and gains.

A resource is any asset, product or service that when invested, exchanged or consumed, provides the household's livelihood and growth potential. Resources gained will improve the household's growth potential, while resources lost will depress it. Under normal circumstances all rural households have some resources and therefore participate in the flow system of their community. Households with absolutely no resources – i.e. no physical and human assets – are absolutely destitute and hence on the threshold of disaster. It is this group which is first victimized during a crisis. Some households have more resources than others, and consequently they are relatively more viable than the rest.

The flow pattern in the system may be likened to a circuit with its point of origin at the point of production. For the purposes of this study the system is broken down into three spheres or sectors consisting of Production, Resource Allocation and Consumption. Each sphere is further broken down into sub-sectors, the main ones being the following:

Production:

- Land Resources and Land Allocation
- Human Resource Allocation
- Cropping Practices and Land-Use
- Rural Policies
- Resource Reproduction.

Resource Allocation:

- Obligations: External, Communal and Household
- Marketing
- Resource Flow from Outside.

Consumption:

Food Management
Communal Values

These three sectors are inter-connected in a dynamic manner, and what happens in one will have a significant bearing on the other. The circuit links each sector so that decisions made in anticipation of gains or losses in one sector are arrived at after careful consideration of the probable consequences in the others. The household in fact does not often make decisions on a sectoral basis; on the contrary, it is systemic in its approach. That is to say, it weighs the gains and losses that will eventually result as the consequences of the decisions work their way through each of the sectors and through the whole circuit.

An example of the dynamic inter-connection of the sectors is suggested in the following scenario. Suppose a community's harvest in a given season is low. This means that a household has less surplus to market. Marketing activity will take place nevertheless, though on a reduced level, because the household has to meet its basic obligations. Food production decline will of course drive up food prices and depress the prices of other agricultural goods as well as of labour. In an open economic system, this will encourage food flows from other areas. But the higher prices paid means that it will be outsiders who stand to benefit; the food deficit community will lose. If the food production decline has been significant the household will consume less, which may lead to further production decline in the next season. In this situation the household's production plans for the next season will emphasize its consumption requirements more than its market-earned income requirements. This will mean the choice of a particular crop mix.

Using this resource flow approach we can distinguish between a resilient and a vulnerable food production system. A resilient food production system is one in which adverse changes in one sector are either compensated by positive changes in the other sectors, or where the other sectors suffer minimal losses. A vulnerable system in contrast is one where a loss in one sector leads to corresponding losses in the others. In the example given above, households in a resilient system will attempt to counter the adverse effects of food production decline by switching to alternative sources of food, by earning income from

non-farm activities, and by selective and careful marketing of live or non-food assets. Households in a vulnerable system will not be able to do this and will therefore suffer significant losses. The advantages of the resource flow approach are that it enables us to examine the points at which resource losses occur, and the reasons why they do so. Resource losses occur for a variety of reasons: because of the inherent weakness of the production system itself; because of state policies; because of external, communal and household obligations; and, finally because of social practice. Once we determine the critical points where significant losses that erode the resilience of the system occur we can identify the kind of interventions that will enable the system to be more viable and to stabilize itself in times of crisis.

Rural Poverty in Bolosso: The Main Indicators

Bolosso is a land of micro peasants and micro enterprises. It is one of the most densely settled areas in the country, and the shortage of agricultural land, a serious problem in the past, has now become a critical one. All the indications are that the area (which until the recent administrative restructuring was one of Wollaita's bigger woredas) has been suffering increasing poverty in the last couple of decades. The intensification of rural poverty – an experience not unique to Bolosso – has largely been the result of shortage of resources, the inability of the agricultural system to accommodate high population pressure, poor state policies, and lack of alternative sources of employment and income.

Bolosso is not a drought or famine prone area. As a general rule, the ensete ecological zone, of which Bolosso is a part, has experienced fewer food crises than other zones in the country. One of the questions we put to peasants during our field work was what they knew of the history of social and natural disasters in the area. Almost all peasants remembered large scale epidemics which killed a lot of people, many of which had occurred in their own life time. The major epidemics, caused by outbreaks of small-pox, typhus and cholera, were said to have occurred in the 1930s, 40s and 60s. They had only vague stories to tell about serious famines which they associated with events at the turn of the century. Many of these peasants suggested that growing, visible poverty for a majority of peasants may have began in the 1950s. This might be an indication of peasant consciousness of population pressure.

The specific elements of rural poverty change from one social setting to another. What is common in most cases, however, is that poor households have low assets, low income, and engage in low risk activities which have a low rate of return (Lipton 1985, IDS Bulletin 1989). The low asset base of the poor makes them vulnerable, and they thus have to engage in far more activities than

the well to do peasant to reduce their vulnerability. These activities include marketing, wage employment where available, collecting resources (eg. firewood, cattle feed, wild food, etc.) from communal areas, and participating in traditional social organizations. The poor are thus not passive or inactive, although how active they can be is conditioned by economic opportunities and the characteristics of the household composition.

An asset is often expressed in physical terms, the most important of which for our purposes is land, livestock and disposable household goods. But the poor also possess human assets which is expressed in labour power, and, in what I call "investments in tradition". I shall return to this latter point further down. The characteristics of the poor are: a) they are landless or own insufficient land; b) they have few disposable assets; c) they have large families often of non-working age; or alternately the families are headed by women; d) the main income earner and/or important members of the family may suffer from poor health; e) they are often illiterate; f) they tend to be exploited in employment or in traditional economic schemes; g) they are often in debt.

The causes of poverty are not always the same, and there are thus varieties of poverty. There are poor peasants who are in this condition because they have reached the end of their life cycle formations, ie., they are old and their children have either left for the towns seeking employment or set up their own households in the community. Such households will remain poor under almost all circumstances. Secondly, there are households which are poor because the bread winner is in poor health, or because they are headed by women. Such households may not be lacking assets but the assets are shared with others because women are handicapped in agricultural work. Thirdly there are the active or industrious poor whose main handicap is the lack of assets.

There is relatively greater concentration of poverty in Bolosso than in many other regions of the country, but the degree of poverty here is not overly different from that found elsewhere. This is a point worth noting because comparisons based on visual impressions tend to suggest a different conclusion. The greater concentration of population here together with micro-plot holdings reveal existing poverty levels far more easily than in other settings.

An indicator of poverty is land ownership. Land in Bolosso is an extremely scarce asset. Some 47% of peasants in our sample survey reported possessing land measuring less than 1/2 (half) a hectare, and 67% below 1 hectare. The great majority of peasants are thus micro-holders. A few peasants, 5% of our sample, could be considered large holders: their possessions measured between 2 and 3 hectares. If we take into account the fact that some of the land worked by peasants is marginal land, particularly in Bombe where the land is poorer and rainfall is inadequate, the seriousness of the land factor as a critical

bottleneck to household viability becomes obvious. On the other hand, peasant agriculture here is based on intensive cultivation which helps overcome the constraints of land shortage. Because of this, and the nature of the farm system in the area, mini-holdings do not necessarily imply acute poverty.

Another indicator of poverty is livestock possession. Some 56% of respondents said they owned no livestock; the figures for those who had no cows and no farm oxen were 41% and 56% respectively. This may be used as a rough indication of the level of destitution in Bolosso. Livestock ownership in the cereal zone of the country, such as Wollo for example, is higher. The national figure for peasants who do not own oxen was 38% in 1983/84, and for Wollo 30% (MoA 1984: 123). Livestock ownership however may not be a good indicator of poverty levels in Bolosso, or Wollaita in general. Peasants here are more involved in livestock marketing activities than their counterparts elsewhere, and a household's live asset base changes constantly. Secondly, the practice of co-rearing and share-rearing of livestock (discussed below), is quite common, and this tends to hide ownership levels. In our case, there was an added element which may have distorted the figures. Peasants knew that the survey was being carried out for Redd Barna-Ethiopia (RB-E), and they may have under-reported their possessions.

A better indicator of rural poverty is what I wish to call the household dependency profile. This is a composite picture involving adult male landlessness, female dependency, and labour power in the household. The household dependency ratio (i.e. the number of male and child dependents in a household as a ratio of the total population) is very high. According to our findings, 7% of the adult population is landless, and lives as household dependents. This figure actually underestimates the real magnitude of landlessness in the survey areas because it does not include the landless who are not registered with the Peasant Associations (PAs); our sample of peasants was taken from PA registers. If this is taken into account, the figure could rise to 12 to 15%. Landlessness will be a growing problem, and there is reason to believe that it has become a serious problem in the last decade or so.

Women dependency in the household is also a serious problem. Women dependency means adult women 18 years and over who do not go to school but live in a household as dependent members. Our findings were that women dependency made up 13% of the adult population in our sample. These women were often in old age, and closely related to one of the spouses of the household; they were often mothers, aunts and sisters without husbands and without assets.

If we add the 7% male landless to the figure for women dependents we have a total dependency figure of 20%. This is a very high figure compared to other areas.

The increasing shortage of land and other physical resources means greater male and female dependency, and greater household "enburdenment". Women suffer more than men here because of their weakened position in the competition for resources. This will also mean greater vulnerability for children. The greater household enburdenment places considerable stress on all members because it means more mouths to feed, less ability to save, and more intra-household conflict. On the other hand, there may be a positive aspect to it in that some women in the family will be able to become less burdened with domestic labour and may become more involved in income earning activities. More women in the house will also mean that children will not be left uncared for during busy times, market days, etc.

The size of the household does also indicate what potentials it has or what pressures it is subjected to. About one quarter of the households in our sample had a live-in population (ie. all persons that live in the same house) of between 9 to 11 persons each; some 8% had over 12 each. The smallest households, i.e. those which had 3 to 5 persons each made up only 20% of the total. This means that a majority are under severe pressure and over-crowded. The health hazards, especially for children, are quite serious. Congested living space provides the ideal ground for communicable diseases.

The age composition of the household is also another indicator of what pressures are at work on the family. I have divided the population in my sample into three groups: vulnerable population (i.e. persons aged below 10 years), youngsters (between 10 to 17), and adults (18 and over). The composition of these groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Household Composition

Total Population		Below 10	10 - 17	18 + Above
No.	1956	806	444	706
%	100	41	23	36

The vulnerable population is the largest group in our sample. These are also persons whose contribution to the viability of the household by providing labour power and/or earned income is the lowest. The most vulnerable group, i.e. children below the age of 5, makes up 18% of the total population. The second group – i.e. those between 10 - 17 years of age – is also important to consider. Persons in this group will soon want to establish their own households. They will then demand land and will need agricultural assets, without which most of them will stay dependent on other households.

The figure for women headed households in our survey (5%) is just about the same as the figures provided in PA registers. Women headed households are relatively fewer here than in many parts of Wollo (see Dessalegn 1987 for Wollo). The reasons for this may be that there is in Bolosso the practice of polygyny, and because divorced women have less chances of obtaining land in their own right. The burden of women-headed households is that they rely on others to farm their land, and this arrangement – known as *kotta* – involves sharing the harvest equally with the man who works it.

Polygyny is common in Bolosso as well as Wollaita. In our survey, 39% of peasant household heads were found to have two or more wives. There is some evidence that the practice has been growing in the last two decades. According to Wollaita Agricultural Development Unit (WADU) sources (1976A), only 8.2% of male household heads in Bolosso had more than one wife in the early 1970s. The connection between polygyny and growing landlessness, or growing poverty is difficult to establish. Most of my peasant informants in Bolosso insisted that marrying more than one wife did not have direct economic benefits; on the contrary, they pointed out that polygamous husbands were often more burdened than others.

In many cases, it is relatively poor peasants who are involved in polygamous marriages, but in the end the situation may lead to loss of resources and impoverishment. At present polygyny's significance is prestige for the husbands (distress for the wives), and more children, which may be a form of insurance in old age for the men. On the other hand, women married to polygamous husbands have to be more economically active to maintain their households as the husband's income is shared with several co-wives. Women in polygamous marriages are, as a rule, poorer than women in single marriages.

Illiteracy among household heads is difficult to gauge, but it is quite widespread, although a good number of our respondents (41%) reported that they have participated in the government's literacy programmes. Interestingly enough, many of our illiterate respondents wished to have their children attending school. Of the school age children in our survey (aged 7 to 12), some 22% are attending school. This figure is higher than the national average for rural areas, and shows peasants are aware of the value of education and are willing to invest in the future of their children.

Poor households tend to be exploited or are economically taken advantage of by others for a variety of reasons. Because they do not possess the necessary farm assets like oxen, tools, seeds or even good health, they have their land rented to others on *kotta* arrangements. This arrangement is quite widespread in Bolosso (about 37% of our respondents had resorted to it the previous season) and is the basis of survival for many families.

Kotta is not exactly an equitable system; though the harvest is shared equally between the user and the owner of the land, the cost of any input, for e.g. fertilizer, is taken out before the sharing is done. Very often the user of the land inflates his costs in order to benefit himself. Nevertheless, it is the best alternative available for poor households such those headed by women, or those where there is no active labour force available. The alternative to *kotta* is to leave the land uncultivated. This alternative is often not the choice of the land owner but may be imposed on him or her if the land is poor and/or if it is too small and uneconomic to farm. Repeated leasing of land to others will lead to the loss of decision making power over the land, and to greater dependency on others, and this is the case with many peasants in our survey area. Thus the poor here are not only asset-less but also dependent on others economically and socially.

The poor are more often in debt than others. Borrowing from others is a common practice in Bolosso, and many peasants (including not so needy ones) resort to it to cover their household expenses as well as to meet their obligations. In a majority of cases, peasants borrow from each other and the money lender does not have a significant presence here. Friends and relatives, and frequently a well-to-do neighbour are the sources of credit for most peasants. That it is the poorer ones who borrow more is indicated by what the money is used for. Table 2 gives a break-down of the reasons respondents gave for borrowing money.

Table 2 - Reasons for Borrowing (%)

Reasons	% Response
Food & Hhd Exp.	40
Pay Tax	13
Pub. Contributions	16
Customary Obligations	16
Other	15
Total	100

The prevalence of borrowing (48% of our respondents said they had borrowed money recently) should not be seen as an indication of acute poverty because borrowing is quite common here. To get a good picture of the scale of indebtedness we should include peasant indebtedness to state authorities (the local extension office, the Service Cooperatives or SCs, etc.). About a third of our peasants said they were indebted to the state. For most peasants the amount of borrowing or debt ranged from small (less than 50 Birr) to medium (between 50 to 100). For us the peasants who should be considered as having serious debt burdens are those who have borrowed and also are indebted to the state (20% of our sample), and those with debts to the state only (14%). Needless to say,

the scale of indebtedness rises in times of hardships, and falls off gradually in times of favourable conditions.

Peasant society in Bolosso consists of individuals with different levels of income and of physical assets. The differentiation of the peasantry here is less marked than in some other areas, and in the last dozen or so years the gap between the poor and the well-to-do has narrowed. There is a general levelling down of possessions and of income partly due to the land reform and the government's rural policy (see Dessalegn 1985), and partly due to family fragmentation. We had a series of group discussions with peasants in the survey areas on the question of peasant differentiation, and while there was no consensus on who was a rich or poor peasant we were able to draw up a picture based on common points raised in these discussions.

The well-to-do peasant here may have one or more pairs of farm oxen, land measuring 2 hectares or more, and about a dozen or more heads of cattle. In addition, he has cash in hand of between 300 to 400 Birr. Such peasants may benefit from lending money to others, and frequently, the more enterprising of them double up as either livestock or grain traders. "Rich" peasant households probably constitute 10% of all households in Bolosso.

The middle peasant is someone with 1/2 or 1 pair of oxen, up to 1 hectare of land, and seeds and other necessities for his farm. He may possess a few heads of cattle, and several sheep and goats. He may have, at one point or other, disposable cash income of up to 200 Birr which he uses to buy young cattle either for the market or for himself. The middle peasant is often active, working other people's land on *kotta* arrangements, involving himself in trade, and raising cattle for the market. Between 33 and 40% of the peasantry in Bolosso may fall in this category. Group discussions emphasized two aspects of the middle peasant: his industriousness and the fact that he is self sufficient and not dependent on others. Poor peasants constitute at least 50% of the rural population. These are peasants with no work stock, no cattle, with perhaps one or two sheep and goats, and very small land. They often depend on others to farm their land, and the income thus acquired is insufficient for their basic needs.

It is hard to estimate annual income levels in Bolosso, or other rural areas. A rough estimate of the median cash income of a peasant household in Admancho, for instance – Admancho is slightly better off than Bombe – would be between 150 and 250 Birr per year. This is far below income levels in Arssi, reportedly the most prosperous province with average rural household income of 939 Birr, and Wollo, one of the least prosperous, with 306 Birr per year (MoA 1984:121).

Food Security and Family Well-being. It is obvious that improvements in family income will lead to improvements in family well-being, which in turn

will help reduce household vulnerability. More income for men and women will mean more and better nutrition in the family. The poor are often defined by their spending habits: more than 80% of their income is said to be spent on food (Lipton 1983). Any incremental income they earn will be used to purchase food and food sources. Peasants in our survey who had recently sold some livestock said that the most important reason for the sale was to purchase food and cover household expenses (see also Table 2 above).

It may be instructive here to briefly recall the experiences of the WADU, which was active in Bolosso and other parts of Wollaita for over a decade until it was closed down in 1984. This World Bank funded agency's main task was to promote a comprehensive development programme in Wollaita. The chief element of WADU's project was the improvement of agricultural production through a wide variety of extension and support services. These latter included promoting peasant consumption of modern inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds, and pesticides through credit programmes, the promotion of cooperatives, and training of peasants to use better agricultural practices. Other major elements of the agency's programme emphasized land conservation through bund building, gully control and rehabilitation of vulnerable soils. This involved large scale afforestation. Finally, livestock breeding and protection, and infrastructure building (rural access roads, water development, etc.) were also included.

After the first phase of operations (when the programme had reached more than 20 thousand households), WADU realized that while the potential for improvement in peasant agriculture was considerable the potential for *development* of rural Wollaita society was very limited (see MoA 1973, Vol. I and II). Wollaita was a food deficit area, and would remain in deficit for a long period of time even with WADU's programmes fully operational. The scope for increased family income, and increased employment outside agriculture was very limited. High population pressure, and severe land shortage provided little room for rural development in the broad sense of the term.

WADU therefore believed that it had to set its sights on limited goals and limited achievements. It consequently sought to actively promote increased production of crops both to improve peasant consumption and family cash income. This was to be achieved not through the modernization of peasant production but through improved cultural practices. Peasant agriculture would not be significantly changed, and modernization involving high technology would not be considered. The aim was to apply green technology techniques on a limited basis.

WADU was actually aiming at promoting food security in Wollaita as a development objective. Better consumption would lead to a healthier

population. The agency was of the opinion that there was sufficient room to raise agricultural production needed for consumption purposes but that the scope for expansion of cash crop production, and hence raising peasant income, was limited. The main source of cash income was to come from raising cotton, coffee, chillies, and haricot beans, but land scarcity was a serious constraint.

WADU's planned development of consumption crops involved expanding production of grain crops and reducing production of ensete and other root crops. The agency felt that improvements in peasant diet would come from greater consumption of grain crops and reduced consumption of root crops. It wanted to discourage tuber crop production therefore for dietary health as well as economic reasons. Less tubers grown would release land for grain and cash crop production. Increased income for the family was to come from cash crop production, but the potential for increased income through this means was limited. Its projected plan for the period 1974-1994, with WADU fully operational (with a five yearly budget of US\$ 13.3 million), was that net incremental income per household would reach about 300 Ethiopian dollars (Eth. \$) per year by the end of the plan period. This was based on some heroic assumptions: that there would not be dramatic increases in prices of agricultural inputs and services, and that peasant holdings will not deteriorate in quality or in size.

By 1980, more than half the population of Wollaita was participating in WADU programmes. In the area of land conservation, road building, promotion of modern inputs, WADU's achievements were considerable. In terms of its main objectives, however, i.e., raising agricultural production, and promoting food security, the results were disappointing. Bolosso and other areas in Wollaita remained food deficit, family income became depressed, and rural poverty did not decline but grew instead. Part of the reason had to do with events that WADU planners did not anticipate, viz., the revolution, and the damaging rural policies that accompanied it.

The failure of WADU was that it was too optimistic and that it underestimated the seriousness of the problems facing rural Wollaita. While peasants here are hard working, industrious and receptive to new ideas, they remain burdened by a rigid farming system which reproduced mini-enterprises and mini-fundia. This system originally evolved to meet the problems of land shortage and population pressure, but over the years its disadvantages came to outweigh its advantages. The major elements of the system are miniscule holdings, intensive and continuous cultivation giving rise to soil depletion, and decreasing productivity. WADU did not seriously consider promoting alternative farming systems in Wollaita but limited itself to providing support to farmers to enable them to overcome some of the weaknesses of the system.

The main elements of WADU support involved improved agricultural practices, but these practices did not have a significant impact on crop production.

WADU's experiences hold a good lesson for all: the task of promoting development in Bolosso is immense; it will require vast resources, and will take several decades to achieve.

A more modest goal, one which is more realistic to plan for is the promotion of Food Security. Bolosso will remain a food deficit area for a long time, and most peasants here will not be able to achieve food self-sufficiency on their own. This should not however be seen as a serious handicap: a community need not be in surplus, or in food balance to attain food security. Food security means that a household has access to food (grown or purchased) and will thus not be exposed to hunger or malnutrition.

In Bolosso's case, food security means: a) the ability of the peasant household to grow most of its food; and b) the ability of the same household to supplement its food requirements through the market. The promotion of food security will thus involve a modest increase in peasant disposable income. Food security will promote family well-being at the basic level, and it will serve as the building block for development programmes. Food security may best be achieved by combining subsistence agriculture with market-based agriculture; this will involve reorienting the farming system so that it becomes more market sensitive.

The Poor and Social Networks

The poor may lack physical assets but they possess human assets. A form of enhancing one's human assets is investing in tradition. The poor tend to invest in tradition more than others, are more active in customary social organizations, and observe traditional life-cycle occasions such as births, weddings, deaths, etc. more seriously. Funerals, weddings and birth celebrations involve heavy expenses. In the purely economic sense this may be wasteful because the resources spent on customary obligations will not bring any direct economic benefits. But to look at it in this way is to miss the significance of traditional organizations and practices.

By investing in tradition we mean participating actively in traditional organizations and observing customary obligations. Traditional social organizations and customary practices are forms of mutual support, and all peasants need these support networks at one time or another. For the poor peasant, mutual support networks (MSNs) are essential because they are a form of social investment, a form of security, a means by which he/she maintains a respectable status in the community, and a channel through which he/she

expresses his individuality. If the peasant does not invest in tradition he/she will have little sources of support in times of need. A poor peasant will not get a loan from a neighbour or relative, for instance, if he/she does not have a respectable social status in the community. The worst handicap in a community is not to be physically destitute but to be a social outcast. Investing in tradition thus has long term as well as short term benefits, and the poor stand to gain and thus depend on it more than others.

For men, the most important form of mutual support is *Idir*. This is the traditional association which provides support to families in times of deaths and funerals. A variation on this is the *amba*, a social organization of self support. *Amba* members come together to share work (like building a house for example), and to support a family if a member of it is sick or in distress. *Amba* also serves as a form of resource pooling: money contributed by each member is saved, and a needy peasant has access to it (in the form of a loan) in times of need. A good number of peasants in our survey said they had borrowed money from traditional institutions such as *amba*. Traditional institutions also serve as forms of security for destitute peasants. It will be easier for a poor peasant to obtain live animal loans, or loans of seed and other inputs from a well-to-do peasant if they are both members of the same traditional institution.

For women, mutual support networks (MSNs) are essential, and without them they can hardly survive. At the primary level, MSNs are work sharing or labour exchange arrangements. A group of women agree to help each other in times of high work loads such as life-cycle observations, bulk food processing occasions, etc. and thereby form a mutual network. Women's MSNs are often informal, small to medium in size, reciprocal in principle and based on equality of contributions. At the deeper level MSNs are discrete platforms for morale boosting and consciousness raising for women, as well as a means of pooling resources and acquiring low level credit opportunities. They function also as forums for the exchange of experience and of information, both of which may have economic significance. For example, information may be about market behaviour, the movement of goods and prices, etc.

The purely work-sharing aspect of women's MSNs functions at different levels. They range from pooling labour during times of need, to reciprocal arrangements for caring for children when one or more women in the group are away from the house. In Wollaita where there are great demands on women's labour due to a wide variety of ritual or religious observances and traditional feasting, women's work sharing arrangements have a dual characteristic. Some are informal while others are formal.

The informal arrangements are where support members come together during working sharing occasions. The more formal arrangements involve

special women's *idir* which are frequently organized for mourning and funeral occasions, when a bereaved family is provided food and other assistance to enable it to meet its expenses. *Idir* members may also engage in other support activities.

Women's MSNs have more overt economic functions. There are three kinds of special women's *iqoub* (*iqoubs* are traditional saving schemes): there is *iqoub* in cash, in kind, and in labour. The normal *iqoub* in cash may involve 15 to 20 women, and the money pooled on each occasion may range from 2 to 5 Birr per person. *Iqoub* in kind is often a weekly affair and may involve 8 to 15 women. Each week the women gather together with their produce, which is often fresh butter, and either by agreement or by lot one woman receives all the produce pooled. Women spinning together (or making baskets, etc.) and giving what has been produced on the occasion to each woman in turn represents the third kind of *iqoub*. In all cases, the additional income earned is used to improve the food intake of the family, for purchasing clothing for children and the women themselves, and to put aside some savings for future needs.

Other economic functions of women's MSNs include credit "services": small cash loans payable without interest but in a short period of time are often provided by the networks. Similarly, food and other consumption loans are exchanged on a regular basis. These varied forms of savings and of pooling resources provide women independent sources of income and help to extend their relative autonomy (for more discussion on Wollaita women see Dessalegn 1989).

The greater the independent income of women the more the nutritional status of the family will improve. Women tend to invest more of their earned income on the family than men. All the women interviewed in the field emphasized that a good part of the money or produce they earned in the *iqoub* schemes was used to improve the family food intake. Another purpose of the *iqoub* that was often mentioned was spending on children, mostly for clothing.

The importance of mutual support networks for both women and men cannot be underestimated. MSNs help reduce the sufferings of the poor, provide a life-line in times of crisis, and keep up the hopes of the needy. Despite widespread poverty, begging is not highly visible in Bolosso, and this may in part be the result of traditional institutions of mutual support, and a greater sense of self-esteem by the poor themselves. Many of the beggars one sees here are physically handicapped and thus unable to engage in productive work; this is not the case, for example, in the northern parts of the country.

Production, Allocation and Consumption

Rural Production

Westphal (1975) divides the country into four agro-ecological zones (or culture complexes as he calls them) of which the ensete complex is one. Bolosso is part of this ecological zone whose distinctive characteristics is that ensete and other root crops are important elements of peasant agriculture. *Ensete* (*Ensete ventricosum*) is a versatile plant, and grows best in *degga* and *woyna degga* environments. Root crops are co-staple crops and are used as sources of food, animal feed, and fuel.

Admancho and Bombe, the two Service Cooperatives where I did field work and where RB-E is working in, have land lying in all the three climatic zones of *degga*, *woyna degga*, and *qolla*. The first two zones are the most important for crop cultivation and are densely settled. The *qolla* area, situated in Bombe, has poorer soils, drier conditions, and low rainfall. Here maize and ginger are important crops. Peasants in the *qolla* zone are more vulnerable because of poor crop yield, poor plant cover (hence poor pasture), greater disease hazards, and generally unfavourable environmental conditions.

In the middle and higher altitudes the soil is considered to be good, there is more than adequate precipitation, and the growing season is long which provides good ground cover for much of the year. This explains the "green-ness" of much of Wollaita that outside observers often note.

There is some controversy as to whether land degradation has been a critical problem in Bolosso or Wollaita. As a general rule, dense settlement is a cause of degradation, and areas with high population densities (such as Bolosso) suffer from high rates of resource loss. WADU believed that soil degradation in Bolosso as well as other parts of Wollaita was very serious, and land conservation was an important component of its programme from the beginning. On the other hand, a recent study commissioned for the Ministry of Agriculture by FAO argues somewhat differently. Though Wollaita is very densely populated, the severity of the land degradation is moderate. The study argues that this is not because of widespread and effective conservation practices but rather because of the long growing season and fairly good soils which are common here. The long growing period – over 240 days in many areas – reduces the seasonal drying cycle which in turn reduces degradation (MoA/FAO, 1984: Annex 1, P. 8 ff).

The need for conservation is not an issue; the issue is whether resource degradation has had a significant impact on peasant production and crop yield.

Indigenous conservation practices here are inadequate at best and non-existent at worst. This may be because the good soils tend to retain too much water which has to be drained out by ploughing the land up and down. Intensive ploughing, which is characteristic of the farming system in Bolosso, has also contributed to land degradation. On the other hand, year round cultivation provides extended plant cover, thus reducing soil loss.

There are two distinctive elements of the agricultural system in Bolosso: peasants practice intensive farming on the one hand, and combine cereal and root crop cultivation on the other. Intensive agriculture involves sequential cropping, i.e., the harvesting of one crop is followed by the planting of another on the same plot and in the same year, and repeated working of the land. For each crop the land is ploughed several times. For maize, for example, three ploughings are done, for teff five to six ploughings, and for barley three to four. The more the land is ploughed the less weeding becomes necessary. In fact so intensely is the land worked that weeding is often unnecessary. The drawback of this is that it exposes the land to wind and water erosion because the soil has been made soft and fine by repeated ploughing.

The close combination of cereals with root crops is an important practice. The main cereals in Admancho and Bombe are maize (in some areas sorghum), teff, barley, cowpeas and soybeans, while the important root crops are ensete, sweet potato, taro, yam, Wollaita potato and Irish potato. Teff and legume crops are often marketed whereas all other crops are consumed at home.

The importance of tubers as a source of food security should not be underestimated. According to FAO sources root crops and tubers give higher yield per unit of land than many grain crops, and can provide food for a higher density of population on limited land compared to other food crops. Many tubers require little labour and can grow under a wide variety of environmental conditions. Further, tubers can easily be inter-cropped with maize and sorghum so that two harvests are obtained from a single plot.

The following is my estimate of the amount of land required to provide sufficient food for an average family of up to six persons for a year using traditional methods of cultivation. The figure for ensete is based on wider plant spacing than is currently practiced in Bolosso. It is noteworthy that on this estimate, less than 6 to 8% of the cultivated land area of Bolosso is sufficient to provide enough food from root crops to sustain the district's population.

Table 3 - Food/Land Sufficiency for Different Crops

Crops	Land (hectares)
Teff/wheat/barley	1.6 to 2.0
Maize/sorghum	1.2 to 1.8
Ensete	0.06 to 0.2
Sweet potato/other tubers	0.4 to 0.8

Source: Based in part on WADU field trials.

The farming system here may be described as follows. The land is worked intensely all year round; so severe is the shortage of land that fallowing is practiced by few peasants. Secondly, crop rotation practices do not often take into account concern for soil regeneration. Cereals are often rotated with root crops, although some peasants occasionally plant legume crops as part of the rotation cycle. The traditional practice of rotating cereals with nitrogen fixing legumes, common in other parts of the country, is not widely employed here. The main reason for this has to do with the food requirements of the peasant household. As will be shown later, combining cereals with root crops provides a greater degree of food security for the family than other cropping practices. Further, many tubers suppress weeds and thus provide weed protection. A maize plot, which frequently is not fully free of weeds is often planted with sweet potato which suppresses weeds.

The farming system here is both resilient and vulnerable. It's resilience stems from the fact that it involves greater use of available resources, and more careful cultivation. The farmer gets to know his land more intimately. The vulnerability of the system, however, is that it leads to the exhaustion of the soil – the land is worked all year round without letup – and soil regeneration practices are inadequate. Most peasants use organic fertilizer to enrich the soil, and practice mulching to reduce soil erosion. Organic fertilizer, especially manure, is a scarce commodity because livestock ownership is low.

At present, the farming system is more vulnerable because average holdings are smaller than before, the pressure on the land has significantly increased, and crop yields for most peasants are either static or declining. According to WADU sources, average yield for teff on the average peasant farm was between 5 to 8 quintals per hectare, and for maize 17 to 25 in the mid-1970s. According to Bolosso MoA sources and sources in several PAs in the two SCs, current teff yield is between 5 to 8 qn./ha, and maize yield between 12 to 18. These two sets of figures are not comparable but they provide a rough picture in the absence of comparable data.

One consequence of intensive cultivation and the rotational system here is the increased need for chemical fertilizers to improve soil fertility. Fertilizer

consumption was popularized by WADU in the early 1970s. Since then many peasants in Bolosso have used fertilizers on a number of occasions. But the price of fertilizer has gone up dramatically since the early WADU days, and many peasants are unable to afford it on a regular basis. Those who purchase on credit often default on payment. This has led to a vicious cycle of indebtedness and poor yield. Fertilizer consumption has been very uneven, as shown in the following Table.

**Table 4 - Fert. Consump. Admancho and Bombe
1979/80 - 1988/89 (Quintals)**

Year	Adm	Bom	Year	Adm	Bom
79/80	407.5	-	84/85	205.0	521.5
80/81	1040.0	-	85/86	70.0	-
81/82	643.5	57.5	86/87	1964.5	1866.0
82/83	613.5	66.0	87/88	1591.0	1552.5
83/84	592.0	152.0	88/89	859.5	1243.5

Source: MoA Files, Areka.

In the five years between 1989 and 1985 for which we have information, the yearly default rate (i.e. the number of peasants not paying their fertilizer credits on time) ranged between 8 to 17% of purchasers in Admancho SC, and 17 to 67% in Bombe SC. The default rate in Admancho is not serious; in the early WADU days the default rate went up to 22% but this was not considered abnormal for small peasants. Some peasants may have accumulated debts for several years. More peasants default in times of hardship, but peasants may also default because the harvest was not up to their expectations, or because they had incurred heavy expenditures during the year or soon after harvest.

There are various forms of penalties for peasants who do not pay their debts. SCs and PAs attempt to enforce debt payment stringently but they are not often successful. Non-paying peasants may be put in jail, or their cattle may be sequestered. This latter is a more serious form of punishment because the owner is not allowed to feed his cattle while in detention and they could starve to death.

It should be pointed out that fertilizer use is not the final solution to production problems in Bolosso. It has been shown in a number of field trials that the incremental gain in yield of fertilized crops is not as high as is often thought relative to the costs incurred. WADU trials in the early 1970s showed that fertilizer yield increases for teff averaged less than 50% at best (WADU 1975). More recent trials in other parts of the country indicate that except for maize fertilizer yield increases are low for most crops. The argument of specialists now is that a yield response that is less than 60 to 70% cannot be

physically seen on the field by the average peasant. Peasants are willing to try fertilizers if the yield response is 100% or more. Only in maize trials have such yield rates been achieved (MoA/FAO 1984: 44ff). For Bolosso peasants, however, maize is not a cash crop and the money invested cannot be easily recouped.

Further, peasants will use fertilizer if the response rate is consistent, if deliveries are made on time, and if the returns are high. Some peasants we talked to in Admancho for example, reported that the fertilizer they had used that year had ruined their harvests; they said it "burned" the soil. Many peasants complain that fertilizers are often not delivered on time to them and the poor timing contributes to poorer results.

Land Holding and Land-Use

The land reform entitles a peasant household registered with a Peasant Association (PA) a piece of land. In the early period of the reform, PA leaders carried out land redistribution several times to accommodate new members of the PA which were youngsters who had come of age. This involved alienating land from those who had bigger holdings because there was little unused land available for distribution (for details see Dessalegn 1985). An individual could only have land in one PA. All this has changed now. There are no longer fresh redistributions, and land possessed by a household remains with it even if not used. Although not legal, some peasants possess land in more than one PA.

Land is registered in the name of the head of the family, and when he dies, the land remains with his widow. Unlike Wollo where women were allotted land equal to their husbands during redistribution, women in Bolosso were not seriously taken into account at the time. Women who came of age after land apportionment had fewer chances of getting plots in their own right than men in similar circumstances. There are few women registered in the PAs, and these few are mostly widows. The land of such widows, as well as that of the elderly and sick is farmed for them by 'voluntary' labour organized by the PA. In other cases the land may be worked on kotta basis.

Peasants who have not been offered land may not register in the PA. Those who do not, form the "hidden" landless. The number of unregistered households is not known, but there is reason to believe that it is not small. Peasants also have to be fee paying members of the Service Cooperatives, but 12% of PA members in Admancho and 37% in Bombe are not registered members of their respective SCs. The reasons for this may be poverty (i.e. peasants cannot afford to pay the initial membership fee), or a statement that they can live without the services of the SCs.

There is no comparative data to show the changes in land distribution since the land reform of 1975, but all the indications are that the competition for land has intensified, and that individual plot sizes have grown smaller. In our survey of peasants in Admancho and Bombe the distribution of holdings appeared as shown below.

Table 5 - Distribution of Land Holdings
(Size in *Timad*)

Size	% holdings
1) Up to 2	47
2) More than 2 less than 4	20
3) 4 <i>Timad</i>	19
4) 5 to 7	9
5) 8 and Over	5
Total	100

The figures shown in my earlier work (1985) cannot be compared with the figures here because the sampled peasants were different, and the unit of measurement was not similar. Our findings show that more than two thirds of peasant holdings are below 4 *timad* (or 1 hectare according to the new rules of conversion). Holdings of 1 *timad* or less make up more than half the first category of holdings shown in the Table. Only 9% and 5% of holdings measure over 1 and 2 hectares respectively. There are more bigger plots in Bombe than in Admancho; 28% of holdings measure over 1 hectare in Bombe while the comparable figure for Admancho is 7%. A good part of the land in Bombe however is marginal land, and the lower parts of the SC was settled recently by poor and land-hungry peasants. Miniscule holdings are more prevalent in the higher elevations.

As noted earlier, *kotta* farming is significant because of shortage of oxen, of land and labour. *Kotta*, while not fully equitable, is a cooperative arrangement, and provides at least minimal support to the needy and the weak. Some of the most aggressive *kotta* farmers are those whose land is neither too small nor sufficiently large enough to satisfy their needs. These are peasants in the 2nd and 3rd categories in Table 4. Of course it requires at least one, but better still two farm oxen to be a good *kotta* farmer.

Government policies in the area of land distribution and holding have been quite unfavourable to the peasantry. In the initial phase of the land reform, periodic re-allotment made life insecure for peasants. Later, the programmes of cooperativization and villagization, which were resented by peasants, created uncertainty and apprehension in the rural areas. The few cooperatives in

Admancho and Bombe attracted far greater attention from extension and development agents than individual farmers. The government's policy for the last six years or so has been to give priority to cooperatives in extension service over individual peasants.

At the time of our field work some ten village settlements had been set up in the two SCs; some of them were located in areas which were hazardous to health, and some in areas which were not quite suitable for habitation. In such overcrowded conditions as Bolosso, villagization is very ill-advised. Villagization is also environmentally damaging since the settlements are built on common property resources such as woodlots, marshy areas, etc. which the poor and the weak depend on in times of need.

The average peasant has three types of land on which he depends. There is first the farm or main plot, which is often close to the homestead. Here the peasant grows maize (or sorghum), teff, cowpeas (or other legumes), and tubers including ginger in Bombe. When the price is good, ginger provides a good source of cash income, but prices frequently rise and fall. Secondly, there is the garden plot or backyard. Here *ensete*, vegetables, some tubers, spices, coffee, and fruit trees are planted. Some work may be done here by women. Thirdly, there is the front yard, which is not farmed; it is covered with grass and usually has a few trees on it.

At first glance, it seems the front yard is wasted land, because it is not put to agricultural use except as pasture for livestock. Live animals are tethered here to graze. The front yard is important, however, in social terms. It is here that relatives and neighbours meet to discuss matters of importance, or to carry out customary functions. A household's prosperity is measured by the size of its front yard: a well-to-do peasant will often have a big front yard; those with small front yards are newly established households and households that have been poor from the beginning.

As was noted earlier, teff, and occasionally barley, are planted as cash crops. All root crops are for home consumption. As root crops are important co-staples a few words on the important ones is in order. Let us first start with *ensete*.

Ensete is to the Wollaita diet what rice is to Asians. The plant is considered to be drought tolerant and unless destroyed by crop disease it can withstand considerable environmental stress. This and the prevalence of tubers explains why the *ensete* agro-ecology has suffered fewer famines than northeast Ethiopia. For best results in cultivation *ensete* should be transplanted twice. Once transplanted, *ensete* has low labour requirements. It takes anywhere between three to six years for *ensete* to mature and be harvested (recent experiments in Soddo have shown however that it is possible to harvest some varieties of *ensete* in one-and-half to two years (Tigist 1987). *Ensete* yields on

the average peasant lot may be between 20 to 25 kg. of foodstuff (i.e. *qocho*) per plant; the rest of the plant consists of fibre, leaves and crop residue. Controlled yield trials have not given any higher results (see WADU 1982).

Because of shortage of land *ensete* is planted in dense packs around the homestead. Closely planted *ensete* grows poorly, and good spacing is important for a good harvest. *Ensete* groves are fertilized with indigenous forms of compost made from crop residue. WADU sources suggest that 50 to 60 plants will provide sufficient food for a family of 4 to 6 for a year. Compared to cereals such as barley or maize, *ensete*'s nutritional content is low. However, in the daily diet, it is often supplemented with other root crops, green vegetables and dairy products.

Ensete is a versatile plant. It provides food for humans, and as crop residue feed for animals and for compost. Its fibre is used for making ropes, strings, baskets, and together with the leaves, mats and cushions. At the household level, it's leaves are used for wrapping and packing a large variety of food stuffs and other agricultural produce. The leaves too serve as cover for pots, bottles, baskets, and similar utensils. It is used as plates for eating or storing food. It can also serve as shelter material during the rains, and is worn as an apron by women when working around the house. When dried it is used as fuel for cooking purposes. Around the homestead it provides shade, and acts as a wind break to protect the house and garden crops.

Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) is also widely grown in Bolosso. It is adapted to a wide variety of environmental conditions including shortage of rain, or even a mild drought. It can be planted twice a year, once in October or November, and a second time in March. It requires little labour and matures in 3 to 4 months. The local variety is said to be better than imported varieties. Storage is no problem because the crop can be harvested as required, i.e., it can be left in the ground for several weeks after maturation, and the family can simply dig up what it needs whenever it wishes. Alternatively, the tuber can be sliced and dried up for easy storage. The industrial uses of sweet potato are many: it is used for canning, and as a source of industrial starch, glucose, alcohol and syrup (Purseglove 1974).

Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) also thrives in adverse conditions, and usually matures in 8 to 10 months. It is often inter-cropped with maize. It is often planted on land which is not good for cereals. Yam (*Dioscorea sp.*) on the other hand takes longer to mature, and requires a lot of labour. It too is frequently inter-cropped with maize. Both Wollaita potato (*Coleus edulis*) and Irish potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) are planted in the back yard. Ginger and cassava are grown on poorer soils in the lowland areas. All root crops are vegetatively

propagated, but any crop residue left is fed to cattle. (For more details see IDRC 1982, Terry 1981, and Terry 1987).

Root crops are important sources of food. They are easy to plant, harvest and store, and with the exception of yam, require minimal labour. They serve to insure peasants against poor cereal crop harvest or crop failure. They also provide food security during the lean months, and help to bridge the gap between one harvest and another. The advantage of combining cereals with root crops is obvious: one has greater security because one does not rely on one class of crops, and one has a wider selection of food sources.

One can say that the agricultural calendar in Bolosso virtually extends for the whole year. Land preparation is probably the most important and the most arduous task here. Ploughing at the right time is critical, and those who do not have farm oxen are often at a disadvantage. But peasants attempt to overcome this constraint through a variety of cooperative schemes. A peasant who has one ox will team up with another in similar circumstances; share-breeding of farm animals is quite common and stock-less peasants eagerly seek such arrangements. Renting oxen is not common here as it is in Wollo or north Shoa, for example.

The timing of every aspect of agricultural work is the responsibility of each farmer. The more experienced farmers attempt to time their operations to reduce risks to the minimum, particularly in sowing which requires more careful timing than ploughing. All peasants are affected by the arrival of the rains. If the rains are late or too early in coming the farmer has to make crucial decisions in his operations, and very often these decisions will be based on his expectations of weather behaviour in the months before and during the harvest.

During our last visit to Admancho in October we were informed by several peasants that the season's teff harvest would be good for some but bad for others. A good number of peasants were already hurt by the rains which were falling at the time; we saw many fields where the teff plant had begun to lodge. These were peasants who had planted early; peasants who had planted their teff late were expected to benefit. Our informants, who themselves had planted late – in early September rather than in mid- or late August – said they had made their planting decisions on the fact that the rains at the beginning of the season were late in coming, and they knew that there would often be some rain in October. The point worth stressing is that adverse or unpredictable weather behaviour is not uncommon here. Untimely rains, too much or too little rain at the wrong time, adequate or inadequate heat, etc. have been part of the Wollaita peasant's learning and living experience for decades. In this condition, the difference between disaster and survival may hinge on the experience, knowledge, and intelligent planning of the peasant. Every decision made in agricultural

operations involves risks, and the lucky ones are those who are able to minimize these risks by careful timing and careful selection of cropping strategies.

Most of the agricultural labour is carried out by men. Unlike other parts of the country where women labour almost equally with men in the field, women's involvement in farming is very limited here. In exceptional cases, widows or unmarried women may help out in weeding and other light work. Further, women also may do some gardening around the house. The task of taking out the manure from the house to the field is however exclusively women's work. The most important contribution of women is in livestock breeding.

Organic fertilizers, i.e. manure and crop residue, are very important to all peasants who use them to enrich the soil. Without them peasant production would have declined far more seriously than it has now, and farm production would have ceased to be viable long ago. Many peasants in fact believe that a household which has many cattle and therefore can produce sufficient manure for its fields does not require chemical fertilizers. Maize and tubers respond well to organic fertilizer (maize responds even better to chemical fertilizer). Crops that require chemical fertilizer are teff, barley and legumes.

The most common form of cropping is sole cropping, that is the planting and harvesting of one crop in one plot in one season. Inter-cropping, that is the planting of different crops in the same field during the same season is not as widespread as one would expect. Our observation in Admancho was that only about a quarter of the fields we saw (we are referring to the main fields) were inter-cropped. Inter-cropping in the garden plot or back yard on the other hand is very widespread, almost universal. A number of peasants interviewed about the subject said that inter-cropping had a lot of disadvantages. It led to lower yield; taller plants would shed shorter plants and this may bring about stunted growth; and shorter plants sometimes act as weeds to taller plants. Our informants pointed out that it is often poor peasants who have insufficient land who resort to inter-cropping. Experiments carried out by WADU in the 1970s support the judgment of our informants. The agency found that inter-cropping was possible only on small, garden-size plots. Inter-cropping on a farm scale led to lower yield for individual crops, and unhealthy growth for stalk plants because smaller plants acted as weeds (WADU 1979).

Inter-cropping is very popular among peasants in West Africa and has been seen as an important innovation that can contribute to greater food security for poor, land hungry peasants (Richards 1985). The experience of Bolosso peasants seems to contradict this. What is inter-cropped in Bolosso is maize (or sorghum) with beans or cowpeas, maize with tubers, maize with ginger, and coffee with Irish potatoes. In addition, peasants grow vegetables and spices in their garden plots. Yam, cassava and ginger may take a year or more to mature.

Cassava is not a popular food source in many areas of Bolosso, but it is consumed (at least in the drier lowlands) during food shortages.

Table 5 below shows the agricultural calendar in semi-degga and woyna degga environments of Bolosso. It also includes the times when harvested crops are consumed.

Table 6 - Crop Cultivation and Consumption Periods

Crop	Planted	Harvested	Consumed
Maize	Mar/Apr	Aug/Sept	Aug-Oct
Barley			
Belg	Feb/Mar	Jul/Aug	Cash
Mehr	Aug/Sept	Nov	Cash
Teff	Aug/Sept	Nov/Dec	Cash
Sweet Pot.			
Belg	Feb/Mar	Jun/Jul	Jul-Sept
Mehr	Oct	Mar/Apr	Mar-Jun
Taro	Oct/Nov	Sept/Oct	Oct-Dec
Irish Pot.	Oct	Dec/Jan	Dec-Jan
Ensete	-	-	Year Round
Horse beans	July	Oct/Nov	Cash
Cowpeas			
Belg	Mar/Apr	Jul/Aug	Cash
Mehr	Jul/Aug	Nov	Cash
Soybeans	Jul	Oct	Cash

It is obvious from Table 5 that the cereal/root crop combination provides a median family with food sources almost all year round. Poor peasants who do not have sufficient land to plant all food crops will of course suffer shortages. Growing the two class of crops in combination has to be done with care. Plot selection for each kind of crop is done in such a way as to maximize landuse, production and yield of the important food crops. Adaptive crops, i.e. crops that grow in a variety of conditions, are planted in less fertile or marginal land so that they do not compete for space with sensitive crops. Peasants are well aware of the characteristics and qualities of each of their crops; they also know their land intimately.

An important practice that also helps to maximize landuse is that of premature harvesting of crops. A peasant will cut a crop before it is fully ready and hang it on a wooden trellis in his backyard to mature. Crops such as barley and cowpeas are often prematurely harvested. This clears the land earlier for planting of other crops. The hung plant matures in the open air. This practice is common among peasants with large holdings and many sub-plots.

A median family will divide its farm into several plots and grow different crops on each. Those with large holdings may have four to five different plots,

but the poor usually cannot afford to sub-divide their land and have to do with only one plot. Peasants with several wives are often forced to divide their holdings for each of their wives; this is done so that each co-wife's household has a share of the husbands' harvest. Irrespective of the size of the holding, polygamous husbands have to sub-divide their farm for their wives. One advantage is that it makes the sharing of the harvest between co-wives much easier, but the disadvantage is that it may involve fragmenting the farm into uneconomic plots.

Crop losses during or after harvest are not significant, because for many peasants the farm plot and what is produced on it is small, and harvesting is done with great care. Crop losses are serious before harvest, however, because of the problem of rodents. Since the farm plot is often close to the homestead, losses in transporting the harvest to the house or storage bin are minimal. Occasionally, the harvest may not even have been taken home to be stored, but is consumed while still on the farm. This was the case for many peasants with the maize crop of the 1989 Meher season. The maize crop was poor, and many families consumed it as *ishet*, i.e., while it was still fresh and on the plant.

Crop storage is also not a serious problem. There are two kinds of storage in Bolosso: the big storage bin made of twigs and wood kept outside the home, and the small container (a round wicker container which resembles a large bee-hive) kept in the house. The harvest for many peasants is small and may not need to be stored in the bin kept outside. Secondly, many peasants sell their crops on the market soon after harvest, and this does away with the problem of storage. What is kept in the house is fairly well protected and there is very little loss involved. Crops such as maize are sometimes kept standing on the land longer; the drier and harder maize becomes the easier it stores. For teff and barley, the wicker container in the house is "sealed" with mud or cow dung to protect the crop from mice.

Agricultural practices in Bolosso are not as backward as some observers have alleged. The main farming tool is the standard Ethiopian plough. In a few cases peasants use hand tools to till their land but this happens if the land is too small to be ploughed. Land is repeatedly ploughed before planting. Contour ploughing, bunding and ridging to protect the soil was introduced by WADU, and much of the large-scale bunds and ridges were constructed by it and later by RB-E. The peasant takes good care of his fields, doing additional tilling, weeding, or providing organic fertilizer whenever necessary.

Improved agricultural practices like row planting introduced by WADU are not very widespread. Peasants use broadcast sowing for all cereal crops (as well as broadcast spreading of chemical fertilizer). While it may be worthwhile to promote improved cultural practices such as row planting, I believe the benefits

are not that significant. Broadcast sowing may be wasteful of seeds, and may lead to uneven seeding, but it takes much less time than row planting. In Bolosso maize and sorghum plots may give higher yield if row-planted, but for teff and barley plots the results will probably be mixed. Other improved cultural practices are the use of improved seed varieties, and weeding. A good number of Bolosso peasants continue to use improved maize and teff varieties introduced by WADU in the early 1970s. Weeding here is not a serious problem because the land is ploughed many times before planting (see above). These three elements constitute the full package of improved cultural practices that have been promoted by WADU, MoA and FAO specialists for many years.

The peasant makes very little long term capital investment in production. Farm or garden plots may be protected from intruders by hedges, and every once in a while he rebuilds or makes repairs on his house or on his tools, but that is about all the investment the farmer makes on his farm. The most important recurrent investment he makes is on the purchase of fertilizers. Exactly how many peasants rely on chemical fertilizer is difficult to determine because the figures one obtains from MoA (Areka) show only the amount of fertilizer delivered to the SCs, and those available at the PAs and SCs are either deficient or uneven. Table 6 gives figures for annual fertilizers credit sales to members of the Admancho SC; we were unable to obtain comparable figures for Bombe SC. The Table also includes data on the rate of credit payment and default for the years information was available (there was no information available for some years). The total registered members of Admancho is 5441.

**Table 7 - Credit Purchase of Fertilizer in Admancho
No. of Members Involved**

Year	Purchase	Not Purch.	Paid	Not P'd	Am't(Qn)
79/80	1281	4160	1184	97	710
82/83	3084	2357	2623	461	1742
83/84	1839	3620	1532	307	1020
86/87	4140	1301	3671	469	2179
87/88	2734	2707	2357	320	1591
88/89	1490	3951	-	-	860

Source: Admancho SC files.

According to the Table, chemical fertilizer consumption ranged from 23% in 1979/80 to 76% in 1986/87. Both 1986/87 and 1987/88 were high consumption years and the default rate was 9 and 6% respectively – a very low rate by any standards. Incidentally RB-E thought the year 1987 was a famine year and distributed relief supplies.

These figures are however rather misleading because they really do not tell us precisely how many peasants used chemical fertilizer (and used it in the right amount, i.e., 100 Kg. per hectare) on their plots. It is not uncommon to see peasants and small traders selling DAP or Urea in the local markets, and many peasants buy small amounts from these traders at exorbitantly high prices. The evidence thus suggests that not all purchasers of fertilizer from the SCs are peasants, and not all peasants who take fertilizer on credit use it on their farms. The years of high fertilizer purchase may be those when large numbers of peasants turned to fertilizer peddling as a means of making ends meet because of poor harvests the previous years. (Compare Table 6 with Table 3 above.)

One of the questions we had in our questionnaire was what kind of assistance peasants preferred most. More than half the answers referred to oxen as the most important form of assistance; only 18% of responses referred to fertilizer as a necessary element of a support package. Interestingly enough there was no request for more land. This evidence may not be sufficient but the extent of fertilizer need and consumption should be precisely determined before any decision on the issue is made.

Livestock and Livestock Raising

Livestock are an important asset for peasants in Bolosso. Livestock are a source of draught power, of food, of cash income, and of manure for the farm. Unlike other parts of the country where livestock are maintained partly for prestige, and are not marketed unless there is dire need, Bolosso peasants are actively involved in livestock marketing. Bull fattening and marketing is a common practice here. Nearly a quarter of peasants in our survey said they had recently sold an animal in the market to raise money for a variety of basic expenses. Peasants here have gone half way to the integration of crop cultivation with animal husbandry.

Very often the responsibility of livestock keeping falls on women; alternately women may and do own their own livestock, especially female animals. Livestock are often tethered and grazed on the front yard. According to the criteria of livestock specialists, Bolosso peasants (including women) are good livestock managers (see, eg. Wrigley 1981: 368 ff). Livestock management here involves keeping animals in the house for safe keeping, for shelter, and protection against flies and insects; the provision of shade in grazing areas the trees in the front yard provide this; good animal feed, including crop residue, and grass; mineral licks which are often offered to animals here; and human care and attention.

Livestock ownership is however very unevenly distributed. A majority of peasants are livestock poor while a few have more than a dozen or so heads of cattle. But there are numerous ways of acquiring cattle for use for poor peasants of which the most common are joint rearing and share rearing of livestock. Both men and women resort to these practices if they have no animals of their own, and for women this is an important source of independent income. Joint rearing involves investing in an animal (frequently a heifer or cow) by two men or women, caring for it in turns, and sharing the benefits equally. The benefits include manure, milk and milk products, and calves. The tradition of share rearing (similar to share cropping) is rather different. A poor man or woman will rent a young female animal from a well-to-do neighbour, raise it in his/her house and share the off- spring and milk products with the owner. The poor peasant also gains because he keeps the manure. A complicated share rearing arrangement for male animals involves purchasing the male calf on credit by the poor peasant, raising it and then selling it at a good price. The poor peasant will then pay his credit and hand over a percentage of his gains to the owner of the animal.

RB-E distributed farm oxen on credit between 1986 and 1988. The credit was to be fully paid in three years and the money was to be used as a revolving fund for the SCs. According to the records of the Project Office in Areka about 58% of beneficiaries still have the animals with them (as of August 1989), 27% of peasants have sold their animals, and 15% of peasants said the oxen died soon after they were handed to them. Many peasants have defaulted on their payments; the default rate in Admancho is moderate, ranging from 13% to 28%, but high in Bombe where it was 17% to 73%. The default rate was arrived at by adding up the number of peasants who did not pay their debts since 1986. We interviewed 23 male beneficiaries on the same problem, of which 12 (52%) said they sold the oxen soon after they received them, but 11 (48%) said they bought other animals with the money. Most of the sellers said they sold the oxen for more than the price they paid for the animals. The difference was used to cover household expenses, and expenses for customary obligations.

Thus livestock marketing is an important activity for peasants who wish to acquire cash income to meet their basic needs and obligations. The astute peasant sells his animal when the price is good and buys another animal when the price is low. There is however one drawback for those who sell their work oxen and buy either a young bull or an untried ox which is often what happens if the peasant hopes to gain some cash from the transaction. This is that it may take anywhere up to three years for a young bull to grow big enough to do farm work. In the meantime the peasant becomes dependent on others.

Other sources of supplementary income are handicraft production and marketing. For men this entails mainly weaving and wood work; pottery and smithing are despised crafts and are left to small outcast groups who live in many parts of the rural areas. For women income sources are selling home made food and drinks, spinning and basket making. It is my opinion that in Bolosso handicraft production has very little significance to the peasantry. Its potentials are very limited mainly because handicraft products do not have a mass market.

Resource Allocation

The resources that the peasant has produced go mainly to maintain himself and his family. But there are a host of claims that burden the peasant household, and it has to allocate its meagre resources to meet these claims. This it does through the market mechanism, and through a variety of exchange arrangements. The major obligations that claim his resources are external, customary and household. Of the three, the first, i.e., external obligations, are the most inflexible, persistent and the most difficult to avoid. These obligations are imposed by the state, and while peasants occasionally default on their payment of taxes and other state exactions, this is merely postponing the problem for another time. Customary obligations are those that the peasant allocates resources for as a member of his community. These are traditional commitments which the peasant has to meet to maintain his standing in the community (see above). Household obligations refer to the basic needs of the family.

The peasant is often burdened by all these obligations; he cannot meet all of them in any given year. When this occurs it is often household obligations that are sacrificed. The peasant consumes less, reduces his spending on the family, and foregoes certain basic benefits. Alternatively, peasants meet their burdens by borrowing, going into debt, or by selling capital assets. But often this is only postponing household sacrifices for a while. There is of course a threshold beyond which household obligations cannot be sacrificed; this threshold is the point beyond which any more sacrifices will threaten the survival of the family.

Subsistence agriculture means most of the food and other resources produced by the household are consumed at home. But this does not preclude active involvement in the market system. The market enables the peasant to exchange what he has in "surplus" for what he is deficit in. Strictly speaking only well-to-do peasants in Bolosso have the ability to produce a surplus; this group makes up only a small percentage of the Bolosso peasantry. For a majority of peasants the resources that are allocated or exchanged in the market represent consumption foregone.

Under ideal conditions, resource allocation would involve dividing one's resources between one's obligations and one's requirements for asset reproduction, ie. investments on existing and new assets. Thus what one has lost in meeting one's obligations will be recouped in the future. In the case of Bolosso peasants, however, most of the resources allocated represent losses to them; only a small amount of their resources go to asset reproduction. There is thus a net loss, some of which is taken out of the area.

As noted above, external obligations refer to legally imposed taxes on the one hand, and a host of state sponsored exactions which have no legal basis on the other. There are two kinds of agricultural tax: agricultural income tax, and land use fee. The latter is a flat sum of 20 Birr for each household which owns a plot (the landless are exempt). The agricultural income tax is, at least theoretically, based on the income level of each household, and ranges from 20 to 37 Birr. But income level assessment, which is made by the officials of the Ministry of Finance in Areka is often arbitrary, and many poor peasants have been made to pay higher taxes than they should. For a poor peasant the total tax comes to at least 40 Birr.

A good number of peasants cannot afford to pay this tax even in a normal season, while large numbers of peasants stop paying during hard times. According to records of the Ministry of Finance in Bolosso nearly one third of the peasantry did not pay their taxes in the famine year of 1984/85. The tax default rate was also significantly high in 1985/86 and 1986/87. Peasants may be put in prison or fined in other ways when they default on their tax payments.

State sponsored exactions include what are ironically called contributions on the one hand, and membership fees on the other. The purpose of the "contributions" frequently vary but there have been more than one "contribution" campaign every year for the last ten to twelve years. For the years 1987 to 1989 there were "contribution" payments for literacy, for the local schools, for sports, and for national defence. In the period 1985/87, Bolosso peasants had to pay a special drought fee even though they themselves were the victims of famine. The membership fees include fees for the PA, and for the Youth and Women's Associations. The combined sum that a poor household had to pay in taxes and other exactions in the 1988/89 season was 76 Birr.

For many peasants, this represents one third to one half of their annual cash income. As was noted earlier, a majority of peasants here have an annual income of much less than 300 Birr, and the burden of state imposed obligations is very high. Many peasants try to avoid the burden by refusing to pay the "contributions" and/or the membership fees. In a given year, a quarter to a third of the peasantry default on these payments; some are put in prison and others harassed in a variety of ways for it. This heavy state exactions not only deplete

peasant resources but give rise to resentment, uncertainty and insecurity among the rural population. Some of the payments may be small, but their cumulative effect is pernicious.

How great the burden on the peasant becomes clear if we consider his condition from the point of view of the claims made on him. A poor peasant's burden is all the more heavy if he has defaulted on his contribution payments, has a backlog of taxes to pay, has been unable to pay his fertilizer credits, and is indebted to a neighbour or rich peasant for money he has borrowed.

AMC's activities and the forced requisitioning of food from peasants involves resource loss to the peasantry and to the area. AMC offers lower prices than the open market, and peasants are forced to deliver to it a fixed quota of grain whether they have produced it or not. Interestingly enough AMC officials have identified only three SCs in Bolosso as surplus producing areas: these are Admancho, Areka and Bombe SCs. Table 7 provides figures for food taken out of Bolosso for the last six years for which information is available.

Table 8 - Food Grain Delivered to AMC from Bolosso
(In Quintals)

Year	Grain
1983/84	2820
1984/85	422
1985/86	816
1986/87	3151
1987/88	4908
1988/89	1862

Source: AMC files, Soddo, 1989.

Local officials in Areka have informed me that much of the food taken out by AMC was not obtained from peasants but from licensed grain merchants operating in the woreda. If this is true, direct loss of resources by peasants has been limited, but there still is an indirect loss. The food taken out by AMC would have been available within the area, and accessible to peasants who could afford it. AMC in other words has helped create an artificial shortage.

The resources that go to cater to communal or customary obligations are considerable, but they are not as debilitating as outsiders consider them to be. While some of the investment in tradition is, as explained above, a form of long term social investment which will bear fruit in the future, some of it is cultural and fulfils a traditional or religious purpose. The peasant is an individual, and belongs to a specific belief and moral system which has its own rules, rituals, and expectations.

The practices that involve heavy investment are *idir*, funerals, births and weddings. The more income a peasant has the more expensive his *idir* becomes; the same is true in celebrations of births and weddings. *Idir* involving horsemen and ritualistic horse play during funerals, for example, is for the well-to-do. Even in poor rural societies, death is an expensive phenomenon. The dead in Bolosso, for example, have to be buried in certain kinds of clothes of which *buluko* (heavy woven cloth) is important. The expenses for these are quite considerable. A number of RB-E's oxen beneficiaries whom we interviewed informed us that they had sold the oxen they had received from the Organization to buy funeral clothes and cover funeral expenses.

There are also other customary practices, such as annual feasts, which claim the peasant's resources. The most significant, and the most expensive traditional feast is the feast of *Mesqal* which occurs on the 11th or 12 of September. The custom here is to slaughter an animal, and to indulge in an orgy of eating. Every household, however poor it is, has to participate in the celebrations. Groups of households contribute money to slaughter a bull or ox for the festivities, and in this way a large number of bulls or oxen are slaughtered. We were informed, for example, that in one PA in Admancho (membership 640) 86 oxen were slaughtered for the 1989 *Mesqal* celebrations – i.e. one ox per 7 or 8 households.

There is a tendency among some observers to belittle or denigrate these traditional practices. For people involved in development work in the rural areas, the best rule is to try to understand the customs of the people and adapt one's activities to make the best use of them. No outsider should be entitled to belittle customary observances without a profound understanding of them, because what may appear foolish or inexplicable to an outsider may satisfy deeply felt needs of a social or psychological kind to the people concerned.

Household obligations are those that cater to the needs of the family and the well-being of its members. Outside certain essentials, what is basic to one family may be more than basic to another. The household here competes with outside forces and tradition for the resources that it has produced. There is also the competition between immediate consumption and deferred consumption, that is, whether what is produced should be stored or marketed. The greater marketing activity tends to suggest that households here indulge in deferred consumption, but this seems to be contradicted by the cropping system.

Root crops are basically for home consumption. Bolosso peasants use only teff, and (partially) barley as cash crops. Everything else grown is for the family. Thus the greater emphasis placed on root crops suggests a greater household orientation. One can also detect a similar orientation in the use made of dairy products. Peasants rarely sell milk in the market; there is almost a traditional taboo on selling milk. Milk is consumed at home, or turned into butter, some

of which is sold on the market. Milk is for children, whereas other by-products from it are for the family as a whole.

Bolosso peasants are actively engaged in the rural market system. There are three classes of markets in the area. There is the small neighbourhood market called *qoche*. This attracts people from the neighbourhood and some itinerant peddlers, and may be held more than once a week. There is secondly the local market held in small subdistrict towns such as Bombe. These may attract many people from the surrounding areas and are weekly affairs. And finally, there is the woreda market in Areka which attracts thousands of peasants from the area, and large merchants and peasant traders from neighbouring regions.

According to incomplete records of the Project Office in Areka there are interesting price differentials between Bombe and Areka markets. The price of most legume crops is cheaper in Bombe than in Areka for the six months that the Office had information; on the other hand the price of cereal crops is cheaper in Areka than in Bombe.

Areka is a major market for grain and livestock. As was noted above, the area is deficit in food, and food grain, particularly maize, flows in from surrounding areas like northeast Wollaita (the Boditi, Shone region) and from Kambatta and Hadiya. On the other hand peasants here market livestock, and traders from the neighbouring regions come to buy livestock. Livestock also come to the Areka market from Kullo Konta, north west of Bolosso.

Bolosso is a net "importer" of food grain, and a net "exporter" of livestock. In times of good harvests the terms of trade favour Bolosso peasants because the price of food grain is low and that of livestock is high. In times of food shortages however, the opposite is the case and Bolosso peasants are hurt.

According to records from MoA (Areka) the price of livestock goes up in the months of June to September (the *Mesqal* period), and goes down fairly steeply in the months of October to December. Prices rise up a little in February and March, and stay flat until June when they rise again. The astute peasant is well aware of the behaviour of livestock as well as grain prices, and unless forced by circumstances he will try to take advantage of the price movements as much as possible.

There is a pattern to the flow of livestock in and out of the area. Bolosso peasants are also eager buyers of livestock when the prices are right. Some of them buy to fatten and sell later, or to raise for the family; some of them are part time livestock traders. Mature animals such as big, fattened bulls ("senga"), slaughter cows and big heifers are taken out of the area by outside merchants, whereas younger animals, calves and milk cows are bought by the surrounding peasantry and stay within the area.

While the major source of cash income is livestock, peasants also market a variety of small produce and other items. Both women and men are equally active in marketing. The lower the resource base of the family the greater will the women of the house be involved in petty trade. Women in well-to-do households are only marginally involved in marketing. The simple schema one often encounters in which men are said to be responsible for "heavy" goods marketing and women for "light" ones does not hold true here. Women in Bolosso are involved in marketing grain, vegetables, home made food and drinks, dairy products, poultry, firewood, basketry, coffee and spices, and small animals. Peasant men also market grain, poultry, basketry, animal feed and licks, firewood, dairy products, coffee and spices, and of course large animals.

For many peasants trading is a major form of supplementary income; many peasants are thus part farmers and part traders. Such farmer/traders often time their marketing activities so as not to interfere with their farming duties. The main traders are grain and livestock traders. Grain traders may specialize in the major crops, such as teff and maize. The larger grain traders are active both in the local as well as the woreda markets such as Areka, Boditi, Soddo, etc. They travel to these markets either to buy or sell depending on the movement of prices. The smaller traders are active mostly in the local and neighbourhood markets.

Livestock traders also share the same pattern of marketing as their grain counterparts: the larger ones in the bigger markets and the smaller ones in the smaller markets. Some of the smaller traders may double up as market based butchers. A common sight in all markets is the open-air stall where meat is cooked and sold to customers. The owner may be a small time livestock trader, or he may have simply bought his animal from a peasant and slaughtered it to sell in the market.

The potential for improved income for peasants in Bolosso lies mainly in livestock breeding and marketing. A farming system in which livestock breeding is closely integrated with crop production provides the best chances for peasants to earn more income and to withstand environmental crisis on their own. There seems to be no other economic activity here that provides as much opportunities as livestock marketing to the peasantry. The skills relating to livestock management already exist, and improved skills can be easily imparted to the peasantry. But livestock ownership is very unevenly distributed, and many peasants are too destitute to afford many animals. The one big question therefore is: how will poor peasants obtain animals for marketing purposes?

Consumption

The level of household consumption is determined by what the household has initially produced and how much of the produce it has given up to meet its obligations. The resources available for household consumption may vary from one year to another due to these factors as well as general environmental ones. Peasant consumption levels are not uniform throughout the year; they fluctuate both in quality and quantity according to the seasons. Seasonal variations obviously affect the poor more than others, but seasonal undernourishment of one degree or another is a feature shared by all peasants except the prosperous. Under ideal conditions, however, seasonality is a much less serious problem in the *ensete* culture complex than in the cereal culture complex.

As was shown above, the cereal/root crop combination has distinct advantages from the point of view of peasant food security. Year round production of a variety of grain crops and tubers is possible in this system, although the range of crops one is able to grow is determined by the size and quality of land one has access to. Once again the poor are disadvantaged, but the more enterprising may be able to supplement their deficiencies in land through a variety of cooperative and co-farming arrangements.

The household food strategy of peasants here is based on a balance between root crops and cereals. This involves a cropping plan in which one food-crop is ready to be harvested when another crop, previously harvested, is about to run out of the family food store. The major root crop, *ensete*, provides food all through the agricultural season. Thus, for a good number of peasants, the system provides food almost all year round, and the lean months are fewer. The data in Table 5 above show that the lean months for a middle peasant in Bolosso are January and February.

In the cereal zone of the country, on the other hand, the lean months for many peasants may stretch anywhere from 4 to 6 months because the dominant food source is food grain. Peasants in the *ensete* zone thus have greater food security than peasants in the cereal zone. Therefore the degree of vulnerability of peasants in Bolosso is not as alarming as is made out to be. In fact, the Bolosso peasant with half a hectare of land is less vulnerable than the Wollo or Gojjam peasant with much bigger holdings.

Further, compared to peasants in the cereal zone, peasants here have a wider choice of food sources, and are thus more resilient for food crisis. The household diet in Bolosso is a mix of cereals, root and garden crops, and animal products. *Ensete*, it is true, does not have as much nutrient value as grain crops but, it is available as food all year round. Sweet potato on the other-hand provides more

calories than all other root crops; Irish potato is also a source of high calories. Tubers such as sweet potato, taro and yam provide carbohydrates, Vitamins A, B, and C, and a variety of minerals. Many of the tubers grown in the area are easy to store, and easy to prepare. The causes of under-feeding or malnutrition here should therefore be sought not in the diet or cropping system but in poverty and destitution.

By custom, milk is not sold in the market but consumed at home or turned into butter. This is a tradition that has benefits for children, for dairy products are part of children's diet. The main problem here is the lack of female animals by the poor. In this situation, share rearing of cows by women, a frequent practice, is a partial answer, and ought to be encouraged. RB-E's decision to distribute cows to women beneficiaries was a wise one.

For parts of the year the household diet may consist of a monotonous regimen of tubers and grain. However, there are some occasions, outside of religious festivities, when peasants consume meat and animal products in large quantities. An old traditional practice called *Hurbua* is one such occasion. A group of close friends get together and buy an ox belonging to one of them on credit. The bull is then slaughtered, and the meat consumed over a number of days. The money owed to the ox owner is paid in installments over a number of months. While this is strictly a men's affair, children often benefit. The custom is slowly dying out now – I suppose because of growing poverty and food crisis – but originally the purpose was to break the monotony of the regular diet in the off seasons. Women also have their own consumption occasions which are more frequent than the men's. One such is known as *chimeta*. It involves women getting together to consume large quantities of dairy products.

The condition of children in Bolosso has not been examined with sufficient care. At the moment there is no comparable scientific data to allow one to compare the degree of children's vulnerability in Bolosso and other areas. The monthly and quarterly nutritional survey reports prepared by Save the Children (U.K.) for Wollaita and many other areas for the last four to five years is unfortunately not comparable. This is a pity because one would have liked to compare the nutritional status of children in various ecological and dietary settings, and to assess how much, and which, customary feeding habits have a good or bad influence on children's vulnerability. My own observation is that children are no more vulnerable here than in other environmental settings. Seen from the Food Calendar discussed above, children in Bolosso ought to be and probably are less vulnerable than children in the cereal farming zones.

Women interviewed in Bolosso during the field work said that it is the custom in most homes to feed the children first in the evenings, before the adults. They also emphasized that cows owned either by the mother or father are meant

for the children, and that the dairy products available in the home are consumed by children. Men peasants pointed out that certain root crops, such as sweet potatoes, are grown specifically with children in mind. One peasant stated that sweet potatoes are good for children. Men and women interviewed about food shortages and children agreed that children are the most vulnerable. Both men and women are conscious of children's vulnerability. Many men informants also pointed out that in times of distress-sale of animals (such as during famines), cows are the last to be sold; peasants will sell their oxen and keep their cows if possible because, as one peasant put it, cows are for children. If children are in poor condition in Bolosso or Wollaita it is not out of neglect by the family but because the family is destitute and cannot afford to feed its children.

It is likely that children in polygamous marriages will suffer more hardships than children in single marriages. This is because mothers in polygamous situations have to be more economically active, because the husband's resources are shared with several co-wives and are not enough to maintain one household. This will mean greater involvement for such women in the market, the informal economy and Food for Work activities. If the household is short of adult women, this will lead to the neglect of children. The problem here is not that women deliberately neglect their children but that they are away from the house often on income earning activities.

The same may hold true for children in women headed households. The one difference here is that women heads who have access to land in their own right are slightly better off than polygamous wives. But here too the produce from the land, which may frequently be worked by someone on *kotta* arrangements, will not be sufficient to maintain the family, and the women will have to be active in trade and the informal economy. Women heads are often older, and the chances that the household will have one or more grown up women is higher than with polygamous wives. In this case, children will not be neglected.

In so far as food management is concerned there is very little loss involved. Food management is the responsibility of women, and while certain kinds of labour, such as processing *enseite*, are very arduous and time consuming, there is very little wastage of food sources involved. Labourious tasks such as bulk food processing are carried out by women's support networks. When the harvest is brought home for storage, the husband relinquishes his "right" to it to the woman. In theory, the food belongs to him but its management in the house is exclusively the woman's task. In the same way, female animals and milk products are managed by women. It is of course true that women also manage male animals, but female animals are directly and symbolically associated with them. Thus the prime responsibility of feeding children falls on women.

I was not able to study the food management habits of Bolosso peasant families in depth because of the constraints I encountered in interviewing peasant women in the field. But the evidence I have suggests that in this area there is very little cause for concern. I find MoA extension work for women, which mostly focuses on home economics, misplaced and counter-productive.

The loss of resources in this sector is minimal. The smallness or non-existence of the farm surplus means minimal storage, hence minimal storage loss. Further, many of the root crops and some of the cereals store well. Occasionally, crops are consumed while still standing on the farm; this makes storage unnecessary.

References

A. Significant Documents from Redd Barna-Ethiopia

- Noragric, Report from Baseline Study for Phase III of Redd Barna-Ethiopia's Integrated Rural Development Programme in Bolosso - Welayita - Ethiopia. Oslo 1986.
- Redd Barna-Ethiopia's Intervention in Bolosso Woreda, Past and Present. January 1986.
- P 4004: Project Plan. 10 December 1987.
- Redd Barna-Ethiopia: Project Plan, Bolosso Rural Development Project. December 1987.
- P 4004: Bolosso Rural Development Project, 3rd Year Plan and Budget 1989-91. 1988.
- Redd Barna-Ethiopia: The Child Development Strategy. Addis Ababa, October 1988.
- Redd Barna-Ethiopia. Annual Report 1988. P. 4004, Bolosso Rural Development Project. Submitted by Alemu Taddese. Areka, January 1989.

B. Other Sources

- Dessalegn Rahmato, 1985, *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia*. Trenton: Red Sea Press.
- _____, 1987, *Famine and Survival Strategies. A Case Study of Northeast Ethiopia*. Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa.
- _____, 1989 A, "Rural Resettlement in Post Revolution Ethiopia". Paper Prepared for ONCCP, Addis Ababa, June.
- _____, 1989 B, "Rural Women in Ethiopia: Problems and Prospects". Paper Prepared for the Seminar on Gender Issues, Addis Ababa University, December.
- FAO, 1975, *Population, Food Supply and Agricultural Development*. Rome: FAO.
- _____, 1986, *The Dynamics of Rural Poverty*. Rome: FAO.
- I. Haque and S. Jutzi, 1984, "Nitrogen Fixation by Forage Legumes in Sub-Saharan Africa: Potential and Limitations", *ILCA Bulletin*. No. 20.
- IAR(Institute of Agricultural Research), 1987, Proceedings. 18th National Crop Improvement Conference 24-26 April 1986, Nazareth, Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: IAR.
- IDRC, 1982, *Root Crops in Eastern Africa*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.
- IDS (Bulletin), 1989, *Vulnerability: How the Poor Cope*. Brighton: IDS.
- M. Lipton, 1983, *Poverty, Undernutrition, and Hunger*. Staff Working Paper No. 597. Washington: World Bank.

- _____, 1985, *Land Assets and Rural Poverty*. Staff Working Paper No. 744. Washington: World Bank.
- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), 1973, "Wollamo Agricultural Development Unit Program, Phase II", Project Proposal, Vols. I, Text and Maps, Vol. II- Annexes. Addis Ababa: MoA.
- _____, 1984, *General Agricultural Survey Preliminary Report 1983/84*. Vol I. Addis Ababa: MoA.
- MoA/FAO, 1984, *Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Study. Assessment of the Present Situation in Agriculture*. Working Paper 11. Addis Ababa: MoA/FAO.
- L.A. Nnadi and I. Haque, 1988, "Forage Legumes in African Crop - Livestock Production Systems", *ILCA Bulletin*, No. 30.
- J.W. Purseglove, 1975, *Tropical Crops*. London: Longman.
- P. Richards, 1985, *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution. Ecology and Food Production in West Africa*. London: Hutchinson.
- Save the Children (UK), *Monthly Nutritional Survey Reports for Wollaita and Wollo*. 1988-1989.
- E.R. Terry et. al. (eds), 1981, *Tropical Root Crops: Research Strategies for the 1980s*. Ottawa: IDRC.
- _____, 1987, *Tropical Root Crops: Root Crops and the African Food Crisis*. Ottawa: IDRC.
- Tigist Demake, 1987, "Better Methods of Establishing Ensat". In IAR 1987.
- WADU, 1974, *Annual Report, July 8, 1973 - July 7, 1974*. Soddo.
- _____, 1975, *Annual Report 1974-75*. Soddo.
- _____, 1976 A, *Agricultural Survey of Bolosso (1971)*. Soddo.
- _____, 1976 B, *1976 General Agricultural Survey*. Soddo.
- _____, 1976 C, *Annual Report 1975-76*. Soddo.
- _____, 1979 A, *Agronomic Report 1977/78 and 1978/79*. Soddo.
- _____, 1979 B, *Annual Crop Sampling Survey 1977/78*. Soddo.
- _____, 1981, *Agronomic Report 1980/81*. Soddo.
- _____, 1982 A, *Cultural Practice Studies on Ensete at Soddo*. In IAR, 13th National Crop Improvement Conference (1981). Addis Ababa: IAR.
- _____, 1982, B, *Annual Report 1980/81*. Soddo.
- _____, 1983, *Annual Report 1981/82*. Soddo.
- E. Westphal, 1975, *Agricultural Systems in Ethiopia*. Wageningen: CAPD.
- Wolde Michael Kelecha, 1987, *A Glossary of Ethiopian Plant Names. Fourth Edition*. Addis Ababa: Np.
- G. Wrigley, 1981, *Tropical Agriculture*. London: Longman.

Annex 1

Study Method

The method and research tools used in this study consist of the following. The major findings were obtained from our extended field work. The researcher made periodic field trips to Bolosso beginning in May 1989, and ending in October 1989. The major components of the field work were the following:

- 1) Discussions and Interviews: a) extended interviews with a wide variety of peasants, including peasant women; b) discussions with RB-E Project staff in Areka; c) discussions with local administrative officials in Arba Minch, Soddo and Areka; also with extension agents, and implementing government units; d) interviews with community elders and knowledgeable people in Areka and Soddo.
- 2) Questionnaire: We administered a short questionnaire on a randomly selected group peasant household heads in Admancho and Bombe. We selected from PA registers 256 peasants (about 1% of the target population), and the questionnaire was filled out by RB-E's field agents. The researcher personally check each questionnaire for accuracy before tallying and tabulation. His assistant on the field, Tesfaye Teka, checked the tabulation for errors. One questionnaire was found to have been wrongly filled and had to be discarded.
- 3) Personal Observations: through visits to peasant homes, farms, and project activities.
- 4) Documents and Files: a) from PAs and SCs in the project area; b) from local government offices in Areka, Soddo, and Arba Minch; d) from Project Office in Areka, and RB-E in Addis Ababa.
- 5) Published and unpublished source material: a) monographs from RB-E, head office; b) secondary sources.

Essay 2: Cultural Dimensions to Rural Poverty

Introduction

It is said that tradition fosters solidarity and promotes mutual interdependence; it reinforces *accepted values, existing social relations, and institutions of individual socialization*. This view, commonly held by students of rural society, may be true in conditions of social stability and orderly change. In other circumstances, in times specially of rapid and stressful change or social crisis, tradition assumes a defensive role, serving as a medium of peasant struggles for security and autonomy.

In crisis circumstances, rural people revitalize their folkways and their associative relationships; routine acts, behaviour and ceremonial rites are now charged with *intricate symbolic meanings*. Ritual, which earlier may have been relegated to the background, is now resuscitated and enacted with renewed vigour. Here the communal and the community is desired as against the individual and the cellular, or the deviant and the non-conformist. Associative forms of social life come to the fore, and individualistic values, if ever they were significant, recede to the background.

The resurgence of tradition is not, as we shall see below, a reversion to ancestral custom. Living tradition is in fact flexible, and contains the new as well as the old. *Peasant society persists, specially in the face of danger, not just by reinforcing its tradition but also by subtly changing it*. In the end, it is these and similarly occasioned discreet changes that in their cumulation cause rural society to evolve, to adapt itself to changing circumstances, and in the process to create new meanings and new forms of social consciousness.

At one level, peasant consciousness may manifest itself in direct political or social action or reaction; this is the area most familiar to social historians or rural sociologists (see Ranger 1987 for the literature). It may, however, be expressed in *attitudes and values which are embedded in productive practice, rituals, belief systems, and traditional institutions*. Following Giddens (1979) we may call these elements of practical consciousness. Practice here should embrace the physical as well as the spiritual and mystical. Famine consciousness, for instance, is embodied not just in everyday practice having to do with food production and consumption, but in forms of mystical thought and behaviour, in specific ritual observances, and in traditional healing practices – such at least is the experience in this country (Rahmato 1990 A).

The hidden expressions of peasant consciousness, such as those reflected in popular culture and institutions, have not received the attention they deserve. In general, though, peasant consciousness as a social force and a contributing element to the course of historical change is now the emerging consensus (see Turton and Tanabe 1984). While the emphasis may vary, there is agreement that the explanation of peasant behaviour in given circumstances should be sought not in some primordial and hence 'frozen' set of principles or beliefs, but in the field of power that surrounds peasants, and in the goals that they wish to attain. Turton has argued in fact that peasant consciousness arises in opposition to the dominant ideology, and is itself a counter-ideology (Turton and Tanabe, 1984: 23ff). This may be narrowing the scope of peasant consciousness, nevertheless the import of the new outlook is to consider the peasant as a conscious actor, and not merely a passive recipient of initiatives from outside.

The literature on peasant response to social adversity is vast and to cover it would take us too far afield, but we shall look at three strands of thought in passing. The first has to do with the "exit" notion associated in the African context with Hyden (1980). The peasant mode of production, it is argued, is based on the "economy of affection", and is characterized by a cellular economic structure where each household is independent of the other. If cooperation among households exists it is temporary, or only in times of emergency; such cooperation is further not formalized. This mode of production allows the household to maintain a high degree of autonomy, enabling it to exercise its exit option in circumstances where it feels threatened. This explains why the peasant remains "uncaptured" by either the state or capitalism (Hyden, 1980: 12-9). We shall see below that contrary to Hyden cooperation within peasant communities is regularized, that "affective" ties do inform economic relations but are regulated by the logic of the rural market, and state domination and exploitation is pervasive.

The second viewpoint is contained in the theory of everyday forms of peasant resistance promoted by James Scott (Scott 1985, Scott and Kerkvliet 1986). Scott has argued that peasant conformity and deference vis-a-vis power holders is only the "partial transcript", the full transcript appears only backstage (i.e. away from power-laden situations), when the powerless have the opportunity to engage in free dialogue and "unedited" behaviour (Scott, 1985: 284-9). In power-laden situations subordinate classes act according to a well-known and publicly expected transcript. Their rejection of the dominant ideology is contained not in their acts, which are censored, but in their beliefs and interpretations (Scott, 1985: 322). There is a good deal that is valid in this argument, but it remains incomplete. As we shall see below, the "backstage"

transcript in our case is not hidden but in full public view, that it invests tradition with new meaning, affirming the "counter-ideology" of the dominated classes. Moreover, beliefs are acted out in rituals, religious revivals or forms of popular culture¹. Anyone familiar with LeRoy Ladurie's discussion of the "carnival" of protest and the "fantasy of inversion", in which French peasants in the 16th century acted out their revolt in street dances and masquerades, or expressed their discord with the existing order through demonic practices involving satanism and witchcraft (LeRoy Ladurie, 1974: Chs. 4 and 5), will recognize that what is hidden in one form emerges into public view in another.

The third viewpoint refers to the notion of "disengagement" from the state in crisis situations (Azarya and Chazam 1987). While this argument was made in reference to urban populations coping with adversity it may be extended to rural conditions. The point here is that populations in stress will take a variety of measures, including flight or migration, self-isolation, etc. to disengage from the state and to secure viability. This is in the main an individual act, and the chances of success are based primarily on individual ingenuity and initiative.

The reinforcement of tradition by peasant communities on the other hand, is not a search for escape or disengagement but rather a re-engagement of the dominant forces, on peasants' own terms, and on the terrain that they know best. Individuals consciously revitalize those elements of popular culture that are valued because they are thought to promote security, identity, and autonomy. Peasants thus actively *invest* in tradition: they observe and participate in them with heightened dedication and fervour, and at great cost, material and emotional, to themselves. Of special interest perhaps to the social psychologist is the fact that the poor make greater investments in tradition than the better-off. We shall return to this later.

This study is based on field work which I carried out in 1989 and 1990 in a district (called Bolosso) in Wollaita sub-province in southern Ethiopia. In many ways this area is unique in the country, with complex rural institutions, and a versatile but confining agricultural practice and history. By rural institutions we include rural organizations based on mutual support and cooperation on the one hand, and on the other values such as the family, forms of religious practice and of ritual. It can safely be stated that for a majority of peasants here associative relations are vital, and few households would be viable without one or more cooperative schemes. Over the years, however, these relationships have acquired a new purpose and a new meaning, becoming in short critical elements both in the open and "hidden" forms of peasant struggles.

Agrarian Change and Social Crisis²

The crisis of Wollaita society³ has its roots in the distant past, but it has been aggravated seriously by the radical agrarian changes of the last fifteen years, which brought with them land reform and the restructuring of rural power relations, collectivization, villagization and resettlement in quick succession. These were policies which had a serious destabilizing effect on the peasantry. Even before the revolution of 1974 which overthrew the Old Regime and ushered in military government, which later adopted hardline Stalinist economic and political policies, Wollaita society was experiencing growing shortages of arable land and other basic resources, and high population pressure.

By the latter part of the 1980s, the shortage of land had reached acute proportions, and most peasants were lucky to farm tiny plots measuring 0.50 hectare or less. In parts of the district where I did my field work, the population density reaches over 400 persons per km². In short, rural Wollaita has for some time been undergoing a serious process of agricultural involution, in Geertz's sense of the term. Intensive cultivation is now the norm, fallowing practices have long been abandoned, and peasant farms are exposed to greater dangers of soil depletion due to over cultivation. Most peasants here cannot afford chemical fertilizers, they employ instead organic matter to enrich the soil. For this purpose livestock are a critical resource, but only a few can afford to maintain more than one or two heads of cattle, and many in fact own no animals at all.

Wollaita belongs to what is known in Ethiopia as the *ensete* agro-ecology, which is confined to the zone that lies in the belly of the country. The farming system here consists of combining root crops with cereals in a dynamic way. The main root crops are *ensete* (known as false banana, *Ensete ventricosum*), sweet potatoes, taro and yam, while maize, barley, wheat and *teff* (*Eragrostis abyssinica*) make up the important cereals. The farmer here is more like a professional gardener: fields are worked intensively but with loving care, a large variety of vegetables and root crops are planted along with cereals, and no patch of ground is left unused. *Ensete*, the staple crop, is often planted around the homestead, carefully nurtured with organic fertilizer until it is ready to be harvested in four to six years. *Ensete* is a versatile plant: it is the main food source, but the residue is used as firewood, cattle feed, as material for a wide variety of household appliances, and for making ropes, mats and protective cover.

The system is both resilient and vulnerable. Combining root crops with cereals provides a greater degree of food security for the family than other

cropping practices; the lean months here are shorter and fewer. Such is the dynamics of the system that it has been able to support a very high density of population without suffering food crisis or famine, until 1984/85. Indeed, despite the increasing ecological pressure and dwindling resources, crop yield per unit of land has either remained unchanged or improved slightly in the last three decades. While the diminution of plots and their fragmentation is a central element of the regressive dynamics of the area's land system, improvements in crop husbandry and farm technology have helped to stave off serious hunger and starvation.

The resilience of peasant agriculture before the revolution was rooted in the land tenure system which provided the owner or user security both over the land and his produce. A majority of peasants here were owner cultivators, and tenancy was not very widespread. Those considered large owners and rentiers were a small percentage of the rural population. While in certain localities in the cool highlands absentee landlords and landlords not indigenous to the area owned considerable property, they were not a significant force in Wollaita as a whole. Tenancy, regulated more by custom than by contract, assured the operator a measure of security, though the burden imposed by the landlord was quite onerous. Landlord tenant relationships were however tempered by the moderating influence of a common culture and language, and a common perception by both classes of their cultural subordination to the ruling forces in the centre.

But the system is also vulnerable because there is greater pressure on the land, and greater inter-household competition for resources. In the period before the revolution, Wollaita peasants could supplement their income through seasonal employment offered by several agro-industrial enterprises and large-scale mechanized farms in the Rift Valley adjacent to the area, but these opportunities are no longer available, and many peasants have turned to itinerant peddling and trade to make ends meet. Common resources such as wood lots, pasture or water points are either heavily over-used, or have disappeared altogether. The farming system has also blocked any tendencies to out-migration. It is a confining system because the Wollaita peasant knows no other agricultural practice, and few places in the country available for migrant settlement offer the environmental conditions requisite for *ensete*-based agriculture.

The agrarian reform of 1975, and the subsequent radical rural policies of the military government profoundly exacerbated peasant vulnerability by striking at the root of the system of peasant production. The reforms that came almost simultaneously in the late 1970s and early 1980s had one important thing in common: they promoted in the name of agrarian socialism insecurity of holding

and of production. For lack of space the reforms cannot be discussed here but they involved group farming and loss of individual holdings, evictions from the land, relocation elsewhere (often to marginal lands), and loss of one's independent decision making ability. The new programmes were based on the earlier land reform which, while not specifically designed with that objective in mind, did nevertheless distort the peasant's chances for a secure holding (Rahmato 1991B for details). Land in effect became nationalized, and though this was not clear to peasants initially, a peasant's rights to its use became dependent on his/her acquiescence to, if not support of the government's increasingly anti-peasant programmes, and on his/her standing with party and government agents in the vicinity most of whom were eager to push peasants, even against their will, into "socialist" agricultural schemes.

Agrarian change also brought high rates of state exactions. It was not just that the new taxes that followed the land reform squeezed the rural poor more than others, but that a variety of plans were concocted to siphon off as much of the peasant surplus as possible. These came to be known as "voluntary contributions" though they were neither voluntary nor contributions but rather levies imposed on an unwilling peasantry. There were levies for famine relief and rehabilitation, for national reconstruction, civil defence, and a host of "development" programmes including literacy.

Added to this was the government's grain requisitioning programme. From the late 1970s onwards, the central authorities strove hard to control grain marketing, agricultural prices and the movement of agricultural goods within the country. To feed the urban population the government imposed a quota of food grain on each peasant household to be delivered to state purchasing agencies at prices far below those of the open market. Peasants had to deliver their annual quotas, which were imposed arbitrarily by state bureaucrats at the capital, whether they had any harvest or not.

Wollaita has suffered few famines, but due to high population density and congested living space, pandemics such as small-pox, cholera, meningitis and malaria have occurred here with greater frequency than elsewhere in the country. The years 1983-1988 were traumatic ones for the peasantry, for they were subjected to one unprecedented crisis after another in which anywhere between three to five thousand people may have lost their lives.

The tragedy was preceded by a virulent form of crop disease which attacked the *ensete* plant, the most important food source in the area. This was followed in 1983-84 by a serious drought, which shattered peasant hopes for a quick recovery. The famine that gripped the area in 1985 was perhaps the worst tragedy for most peasants here and the death toll was estimated to be very high; but it was the only one of its kind in nearly a century. No sooner had the

peasantry recovered from the trauma of starvation than it was paralyzed by a terrible outbreak of meningitis which swept through the sub-province in 1987-88. This, together with a resurgence of malaria earlier in the lowlands, may have claimed the lives of more than a thousand people.

Such in brief has been the social, economic and environmental crisis that rural society has undergone. The pressure on Wollaita peasants continued mounting without letup, until by the close of the 1980s it had reached explosive levels. There were here and there violent acts of resistance against party and government agents. In one incident in 1980, a large group of peasants protesting the enclosure of communal lands for the benefit of cooperatives in north-central Wollaita angrily beat up several rural agents, seriously wounding some of them. In 1986 and 1987, district officials had to abandon several village schemes because peasants refused to be involved in them. In 1989 there were scattered incidents of violence against party and extension agents by irate peasants protesting against forced collectivization or villagization, and in one such incident in central Wollaita a party agent was hacked to death. But such acts occurred in exceptional circumstances, and a majority of peasants relied instead on "hidden" forms of struggle and "silent" forms of protest.

A word about the nature of peasant struggles in this country. Where social differentiation within the peasantry is negligible, as is the case in Ethiopia as a whole, the struggle of the rural population is aimed primarily at threats emanating from outside; intra-peasant struggles are either muted or are of minor importance. One of the most significant outcomes of the agrarian changes in post-revolution Ethiopia is the destruction of the economic and political power of the landed classes, and the transformation of rural Ethiopia into a society consisting almost exclusively of a class of self-labouring peasants (Rahmato 1984, 1991B). This is more visible in Wollaita which is almost wholly a land of micro-peasants and micro-enterprises. Simple forms of differentiation of course still exist (no social revolution can bring about complete homogeneity), and one may distinguish between poor and relatively better-off peasants, but these differences are not class or qualitative differences in the Marxist sense of the word. Land reform has effectively dissolved the material basis of class formation in the countryside. The significant forces confronting each other here are therefore the state and the peasantry.

Investing in Tradition

As was noted earlier, the two categories of traditional institutions that will concern us here are the associative and the "emotive". The first refers to rural organizations whose main objectives are cooperation and solidarity. Such forms

of organization are common throughout rural Africa, and serve, at the primary level, purposes of mutual self-sustenance and resource mobilization (Rahmato 1991 A). In Ethiopia, greater attention has been given by researchers to urban-based "voluntary associations", while rural self-help organizations have either been neglected, or considered merely as off-shoots of the former (see Salole 1982 for the earlier literature; the exception is Worqneh 1966). Works produced of late, however, are beginning to redress the balance (Abatena 1987, Aspen 1990, Rahmato 1990B).

There are a wide variety of associative schemes in rural Wollaita, all of which are at present active and thriving. It is clear that as life becomes more precarious and peasants' resilience to social and economic crisis is eroded, families turn increasingly to traditional cooperative endeavour to maintain their viability. Co-rearing and share-rearing of livestock are widespread; rotating credit schemes involving cash or material produce, the latter often favoured by women, are very common; and *kotta* farming, in which the poor lease their land to others for a share of the harvest while they themselves engage in itinerant trading, is popular.

The institution that is of interest to us is the *edir* which is universal here and to which virtually every household belongs. On the surface the *edir* is a burial society, the kind commonly found elsewhere in rural Ethiopia or Africa. However, a closer look reveals that the organization is a multi-purpose body with wider and more socially-oriented responsibilities. Over the years, the *edir* has evolved, first to a general welfare society, and more recently to a kind of "proto-political" body. The *edir* is perhaps the most significant institution in rural Wollaita, and everyone puts great trust in it, participating in its functions regularly and with great solemnity. Few peasants will miss an *edir* occasion, and fewer still will bear the heavy social cost of being excluded or removed from membership.

Let us first look at *edir* as a welfare institution, a role which has become more pronounced of late as more and more peasants have become more vulnerable to poverty and food shortages. In many communities the larger *edir* which may have a membership of 300 or more households is often sub-divided into smaller *edir*, sometimes called *amba*, consisting of 50 or more households. The following are the most important cooperative and support activities carried out through the *amba*.

First is mutual exchange of labour to help families meet their needs during heavy work schedules such as land development, home and other construction, bulk food processing, etc. Connected with this is the practice of supporting families unable to farm their land due to old age, widowhood or serious physical disabilities. If such families cannot find alternative ways of using their land,

edir members will cultivate it for them in return for a share of the harvest. Secondly, *amba* provides credit services to its members: needy peasants have access to the savings of the *amba* and small loans are offered to them without interest. A third service common in several communities is medical "insurance". Such schemes involve transporting the sick to a health centre or the house of a traditional healer (and this can often mean travelling on foot for two or more hours, carrying the patient on a stretcher), and paying for his/her medical expenses from the *amba* savings. Finally, there are expenses for early warning information. It appears that in the last decade or so more and more peasants are turning to the rain-diviner to obtain environmental foreknowledge, which they then use to plan cropping and harvesting strategies to minimize their loss. The "rain-man", as he is often called, always charges a fee for his services, and the expense is covered from the coffers of the *amba*. Significantly, this is not an individual decision; *amba* members are first consulted and it is with their approval that a group of messengers is sent to consult the diviner.

What we have here is an example of a primary form of self-reliance in which peasants consciously strive to build their community's capabilities to sustain its members. A traditional structure whose original purpose was to provide succor in times of family bereavement is here adapted to meet the felt needs of the community, and to serve as an alternative to state run services. The *edir* is turned into an active institution drawing its strength from the old and the new, and accessible to all without discrimination. It has become formalized of late with an elected body of officials and, in some cases, with written records of its activities and decisions⁴. Self-reliance in this context is not withdrawal, but rather an affirmation of confidence on one's own community and one's own potential⁵.

The *edir* also provides the medium for the "backstage" or "unedited" transcript considered by James Scott to be a critical element of everyday resistance. Here, peasants gather to talk about their problems (agricultural, social, political), to discuss survival strategies, to plan cooperative schemes, and to exchange information. Here is a free and accommodating environment for open dialogue, for moral support and for consciousness raising. Elders and those with greater experience assume their respectful positions, and those with connections to the local power structure are sought out for information and advice.

The *edir* comes to life, as it were, during burial ceremonies when all members gather at the home of the bereaved family, and for some time until the deceased is buried, the assembled guests engage in a solemn song and dance. The funerary ritual has become more elaborate and more impassioned. It is

followed, after burial, by communal eating. This could either be a modest affair or an extended mini-feast depending on the endowment of the *edir*.

It is a common sight nowadays for funerary rituals to involve horsemen and a riding display. Horses in Wollaita are rarely used as beasts of burden, and only occasionally as a means of human mobility. They are kept primarily for ceremonial occasions of which burial is one of the most important. The owner of a horse (about a quarter of rural households may fall in this category) will take great care of his animal at considerable expense to himself. In the funeral ceremony, the riders in their gayly decorated horses gather in an open field near the burial ground, show off their horses and their horsemanship, and engage in mock competition. The display is a sort of masquerade except that it is the horses which are brightly "costumed". The competition itself is a fantasy show in which the object is to run away from one's rival, and to demonstrate one's prowess.

The ritual of song and dance in this context may be considered as formalized, non-discursive communication: it is, in other words, a form of communion, an unvoiced but intimate dialogue with fellow participants. Through the ritual, the participants communicate with one another and project themselves to others as a collectivity. This bonded experience imparts to the participants a sense of power and identity. The occasion is a mystic one in which the symbolic fusion of the individual with the collective is achieved. Here everyone is linked together, everyone has a rightful place, and every thing is in harmony. In brief, the *edir*, through the mystical experience of the funerary ritual, serves to reaffirm the identity and collective will of the community.

We now turn to "emotive" forms of traditional institutions. A religious revival has been spreading through rural Wollaita since the early 1980s. The three major religious groups here are the Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics (Moslems are negligible here), and while the first has for quite some time been quiescent and languishing, the other two are expanding rapidly. Recently, *Qa'ale Hiwot* (Word of Life), the Protestant group (or rather movement because it acts like one) has been receiving large numbers of new converts, and spreading its activities vigorously. There is competition between it and the Catholics, and at present it looks as if the former has a slight edge over the latter. These two foreign-based churches are gaining at the expense of the Orthodox Church, a fact worth noting because the latter was the official church of the Old Regime and is associated with northern domination in the minds of many peasants here. While the evidence is not complete, there is reason to believe that the new converts of the 1980s, particularly Protestants, are the less endowed elements of rural society; the older Protestants and Catholics, those that joined the churches in the 1950s or earlier, are mostly well-to-do.

Qa'ale Hiwot adherents are more visible and more vocal, because they have a habit of frequently gathering in a well positioned house and praying, chanting and singing loudly. It is as if they want the whole world to hear them and to take note of their devotion. Interestingly enough, peasants are joining the revival movement and converting on their own terms, i.e. without giving up many of their traditional values. Polygyny, for example, is practiced openly by peasants belonging to all three religious groups.

The significance of religious revivalism here lies in social and relational factors more than in factors having to do with faith. The phenomenon does not indicate that peasants are turning towards spiritualism and other-worldliness and away from their immediate and material concerns, nor does it imply that they wish to trade their traditional values for new ones. There are of course elements having to do with faith and spiritualism, but these are surface elements and what is hidden behind them is quite different. Revivalism denotes the search for community and collective strength. It is investing in new traditions without changing the existing ones in any significant way. Revivalism, in brief is an indicator of growing political awareness.

The practice of polygyny has been on the increase in rural Wollaita since the early 1980s. Comparative data on the subject is hard to come by, but in two communities in Bolosso where I did an extended survey in the latter part of 1989 I found that 39% of my male respondents had two or more wives. A survey of Bolosso in 1971 by WADU, a multi-purpose World Bank supported project, found that only about 8% of peasants sampled were polygynous (WADU 1976: 8). These two findings are not strictly comparable, but they are indicative of a growing trend in multiple marriages. Oral interviews I had with knowledgeable peasants here showed that more and more male peasants are adopting polygamous households despite the fact that the practice brings more economic hardships to the families concerned. What is interesting is also the fact that polygyny is now favoured by a good number of younger males who have had relatively more formal education. Polygyny is an indigenous tradition, but in the past it was confined to the landed classes or well-to-do peasants.

While the facts seem to be clear, the reasons for the spread of the practice appear to be quite involved, and the interpretation I am offering here is tentative, pending more work by rural sociologists and social psychologists. The literature on the subject is quite extensive, and even a brief review of it is beyond our purview (see White and Burton 1988 for this). The debate focuses on the social and economic meaning of polygyny, and the key issues that are the subject of discussion are whether polygyny bestows on the practitioner social status and power, whether it brings greater wealth through the additional marriage contract, or whether it is linked to war and booty acquired through war. Neither

of these questions seem to be pertinent to our case, because the practice is spreading in times of social and economic crisis, and the practitioners are for the most part poor peasants.

The real meaning of polygyny may lie in peasants' changing perceptions of the family and its value in social cohesion. It is obvious that the family is, specially in times of prolonged crisis, the main engine of individual sustenance and viability, as much as the bond that ties the community together. The disintegration of the family, and the atrophy of familial values is a fatal wound that will lead to the disintegration of the community and the loss of security and identity of the individuals within it. This fear of social disintegration and loss of individual security may be linked to the fear of castration and loss of sexual potency. Polygyny thus seems to be an attempt or a desire, at least in the imagination, to reinforce the family and familial consciousness, and through this, reaffirm the peasant's security and individual worth.

As was noted earlier, the practice of polygyny is more widespread among the poor than among the well-to-do. The two communities in Bolosso where I did my survey, Admancho and Bombe, are different in terms of resource endowments, the latter being much poorer than the former, yet more peasants in my sample in Bombe were involved in multiple marriages than in Admancho. Taking size of land holdings as a measure of economic status, I found in Admancho (where data was collected in more depth) that 50% of the polygynous households possessed land measuring 0.50 hectare or less, 29% land measuring 0.75 hectare, and 21% one hectare and more. In other words, it was mostly the lower and upper poor, those with land measuring less than one hectare, who maintained polygynous households. In terms of religious affiliation my findings were that polygyny was spread proportionally across the three main religions discussed above.

This brings us to the subject of the rural poor and their participation in traditional institutions. We noted earlier that the poor invest in tradition relatively more heavily than the well-to-do. The conventional view of the poor is highly quantitative: it believes that the social condition of the poor is definable if it can be measured in terms of assets, income and consumption (see Lipton 1985 for the literature). While this may be useful for development planning and targeting purposes, it does not advance our understanding because it leaves out the behaviour, perceptions, and social dynamic of the group. The poor are first people with their own thoughts, desires, hopes and fears, and only secondly objects of statistical measurement.

To be poor means not just to lack sufficient assets and income, but to be threatened with the loss of one's standing in the community, and of one's self-esteem. An individual's social standing is measured not only by his material

possessions, although this is an important factor, but also by his participation in social functions, religious and traditional observances. The poor often "over participate" in these occasions. They "over invest" in tradition because this is a symbolic act of *defiance of poverty*, of denying poverty the ultimate victory, namely, social humiliation⁶. Heyer (1989) found, for example, that the high priority investments of the poor in a rural district in India were marriage celebrations and housing, not land, farm tools or livestock. She considers these as investments for material gain, and leaves out the social side of the equation, viz., maintaining self-esteem and individual worth, which the poor are more conscious of than others.

In Wollaita, the rural poor are more dedicated to traditional institutions. They are greatly attached to their *edir*, and go to great lengths to meet their social obligations. They go heavily into debt, or sell off their hard earned assets to pay for burial, wedding and similar expenses, which are often costly and bring no immediate material benefits. In the post-famine period of the second half of the 1980s, many poor peasants in Bolosso were provided farm oxen, the main traction power here, on credit and at subsidized prices by NGOs operating here; the goal was to promote the quick recovery of the needy. However, a good number of beneficiaries sold the animals soon after, and the two most important reasons given were that they needed the money to cover expenses for burial ceremonies and household consumption.

One of the most significant occasions in the Wollaita calendar is *Masqel* (the Finding of the Cross), celebrated each year on the 26th or 27th of September. The festival, which is probably pre-Christian in origin, is remarkable for the orgy of feasting that takes place in all communities. Young and old, rich and poor participate in the celebrations with great joy; preparations for the occasion take place several months in advance. In each community large numbers of oxen are slaughtered (and it is always oxen, often fattened for the occasion), the meat distributed to each participating family, and the orgy of eating, drinking and above all singing and dancing goes on for five to seven days. It is considered a great shame for any family to miss out on the festivities due to poverty or bankruptcy. The festival is quite costly, and a poor peasant may spend up to a quarter of his annual income for the occasion. The poor borrow heavily and seriously deplete their savings in order to meet the obligations of *Masqel*.

For poor peasants associative or emotive traditional values are essential because they are a form of social investment and of security, a means by which they maintain a respectable position in society, and a channel through which they express their individuality. If the poor do not invest in tradition they will have few sources of support in times of need because they would become a *social nobody* in their community. To be a social outcast or to lose the traditional

consideration due each family is a worse handicap than mere material deprivation.

Notes

1. Scott does make a passing reference to "authorized ritual occasions when it is possible to break the rules" relating to conformity (1985: 287).
2. The radical political changes that have taken place in the country since May 1991 make the discussion presented in these pages just as topical as before.
3. The discussion in this section is based mostly on my earlier works: Rahmato 1990B, 1991B. See also the contributions to the volume edited by Pausewang et al. 1990: this work contains an extensive bibliography.
4. For a similar example of a traditional institution adapting to new demands in another part of the country see Aspen 1990.
5. For a comparison with the defensive strategies of Russian peasants during the crisis of forced collectivization in the late 1920s and early '30s, see Lewin 1985: Ch. 7.
6. The depth of poverty is a matter for debate, but in all rural communities there are people poorer than the poor. The "privileged" poor, i.e. those with *some* assets which are however insufficient to meet their needs, know that there are poorer people than themselves. The ultimate humiliation in rural Wollaita is total destitution epitomized by beggars, mendicants and the homeless. This group of ultra-destitutes has been left out of the discussion.

References

- Abatena, Haile (1987), The Potential Contribution of Indigenous Self-help and Mutual Aid Organizations to the Socio-economic Development of Ethiopia, *Journal of Rural Cooperation*, 15 (2), 89-106.
- Aspen, H. (1990), "Present Forms of Traditional Associations and Institutions in Mafud, Northern Showa", in S. Ege, ed., 145-61.
- Azarya, V. and N. Chazam (1987), Disengagement from the State in Africa: Reflections on the Experience of Ghana and Guinea, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29 (1), 106-31.
- Ege, S., ed. (1990), *Ethiopia: Problems of Sustainable Development* (Dragvoll, Norway: University of Trondheim).
- Geertz, C (1963), *Agricultural Involution* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Giddens, A. (1979), *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Heyer, Judith (1989), Landless agricultural labourers' asset strategies, *IDS Bulletin*, 20 (2), 33-40.
- Hyden, G (1980), *Beyond Ujama in Tanzania* (London: Heinemann).
- LeRoy Ladurie, E. (1974), *The Peasants of Languedoc* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press).
- Lewin, Moshe (1985), *The Making of Soviet Russia* (New York: Pantheon Books).
- Lipton, M. (1985), *Land Assets and Rural Poverty* (Washington: World Bank).
- Pausewang, S. et al., eds., (1990), *Ethiopia: Options for Rural Development* (London: Zed Books).

- Rahmato, D. (1984), *Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies).
- _____ (1990A), "Famine in Peasant Consciousness: Aspects of Symbolic Culture in Rural Ethiopia", Proceedings of the Fifth Seminar of the Department of History (Addis Ababa University), 31-48.
- _____ (1990B), *A Resource Flow Systems Analysis of Rural Bolosso (Wollaita), a report to Redd Barna-Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Redd Barna-Ethiopia).
- _____ (1991A), *Peasant Organizations in Africa: Constraints and Potentials*, CODESRIA Working Paper 1/91 (Dakar: CODESRIA).
- _____ (1991B), *Agrarian Change and Agrarian Crisis: State and Peasantry in Post-revolution Ethiopia*, Forthcoming.
- Ranger, T. (1987), *Peasant Consciousness: Culture and Conflict in Zimbabwe*, in T. Shanin, ed., 331-38.
- Salole, G. (1982), The Development of Edir and Mahaber in Addis Ababa, *NEA, Journal of Research on North East Africa*, 1 (3), 233-45.
- Scot, J. (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- _____ and B. Kerkvliet, eds. (1986), "Special Issue on Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in South-East Asia", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13 (2).
- Shanin, T., ed. (1987), *Peasants and Peasant Societies, New Edition* (London: Penguin Books).
- Turton, A. (1984), "Limits of Ideological Domination and the Formation of Social Consciousness", in Turton and Tanabe, eds., 19-73.
- Turton, A. and S. Tanabe, eds., (1984), *History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia*, Senri Ethnological Studies No. 13 (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology).
- White, D. R. and M.L. Burton (1988), Causes of Polygyny: Ecology, Economy, Kinship and Warfare, *American Anthropologist*, 90 (4): 871-87.
- Wollaita Agricultural Development Unit (1976), Agricultural Survey of Bolosso, December 1971, WADU publication 48 (Wollaita-Soddo).
- Worqneh, Habtemariam (1966), *Social Life in Ethiopia* (Amharic) (Addis Ababa: Artistic Press).

