

# Enabling development and 'transition' among food-supported producers in Ethiopia: a comparative case study.



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## Cover photos

From top left, clockwise: Photos 1-3 are images of MERET-PLUS sites in SNNP killil, and photo 4 shows aid provided by WFP, SNNP killil. Credits: Ato Erkeno Wossoro (1) and Peter Jackson (2-4).

## Keywords

Exit strategy, phasing out strategy, graduation, Ethiopia, MERET-PLUS, Productive Safety Net Program, food assistance program, food aid, watershed-based, World Food Programme.

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## Terms and acronyms used

**ALD** – Agriculture-led development.

**Balg rains** – literally ‘little rains’, which fall (generally) during March and April, corresponding with harvest season between (generally) June and July.

**BoARD** – Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development

**CBPWD** – Community Based Participatory Watershed Development.

**DA** – Development Agent.

**Debub Wollo** – in English, ‘South Wollo’, a zone in Amhara region, Ethiopia.

**ESMF** - Environmental and Social Management Framework.

**Exit** – the withdrawal of all externally-provided program resources from the entire program area<sup>1</sup>.

**FAO** – United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

**FBIs** – Food based interventions, involving food distribution, market intervention, or financial transfers which improve food security<sup>2</sup>.

**Food aid** – Internationally-sourced, concessional food resources<sup>3</sup>.

**Gebbar** — Refers to a tribute-paying, smallholder peasant.

**Graduation** – A state where participants in an intervention have achieved all relevant benchmarks for progress, and become independent from receiving support under the intervention.

**IGA** – Income generating activities.

**Kabele** – The smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia, also known as a Peasant Association (see [Map A.1](#)).

**Keremt rains** – literally ‘big rains’, which fall (generally) from June to September, with a corresponding harvest season (generally) from October to January.

**Killil** – (or region) The largest multiple administrative unit in Ethiopia, an ethnically-based, self-governing country. There are nine *kiloch* in Ethiopia (see [Map A.1](#)), which are overseen by a federal government.

**LLPPA** – Local Level Participatory Planning Approach

**MERET-PLUS** – Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transition to more sustainable livelihoods through Partnership and Land User Solidarity.

**MoARD** – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

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<sup>1</sup> Macias, K. and Rogers, B., 2004, ‘Program graduation and Exit Strategies: Title II Program Experiences and Related Research’, TUFTS Nutrition, Discussion Paper No. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Clay, E. 2005, ‘The changing meaning and role of food aid’, presented at FAO in Rome on January 28th.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: Barrett, C. and Maxwell, D., 2005, *Food Aid After Fifty Years: Recasting its Role*, Routledge: London, New York.

**NRM** – Natural resource management

**Phasing down** – A staged process of decreasing the amount of support provided to sites, communities, or interventions as a whole.

**Phasing over** – A staged process of transferring responsibility for an intervention to participating communities, or to a local development institution (government office, non-governmental organisation etc).

**Phasing out** – A staged process of withdrawing support provided under an intervention to participating communities.

**Program food aid** – Food aid that is either donated or sold at a concessional price to the government of a recipient country, which then sells the food on the market.<sup>4</sup>

**Project food aid** – Project food aid is food that is distributed for free (or in exchange for work) to participants in programs typically run by non-governmental organizations or the World Food Programme that are intended to promote agricultural or economic development.<sup>5</sup>

**PSNP** – Productive Safety Net Programme

**PWTG** - Public Works Technical Guidance.

**SNNP** – Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region.

**SWOT** – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.

**Transition** – A process that is jointly planned and agreed-upon by 1) foreign humanitarian institution(s), 2) in-country government, and 3) recipients/participants in the intervention. Transition occurs when appropriately equipped and ‘ready’ participants/recipients, supporting government and civil society come to hold full responsibility for the activities and outcomes of the intervention. As such, the term encapsulates both ‘graduation’, which is an end-point achieved by participants, as well as ‘phasing down’, ‘phasing over’, ‘phasing out’ and ‘exit’, which describe action taken by humanitarian institution(s). This definition excludes situations where support is withdrawn ‘prematurely’, before appropriate capacities and plans are in place.

**UNWFP** – United Nations World Food Programme.

**Woreda** – An administrative unit in Ethiopia, equivalent to district, and containing multiple kabele.

There are over 550 woredas in Ethiopia (see [Map A.1](#))

**Zone** – An administrative unit in Ethiopia, containing multiple woredas (see [Map A.1](#)).

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<sup>4</sup> Clay, E. and C. Benson. 1990, ‘Acquisition of commodities in developing countries for food aid in the 1980s’, Food Policy, 15, 1, pp. 27-43.

<sup>5</sup> Lowder, S., and Raney, T., 2005, ‘Food Aid: A Primer’, ESA Working Paper 05-05: FAO, pp. 7.

## Abstract

Ethiopia is synonymous with protracted drought, natural resource degradation, and hunger and impoverished livelihoods among many millions of farm-based producers. Since 1971, the Government of Ethiopia and foreign donors have channelled food aid and administrative and extension support to relief and rehabilitation projects for improved natural resource management. One such intervention is MERET-PLUS (Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transition to more sustainable livelihoods through Partnership and Land User Solidarity), a long-standing, watershed-based food-for-assets development project. In its latest form, MERET-PLUS like many similar 'new generation' food-funded natural resource management interventions has multiple positive impacts, both for targeted watershed areas, and for the inhabitants of these areas. In spite of this, successfully enabling 'transition' of participants from receiving food aid remains highly problematic. Transition has not received sufficient attention in programming or – until recently – in academic literature. Partly for this reason, such interventions often lack an agreed, coherent definition of transition, a strategy for achieving such transition, and a means of measuring progress toward transition. Recognising potential for transition to advance policy and practice for such projects, I critically evaluate transition as an inherent objective of the current phase of MERET-PLUS, through the positional lens of my internship with a major donor to the project, the World Food Programme (WFP). I use four case study woredas as talking points, and use quantitative and qualitative information gathered from extensive research from site- through to federal-level. I wish to answer two research questions about transition through this research. Firstly: to what extent has 'enabling transition' in MERET-PLUS been developed as a concept, in policy or strategy, and as an understood and measurable concept? And secondly: what place does transition have in the MERET-PLUS project?

In relation to the first question, this research presents four main findings. Firstly, formal strategy for transitioning MERET-PLUS beneficiaries from project support has been formed only after thirty years of continuous food support. In many ways, this reflects the legacy of continued difficulties in linking relief, rehabilitation and development – and of achieving real development and independent capacities to sustain this development – through food-supported programming. Secondly, there are currently diverse interests in transition across all levels of the MERET-PLUS project, which must be factored-in to any strategy for implementation. In sub-federal government offices for example, strategy for transition is

formed by observing the particular contexts of particular successful sites within their area. By contrast, at federal level, in the WFP Country Office, strategy for transition tends to be formed as part of instrumental programming goals. Thirdly, two particular components of MERET-PLUS make it difficult to conceive of transition as inherent in programming, or as an instrument introduced from higher levels. First, the integrated nature of MERET-PLUS, with a wide range of activities for land and water-source rehabilitation and human livelihood improvement, makes it difficult to conceive of one, integrated strategy for transition. Second, the holistic, participatory approaches to targeting project assistance and planning project activities make instrumental approaches to transition inappropriate. ‘Transition as inherent’ and ‘transition as instrumental’ approaches represent unrealised potential for scalable improvements of project impacts, coupled with the challenge of building the kind of concerted confidence required among beneficiaries, planners, leaders and government agencies. Fourthly and finally, information from project beneficiaries, planning teams, and project managers at higher levels has highlighted the importance of asset-based measures of communities’ and households’ livelihoods in assessing readiness for transition. Communication and planning for transition with engaged beneficiaries remains an important challenge, and one which has not been sufficiently understood in the literature.

The goal of ‘enabling transition’ in MERET-PLUS is as yet unrealised in practice and at scale. A number of factors indicate real potential for transition in case study areas, including income generation from collective farm-based activities, and more broadly, confidence and belief among beneficiaries in improving their livelihoods through available project activities. As a snapshot of potential to ‘enable transition’, this research contributes practice-based insights for progressively phasing out “outsiders” assistance to vulnerable communities.

## Introduction

Since the beginning of externally-administered ‘integrated’ rural development projects in Ethiopia in 1967, different ‘discourses’ over policy for rural development have fed-into the lives of rural people. While different strands of policy have showed success and promise – particularly through the 1974 Land Reform Proclamation – policy for rural development, as a whole, has not been successful in ‘enabling’ rural development and resilience at scale. In contexts of discontinuous efforts to modernise, to ‘socialise’, and most recently to ‘capitalise’ Ethiopia’s agriculture sector (Rahmato, 2008), three recent periods of major famine (1971-1974; 1983-1984; 2002) have severely limited the effectiveness of a range of efforts for rural development, and have also placed constraints upon understanding of the extent to which these efforts can be called sustainable. Currently, in a federal context of a comparably more democratic and stable political regime, improved arrangements for emergency response, and consensus-forming by decision-makers in particular areas (community-based participatory watershed development is an important example), the question of how to ensure sustainable development in Ethiopia’s agricultural sector is receiving increasing attention. Emerging policy efforts aim to promote the known successes – at scale – of these development activities by planning in concert with the Agricultural Led Development Industrialisation (ALDI) policy of the Government of Ethiopia, as well as multilateral policies such as the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) agenda, and the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative.

MERET-PLUS (‘Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transition to more-sustainable livelihoods through Partnership for Land User Solidarity’), is an important, long-standing intervention in Ethiopia which aligns with these policies for ensuring sustained development. In its various forms, the project has received funding from donors for watershed rehabilitation since the early 1980s. These funded activities have had important results for watershed sites and inhabitants in this time, as well as for institutional practice at both domestic and international scales. The planning approach of the project has been awarded by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and adopted by both the Government of Ethiopia and the World Food Programme internationally as a model for best practice (MoARD, 2009b; WFP, 2009 pers. comm.). As the case study for this research, MERET-PLUS provides insight into long-standing, food-supported Soil and Water Conservation (SWC), land- and community-based asset-building activities across much of Ethiopia’s rural diversity. In the context of four different case study areas, this research discusses the concept of transition which is inherent in the latest (sixth) phase of the project.

## Research objectives and questions

The objectives of this research are to:

1. To critically evaluate the notion of transition in a food-supported, watershed-based, public work project in Ethiopia;
2. To relate findings to discussion of the place that ‘transition’ strategies have in institutions’ policies.

The questions which I address through this research are:

1. What factors in case study areas are known to lead to a ‘more sustainable livelihood’?
2. What does available evidence show in these areas about the potential for transitioning from food support?
3. What does this imply for MERET-PLUS planners in ‘enabling transition’ from the project?

## Organisation of this work

This work is organised into seven chapters. [Chapter 1](#) begins with a review of literature which discusses evolving responses to food supply, chronic hunger and malnutrition, relating this to the concept of ‘transition’ in contemporary food-supported development. [Chapter 2](#) sets out the methodology and methods used to inform this research, including a discussion of various aspects of positionality in this *cross-lifeworld*, institution-based research. [Chapter 3](#) introduces distinguishing information about Ethiopia as a case study for this research, painting broad strokes of factors which distinguish Ethiopia’s agrarian sector, including Ethiopia’s distinctive and varied agro-ecology, experience with land reform, and protracted experience in food-supported, agro-emergency response. [Chapter 4](#) then discusses the case study project – MERET-PLUS – in the context of current programming for rural development in Ethiopia. This information sets the scene for discussing the coherence of the notion of ‘transition’ in case study areas, including findings from the quantitative component of research. This information is set out in [Chapter 5](#), comparing households’ own perceptions of potential for transition to objective measures of household food security. In light of findings from qualitative and quantitative methods,

[Chapter 6](#) evaluates transition' in MERET-PLUS from three overlapping points-of-view: in terms of coherence with project policy at federal level; in terms of contextual realities of case study areas; and as an end point to MERET-PLUS.

## **How might this research feed into policy?**

This research provides insights for policymakers of long-standing, food-supported, integrated development projects.

Particular features providing insights into transition are the mixed method and comparative case study approaches, which help, respectively, to capture diversity in operational areas, and to provide contextualised measures of more sustainable livelihoods and of transition. The 'insider's perspective' from my time as an intern with the World Food Programme helps to highlight the challenges in exploring livelihoods and transition in policy environments, and amongst beneficiaries, project planning teams and managers.

## **How might this research feed into practice?**

Building on my involvement at all levels of operation, this research includes many examples of 'best practice' in many aspects of project design and implementation from highly-experienced and skilled stakeholders. Part of evaluating transition in MERET-PLUS is to 'reports what works' (as well as what has not worked). These insights stand to make a contribution to understanding of the tools, practices and strategies required to successfully transition sites and communities. Along with this, this work constitutes a preliminary, heuristic study of transition in MERET-PLUS. The kinds of findings which emerge, therefore, reflect the suitability of the methods adopted.

# Chapter 1 - Situating 'transition' in the literature

## 1.1 Introduction

The first part of this review is a broad examination of the ways in which issues of global food supply, hunger and malnutrition have been responded to by major humanitarian 'players'. A synopsis of some of the major historic developments helps to illustrate a steady broadening of institutions' understanding of the role of food in responding to known crises of hunger such as famine. Modern approaches to food security, and to staving-off hunger and malnutrition [Box 1.1](#) have benefitted from the emergence of a livelihoods framework, and from increasingly concerted efforts between institutions and across sectors (see [Figure 1.3](#)). Following this, the second part of this review seeks to explore new ground by considering the concept of transition in contemporary food-for-development programming. Finally, relating each conception to means of measuring progress in rural food security and livelihood projects, the review concludes by evaluating the potential of 'transition' frameworks to contribute to 'enabling' transition to more sustainable rural livelihoods.

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### Box 1.1, Recent trends in food aid

- Food aid allocations have declined in the last 20 years, reaching their lowest point in this time in 2008.
- Due to various political, economic and ideological factors, donor governments are less-able and less-willing to provide food aid.
- There has been a rapid increase in food allocated to emergency response, but a decrease in food allocated in bilateral 'programme' form for development.
- Since 2000, multilateral food aid has increased significantly in proportion to food aid allocated through bilateral or non-governmental channels, reaching its highest-ever level in 2007.
- Recently, donors have shown a greater preference for purchasing food aid from the recipient country or immediate region.

**Source:** Lowder and Raney, 2005; WFP, 2008; FAO, 2009b.

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## 1.2 Evolving understanding of global food supply, malnutrition and hunger



The first major multilateral food aid operations began after World War One, with US Congress providing post-war relief credits between 1918 and 1919 to stimulate the reconstruction of Europe (Shaw, 2007). The direct involvement of the American president Herbert Hoover in these activities, as well as the sheer volume of aid provided, was unprecedented, and highlighted the potential of food as a factor in achieving political stability (Singer et. al., 1987). Along with the political support and impetus from this arrangement, a major report published by the League of Nations (Aykroyd and Burnet, 1935) was the first of its kind to provide figures for acute food shortage in poor countries around the world. The report raised mainstream awareness about the extent of food gaps within and between regions (Shaw, 2007) by emphasising the importance of considering food production, distribution and consumption in relation to public health (Anderson, 1936). At this time, the extent of worldwide hunger and malnutrition was only beginning to be understood. People were provoked by the levels of inequity in access to food, not only between countries, but also within countries previously thought-of as ‘developed’. In 1948, the FAO characterised findings about levels of inequality of food and income livelihoods as “the principal economic problem of our time” (FAO, 1948, n.p.). At this time, aggregate food supply and hunger were believed to be correlated in a straightforward manner; the quantity of food produced domestically and available through international supply and exchange served as the primary indicators of progress in addressing global hunger (Shaw, 2007).

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) was founded in response to an identified need for a multilateral world food security arrangement. FAO was intended to serve as a centre of statistical and more general information about agriculture and nutrition. Subsequently the FAO played a crucial role in early understanding of the nature and causation of hunger, malnutrition and famine by “seeking out science professionals to identify, catalogue, categorize, and monitor information related to the global supply of and demand for food” (Ilcan and Phillips, 2006: 54). Scientific work by biological, agricultural and nutritional scientists received popular support from the wider policy and legislative work, from country delegates in international forums and parallel resolutions, and from national campaigns, policy and legislation<sup>6</sup>. Initiatives and interventions resulting from this scientific approach include agricultural training centres being established, and dietary surveys, food composition tables, and food balance sheets and bulletins for quantifying nutritional status of populations, and guiding provision of food to

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<sup>6</sup> Notable examples include Roosevelt’s ‘four essential freedoms’ speech; the United States Agriculture, Trade and Development Act in 1954; a major report, ‘Functions of a World Food Reserve: Scope and Limitations’ published by FAO in 1956; Freedom From Hunger Campaign from 1960-1965, initiated by then-Director-General of FAO, Binay Ranjan Sen.

food-insecure populations (Ilcan and Phillips, 2006). These particular Modernist science-based strategies for understanding the international agro-food system played a large part in establishing a new orientation toward food, based on standardisation of food and human consumers, aiming to build a global model of food consumption (Ilcan and Phillips, 2006). Thus, the ‘inscription’ (Latour, 1987) of standardised mechanisms and approaches for understanding food and nutrition in international scientific discourse became a prominent feature of international initiatives (Ilcan and Phillips, 2006).

In addition, understanding of the interconnections between the food systems of less developed countries (LDCs) and more developed countries (MDCs) was evolving during this period (FAO, 1951; FAO, 1956). The thrust of these studies was to understand firstly, the possibility of creating a world emergency food reserve, to be drawn-on when international assistance was requested, and secondly, the bases of detection and appeal for assistance (Shaw, 2007). Institutions recognised the need for food reserves at the international scale to help to mitigate food crises such as famine, problems of food supply, as well as to find a means of disposing of food surpluses (Shaw, 2007: 5). Underlying interest in establishing a multilateral food system were concerns to protect both producers and consumers from unmediated fluctuations in levels of production and pricing, thus preventing a repeat of the major global Economic Depression that culminated in World War Two (Ilcan and Phillips, 2006). Although a collective interest of sorts was established during this period, there was still disagreement at policy and political levels. Recommendations to establish a global food reserve were initially rejected “on ideological and political grounds” (Boerma, 1975), the result of the clash of interventionist economic policy for the agricultural sector with free market macro-economic policy.

In 1954 the Agriculture, Trade, Development and Assistance (‘Food For Peace’) Act (PL-480)<sup>7</sup> was initiated in the United States, see **Box 1.1** seeking through a variety of economic, political, social and humanitarian objectives to ‘relocate’ food produced in excess of domestic and international commercial demand (Austin and Wallerstein, 1978). The burgeoning levels of production in the United States and other major producing countries exceeded domestic requirements and trading capacity (Faaland et. al., 2000). This act formally acknowledged that the United State’s food production represented systemic

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<sup>7</sup> Of the four ‘titles’, Title I food (program food aid on concessional credit, to be sold in recipient countries for local inconvertible currency) and Title II food (grants of food commodities to provide emergency assistance to meet famine and other urgent relief requirements) are most directly relevant to food security interventions. However, the establishment of four Titles formally diversified the global market of food transfers beyond simply the provision of program food surpluses.

inequity in the world food system; established a formal relationship between US domestic agricultural and foreign policy interests through food aid policies and interventions; and sparked significant growth in the amount of food aid provided (FANTA, 2003). This Act also marked the formal beginning of bilateral food aid (Colding and Pinstруп-Anderson, 2000). Since this time, the United States has consistently provided by far the largest proportion of global food aid of any donor (Barrett and Maxwell, 2005; WFP, 2008), with unquestionable impacts for policy and political arrangements around these food transfers.

The 1960s were a decade of significant change in multilateral food aid operations, particularly through the Food and Agriculture Organisation. Resolutions passed in November and December 1961, established the World Food Program on three-year trial basis<sup>8</sup>, later on an ongoing basis “for as long as multilateral food aid is found necessary”<sup>9</sup>. This signalled a significant shift in the way that food aid was conceived of in emergency response to food shortages and malnutrition. The intention in establishing the World Food Programme was to forestall the creation of other bilateral food reserves, and by doing so, maintain central control over standards for allocating food aid (Shaw, 2007). In addition, it was intended to test the effectiveness of a project approach to allocating food aid (Shaw, 2007) in addressing malnutrition and hunger more directly (Faaland et. al., 2000: 221). As with major initiatives in the past, the establishment of the World Food Programme was preceded by major political support from the United States’ government.

In the 1970s PL-480 was restructured significantly, leading to a dramatic increase in the proportion of US food aid distributed to countries in the African continent, increasing from 21% to around 50% by the early 1980s (Colding and Pinstруп-Anderson, 2000: 199-200). At this time, in particular from 1973 onward, significant increases in the international trade prices of both staple food products and petroleum created widespread concern about national food-deficits, and led to the World Food Crisis of 1972-1974. Grain production around the world plummeted in 1972 by 40 million tonnes, ending a 10-year upward-trend of grain production (Hathaway, 1975). This led to a huge decline in food reserves world-wide, as well as sharp and wild price increases for food commodities (Hathaway, 1975). In response to this crisis, a World Food Conference was called in 1974, focussing on firstly, better research

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<sup>8</sup> FAO, 1961, *Utilization of Food Supplies. World Food Programme*, FAO Conference Resolution 1/61, adopted on 24 Nov 1961.

<sup>9</sup> WFP, 1965, *Recommendations by the Intergovernmental Committee to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and to the Council of FAO on the Future of the World Food Program*. MO/IGC: 7/19, 20 April.

and development for food production, including improved use of fertilisers, and more investment in agricultural infrastructure and institutions; secondly, better information about food stocks and food-aid supplies with a view to avoid and mitigate effects of dramatic falls in food supply; and thirdly, agreements on international trade, stabilisation and adjustment. Of the 12 prescriptions made from the World Food Conference, almost every one focussed closely on improving food production and (to a lesser extent) access to food.

An assessment by Sartar Aziz of progress since this conference, published in 1979, noted dissatisfaction and frustration with the lack of progress, firstly in establishing internationally-managed food reserves rather than a reserve dominated by a single supplier, and secondly in securing a 'better deal' for countries in international trade in general, and in agricultural products in particular (Aziz, 1979). Aziz argued, in line with macro-economic, market-centred thinking around food security at the time that this lack of progress was the primary reason for the inability to achieve world food security; chronic malnutrition, however, was attributed to inequitable distribution of land resources worldwide, and subsequent inequitable access to resources produced on this land.

Along with policies of price- and income-support to the agro-food sector, burgeoning food production in North America served to exclude other grain producers from international markets. At the same time, the accessibility of US grain to net grain-importing countries left little incentive to increase domestic grain production (Aziz, 1979). Alongside the establishment of WFP, FAO initiated a campaign during the 1960s, 'Freedom from Hunger', along with a comprehensive World Food Survey, and a perceptive and influential study of the use of surplus agricultural commodities.

The study recommended principles for the distribution and utilization of these surpluses, recognising the

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**Box 1.2, Effectiveness of food aid**

- The need for impartial, evidence-based allocation of food aid resources;
- The need for appropriate operational analysis and management of food aid;
- The need for appropriate targeting and use of food aid – food should be used with complementary resources in a flexible and predictable manner;
- The need to clarify the obligations and levels of accountability of stakeholders.

**Source:** Maxwell, 2007: 29.

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importance of in-country ownership, equity and a commitment to developmental impacts (United Nations, 1961). The recommendations of the study presented an awareness of the political economy of food aid. However, donors' political interests have often led to significant divergence from – or complete rejection of – the views of country delegates. Much more-powerful interests overrode promising multilateral arrangements to maximise impacts on hunger and poverty among vulnerable recipient populations.

As an example, food surpluses also served as a key input into the 'Development Project', initiated after World War Two, and defined by McMichael as a politically-driven initiative incorporating post-colonial developing states into a system which legitimised capitalist markets as a vehicle of national economic growth and modernity (McMichael, 1996). This Project instigated a national model of economic development, coinciding with the formation of a new international division of labour in agriculture around transnational commodity complexes. The United States in particular achieved substantial increases in farm productivity – grain production, for example, increased five-fold between 1948 and 1977 (Aziz, 1979: 22). Studies of such "rule-governed structure[s] of production and consumption of food on a world scale"<sup>10</sup> (Friedmann, 1987; 1992; 1993; 2005) and McMichael (McMichael, 1992; Buttel and McMichael, 2005; McMichael, 2009) have documented the political economy of food since the late nineteenth century. The massive growth in food supplies which became available following the Great Depression in the United States was deliberately stimulated to assist farming communities through this period. These stimulus policies continued to operate well past the end of the Depression, establishing an enduring regime of ever-increasing food supplies which outstripped domestic and international commercial demand (Benedict and Bauer, 1960). During the second 'food regime' (1950s-1970s) identified by Friedmann, these resources were "re-routed [...] from the United States to its informal empire of postcolonial states on strategic perimeters of the Cold War" (McMichael, 2009: 141). Thus, alongside ostensible humanitarian objectives of these food regimes, embodied in both the rhetoric of donor Government Administrations, and in newly-established multilateral institutions, countries producing sizeable food surpluses had opportunities to 'buy in' to political decisions of impoverished countries. The resulting 'Surplus Regime' – involving the re-location of US food produced in excess of domestic commercial demand – was based explicitly on recognition that food aid could and should be used as a political 'weapon', to 'negotiate' peace and stability (Shepherd, 1985: 4). Food ostensibly

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<sup>10</sup> Friedmann, H., 1993, 'The political economy of food: a global crisis', *New Left Review*, 197, pp. 29-57.

provided as aid to foreign recipients served in reality as the raw material for a mixture of political, economic, social and humanitarian objectives (Shaw, 2007). This practice of further political objectives through ostensibly humanitarian activities was critiqued in ethical terms, as food aid was allocated in line with geo-strategic interests, rather than the humanitarian rhetoric of Government administrations. Examples of the influence of political concerns in the allocation and use of bilateral food aid can be seen in impoverished countries such as Sudan (de Waal, 1997), Mozambique (Shepherd, 1985) and Ethiopia (Shepherd, 1985; Kissi, 1997). Donors – most notably the United States – have withdrawn or withheld food aid to these and other countries in order to signal disapproval with the country's government, or even to bring-about the downfall of a regime. Donors have also used food aid to support allied, strategically located states<sup>11</sup>. Even when food aid was allocated in response to humanitarian crises, such as the famine in Ethiopia from 1983-1985, considerations such as civil conflict, as well as the vested interests of recipient governments, soured political relations and led to disunity in addressing issues of life and death at large scale.

With the failure of large-scale macro-economic policies, and the impact of entitlements analysis (explored below), responses to the fact of chronic hunger have been sensitised by a number of important factors. Perhaps most crucially, the shift in the framework of analysis – from food-first to broader models – has changed the nature of problem diagnosis, and the public response (Shaw, 2007).

More recently, a study of the bilateral foreign aid provided to the developing world between 1974 and 1994 has shown that aid is allocated to countries with links to donor countries (Alesina and Dollar, 2000). The authors found that those countries which were once a colony of donor countries were significantly more likely to receive foreign aid. This factor increased the likelihood that a country would receive foreign aid more than any other factor, including a country's democratic status, or its levels of openness to trade (Alesina and Dollar, 2000: 55).

### **1.3 The role of WFP in contemporary efforts to alleviate hunger**

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<sup>11</sup> During the final stages of the war in Vietnam, the Nixon Administration allocated contributions under the 'Food for Peace' program in 1974 almost exclusively to South Vietnam and the Khmer Republic, in spite of developing humanitarian crises in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Shepherd, 1985).

The World Food Program is the world's largest single distributor of bilateral food aid, and has a significant stake in demonstrating the comparative advantage of food aid. With the decline in surplus production from major donors, and a consequent need to explore other aid options, a fresh need has surfaced to demonstrate the 'additionality' of food aid. As Faaland et. al. noted in 2000: "the ability of the WFP to provide relief is no longer dependent on the availability of surplus food in some rich countries, but on the willingness of donors to finance relief operations through their operations" (pp. 251). This has led to increased understandings of the ways in which food aid can function as the most effective kind of assistance. A number of important challenges have been identified (see [Box 1.3](#)), which WFP must address (see Maxwell, 2007 and Webb, 2008). [Chapter 6](#) briefly discusses the coherence of transition in WFP policy for MERET-PLUS.

## 1.4 Evolution of the concept of food security over time

The concept of global food security was employed, following the First and Second World Wars, as a way of characterising a situation in the global food economy where food production, pricing and trade operated at optimum efficiency, and thus all demand was met by sufficient food supply. At this time, many academics and food security professionals attributed the causality of chronic hunger and famine through Malthusian analysis of the natural, inexorable processes of changes in population and the natural environment, manifesting in drought and population pressure on the natural resource

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### Box 1.3 Challenges for the humanitarian system in addressing food security

- Sufficient analytical capability (needs assessment; cost effectiveness, impact analysis)
  - Ensuring impartial resource allocation
  - The ability to link early warning information and analysis to timely, appropriate response
  - Balancing response to food security crises and engagement with humanitarian food security actors at policy level
  - The ability to link short-term protection of food consumption with long-term improvements in production and access
- 
- The ability to define effectiveness or 'success'

**Source:** Coates, J., Maxwell, D., Webb P., Wirth J., 2008, 'Rethinking Food Security in Humanitarian Response', paper presented to the Food Security Forum, April 16–18, Rome, pp. 23.

base (Pokrovsky, 1968; Lofchie, 1975). Vadala noted in 1980: “[f]ears grew that the world was irrevocably moving toward chronic food shortages, attributable to unfavourable long-term climatic changes and continued high rates of population growth” (1980: 258). Solutions to food insecurity which were based on a Malthusian framework focussed on increasing per-capita and per-hectare production through agricultural intensification strategies, or on easing population pressure through resettlement strategies.

Particularly in early analyses of global hunger between 1943 and 1976, the Food Availability Decline (FAD) explanatory framework was widely used to characterise food insecurity and its causation, and to negotiate solutions, by the international community. Instead of focussing on a cycle whereby a human population exerts pressure on degraded natural resources through emergency coping strategies, leading to further degradation to natural resources and continued use of negative coping strategies, FAD describes a declining *trend* in the amount of food available (through supply) for consumption in a particular area over a particular time (Sen, 1986; Rubin, 2009: 622). This approach to famine analysis emerged as a critique of Malthusian approaches. The emphasis on market supply of food broadened understanding of the causal factors in food security, from constraints upon food production, to economic factors constraining market supply. As Carr (2006: 16) notes:

such efforts focused on the supply of food as the determining variable for food (in)security. Therefore, issues such as famine were addressed by augmenting the amount of food available in an area through adjustments to trade, technology or the supply of food aid. Development and aid practitioners looked upon the failures of such efforts to improve food outcomes as products of inadequate local food supplies, aid flows, or agricultural restructuring. As a result, these failures were addressed by more intensive applications of existing efforts to augment local food supplies.

Many studies have noted complex interrelations and paradoxes in consideration of food security (Harar, 1968; Lofchie, 1975; Fine, 1993; Shaw, 2007), and in particular, between the provision of price-supported food and food aid on one hand, and the persistence of hunger on the other. Ironically, the inherency of food within wider human activities and relations—subsistence, economic social and geo-political relations—has significantly complicated understanding of food availability decline (FAD), hunger, malnutrition, starvation and famine (each of which have a degree of conceptual exclusivity). Paradoxes of food production have noted that (because of dramatic increase in production following the Green Revolution), more became better fed than ever before; yet a larger proportion of people had diets that



were of insufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life (Harrar, 1968; Lofchie, 1975). At global scale, even though food was produced for export by both More- and Less-Developed Countries, or even in excess of domestic and international market demand, millions of people did not have enough to sustain a healthy life (Lofchie, 1975; Shaw, 2007). Amartya Sen catalysed a significant shift in understanding of the causal factors in food insecurity in 1976; Sen's *entitlements* analysis (elaborated-on below) of the Bengal famine showed, through empirical analysis, that famine can occur when there is a sharp increase in demand, but this is not the same as famine occurring due to FAD (Sen, 1981; Sen 1986). As a result, frameworks for understanding food security came to be defined in relation to the importance of access in securing sufficient food to sustain a human livelihood. Implications were quickly incorporated into programming, with aggregate food supply omitted from World Development Report in during the 1980s.

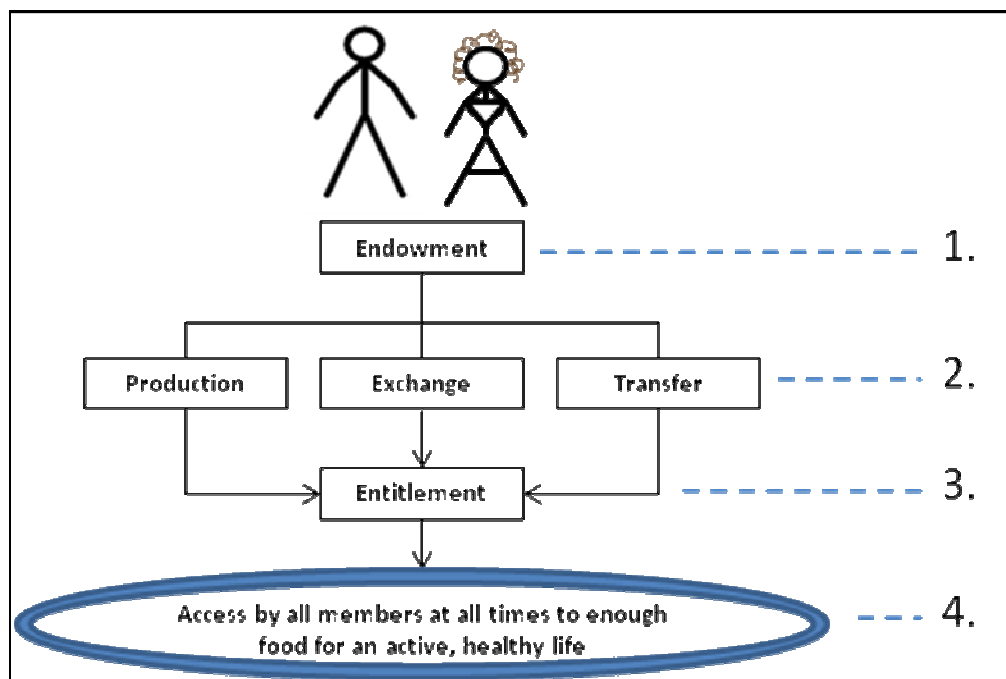
#### **1.4.1 Formalising the Entitlements approach**

The Entitlements framework for analysing food security (Sen, 1976; Sen, 1981) formalised a critique of first generation, Food Availability Decline approaches to measuring food security, and provided a supplementary analytical framework. Sen used empirical data from three major famines to uncover a significant paradox inherent in FAD frameworks for understanding the causation of starvation and famine up to that point. Sen showed that famine had occurred even when there had been no decline in food availability (FAD). Sen's Entitlements framework established a second generation of food security analyses (Barrett, 2001).

The concept of entitlement denotes the ability of a household to access a resource – food, in the context of starvation and famine – through production, trade or as the result of outside provision (Sen, 1981: 45). It “concentrates on each person’s entitlements to commodity bundles including food, and views starvation as resulting from a failure to be entitled to a bundle with enough food” (Sen, 1981: 45). Food produced by a household is a direct entitlement, while any good or service that can be used to procure food is an exchange entitlement. A person’s entitlement depends on both the endowment of the person—an ownership bundle of commodities including food (Sen, 1981: 45)—and the ‘Exchange Entitlement Mapping’ (‘E-mapping’ for short) (Sen, 1981: 46).

Through the Entitlements framework, Sen made two pioneering contributions to literature seeking to understand the causality of famine and food insecurity more widely. Firstly, Sen provided “a general analytical framework for analysing famines, rather than one particular hypothesis about their causation” (Sen, 1981, 162). Secondly, Sen illustrated, through empirical data, that “*certain* famines are characterized by declines in access to food for identifiable population groups irrespective of food availability at national level” (Devereux, 2001: 247, emphasis mine). The fundamental contribution to literature on food security is the assertion that the ability to *access* enough food (actual direct and exchange entitlement) is the fundamental characteristic of starvation, not whether or not sufficient quantities of food are available through supply.

**Figure 1.1,** The process of securing an entitlement in graphical form



[Figure 1.1](#) provides an illustration of basic relationships between essential components of Sen’s entitlements approach to analysis of food security (the definition of which is taken from Anderson [ed.], 1990). An entitlement (third level) which is sufficient to ensure food security (defined in fourth level) is underpinned by productive, exchange and transfer entitlements of the individual (second level). At the first level is the initial endowment package of the individual person.

Critical contention with Sen’s thesis has ranged from attempts to refute the empirical base (Bowbrick,

1986a and 1986b), to questions of whether entitlements created an artificial distinction between hunger and famine on the one hand, and chronic under-nutrition on the other (Stewart, 1982; Rangasami, 1985), to assertions that “Sen's analysis has led to the widespread belief that food output does not affect the susceptibility of low income countries to famine” (Nolan, 1993: 6), has dangerously underplayed or even discounted the importance of food supply to alleviating hunger and preventing famine (Bowbrick 1986a, 1986b; Nolan 1993) and even to assertions that the entitlement approach has added nothing new to debates over famine causality (Bowbrick, 1986; Rangasami, 1985). However, these critiques failed to help to resolve these paradoxes through analysing the explanatory function of entitlements (including direct entitlements – immediate food availability). Understanding of Sen’s thesis centred-around if – or how – FAD fitted within the entitlements approach, leading to accusations that Sen was neglecting this important indicator of food availability. This misunderstanding of the entitlements framework also captured a concept that was poorly-understood at that time: that, even where a decline in the amount of food supplied to a given market is an immediate cause of starvation, the ultimate cause is a decline in exchange entitlements (i.e.: a household’s ability to cope with this decline in the availability of food by securing food supplies through alternative exchange). A number of the persistent misunderstandings of the nature of Sen’s entitlements approach in many of these critiques was explained and refuted in Sen’s responses (Sen, 1983, 1996), supported by others (Ravallion, 1997; Drèze, 1999; Devereux, 2001). These scholars would later characterise early critiques as failing to advance the debate (Ravallion, 1997; Drèze, 1999; Devereux, 2001), while also acknowledging the difficulty in understanding how entitlements should be thought-about in relation to measures of food supply. Later evaluations and critiques (Devereux, 2001; Murugan, 2003; Eliar, 2006; Rubin, 2009) helped to re-centre critical response upon the four critiques of the explanatory scope of entitlements that Sen himself originally set out (Sen, 1981: 48-50); firstly, “ambiguities in the specification of entitlements”; secondly, illegal “extra-entitlement” transfers; thirdly, “ignorance, fixed food habits or apathy”; and fourthly, famine deaths not (directly) related to starvation, such as those resulting from morbidity. De Waal’s research (de Waal and Whiteside, 2003; de Waal, 2005) into the causes of mortality during famine situations in Darfur helped to better understand linkages between food supply, poverty and mortality. Stephen Devereux (2001) provides an excellent assessment of the limitations of the entitlements analytical construct.

Sen’s entitlements approach had visible influence upon policy developed during the 1980s, and continues to be influential in contemporary approaches. The findings from Sen’s case studies of famine were vigorously debated and critiqued before entitlements gradually came to be accepted as the

crystallisation of a new focus in food security.

By the 1990s, the question of ‘access’, highlighted in Sen’s entitlements approach, formed a major part of mainstream definitions of food security. The definition of food security currently used by the United States Department of Agriculture<sup>12</sup> (emphasis mine) is one example:

“*access* by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”

Further, “food security includes at a minimum:

- the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods; and
- assured *ability to acquire* acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).”

By the 1996 World Food Summit, policy had shifted away from equating food security solely with the world food problem. Securing access to available food was firmly adopted alongside ensuring adequate food supplies and stability over time – the demand and supply side of food security (Shaw, 2007: 349).

## 1.5 Towards a livelihoods focus in food security

Just as the entitlements approach has impacted on food security in practice, so the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) has had an impact. The approach has changed the way that development interventions are organised, from a project-based approach to a contemporary focus on Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs) and Budgetary Support (Muhumuza and Toner, 2002). In relation to food security literature, three simple shifts toward a livelihoods approach have been identified (Maxwell 2001: 156). Firstly, the scope through which food security is defined and studied has shifted from the global and the national to the household and the individual. Secondly, the perspective from which food security is defined and studied has shifted from a food first perspective to a livelihood perspective. Thirdly, the means of defining a state of food security has shifted from (purely) objective indicators to subjective perception.

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<sup>12</sup> Based on an article in S.A. Andersen, ed., 1990, ‘Core Indicators of Nutritional State for Difficult to Sample Populations,’ The Journal of Nutrition, 120, pp. 1557S-1600S.

### **1.5.1 From global and national to household and individual**

The first shift in definitions and studies of food security in literature – from national to household level – was catalysed by an increasing recognition in international policy that food insecurity was not simply a function of food supply at a national level (and the economic stability which is closely interlinked with this), but that access to food resources at a smaller (micro-) scale was also very important (Maxwell, 2001). It became clear that merely ensuring “adequate world food supplies” (UN, 1975) did not address the issue of who has access (and to what extent) to such supplies. Secondly, and related to this point, inequalities and exclusion within nation-states (from the individual level through to a national level) were not illuminated by macro-scale analyses, nor were the diverse range of capabilities of individuals, households and communities in a given country. One example of inequity is the well-known trend where male household heads ‘capture’ income and resources (Seebens and Sauer, 2007). Studies of household decision-making and spending in developing countries have found that bargaining power among women is positively associated with spending on education (Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2000) and health (Thomas et. al., 2002). The models developed in early stages of analysis were not sufficient to measure power relations, seen, for example, in the issue of who controls resources within the household (Maxwell, 2001).

While the conceptual importance of this shift was clear, scholars were divided over whether to privilege the household or individual level as the unit of analysis (Maxwell, 2001). Proponents of analyses at the individual level demonstrated the necessity of understanding the access- or demand-side of food security.

### **1.5.2 From a food-first perspective to a social livelihoods perspective**

This second shift in definitions of food security, “from an initial view of food security as a product of reliable supplies of food to the growing contemporary emphasis on food as a single input in diffuse local livelihood strategies” (Carr, 2006, 15), had been anticipated by some contributors to the literature. As early as 1981, Sen noted “ambiguities in the specification of entitlements”, as well as the need to acknowledge “extra-entitlement transfers”. In doing so, Sen identified a need for analyses of risk and uncertainty which standard economic models could not predict, as well as a need for analyses of wider

historic and other structural factors directly affecting individual entitlements. In the 1980s, prior to mainstream scholarly discussion of livelihoods frameworks and analysis, household economy approaches were able to bridge the sometimes atomistic perspective of behavioural or rights-based theories, and the sometimes too-deterministic sweep of structuralist theories (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005). Early livelihoods approaches emerged out of studies of the coping strategies of poor households in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa (Bryceson, 2004). However – in contemporary livelihood terms – these early approaches considered only two of the four major stages of analysis (see [Figure 1.2](#)), focusing only on livelihood assets in relation to the livelihood context. The current form - the Sustainable Livelihood framework (Carney et. al., 1999; Maxwell, 2001; Brocklesby and Fisher, 2003; Christopolos et. al., 2006; Butler and Mazur, 2007) emerged out of shifts in the scale and scope of food security analyses (Carr, 2006), and from the waning of major structuralist approaches such as *dependencia* in explaining poverty and informing solutions (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005). Largely as a result, interventions based on such approaches achieved disappointing results for poverty alleviation (de Haan and Zoomers, 2005). Scholars such as Guyer and Peters (1987) identified the importance of analysing household's productive and coping strategies alongside standalone asset- or capital-based studies.

A widely cited definition of the refined, sustainable livelihoods framework which emerged out of these critiques is provided by Carney (1998: 2):

A livelihood system comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

The livelihoods framework emphasises the capabilities of households and communities (Sen, 1989) as the starting point for analysis of food insecurity. The resources deployed, and livelihood strategies employed by households are affected by a 'vulnerability context', as well as by institutions and their policies. The strategies employed by households influence how these households are affected by exogenous shocks and trends. In turn, households' bundles of assets can be depleted or increased by the modified shocks that result. The livelihood pathways which are chosen by household decision makers are highly diverse, particularly in less-developed countries where urbanisation creates off-farm job opportunities (Block and Webb, 2001; Bryceson, 1999; Bryceson, 2004; Carswell, 2002; Ellis, 2000).

Progressively, analyses of ‘positive liberties’ have focused on household-level protection, coping strategies and resilience (Abel et. al., 2003; Aberra et. al., 2007, Leach, 2008), and livelihood diversification. Under such frameworks, households are seen:

as clusters of task-oriented activities that are organized in variable ways, not merely as places to live / eat / work / reproduce, but as sources of identity and social markers. [Households] are located in structures of cultural meaning and differential power (Guyer and Peters 1987: 209).

Thus, the central objective of modern livelihoods approaches is “to search for more effective methods to support people and communities in ways that are more meaningful to their daily lives and needs, as opposed to ready-made, interventionist instruments” (Appendini, 2001: 24).

Recent work on different aspects of the food security paradigm affirm the insights of the sustainable livelihoods approach into problems around food security, showing how participatory approaches such as risk and gender analysis (Dipelou et. al., 2008), and analyses of the role of societal power relations in new, broader frameworks for measuring food security (Collins, 2004; Carr, 2006; Butler et. al, 2007; Scoones, 2009), can enhance the abilities of researchers and development practitioners to understand constraints upon and opportunities for enhanced livelihoods. In parallel with these developments, however, is a ‘muddying of the waters’ in contemporary attempts to usefully define what constitutes a sustainable pathway or trajectory for developing human livelihoods (Haan and Zoomer, 2005). The institutional power behind ideas creates a particular politics of knowledge in the development field, and the role of the World Bank and other donor agencies are key (Broad 2006). Such dominant framings are, in turn, reinforced by educational and training institutions, as scientific knowledge, policy and development practice become co-constructed (Scoones, 2009: 14). In many ways, this (currently) constitutes an ‘impasse’ in the concept of livelihood trajectories, as the determinative role of contextual factors in developing strong livelihoods is becoming increasingly clear.

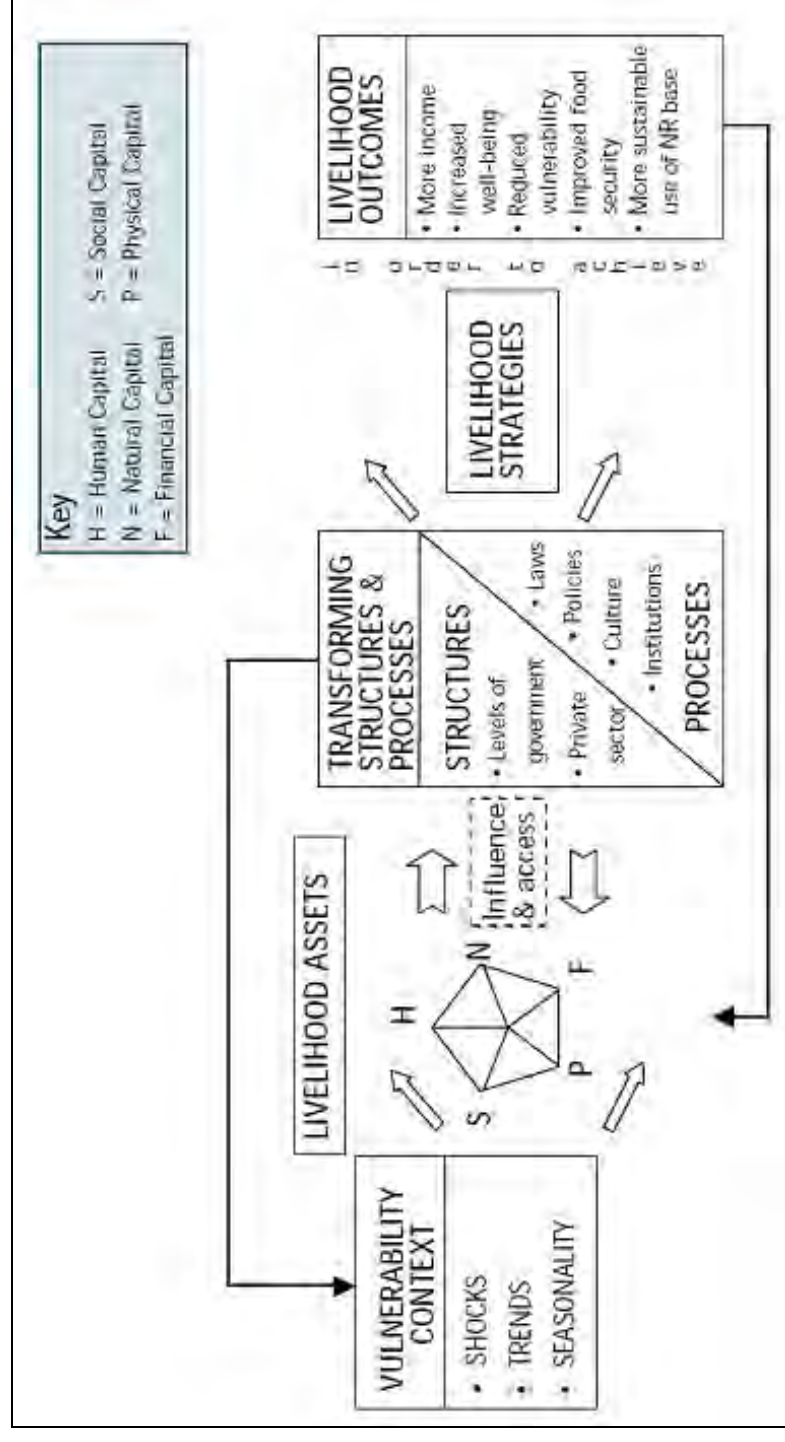
### **1.5.3 From objective indicators to subjective perception**

A number of potential areas have been identified for better defining or measuring livelihood development in particular contexts. A number of important new perspectives into household food security emerged during the 1980s, including ‘second wave’ feminist critiques of household resource

allocation and power relations, and work on the relationship between the food security of households and the food security of individuals within those households (Mechlem, 2004). As a result, the importance of social and power relations has been increasingly recognised. The third shift in definitions of food security, from objective indicators to subjective perceptions has emerged alongside these analyses, contributing to a broadening of the food security agenda over time, particularly an increasing recognition of the importance of participation with food-insecure households and communities in defining and measuring food insecurity. While there is an awareness of the importance of local perceptions in understanding the context and outcomes of food insecurity, Carr (2006) identifies the need for a “systematic approach to society and food security that places perception and local knowledge into existing efforts to identify causal relationships between environment, economy and food outcomes” (Carr, 2006: 18).



**Figure 1.2,** Livelihoods Framework



Source: DFID, 2000, 'Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets 2.1, available from: <http://www.nssd.net/pdf/sectiono.pdf>, accessed June 2010.

## 1.6 Assessing progress toward household food security

As the preceding review of food approaches to tackling hunger, malnutrition and famine has pointed out, ideas of what constitutes food security have broadened over time. Increasingly, the concept is being situated in the ‘sustainable livelihoods’ framework, which includes physical, economic, social and institutional factors in sustainability (Bryceson, 2004: 622). Frameworks have recognised and included medium- and long-term objectives for more holistic approaches to development (see [Figure 1.3](#)). Increasingly, sets of indicators that include traditional “second generation” measures of food security (household income, food consumption and assets) are considered alongside indicators of wider technical, institutional and environmental factors, such as “land rehabilitation activities which meet technical standards”, “sites preparing community based watershed plans” and “percentage of implementing partner staff that have received training HIV/AIDS by gender”<sup>13</sup>. Households’ own perceptions of food insecurity are also being recognised as important. In response to developing definitions of food security, institutions engaged in food security projects have broadened methods of measuring progress toward food security, including notions of vulnerability being developed and adopted (Boudreau and Dilley, 2001; Burg, 2008).

Interventions in rural areas, and particularly those in watersheds, are notorious for the high level of integration between activities and actors which is required to achieve results. In such contexts, there are strong tendencies for project and program managers to ‘miss the wood for the trees’, concentrating on demonstrating results at the level of project indicators, while failing to concentrate sufficient attention on achieving ‘higher-level’ outcomes (Ika and Lytvynov, 2009). Concomitantly, such outcomes are more difficult to precisely summarise in the Results Based Management (RBM) format (Earle, 2002; Ika and Lytvynov, 2009; Muhumuza and Toner, 2002). A further tendency is for project managers to emphasise clearly “describable or measurable development change” which results from “a cause and effect relationship that should be attributable to [an institution’s] investment” (Ika and Lytvynov, 2009: 63). Impacts which result indirectly from the intervention, or which cannot unambiguously be linked to the intervention, are not taken into account. ‘Soft’ assistance such as policy advice, community-centred dialogue, advocacy and

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<sup>13</sup> Taken from MERET-PLUS’ RBM framework.

coordination are found to be a crucial part of the success of food based interventions (ROM SSI01), in achieving food security and impacts that are sustained for communities (Coates et. al., 2008); yet in RBM frameworks, this form of assistance is relegated to tacit understanding. As the importance of vulnerability has gained influence in humanitarian programming, the impacts of contemporary food security interventions are increasingly being assessed through integrated matrices for monitoring, evaluation and management. The Results-Based Management (RBM) framework is one example. In such frameworks, indicators are allocated targets or quantified benchmarks. This allows easily comparable data of progress for particular outputs or outcomes, within and between geographic areas, and across time. While the initial effort of establishing RBM frameworks is often prohibitive (Gebregziabher, pers. comm.; WFP, 2003), particularly for institutions that have underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation capacity, the utility of the framework is significant (WFP, 2003). In spite of the development of these frameworks, however, “measurement problems remain a major challenge, not only for research, but particularly for targeting, program management, monitoring and evaluation” (Ahiadeke et. al., 1999).

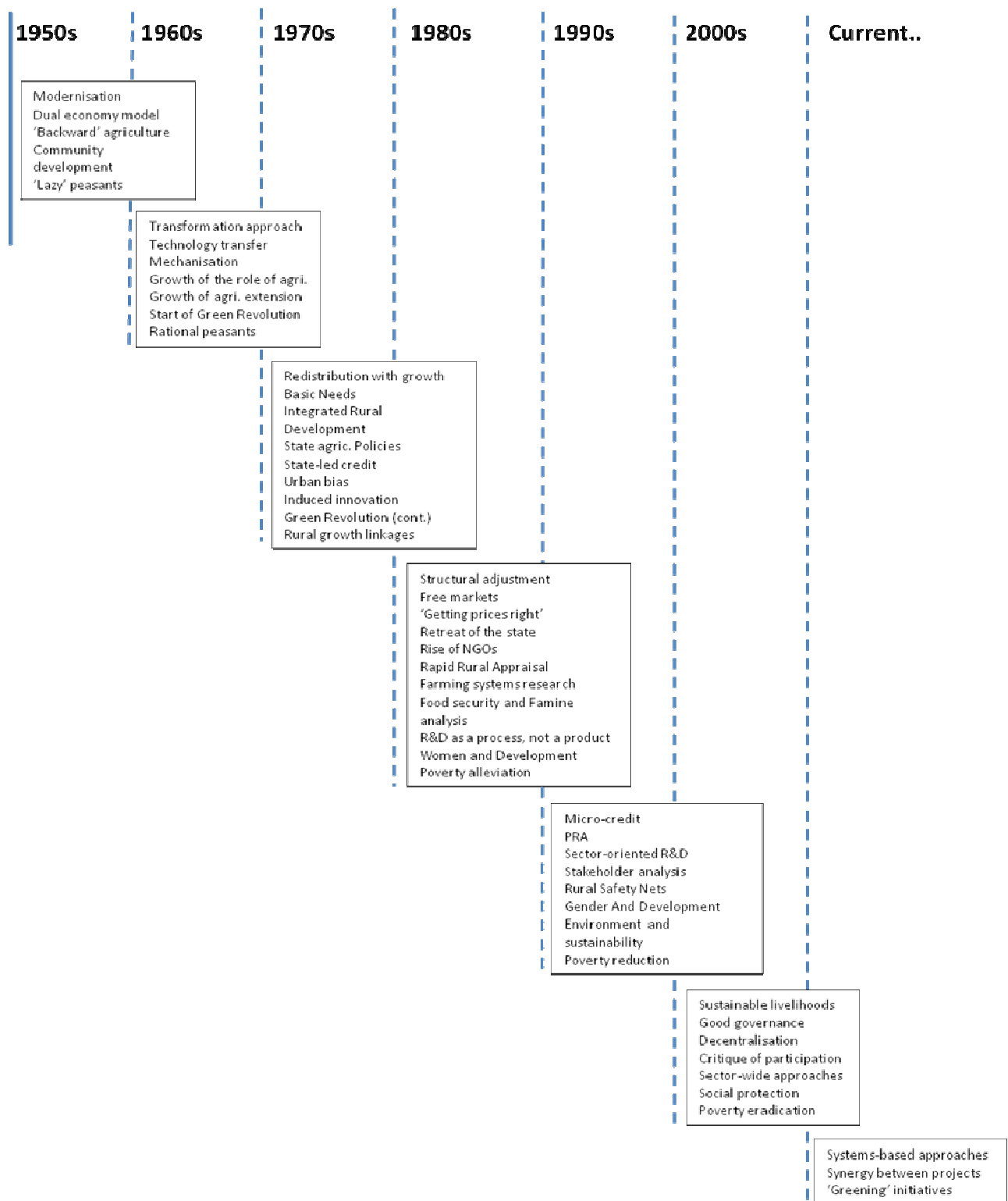
Underlying the increasingly important notion of mustering appropriate conceptual, methodological and realistic assessments in food security interventions is the question of how to define ‘success’ in such contexts (Coates et. al., 2008; Muhumuza and Toner, 2002). Food based interventions occur, by nature, in contexts where inhabitants’ abilities to provide for their own households and communities is severely limited by structural factors. As Coates et. al. (2008: 23) note:

It is quite clear what constitutes failure in humanitarian terms: the loss of human lives, the crippling impact of malnutrition, and the destruction of livelihoods. But “success” isn’t simply the opposite of failure; because failure has a clear end point, but success does not.

The clear need to establish a “measure of assurance” in food-based interventions for food security has not been sufficiently addressed, and is linked to the ‘grey areas’ which exist in seeking to link relief, rehabilitation and development; in particular, there are challenges in defining agricultural rehabilitation (Christopolos et. al., 2004).

[Box 1.3](#) sets out challenges for contemporary humanitarian programming. The following section in this review, and discussion throughout this thesis, seeks to develop understanding of ‘success’ in food-based interventions through a case study intervention in Ethiopia, MERET-PLUS. In particular, the notion of ‘transition’, and different modalities which are built into policies for projects and for institutions, is critically considered in terms of its potential as a component of ‘success’, or ‘enabling development’.

**Figure 1.3, Rural development ideas timeline**



**Source:** Adapted from Biggs, S., and Ellis, F., 2001, 'Evolving themes in rural development 1950s-2000s', Development Policy Review, 19, 4, pp. 439.

## 1.7 'Transition' in the literature

### 1.7.1 Origins of 'transition'

The preceding discussion of developments in food security literature has developed the concept of '[transition](#)'. The project cycle approach emerged in mainstream management discourse from papers published by the US military in 1956 (Cleland and Ireland, 2006: 8). In the mid-1990s, exit strategies mandated by US Congress were seen as essential component of future US involvement in Bosnia (Rose, 1998). Essentially, an exit strategy is a plan for withdrawing completely from an operation. Conventionally, exit strategies are applied to military and peacekeeping operations.

### 1.7.2 Modalities and forms of transition

'Transition', for the purposes of this research, is defined as:

A process that is jointly planned and agreed-upon by 1) foreign humanitarian institution(s), 2) in-country government, and 3) recipients / participants in the intervention. Transition occurs when appropriately equipped and 'ready' participants / recipients, supporting government and civil society come to hold full responsibility for the activities and outcomes of the intervention.

Transition as a tacit or sometimes tokenistic goal in emergency and development response, encompasses both an [exit](#) strategy, and successful participant '[graduation](#)'<sup>14</sup>. Broadly, transition in food-based interventions, through either exit or graduation modalities, can occur in three forms. Firstly, participants transition from one stage of the intervention into the next, which is expressed as 'phasing over'. This is a common way of conceiving of graduation for the chronically food insecure beneficiaries, who are highly vulnerable to exogenous shocks, and who lack access to assets and services for sustaining their own livelihoods. Further, in addition to indicating progress toward achieving strong livelihoods for households, phasing over can be indicative of broader potential for external institutions to 'hand over the stick' (Chambers, 1997) to endogenous agencies who have partnered with them in administering the

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<sup>14</sup> For discussions of transition modalities, see Catterson and Lindahl, 1998; Levinger and McLeod, 2002; Macias and Rogers, 2004; WFP, 2004.

intervention. Secondly, participants transition from receiving food-support altogether, and sustain their own livelihoods. Thirdly, external humanitarian agencies withdraw support from the intervention as part of an exit strategy, ideally once “the change the service was designed to promote has [...] been fully internalized by the targeted population” (Levinger and Mcleod, 2002: 3). An important part of an exit strategy is the gradual withdrawal or ‘phasing out’ of food aid and other support provided by the exiting institution.

Transition can occur at different scales. At global and regional levels, agricultural workers can ‘exit’ voluntarily from rural areas and livelihoods. Such ‘deagrarianisation’ in emerging Less Developed Countries such as China and India is projected to increase significantly, with pressures from growing GDP per capita and subsequent rural to urban migration (Bezemer and Hazell, 2006; Bryceson, 2004). This form of (usually voluntary) exit has significant implications for rural communities’ productive and social livelihoods. Planned exit of humanitarian institutions from agriculture-based development interventions has not been well documented or studied. However, recent discussion of transition modalities note examples of interventions where in-country capacity to respond to drought has allowed full exit of a humanitarian institution, and a designated government institution to take over full responsibility (Gardner, et. al., 2006: 10; WFP, 2004)<sup>15</sup>.

Criteria or ‘triggers’ for planned transition fall into three broad categories (Gardner et. al., 2005: 10). Transition can be triggered based on a specified time limit imposed by a funding cycle. While this lends limited potential to catalyse efforts for sustainability, funding cycle triggers are rarely suitable in food based interventions, particularly because of the potential for premature transition to have damaging impacts upon still-fragile livelihoods. More commonly, transition can also be triggered as program impacts are achieved. Impact indicators are important in assessing the performance of different project activities in different areas of operation. As such, results per impact indicator can provide key information in ‘tracking’ various aspects of performance over time, and assessing readiness for transition. Lastly, specific ‘benchmarks’ explicitly linked to the wider graduation strategy can be used. Ideally, these will have been part of the project since its inception, included in the Monitoring and Evaluation framework (Macias and Rogers, 2004).

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<sup>15</sup> A study (WFP, 2004) of the World Food Programme’s Emergency Operations (EMOPs) found that in only 2% of cases, the World Food Programme was eventually able to exit from the country entirely. In almost half of all cases (46%), EMOPs were phased-out. In an equivalent number of interventions, initial assistance was extended (27%), or linked into longer-term operations (21%).

### 1.7.3 Transition in food for work interventions

Food for Work (FFW) interventions are a form of Food Assistance Program (FAP) in which public works (PW) schemes are established to create public assets. Participants are paid in food for their labour. Three main aims of these schemes are: i) to give participating households at least the minimum quantity of food required for adequate nutrition; ii) to ensure that food resources are used in a ‘developmental’ manner, namely, to create opportunities for work; and iii) to reduce or decentralize both the targeting of beneficiaries and the prioritization and management of public works projects (Barrett et. al., 2002: 2). These schemes have become increasingly popular since the 1990s, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries where food aid is provided in support of agriculture-led development are among the poorest in the world (Binns et. al., 2008). By their nature, food security interventions operate in contexts where food needs are not met by existing livelihood activities or coping strategies. This can lead to particular political sensitivities for governments receiving food aid, as to do so tacitly acknowledges a failure to provide for their own people, and a need for support from (often politically unpopular) donors such as North America. During responses to large-scale humanitarian crises in the past, food aid has been mobilised or withheld by both donors and recipient governments for political purposes, and can potentially ignite deep-seated suspicion and tensions in the recipient country. Further, lengthy delays and inconsistencies in the administration of food aid – such as improper targeting procedures – have a fundamental effect on the good that could otherwise be achieved. Intended recipients can either become overly-reliant upon aid provided as a ‘free handout’, or achieve no benefits for their livelihoods where the amount or timing of food aid is inappropriate. As a result of these and other factors in food aid programming, discussion of phasing-out aid or exiting altogether from institutional involvement is a potentially highly sensitive, ‘loaded’ topic for program staff and recipient communities and households (Levinger and Mcleod, 2002; Gardner et. al., 2005)<sup>16</sup>.

Food for work (FFW) interventions have strengths in creating needed infrastructure for agricultural production and marketing systems, and for targeting women as participants (Barrett, 2002; Barrett et. al., 2002). However, because of declining availability of food aid worldwide, and particularly of food for development (see [Box 1.1](#)), FFW interventions are increasingly beleaguered by resource constraints, and

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<sup>16</sup> This was emphasised to me by Country Office (national and international) staff at the beginning of my contract as an intern.



transient or declining political will (Barrett, 2001). In spite of this, studies of FFW projects demonstrate the continued importance of the long-term focus of these interventions in reducing food insecurity (Barrett et. al., 2006; ROM SSI01).

[Figure 1.1](#) outlines ‘principles’ and ‘pitfalls’ in aid-supported interventions. There are particular challenges in transitioning from FFW projects – perhaps particularly for staff of food aid. Particular challenges for transitioning in food-supported interventions in highly impoverished countries are based on firstly, the context of such operations, and secondly, the particular methodological difficulties with measuring food security, and readiness for sustained transition. Ostensibly, ‘transitioning’ participants / recipients from food security interventions is a matter of overcoming the set of problems which lead to food insecurity. However, as earlier discussion has shown, it is very difficult to define progress in food security interventions. A number of often unexpected considerations feed-into this. Firstly, there is a need for improved understanding of phasing out and exit strategies as a programming modality. Gardner et. al. (2005) point out the need for training in this regard, particularly in distinguishing project activities from specified activities leading to exit. Related to this, program managers of long-standing FFW projects have not planned-ahead for how transition can be achieved, particularly in anticipating and responding to future trends in wider environments, the need for productive communication about the intention for transition with participating communities, and the ongoing need to build capacities for procuring program resources, and managing and evaluating program activities and strategic outcomes (Gardner et. al., 2005: 17-19). In spite of these factors, there is evidence from food-supported programs of successfully transitioning participants without compromising the outcomes of the intervention (Gardner et. al., 2005). If continued food assistance is needed to ensure sustained outcomes, phasing over to government, local institutions or other sponsored programs is feasible, with the appropriate handover arrangements in place. When the continuation of food aid after program exit is *not* feasible, some of the program outcomes indicators may require modification. Alternatively, obtaining appropriate non-food inputs may be explored (Gardner et. al., 2005: 12).

Figure 1.2, A staged approach to an organisation's program exit

← Principles (Elements Support Each Other) →					
Plan for exit from the earliest stages of program design	Engage in participatory planning with local stakeholders	Identify necessary skills and capacities, as well as performance milestones	Consider the time frame of current funding, and explore ways to cover recurring costs beyond that time frame	Set target dates by which local actors will be able to take on new roles and responsibilities, monitor progress	Discuss the eventual exit with local stakeholders, open a dialogue about ongoing roles even after funding or service delivery has ceased
Lack of planning and communication with local stakeholders can lead to feelings of shock and "abandonment" at the time of phase out	Develop partnerships and local linkages	Partner with local actors to deliver services, rather than delivering service directly	Link local actors to each other, as well as to international donors		
	I fail to work with local stakeholders may build dependence on outside resources and expertise, threatening long term sustainability	Build local organizational and human capacity	Build local capacity to generate funding directly, through enhanced fundraising capacity, and indirectly, by strengthening organizations and enhancing their reputation	Support local organizations as they take on programmatic and logistical responsibilities; ensure that individuals have internalized new attitudes and behaviors through an "interspersed" phase out	Draw on the experience of individuals and organizations in "produced" communities to help implement programs in new areas
I fail to plan for exit may result in a sudden "scramble" to find new funding due to a donor-initiated phase out	If poor selection of partners may impede maintenance of activity schemes	If local capacity building is inadequate, organizations may be "set up" to fail with far-reaching consequences for their ability to render any services effectively	Mobilize local and external resources	Avoid disruption to service delivery by ensuring that necessary inputs will continue to be funded through local support or new external donors before phasing down or phasing over	Advocate for "graduated" communities or programs with new donors
	Partnerships are "time intensive" and are seldom effective if hastily arranged	I fail to allocate sufficient time for capacity building leads to premature exit	When only external resources are mobilized, there is increased risk of premature exit by the program sponsor	Stagger the phase out of various program activities and resources	Allow roles to progress from training and technical assistance to more collegial advisory, monitoring, and advocacy roles
				Sudden phase out may remove necessary technical support, and also undermine working relationships between local and external actors and	Allow roles and relationships to evolve and continue after exit
← Pitfalls (Elements Fail to Support Each Other) →					

Source: Levinger, B. and McLeod, J., 2002, 'Hello I must be going: Ensuring Quality Services and Sustainable Benefits through Well-Designed Exit Strategies', Educational Development Center, Incorporated, pp. 16.

## 1.8 Conclusion

As this discussion of the evolution of thinking in food security literature, and contemporary developments in programming has helped to emphasise, ‘enabling transition’ is not a straight-forward objective. As frameworks for conceiving of food security – and its co-requisites – have evolved, the challenge of conceiving of and ‘mapping out’ transition has become increasingly difficult. Developments in livelihood approaches have highlighted the importance of understanding trade-offs required. This perspective can be usefully applied to the problematic – yet very important – notion of transition. This is explored in relation to MERET-PLUS, illustrating challenges in measurement and policy formation, in [Chapter 6](#).

## Chapter 2 - Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out firstly, the research carried out during my internship with the World Food Programme, and how it informs this thesis; secondly, the methodological approach that I adopted; thirdly, the methods I used, and those I didn't use; fourthly, my use and analysis of field information; and lastly, a 'reflexive' view of the impacts of my positionality in the field, and in relation to findings.

### 2.2 Research as an intern with WFP

Fieldwork for this research was carried-out as part of a 4½ month internship with the World Food Programme in Ethiopia. WFP first began their involvement in Ethiopia in 1968 (Gebru, pers. comm. July 2010), and are now the largest donor of food aid in the country (DPPC, 2010). WFP have been a major donor to MERET-PLUS since the 1980s, and continue to provide technical input, and administrative and logistical support to the project. As a result, my internship with WFP gave me access to a financial stipend, office space, access to project managers' documents and their own extensive experience with the project, a vehicle and WFP driver, and normally a WFP field monitor with whom to visit sites and key informants. After completing the field-based component of my internship, I presented my findings to the project's management section of WFP, and completed and submitted a report of findings and recommendations for a strategy for phasing out from MERET-PLUS (Jackson, 2009a).

At the start of my internship with the World Food Programme, Terms of Reference, background information, specific aspects of the project's performance and impact were discussed with WFP project managers. The agreed Terms of Reference for my report were to research and form benchmarks for a phasing out strategy from MERET-PLUS. Initial field-orientation with Field Monitors helped to situate research objectives in the contexts of MERET-PLUS sites, and rural Ethiopia more widely. Following orientation, and selection of case study areas, field research was carried out, concluding with a report of findings from both qualitative and quantitative research methods to the World Food Programme Country Office (Jackson, 2009a).

Research for this thesis builds-upon all the research which undergirds the draft phasing-out strategy developed during my internship. The central ‘point of difference’, however, is that research for this thesis considers ‘transition’ (including the phasing out modality) for MERET-PLUS more broadly, and also incorporates findings from the substantial quantitative component of my field research.

## **2.3 Methodological approach**

This research is based on a mixed-method approach (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Qualitative information is employed to describe the relative significance of those quantities being described (Caws, 1989: 15). In turn, quantitative information provides a measured means of evaluating the significance of qualitative findings, and of applying these findings across multiple scales. This is particularly important in accounting for the integrative nature of the case study project, and for the highly vulnerable human and environmental ‘fabrics’ of research sites.

### **2.3.1 MERET-PLUS as a case study for this research**

A case study approach involves “the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalisable to other events” (George and Bennett, 2004: 5). Only since the mid-1970s has this approach been formalised as a research method, and linked to overarching arguments in the philosophy of science (George and Bennett, 2004: 6). The case study project for this research, MERET-PLUS, is a long-standing, critically-affirmed food-based intervention (FBI). Particularly through the three-decade-long involvement of the World Food Programme, the project has evolved substantially. The focus on developing ‘more sustainable livelihoods’ situates the latest two phases of the project in the current livelihoods-based focus in food security. As such, MERET-PLUS represents significant experience in watershed-based food security programming, which has been recognised and influential in Ethiopia. More detailed information about the project is set out in [Chapter 4](#). Over time, MERET-PLUS has performed impressively, having distinct impacts upon degraded lands and impoverished livelihoods in Ethiopia. Through best-practice, sustained over a number of decades, the project has now reached a ‘cross-roads’ in terms of strategic direction. As with similar food-supported interventions, ‘enabling transition’ from the vulnerabilities of rural areas remains a major challenge in MERET-PLUS. Thus, as a leading example of food-based watershed development intervention, the project provides opportunities to study the constraints of such a project.

### 2.3.2 Comparative case study approach

The exploratory nature of this case study approach helps to broaden analysis, leading to “powerful advantages in the heuristic identification of new variables and hypotheses through the study of deviant or outlier cases in the course of field work” (George and Bennett, 2004: 20). This makes it a suitable approach for the under-explored concept of ‘transition’ in the project, which requires conceptual development and testing. In addition, a trial-and-error approach is important because of the different programming contexts in attempting to measure the process of ‘enabling transition to more sustainable livelihoods’. Food security interventions such as MERET-PLUS have been evaluated previously through single (Cohen et. al., 2008; Little, 2008) and comparative (multiple) case study methodologies at inter-regional (Aberra et. al., 2007; Ashine et. al., 2009; Devereux, 2004; Gilligan et. al., 2008; Gilligan et. al., 2009b; Kebede, 2006) and international (Shylendra, 2002; Gilligan et. al., 2005) levels. This research is informed by a comparative case study approach. The means of investigation is to compare salient aspects of watershed-based development in each of Kalu, Worebabu, Lemo and Konso woredas<sup>17</sup>. The comparative case study approach employed in these areas highlights distinct ecological, socio-economic and cultural contexts, and links these to arrangements and strategies of government and World Food Programme project staff.

### 2.3.3 Mixed-method approach

As an integrated watershed development project, MERET-PLUS is already monitored through both quantitative means (Results-Based Management framework; quantitative external studies), and qualitative means (face-to-face interviews, photographic and anecdotal evidence gathered by field monitors). The mixed-methods approach informing this research integrates information from existing project evaluations with insights from fieldwork. Integration of the qualitative and quantitative research methods was achieved by seeking to rule in important variables, and rule out impossible ones (Maxwell, 1998: 16). Particularly in the context of contrasting agro-ecological areas, distinguishing variables, and identifying important correlations can be very difficult. In such contexts, overcoming “causative plurality” in quantitative research (Cartwright, 2007) requires a mixed method approach.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘woreda’ is an administrative unit, equivalent to ‘district’. Each of Ethiopia’s 550 woredas and several special woredas have their own line offices – Agriculture and Rural Development, Health, Education, and Administration.



## 2.4 Methods

### 2.4.1 Methods used

This research is informed by 19 semi-structured interviews, 6 focus group discussions, by a large survey of 692 households in the four case study areas, and by experiences throughout my 4 ½ month internship with the World Food Programme.

An initial desk-based review of available evaluations of MERET-PLUS highlighted impressive impacts and successes of the project, including levels of empowerment (Cohen, et. al., 2008), and a positive cost-benefit analysis (WFP, 2005). Policy initiative has helped to increase the project's comparative advantages, and its influence upon best-practice (Carucci, 2009). In addition, quantified measures of progress under the project's annual RBM system have provided quantitative information for project managers, donors and evaluation teams, and are the basis for quantitative outputs from this research.

Following a desk-based 'orientation' to the project, my field research was carried out in two stages. On my initial visits to case study areas, I was based in WFP regional offices in Amhara and SNNP regions. I discussed the design of my research with WFP project managers in these regions, and accompanied two very experienced field monitors to various MERET-PLUS sites that they were responsible for. During this period, I became familiar with various activities of the project in very different agro-ecological contexts. I was included in discussions with beneficiaries, community leaders, government extension agents and management staff.

During the second stage of field research, I travelled again to WFP regional offices. I used stratified multi-stage sampling to ensure that information was as representative as possible of each of the four case study areas that I selected— Kalu, Worebabu, Lemo and Konso (see [Map 5.1](#)). These areas were selected on the basis that model or otherwise exemplary sites were present, and that the areas selected represent diverse demographic, socio-economic and agro-ecological properties and farm-based livelihoods. As a result, the four selected woredas capture some of the diversity of MERET-PLUS sites.

Following the selection of case study areas, I began qualitative research. As an intern with WFP, I observed and participated in internal meetings, and meetings with government partners and project



participants. I used both purposive and snowball sampling for semi-structured interviews with key informants. The 19 semi-structured interviews were carried out with project staff at all levels of the project in Ethiopia, as well as one interview at WFP headquarters in Rome. The majority of interviews were carried-out in English; some were carried out in *Amharingya*<sup>21</sup>, with translation provided by WFP field staff. These interviews helped to contextualise project activities and performance, and to discuss readiness for transition, and sites of particular potential.

The six focus group discussions were carried out with extension agents (Development Agents, D.A.s) employed by the Government of Ethiopia, and MERET-PLUS planning teams, elected by communities participating in the project. These discussions were carried-out prior to the survey being administered, and focussed on community members' own perceptions of MERET-PLUS, and the current status of food security and watershed rehabilitation in the area.

The household survey is the largest component of this research. The design of the survey instrument was based on surveys of Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopian communities, and modified through ongoing analysis. The variables tested included those proposed as preconditions for a household reaching a state of food security in various studies (DPPC and FSCB, 2004; Ashley et. al., 2006; Gedamu, 2006; Kebede, 2006; Aberra, 2007; Gilligan et. al., 2008; WFP and IFPRI, 2008). The survey was carried out in two phases. The stratified sample selected two woredas in each region. Within each woreda, a representative sample of kabeles was selected. A total of 46 kabeles were selected<sup>22</sup> for surveying. Within each kabele, 15 households were surveyed. The total number of households surveyed is in direct proportion to both the number of households participating in the MERET-PLUS project, and to the total number of households in the woreda. Around 80 Development Agents in total were employed as enumerators. All enumerators were oriented with the survey instrument, and trained in administering it, in order to ensure greater understanding of the purpose of the survey, as well as to ensure greater accuracy in communicating questions and responses. Where possible, I visited enumerators with my field supervisors at the beginning of enumeration in the case study area.

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<sup>21</sup> Amharingya is the national language of Ethiopia as a federal whole.

<sup>22</sup> As far as possible, *kabeles* were randomly selected from a complete list provided by the local Office of Agriculture and Rural Development. However, sites that were inaccessible because of distance, terrain or the presence of disease were excluded.

### **2.4.2 Methods that I didn't use<sup>23</sup>**

The methods chosen for research are determinative in the quality of results. However, the means of framing initial research problems, including the methods that are excluded – is an important, under-explored concern, particularly in post-graduate research (Groenke and Nespor, 2009; Sherwin 2005). This is especially salient in the area of food security, where methods of measuring food security are still being developed. The importance of informants' own experiences of food insecurity has been demonstrated in a number of studies. Participatory approaches such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) can be very effective in privileging and understanding these subjective factors in food security. In turn, these subjective factors supplement the shortcomings of quantitative surveys, providing greater depth and detail for analysis (Chambers and Mayoux, 2005). However, I chose not to make extensive use of participatory tools. Because of the emerging, sensitive nature of transition, my naivety and lack of experience, and my responsibility to the World Food Programme for forming benchmarks for phasing out (explored below), I thought that such methods would have been inappropriate. In particular, I was concerned not to appear naive or unprofessional to my supervisors at WFP. Partially as a result of this, I did not consult project participants in-depth for this research, but focussed instead on consulting 'at scale' with as many people as possible from within case study areas. This has yielded quite important information of extensive scope about sample survey households, but has shifted the emphasis of this research toward the contextual diversity, and subsequent uncertainty and 'trade-offs' which are necessary for households in these areas.

While in-depth, participatory research with project participants has been limited, both the focus groups and household survey did include questions about participants' attitudes to interventions. However, because I lack specialties in quantitative research methods, I used a 'cut-down' version of the more sophisticated approaches, fully-fledged food security surveys such as the Household Economy Approach (HEA) (Boudreau, 2008).

### **2.4.3 Limitations of this research**

The most important limitation of this research is the fact that the concept being investigated is not well

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<sup>23</sup> Thanks to my classmate Monica Evans for this idea.

understood, and thus, attempts to measure transition are exploratory. The snapshot of potential in four case study areas which this research provides represents a quite limited picture of a long-term objective.

The methodological problem of how to conceive of and measure transition in the context of such contingencies is significant. In response to these problems, increasingly sophisticated and integrated research methods mean that “it is becoming less likely that a single researcher can be adept at more than one set of methods while also attaining a cutting-edge theoretical and empirical knowledge of his [or her] field” (George and Bennett, 2004: 35). The findings of quantitative research for this work are indicative of key potential in case study areas. However, studies of change over time are needed to provide sufficient evidence for transition. Case study approaches are critiqued in terms of the potential for ‘case-selection bias’, and in terms of scepticism about whether single-case studies provide explanation of phenomena that is broad-enough to form – or to contribute to – theory (George and Bennett, 2004). Both single case studies and homogenous multiple case studies lead to problems of under-determination in the analysis of information gathered, namely “the problem that evidence, whether from a case or a database, can be equally consistent with a large or even infinite number of alternatives theories” (George and Bennett, 2004). Thus, while the woredas selected for this research are agro-ecologically, economically and socially diverse (see [Chapter 5](#)), research findings are limited in their application.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

Relevant literature and key informants at all stages of research have emphasised the value added to operations, and to participating communities, by the project’s field staff, and the positive relationships formed with participating communities and families over time<sup>24</sup> (Showat SSI01; Amhara SSI01; ROM SSI01). Qualitative information for this thesis was analysed with input from WFP field- and headquarters-based staff. This immediate feedback from WFP and Government staff was invaluable in understanding the contextual significance of initial findings, and implications for research objectives.

By contrast, analysis of quantitative data from the household survey was carried-out well-after returning

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<sup>24</sup> During fieldwork, first-hand experience of the productive synergy resulting from friendships and working relationships between MERET-PLUS participants, Government staff and field monitors firmly established this point in my mind.

from the field, largely through an informed “trial and error” approach to pinpointing appropriate and useful analyses to run. The design of my survey instrument (see Annex [A.3](#)) and subsequent analysis benefitted from the input of specialist staff in the World Food Programme’s Vulnerability Analysis and Monitoring (VAM) unit, and advice and analysis from a statistical consultant at Victoria University. The consultant provided advice about the statistical analysis best-suited to the interrelationships that I wanted to test, and carried-out this analysis using SPSS, v.18.

The 692 rural households surveyed from across 46 kabele, and four case study woredas were questioned about key proxy indicators of food security, including local climates and land holdings, household size and available labour power, assets and debt, land entitlement, and shocks and coping strategies. These measures were related to households’ belief in achieving independence from food support using descriptive statistics, the chi square statistic, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to indicate significant relationships between variables.

The intended use of the data elicited by the survey was originally to build-upon existing studies of forming benchmarks for measuring graduation from an agriculture-based FFW safety net in Ethiopia. In order not to replicate data already available which could be adapted for case-study areas (CSA, EDRI, IFPRI, 2006; CSA, 2007), certain assumptions were made. The relatively uncharted nature of quantitative research into forming such benchmarks made it difficult to know which aspects of a household’s livelihood should be included in the survey. As Gillham (2007: 2) notes, this is a more general problem faced in structured questionnaires. The kind of information to be elicited is decided in advance, meaning that the results are skewed toward the researcher’s own pre-conceptions. Especially when seeking to create insights into new territory, this is of limited value when not supplemented with less-structured, more qualitative research.

## **2.6 Reflexivity in research**

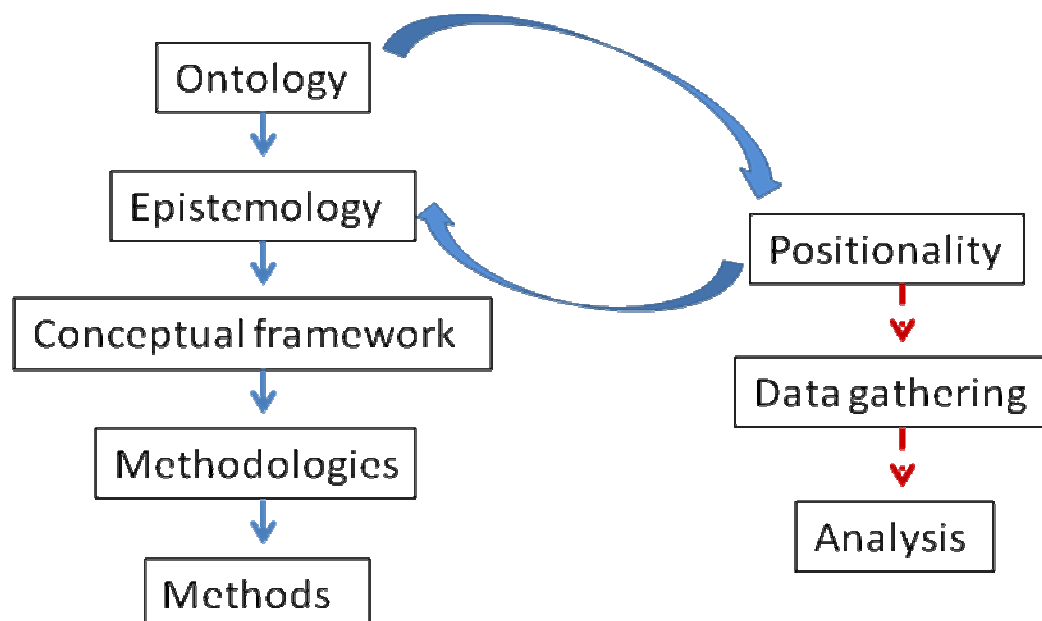
A reflex is defined as something being directed back on itself (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 36-37), a ‘knee-jerk reaction’. These reactions, and actions performed in response, occur as part of an inter-subjective interplay between the researcher and key informants. As a result, the research initiator is drawn into many relationships throughout the process of research. ‘Reflexivity’ in social science research is “self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as

researcher” (England, 1994: 82).

Reflexivity in qualitative and quantitative research is contested in terms of its usefulness, with opinions of its place varying from a “research instrument *par excellence*” ‘to be exploited for all its worth’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 18) to a means of ‘self-critical awareness’ in the research process, to ‘narcissism and solipsism’ (Marcus, 1994, 569; England, 1994: 82). I argue that reflexivity is necessary to account for the inequities which are inherent between the contexts of this research, as well as a general rule in evaluating the quality of research carried out (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 43-44; Darling, 1998; Lincoln, 1995; Nowak and Scheyvens, 2003). I seek to reflect upon aspects of my positionality throughout this research, and in relation to research design and implementation (see [Figure 2.2](#)).

Here, a reflexive view of my engagement and interaction with people, and their perspectives and information, is provided. Three points for reflexivity are: the ‘framing’ of research through my responsibilities to university and the World Food Programme for research outputs and findings; my interaction with different parts of the research context; and ethics and ethical praxis. These are related to the practices and considerations for ‘enabling transition’ in later sections. Annex [A.5](#) sets out some implications of my positionality in this research.

**Figure 2.2,** Linkages between frameworks and positionality of researcher and process of research.



**Source:** Adapted from Summer and Tribe, 2008, pp.55, itself adapted from Crottey, 2004, pp. 5.

### **2.6.1 Framing of research**

During research, a range of subjective, inter-subjective and normative impressions and beliefs (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005: 305) had an effect upon how this research project came to be framed. My self-awareness of the assumptions that I brought to field research evolved in a discursive manner. In retrospect, I operated with two particular presumptions: a presumption of how best to capture information about the impacts and sustainability of project activities, and a presumption of egalitarianism in field relations. In each case, these ideological approaches impacted upon how the perspectives of respondents were included or excluded throughout the process of this research.

Involvement with the World Food Programme as an intern brought particular advantages and challenges. Because of my high level of dependency upon the World Food Programme for access to ongoing contact with expert program managers, a wide range of key documents, a very large range of networks with key informants and experts (internally and externally) at all levels, as well as transportation to inaccessible rural areas, there was a high level of potential for prejudice in research outcomes. As Scheyvens and Nowak note: while researchers must be wary of criticising too-easily the institutions that they are in contact, “[o]n the other side of the coin, we must be equally wary of glorifying the institutions and the individuals we study [...]. Regular reflection on the nature of our relationships with individuals and institutions we are in contact with during the course of fieldwork is necessary in order that these relationships do not bias our research findings” (2003: 106-107).

Socio-political analyses were tacitly excluded, as was the broader question of an exit strategy. The sensitive nature of an exit strategy was made clear to me by supervisors from WFP. Their emphasis on the potential to ‘panic’ or negatively impact participants and create misunderstandings between WFP and project staff from the Government of Ethiopia—along with my position as an amateur researcher and intern – led to a modal change in focus, from exiting to phasing out at site level. The mixed method approach adopted was influenced by the nature requirements to form quantified benchmarks for phasing-out. By researching a gap in programming – which was refined with the consent and support of WFP – there was greater direct potential for actionable results from my report. Further, my research occurred around a time when project staff themselves were investigating the future direction of the

project.

Reporting to a large multilateral institution also meant adhering to particular modernist strategic objectives and frameworks, including logical frameworks, as well as a tacit non-political discourse during fieldwork and semi-structured interviews. I attempted to align my research with existing project monitoring approaches, based on the assumption that instruments such as the Results Based Management framework and the logical framework would provide the best templates for such results. Findings from field research and evaluation of the project were initially presented to the World Food Programme at the end of my contract in the form of a logical framework model (Jackson, 2009: 22-25), in line with existing strategic and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Constructing this framework involved ‘translating’ disparate information from a wide range of key informants into a much-critiqued tool for instrumental reasoning (Earle, 2002; Kerr, in Cooke and Darr, 2008).

My position as an intern reporting to the World Food Programme created direct potential for findings to impact programming reality. This provided strong motivation for gathering appropriate data of sufficient quality to help catalyse such impacts. However, the requirement of my internship – to meet the requirements of a programming strategy for a large humanitarian agency – also created pressure to produce quantified and actionable findings. For my research, however, a personal motivation was to take advantage of the opportunity for field experience with WFP offered by an internship. Because the capacity and reputation of WFP represented a significant opportunity to get my “foot in the door” of the development industry, I wanted to ‘chalk up’ a large household survey as work experience. As a result, I designed a large-scale, quantitative research instrument, supplemented by interviews with project staff, to provide appropriate information – at scale – for answering research objectives. In many ways, this decision reflected a critiqued “combination of scientific insecurity and the necessity to plan on the basis of statistics” (Beazley and Ennew, in Desai and Potter, 2006: 190).

Along with the drive for producing scalable, quantified results, I brought a number of naive presumptions as an ‘outsider’ and post-graduate student. These emerged, in part, from steeping myself in concepts and terminology the junior ‘researcher culture’ (Holliday, 2007: 151) during my four years studying Development Studies. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992: 39) describe this kind of ‘intellectualist bias’, one which construes the world as “a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically”. Bourdieu calls for ‘reflexive’ scrutiny of, and response to, “the

collective scientific unconscious embedded in theories, problems, and (especially national) categories of scholarly judgement” (1990).

### 2.6.2 My interaction with contextual factors

A further aspect of my positionality is that the large household survey that I conducted led to quite extensive interaction between poor, traditionally marginalised and otherwise ‘quiescent’ (Zewde, 2001) Ethiopian rural producers and the comparatively powerful, vocal and authoritative agencies that I was affiliated with (Beazley and Ennew, 2006). I presumed that I could achieve egalitarian relationships with people during fieldwork. In reality, the unequal power relations which became evident between project staff, participants and communities and me disproved this assumption. These unequal relations, on reflection, are to do with important aspects of my position and identity, emerging from the privileges that are tied-in with being the citizen of a Western<sup>25</sup> country with access to comparatively large amounts of personal finance, as well as from my affiliation with the World Food Programme. These factors became evident during training with the 80 survey enumerators employed to administer the household survey. As an intern initiating (and funding) a survey, I was focussed on achieving the highest quality result possible. The scale of the survey and tight deadlines left little room for dialogue with the Development Agents serving as enumerators. The necessity of delegating all face-to-face contact with respondents to the survey reinforced my distance from the process of ‘quantifying’ information about their livelihoods. In some ways, these factors reinforced the structure of ‘passive informants responding to an instrument’. More nuanced aspects of a household’s livelihood are often neglected or missed entirely in pre-designed and rigid instruments such as household surveys (Lofland and Lofland, 1984).

By its nature, the project which I undertook required the broad participation of a representative range of informants. During fieldwork, many of the communities surveyed were facing protracted drought. Survey respondents, therefore, were largely free from many on-farm responsibilities, and could make more time for answering questions. I emphasised strongly during training sessions with all enumerators and supervisory staff the nature of the research, its use, the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity in the process of writing-up research, and the voluntary nature of responding to the request for

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<sup>25</sup> The fact that I am a Westerner did create perceptions among my enumerators and some key informants of personal privilege. However, my New Zealand citizenship had a very different effect on my managers. During my first meeting as an intern - I was asked by our section manager about my nationality. When I said that I am a New Zealander, our manager responded: “oh, New Zealand isn’t a very big donor to WFP”.



information. Due to the scope of the survey (for which I employed over 80 enumerators to survey), two risks needed to be accounted for. Firstly, some survey respondents may have been unduly influenced to take part by coercive influence from some enumerators. Secondly, for the same reasons, enumerators may well have entered ‘bogus’ information, assuming a young, foreign researcher with no native language would not realise. In response to the first, enumerators were trained, with the help of survey assistants from the Offices of Agriculture and Rural Development, and a field supervisor from the World Food Programme, to obtain informed consent; to explain the nature of research; to explain ongoing anonymity and confidentiality of responses given; and finally to administer the survey. Payment of enumerators was negotiated directly by me, assisted by my WFP field supervisor, and with advice from colleagues with experience in administering similar surveys. In response to the second, respondents were asked to provide detailed household information (name, age, relationship to household head and occupation) for each member of the household. My field supervisors advised me that this – along with on-site training and regular field visits to each team of enumerators – would limit potential for enumerators to falsify information.

### **2.6.3 Ethics and ethical praxis**

In development studies, the relationships between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ are nearly always loaded with unequal power relations (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003). For this research, these power relations were particularly apparent as a white European male, allocated a vehicle and driver, based in the WFP Country Office, and given support from WFP and Government field staff. Surveying highly vulnerable households in rural areas led to ‘unequal’ encounters at two levels. Firstly, in recruiting and training enumerators from among local Development Agents; and secondly, in the contact between enumerators and surveyed households.

In addition, I had to account for the dual role of reporting as an intern, and researching as a Masters student, with particular challenges of ensuring thesis research was not biased toward a dominant viewpoint, to the exclusion of other informants and stakeholders. The existing partnership between the World Food Programme and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development was a fundamental enabling factor in the willing cooperation of project staff. Cadwell et al. (2005) note the importance of including indigenous people in the process of research, and the range of benefits which can result. Existing arrangement of institutions, infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation and project staff meant that

information about the operation of the project was more readily accessible. Thus, the interaction of my positionality with inherent difficulties in surveying rural areas managed by impoverished people placed real constraints upon potential to successfully survey case study areas; but being part of existing well-established arrangements for monitoring and evaluation helped to a large degree to overcome these difficulties.

Having a young, inexperienced intern report on the issue of exit or phasing out from a project creates potential for tension with community members and Agriculture office field staff, having potential to reinforce perceptions of unhealthy Western influence upon the nature of aid received or withdrawn.

### **2.6.3 The overall effect of my positionality**

My positionality emerged through two fundamental factors. Firstly, my ‘empowered’ status as a Westerner, and a representative of WFP, provided significant opportunities to understand the MERET-PLUS project across sites and at scale. However, the second factor, my significant lack of experience or expertise in designing food security surveys, meant that much of the fieldwork carried out was based on ‘extracting’ advice and information, instead of a more equal exchange of ideas and expertise. In some ways, this constituted ‘spring boarding’ from my privileged position. With more experience, and particularly more technical expertise, the research methodology could have been tailored to be more time and cost efficient. A lack of expertise and experience also fed into my inability to adapt to nuances of cultural and social factors. Given the paramount influence that the worldview perspective that any individual evaluator brings to bear in any particular exercise of evaluation, it is not only regrettable when the issue of perspectives remains unaddressed, but also grossly negligent” (Bawden, 2006: 2). Further, “can we [program evaluators] expect people to think and act differently if we don’t do so ourselves?”

## Chapter 3 – Setting the scene

As a result of notorious famine in Ethiopia's recent past, and perpetual hunger in particular areas to date, Ethiopia has commonly been represented to a global audience in reports by western media, and through humanitarian and emergency appeals, almost solely in terms of unending need for outside support, as an object of pity and site of western intervention, and as "famine-stricken, war ravaged and politically unstable" (Frost and Shanka, 1999: 1). Ostensibly and with regards to millions of vulnerable agricultural producers, this has been borne out through unrelenting appeals for food-support (see [Figure 3.2](#)), with Ethiopia in structural food deficit since at least 1980 (Devereux, 2004). However, factors which indicate latent or emerging potential at all levels of Ethiopian society are not as well known or publicised. There is very little available literature on lessons that can be learned from Ethiopia's long experience in emergency response<sup>26</sup>, and in particular with the in-country administrative capacity built, with the clear evidence of sustained environmental rehabilitation through food/cash aid-supported activities (Ashine et. al., 2009), and with evolving discussion of phasing-out beneficiaries from receiving support. The literature which does exist usually focuses on "bang for birr" program evaluations (Ayele et. al., 2008), largely from the perspectives of, and in the interests of, aid donors and humanitarian agencies (Muhumuza and Toner, 2002). This work aims to adopt a broader view. This chapter sets out contextual information, seeking to 'set the scene' for the difficult task of phasing-out food-supported producers (Gardner et. al., 2005).

### 3.1 Contextual factors in 'managing' development

Agricultural production in Ethiopia occurs in a distinctive productive environment, leading to particular challenges for producers and for all interventions under the umbrella of food security and agriculture-led development. Production in the agriculture sector of the Ethiopian economy is the dominant form of livelihood for a very large proportion of the population, with approximately 85% employed in subsistence or semi-subsistence agricultural regimes (Alemu et. al., 2006), providing 89% of Ethiopia's exported commodities, and contributing to around half (48%) of total real GDP (PPP) (World Bank, 2007). Thus, Ethiopia 'bucks the trends' of deagrarianisation in sub-Saharan Africa emerging from the

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<sup>26</sup> Recently, studies at international conferences such as Social Protection for the poorest in Africa: Learning from experience, 2008 and CSAE Conference Economic Development in Africa, 2009 have helped to publicise best-practice, including cases from Ethiopia.

implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs and market liberalisation policies (Bryceson, 2004; Coates et. al., 2008), with one of the lowest rates of urbanisation in the world (17%)<sup>27</sup>. Historically, Ethiopia has been known for having one of the most productive agricultural sectors in Africa, and still has one of the largest livestock holdings in Africa (Bewket, 2003: 1). As a result, the state of the natural resource base, and residents' ability to make productive use of this, is one of the most important measures of the extent of poverty and the state of livelihoods in rural areas. Rahmato, an Ethiopian scholar, notes the various impacts that:

in traditional agriculture such as ours, natural conditions  
and endowments determine the range of crops  
that can be grown, farming practices, responses to the  
environment, and, in direct or indirect ways,  
consumption patterns and household dynamics (2008: 29).

### 3.1.1 Ethiopia's landform and climate

Ethiopia's longitudinal location (3-15° E) close to the Equator implies, in theory, a tropical climate; this is belied by the country's varying relief. This leads to distinctive micro-climates in Ethiopia, with different variance in temperature and humidity, rainfall, soil type and depth, and subsequently, in the kind of crops that can be grown. This, in turn, has implications for all aspects of agricultural production, for the vast majority of the country's rural inhabitants, and for Ethiopia's agricultural-led economic development.

The two main rainfall seasons in Ethiopia: *Kreamt* ('heavy rains') which fall between June and September, and *Balg* ('little rains') which fall, generally, between March and May, occur in distinct parts of the country. Broadly, a large area in the east of Ethiopia, including almost all of Somalia and Afar regions, experience low levels and monthly amounts of rainfall (CSA, 2006: 20). *Bega* is the dry season or summer, from October to February, with limited rainfall, yet essential for ensuring that grass can be provided to sustain cattle. *Kreamt* rains fall most heavily in the South West of Ethiopia, decreasing in volume as they move north- and east-wards (CSA, 2006). The main planting and growing season for

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<sup>27</sup> CIA World Factbook, <[#et](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2212.html?countryName=Ethiopia&countryCode=et&regionCode=af)>, accessed May 2010.

most food crops is during the Kreamt (Zewde, 2001), with long season crops depending upon the Balg. Harvesting occurs during Bega season (Fesseha, 2001).

The high level of diversity within the nexus of agricultural, ecological and climatic conditions in Ethiopia has been described in different classifications of agro-ecological zones<sup>28</sup>. The measures of relief traditionally used most commonly are lowland areas (*kolla*), 500-1,500m above sea level (a.s.l.); mid- (*woina dega*) 1,500 to 2,300m a.s.l.; and highland (*dega*) 2,300-3,200m a.s.l. areas (CSA et. al., 2001). These categories have taken-on broader connotations, of the different modes of life and characteristics in the respective areas (Zewde, 2001: 2). Understanding the context in which food security interventions operate is of crucial importance to all aspects of a project cycle. A relatively recent study (Abera et. al., 2007: vi) identified five different land/agricultural-based livelihood systems in Ethiopia:

- 1) Diversified Peri-Urban Livelihood Systems;
- 2) Highland Food Crop Dominant Livelihood Systems;
- 3) Lowland Livestock Dominant Livelihood Systems;
- 4) Cereal Crop and Livestock Mixed Livelihood

System; and

- 5) Cereal/Food Crop and Cash Crop Livelihood System.

Each of these livelihood systems have a range of implications for households. In particular, lowland livestock dominant livelihood systems (or ‘pastoral livelihoods’) are an integral livelihood strategy (see [Box 3.1](#)), yet livestock and early warning information for such areas have been overlooked until recently (Boudreau, 2009: 34). As a result, interventions seeking to restore environmental ‘credits’ (Carucci,

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### **Box 3.1** Pastoral livelihoods in Ethiopia

“ Pastoralism in Ethiopia and the Horn is ‘evolving’ towards complex and mutually influencing directions. Aspects of sedentarization may provide the wrong impression of a gradual abandonment of pastoralism which is incorrect as livelihoods are multifaceted and ties to pastoralism remain strong even when households settle around irrigation schemes and in towns. Indeed, the original transhumance patterns are changing and agro-pastoralism is increasing, often at the expense of marginal lands.

Adaptation to shocks is increasingly difficult for pastoralists, forcing more people to move out of pastoralism due to hardships. However, such trends are highly diverse in the different woredas and regions, driven by adaptation and opportunities for accumulation of livestock.

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<sup>28</sup> An agro-ecological zone is defined as “a micro-region, which is sufficiently uniform in climate, physiography and soil patterns” (de Pauw, 1988: 88). In Ethiopia, six traditional agro-ecological zones have been used for over a century to categorise production environments.

2009) and revitalise Ethiopia's watersheds must deploy a range of activities.

### 3.1.2 Key demographic information

In addition to diverse agro-ecological factors, Ethiopia's 79.83 million people<sup>29</sup> are ethnically and culturally diverse. In 1995, with the adoption of a new Constitution, Ethiopia was separated into distinct, ethnically-based *Killiloch* or regions, with the majority of people living in Oromiya, followed by Amhara and SNNP Killiloch (CSA, 2008). Eight out of Ethiopia's twelve regions have an urban to rural distribution of 10-20 percent to 80-90 percent (CSA, 2008: 19), with SNNP and Amhara as two of the most rural areas of the country. Distribution of population is determined by altitude, with 11% of Ethiopia's population in areas <1,500 metres, 75% in areas 1,500m to 2,300m, and 14% in areas 2,300m and above (Berry and Ofcansky, 2004). Increasing population pressure in a predominantly rural country complicates existing plans for development, in particular, along 'fault lines' of securing access to sufficient land plots for all citizens in accordance with the 1995 Constitution, and for creating sustained growth in agricultural production to meet increased demand (set out in the Food Security Strategy, (2002 and forthcoming).

As [Map 3.1](#) illustrates, the most densely populated areas of Ethiopia are found across a distinct section of the western side of the country, extending broadly from the northern- to southern-most boundaries, with a secondary section from west to east across a mid-section of the country. These more-densely populated areas overlap closely with higher-altitude (highland) areas—2,000 metres and above—in dega and woena-dega traditional agricultural zones (CSA, 2006: 15). Over 90% of the total population of Ethiopia, well-over 90% of regularly cropped land, and around 66% of total livestock population are found in these highland areas (Kassie et. al., 2005: 15; Bewket, 2006). This has been a major factor in the extensive land degradation in the Ethiopian highlands. This has been a major factor in the extensive land degradation in the Ethiopian highlands.

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#### **Box 3.1** Pastoral livelihoods in Ethiopia (*continued*)

Overall, pastoralism remains a highly efficient system within the arid lands context in many areas, and it would remain a prominent livelihood feature which needs to be supported through innovative approaches. ”

**Source:** Carucci, 2009: 28).

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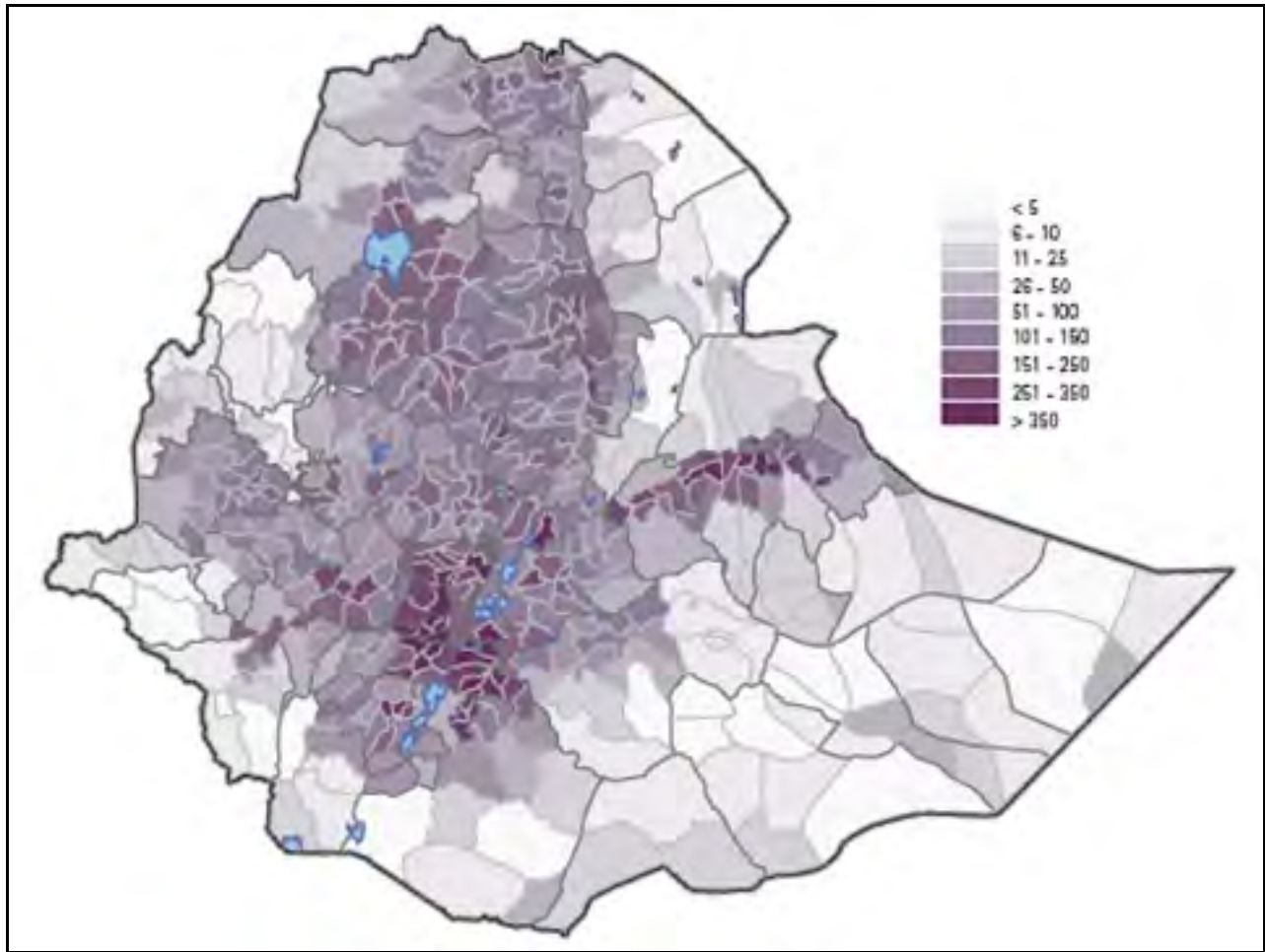
<sup>29</sup> Based on population census conducted May-November 2007, and a growth rate of 2.6% across three years (to the end of 2010).

As [Table 3.1](#) shows, population density in Ethiopia is projected to increase exponentially over the next forty years. This trend has been “exacerbated by policy induced stagnation of agriculture and internal conflict and instability in the past” (Demeke, Guta and Ferede, 2004: 13-14). If this trend persists as predicted, the significantly increased average population density will exact a higher toll on arable land. In some areas of Ethiopia, holdings of such land are so highly fragmented, particularly in the south of Ethiopia, but also in northern highland areas, that each household may farm a strip of land that is one fraction of the size of a normal plot (Field diary, June 2009; Amise interview, Hadiya ZoARD, July 2009). Particularly in southern areas of Ethiopia, population density is not only extremely high, but also highly variable between areas (SNNPSSI01, 2009).

Rahmato (2008) helps to highlight the seriousness of population pressure for the success of agrarian change in Ethiopia. Along with the decline in the size of land holdings available per capita (due to population pressure), declining food production per capita (Getahun and Getahun, 2001: 13), the relative immobility of the majority of rural inhabitants, and the lack of employment opportunities available outside the agriculture sector – the entrenched source of employment and livelihoods in Ethiopia – the country faces a “Malthusian disaster” (Rahmato, 2008: 348). As a result, land-based livelihoods in these areas simply do not provide the necessities of life for subsistence farmers.

Other factors which increase competition for resources include cross-cutting issues such as HIV/AIDs. Currently, there is a population of approximately 1 million living with HIV/AIDs in Ethiopia (Berrutti et. al., 2009: 1). The majority of HIV-positive people are located in urban areas (Berutti et. al., 2009: 1). Because of the particular requirements of food-insecure households with one or more member who is HIV/AIDs positive, food-supported interventions require particular attention in initial targeting, as well as during phase-out. Gardner et. al. (2005: 13) set out 14 factors that are unique to communities with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDs. Such households have a decreased capacity for labour, a greater demand for support services, particular nutritional requirements, and extension services for health and income.

**Map 3.1, Population Density in Ethiopia, 2004<sup>30</sup>**



Source: CSA, EDRI, IFPRI, 2006: 39.

### 3.1.3 Environmental degradation in Ethiopia

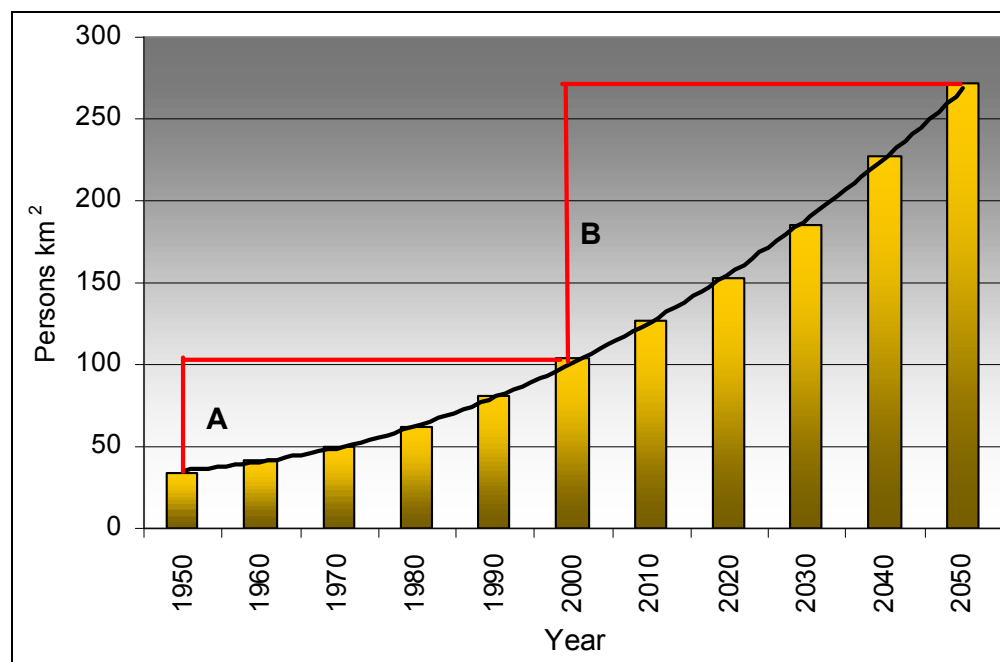
Recent figures about the nature and extent of environmental degradation in Ethiopia help to highlight the severe degradation of the country's most productive asset, the natural resource base. An extensive survey of land degradation worldwide shows that Ethiopia has the sixth-largest area of degrading land in Africa, an area which is comparable in size to South Africa and Namibia. A recent measure of land degradation, normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), affects a little more than a quarter of the total land area, and almost a third of the population (from Bai et. al., 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Figures are projections from earlier data



Changing climatic conditions such as reduced and erratic rainfall<sup>31</sup> exacerbates the poor condition of soils, leading to leaching and erosion; this is further exacerbated by the poor holding-capacity of soil, leading to reduced soil-moisture content and retention, and increasingly inaccessible ground-water and loss of natural springs (Jackson, 2009). Especially in food-insecure lowland areas, the death of less-hardy biomass covering the land, combined with negative household coping strategies such as clearing steep or marginal land for production or to obtain firewood, further exposes soil to erosion and damaging natural processes (Jackson, 2009). Estimates of the cost of annual land degradation<sup>32</sup> in Ethiopia a recent synopsis of different studies vary from 2% to 6.75% of Agricultural Gross Domestic Product (AGDP) (Kassie et. al., 2005: 65).

**Table 3.1,** Persons per square kilometre of land in Ethiopia, 1950-2050.



**Source:** Ashine, S., Asnake, S., Ferguson, A., Riley, B., and Torres, C., 2009, 'Mid-Term Evaluation of

<sup>31</sup> Particularly visible in 2008 and 2009 with the failure of Berg and Keremt rains in many areas of Ethiopia

<sup>32</sup> The U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification defines land as “the terrestrial bio-productive system that comprises soil, vegetation, other biota, and the ecological and hydrological processes that operate within the system”, and land degradation as “reduction or loss [...] of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of rainfed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture, forest and woodlands resulting from [...] processes [...] such as (i) soil erosion caused by wind and/or water; (ii) deterioration of the physical, biological or economic properties of the soil; and (iii) long-term loss of natural vegetation”. The full text of the Convention is available from the Convention’s website: <http://www.unccd.int/convention/text/convention.php?annexNo=-1>

Ethiopia Country Programme 10430.0 (2007-2011)', August 12 2009, World Food Programme: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, pp. 3.

As [Figure 3.2](#) shows, the number (in millions) affected by drought or disaster, and the proportion of the total population that this represents, has increased. These estimates represent two significant trends. Firstly, across 23 years, drought or disaster had affected between 2.53 million and 14.3 million people, and 5.8% and 22% of the population. The significant variation in these figures is characteristic of impoverished countries perpetually affected by drought; however, Ethiopia is distinctive – if not unique – in the protracted operation of food security interventions since the 1970s (Ashine et. al., 2009; ), as well as being recipient to the largest, or near-largest amount of food aid of any WFP recipient country (WFP, 2008). Secondly, while particular “peaks” (such as 1984-1985 and the most recently evaluated in 2002) are clearly correlated with particular disasters in those years –the “Great Famine”, and the severe drought (respectively)—the overall picture is difficult to correlate to any one factor. While the occurrence of drought has a significant effect on Ethiopia as a whole, and on impoverished rural areas where agricultural production is dependent on rainfall in particular, requirements for emergency aid persist even in periods of sufficient, seasonal rainfall.

## **3.2 Shifting institutional responses**

While a review of Ethiopia’s rich agrarian history is far beyond the scope of this study, aspects of relevant political and administrative changes are considered here, along with implications for current agrarian policy and practice. Two main themes are characteristic of Ethiopian history in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: firstly, driving-out foreign incursion, and secondly, unification under Emperor Menelik II (who ruled from 1889-1913) (Zewde, 2001). Unification was particularly important for the formation of the centralised power-base in Ethiopia, and the landlord-tenant relations emerging from this (Zewde, 2001).

### **3.2.1 Governance of land in Ethiopia**

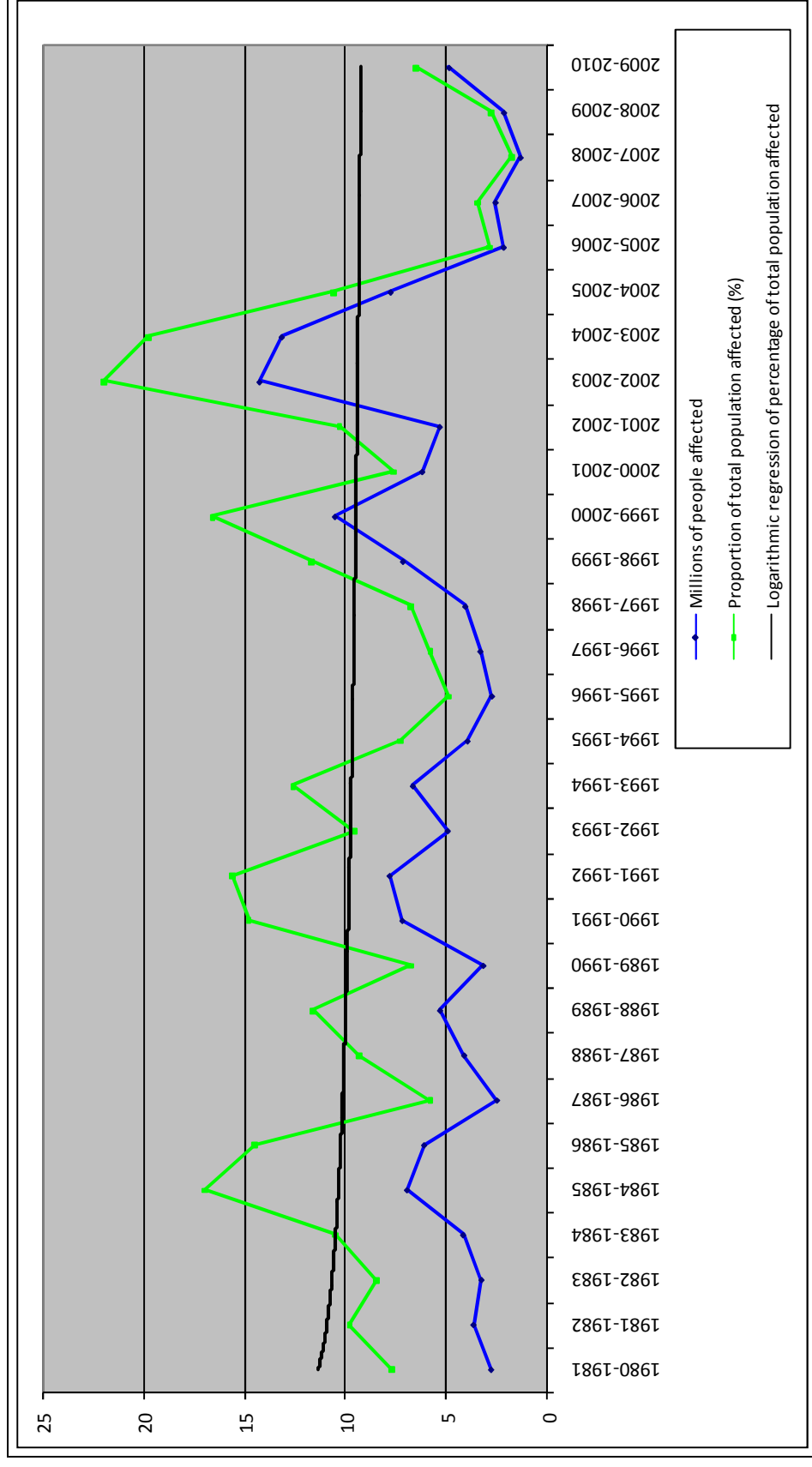
During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, conquest of areas now incorporated into the south of Ethiopia extended hegemonic interest of the Amharans in the north (Zewde, 2001). Many aspects of the dominant Amharan society were imposed-on the south, including administrative structure of the government (Zewde, 2001), language, religion and culture (Watson, 2009), and the development of

distinct landownership patterns whereby land was divided between the military, state and Christian church. The ruling class, bolstered by unified military efforts, effectively subjugated peasant farmers ('gebbar') to providing 'surplus' agricultural products and labour. This practice persisted from the 19<sup>th</sup> through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and reinforced a pattern of strong central political control and domination, literally at the expense of the livelihoods and lives of many 'gebbar'. The persistent dominance of Amhara as an ethnic and political force in Ethiopia emerged as a significant political issue in contemporary arrangements for grouped ethnic federalism (Crummey and Marcus, 2010). Southern states have not had the same tradition of state organisation as the politically dominant north, and as a result "have consistently lacked resources and administrative capacity" (Keeley and Scoones, 2000: 94-95).

Following the Second World War, privatisation of land in Ethiopia was increasingly becoming the normative tenure system in Ethiopia. Tenure arrangements across Ethiopia granted freehold access to land for settlers with tributary rights, for those in government service, for those who received grants of government land, as well as for owners of privatised land. The effect was to concentrate land ownership amongst the powerful (Zewde, 2001; Rahmato, 2008). This was particularly true in the south of Ethiopia, with up to 75% of people in some areas forced into tenancy, and the persistence of unsettled use-rights and unfairly-weighted division of produce. In the north, the situation was quite different, as rist (usufruct kinship) tenure arrangements helped to overcome the problem of unsettled use-rights. Different problems prevailed, however, namely "litigation over land-use rights and fragmentation of holdings" (Zewde, 2001: 192) due to the lack of an efficient land rental market, and accompanying freedom to divide land for most-efficient production.

Between 1950 and 1974 there was a steady decline in the productivity of large, crop-producing areas in the north and south of Ethiopia, exacerbated by diminishing resources, increasing vulnerability and growing rural poverty. The worsening problem of ensuring sufficient access to land brought out the subservient status of gebbar to landlords and the imperial regime (Rahmato, 2008).

**Figure 3.2, Disaster- and drought-affected population<sup>33</sup> in Ethiopia, 1980-2009**



**Source:** Adapted from Demeke, Ferede and Guta, 2004: 14 using data from joint Government and Humanitarian Partners' appeals, 2004-2009, available from <http://www.dppc.gov.et/pages/appeal.htm>, accessed March 2010.

<sup>33</sup> The massive decline in 2005-2006 (by 5.6 million people, and 8% of the population) is explained by the beginning of the PSNP, which effectively 'adopted' these beneficiaries into public works and/or other food security programs (Mulat Demeke, pers. comm. March 2010).

At the same time, the package approach to agricultural development was being implemented – successfully – in southern parts of the country. This approach included extension packages – which rapidly expanded in scope up to 1974 – leading to “the peasant [...] being actively sought by the development state” (Rahmato, 2008: 49). Overall however, successive five-year development policies had only a limited impact. A major barrier to not only the success of these discrete development plans, but also to the capacity of the Ethiopian government and sectoral agencies to plan and administer their own development policies and plans, was the fact that the Selassie regime allowed donors to both design programs and development policy for these programs, as well as to supply needed finance for these projects (Cohen, 1987; Rahmato, 2008). Combined with donors’ relative disinterest in understanding the particular agrarian context of Ethiopia, and the neglect of the situation and priorities of peasants’ livelihoods by donors and the imperial regime, this led to the inefficacy of the government’s development plans.

The seeds of cerebral discontent with the Selassie imperial regime were sown among the Ethiopian Student Movement as early as 1958 (Zewde, 2001: 222). Initially driven by anti-imperial ideology, the movement came to be characterised by a purist and uncompromising Marxist-Leninist critique of the dominance of the imperial government. During this time, government repression – often violent, leading to student leaders and representatives being killed by government forces (Zewde, 2001; pers. comm., Dessie 2009) – led to increasingly rigid student opposition (Zewde, 2001). Combined with later populist support from almost all areas of society – students, teachers, unemployed youth, civil servants, taxi drivers and soldiers, as well as many Muslims calling for autonomy and equality, – this marked the beginning of a fundamental shift in power relations between the ‘governors’ and the ‘governed’. Such was the entrenched nature of authoritarian and patriarchal tradition in Ethiopia however (Rahmato, 2008: 233), that only the land reform proclamation of 1975 was found to have enduring positive content for the country (Zewde, 2001). The Public Ownership of Land Proclamation (No. 31, 1975) was “one of the most radical land reform proclamations that any regime has ever issued” (Zewde, 2001: 242), fundamentally changing the existing exploitative arrangements for land administration which had concentrated land entitlement among gentry, at the expense of *gebbar* (‘peasants’). The Proclamation transferred all rural land in Ethiopia to state ownership, granting farmers usufruct rights over the land they worked; abolished tenancy; prohibited the sale, mortgage or leasing of rural land; and terminated all land litigation cooperatives (Adal, 2001: 56; Berry and Ofcansky, 2004; Zewde, 2001). However, perhaps inevitably, the reforms had retained ultimate control over land with the state – a policy which

successive governments have consistently upheld, in spite of external pressure. Further, reforms to land entitlement arrangements were accompanied by a set of interventions in pricing of commodities supplied to local markets, and the forcible re-organisation of neighbourhoods through villagisation, collectivisation and resettlement. Ironically, discontent among rural inhabitants affected by these changes led to the formation of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPDRF), which has been the elected government of Ethiopia since 1991.

The government of Ethiopia has continued to enforce state-owned land<sup>34</sup>, defending this enforced arrangement by arguing that it promotes social equity, and arguing that private ownership will give rise to peasant dispossession through distress sale or eviction, possession of disproportionately large plots of land by the wealthy, and widespread poverty and landlessness (Rahmato, 2008: 304). Opponents to the state-owned system, such as the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA), contend on the basis that the system of state-owned land prevents the emergence of dynamic, rural land markets (including rental markets) and the creation of incentives for entrepreneurs; discourages or disenables out-migration from marginal plots of land that are not being used efficiently, leading to overpopulation, fragmentation of plot size and degradation of the natural resource base; and leads to uncertain land tenure (Crewett and Korf, 2008: 206).

However, land tenure arrangements across Ethiopia have remained largely unchanged since the landmark 1974 Proclamation, failing to guarantee peasants full rights over their land entitlement, instead vesting in the state judicial authority over land and inhabitants (Rahmato, 2008). Alongside this, peasants are subject to erratic legislation governing the use of land, leaving them with limited or unknown time horizons and investment choices, distorted land management practices and uncertainty and insecurity (Rahmato, 2008: 235-236). Persistent problems have arisen with an absence of a clear justice system for settling land disputes; the significant discretionary decision-making power given to government agents and offices at (local) *woreda* and *kabele* level, creating the potential for peasants to be dispossessed of land; and a lack of legislative awareness by peasants, and by local officials (Rahmato, 2008: 302-303). There is some historic and current empirical evidence of peasants being evicted from land to make way for investors, leaving them without equitable compensation, and often with small chance of recourse to an independent, impartial and efficient judiciary (Rahmato, 2008; site visit, SNNP,

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<sup>34</sup> In 2000, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (PM from 1995 – current) even classified debate over land tenure arrangements in Ethiopia as a 'dead issue'.

July 2009; pers. comm., July 2009). However, the empirical examples of this trend are counterbalanced by empirical evidence of informal land markets in place from prior to the Reform up until contemporary times (see Crewett and Korf, 2008: 214), as well as the different practices in place in different localities (Benedickt et. al., 2008).

Most recent initiatives to ensure tenure security undertaken by the Government are land holding registration and certification. The Land Certification project began in 2003 in an aim to provide tenure security at federal level, and has become one of the largest land registration projects in the world, having registered 6 million people up to January 2009 (Deininger, 2009: 19). A recent review of land certification carried out thus far (Deininger, 2009) noted that decentralised and participatory implementation of the certification process – with all responsibility given to village-level organisations - has contributed to a high-quality, low-cost certification process. This in turn “has had a positive economic impact and improved tenure security, investment and supply of land to the rental market” (2009: 25).

Since the rule of the ‘Derg’, 1974-1987, political, fiscal and administrative powers have been steadily passed to local administrative authorities. In 1991, this process received new momentum when the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the military government (PMAC) and – using ethnicity, language and political power as determining factors – established self-governing *Killiloch* (regions) (Europa Publications, 2005: 410). This arrangement vests sovereign powers in the ethnically-based Killiloch, including the right to develop and promote their own cultures and preserve their own histories; autonomous government of institutions within their regional territory; and representation in regional and federal government (Aalen, 2006: 243). The administrative decentralisation involved was originally intended to “bring the development effort closer to the local community and make service delivery more efficient and effective” (Rahmato, 2008: 245) by passing local government positions to locally-educated people who knew local languages and customs (Watson, 2009). However, ironically for the party initiating this arrangement – which was designed to allow the autonomy that various ethnic fronts were agitating for – it was seen by many as undermining unity at federal level (Crummey and Marcus, 2010).

Decentralising governance responsibilities and services from central (federal) authorities to local (regional- and district-level) authorities has four potential advantages for the nature of services

provided, and the resulting performance of Government. Firstly, because of more-direct connections with regional constituents, local government can utilise tangible and intangible assets to provide service in a more efficient manner than central authority. However, highly constrained budgets (Rahmato, 2008) which make it very difficult for offices to provide-for all project activities, and to retain staff; crucially, this affects potential to phase-out from food security interventions (Atalay et. al., 2007; Kalu SSI01; ETH SSI001). Secondly, local (decentralised) government creates greater potential for constituents to make more-efficient use of such services by closely matching the service provided with constituents' needs. Similar problems apply here as to the first point, with significant skill- and capacity-gaps in many line offices (ETH SSI03). Thirdly, decentralising government leads to greater autonomy among local government agencies, and facilitates productive competition. Happily, 'productive competition' between *Killiloch* is evident (SNNPSSI01), with offices able to facilitate experience-sharing of successful natural resource management within their region, and up to federal level. Finally, decentralisation leads to greater potential for checks and balances on central government, and higher levels of accountability (Mueller, 2006; Chanie, 2007). A historic, entrenched political culture of *yebalal akal* or 'obeying orders from above' exists in Ethiopia, particularly in Amhara and Tigray Killiloch (Levine, 1965; Tronvoll and Vaughan, 2003). At policy level, this "translates into bureaucratic cultures that are antithetical to bottom-up or decentralised practices and to reflexivity and learning" (Keeley and Scones, 2000: 94). The major source of political discourse is the central government, and "there is little realistic alternative to the communication of political programmes from the top-down, from centre to periphery (whatever the aspirations to the contrary of those involved)" (Tronvoll and Vaughan, 2003: 33-35).

By passing local government positions to locally-educated people who knew local languages and customs, the new government hoped to reduce gaps between officials and local people, ultimately leading to "more effective, culturally appropriate and sustainable policies" (Watson, 2009: 177). Thus, Zewde argues, "[p]olitics, which had always been the preserve of the privileged few, came down to the lower ranks of society, albeit carefully controlled and monitored from above" (Zewde, 2001: 274). Woredas have their own administrative structures, police and security forces and judiciary. In addition, woreda have "power and resources to prepare and determine economic and social plans in the area under its authority" (Tronvoll and Vaughan, 2003: 42).

### 3.3 Food-supported rural development in Ethiopia



A review of food-supported development activities initiated among rural producers in Ethiopia is well-beyond the scope of this thesis. The following, very brief review illustrates broad patterns to help set the scene for discussion of phasing-out from a conceptual perspective in [Chapter 1](#), and transition in MERET-PLUS in Chapters [5](#) and [6](#).

Soil and water conservation activities, designed to address resource degradation and meet basic needs, have been practiced in Ethiopia for over 300 years, with ongoing public work activities supported by external food aid since 1971. The World Food Programme became involved in afforestation and soil conservation in the mid-1970s (Hurni, 1988). Here, two key aspects of developments in Ethiopia are quickly sketched: early agricultural extension and minimum package programs, and aid-supported humanitarian programs.

Between 1969 and 1974, levels of food aid increased significantly – between two and three times (Rahmato, 2008). With the influence of major donors – the World Bank and particularly USAID – extension services were introduced in support of peasant agriculture. The five-year development plans of the Imperial regime had, by this point, shifted from a standalone focus on economic development to social equity, expanded employment and re-distribution of wealth; and from a neglect of peasant agriculture to an acceptance of small-scale farming and peasant enterprises (Cohen, 1987; Rahmato, 2008). The Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU) was the first large-scale integrated rural development (IRD) project in Ethiopia, operating for six years from 1967. Comprehensive programmes like CADU at this time consisted of six major components (Rahmato, 2008: 55), including providing peasants with access to modern farming inputs; organising peasants into cooperatives and providing better access to credit; and building rural public work schemes. With recognition that it would be uneconomic to extend these projects across Ethiopia, the World Bank pushed for Minimum Package Projects (MPP), with select “proven interventions” to be implemented progressively, starting in “high potential” areas. The Extension and Program Implementation Department (EPID) of the Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for the MPP, along with the comprehensive (IRD) projects, achieved promising improvements in farm output and productivity in the areas where the interventions had been operating the longest (Rahmato, 2008). The project was found to significantly increase income among participants (Cohen, 1987; Rahmato, 2008). The project’s success in increasing smallholders’ productivity “reinforced donor pressure on the government to view agriculture in general and small-holder productivity in particular as the country’s major engine of growth” (Cohen, 1987: 44).

### 3.3.1 Factors affecting Ethiopia's Food For Work (FFW) interventions

By its nature, food-supported assistance to food-insecure, vulnerable communities has political significance. Food provided to food-insecure communities in Ethiopia becomes a focal point for political sensitivities on the part of the Ethiopian government (Zoutewelle, pers. comm., June 2009). This is a common experience in the provision of humanitarian food aid worldwide. Ethiopia's distinct reputation as a recipient of externally-funded food (see WFP, 2008d) has become a source of sensitivity for many – including government officials – in a country that fought-off foreign colonial influence multiple times; in many respects, many Ethiopians see themselves as a model for other states in Africa. In addition to continuing vulnerability - necessitating a response in the form of food aid - there have been particular situations in Ethiopia's past where local and central government has consciously delayed distribution of food aid (White, 2008; Zewde, 2001), and foreign and domestic governments have consciously used food aid as a geopolitical tool or as a political 'weapon' (Africa Watch, 1991: 4-7; Tronvoll and Vaughan, 2003; Zewde, 2001). Such practices provide a precedent for some scepticism – particularly among the older generation – about how reliable food and food-funded project are as a 'bridge' to more-sustainable livelihoods. Further, well-documented intimidation of voters, and assertion by the party incumbent of hegemonic control, continue to mar Ethiopia's emerging ethno-federal democratic system (Tronvoll and Vaughan, 2003). Hadiya zone, in which Lemo is located, has been the most visible site in Ethiopia of widespread voter intimidation during – and following – the country-wide elections in 2000 (Tronvoll, 2001; Lefort, 2007)<sup>35</sup>.

### 3.3.2 Modern situation

Frameworks for understanding environmental problems in Ethiopia interpret problems in Malthusian terms, emphasising the role of population pressure in the degradation of natural resources; the loss of vegetation and forests, soil and soil nutrition; biodiversity; and subsequent effects upon stock animals and human inhabitants whose livelihoods depend on these resources. In such contexts, managers of

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<sup>35</sup> During the national elections in 2000, the opposition party – Hadiya National Democratic Organisation (HDNO) – gained the majority of votes in Hadiya zone. Prior to - and during - the election, there had been widespread intimidation of voters by the incumbent party – Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPDRF). Following objections from voters at coercive practices and 'rigging' at polling stations, five protesters were killed. In spite of this, HDNO retained their place as the elected party for Hadiya.

watershed development interventions must deal with uncertainty in assessing and planning project activities. These uncertainties emerge from a lack of empirical data about project performance, and unclear causal linkages between aid-supported activities and the livelihoods of participating households (Abel et. al., 2003; Abebe et. al., 2008; Rahmato, 2008). Assessing the benefits of strategies for transition from watershed-based interventions has proven to be difficult. The complex interrelations between human or population variables, biophysical variables and natural resource variables are still being explored in studies (Adger et. al., 2002; Aggarwal et. al., 2008; Gray and Mosley, 2005). In such systems, key drivers of change, particularly in the short-term, are un-predictable; systems may change faster than forecasts predict; and human action in response to forecasts is reflexive (Abel et. al., 2003: 14). In such contexts of uncertainty, household decision-makers are reluctant to invest household land and labour in aid-supported conservation efforts (Devereux and Sharp, 2004; Little, 2008). Levels of uncertainty among inhabitants feed into the kinds of ‘coping strategies’ adopted, and can lead to significant difficulties in sustaining progress in environmental rehabilitation and livelihood improvements. Particularly in the face of shocks which deplete already-scarce resources, households adopt activities which are over-intensive and unsustainable, including the exploitation of land and biophysical resources, ‘distress sales’ of assets, and consuming seed stocks held for next-season. In cases where natural resources and livelihoods are untenable, inhabitants “die along with their land” (Kebede, pers. comm.).

The complexity and intricacy of managing watershed-based activities, and of coordinating between organisations (Davenport, 2003) presents real difficulties for successfully transitioning sites from receiving support. Over the past thirty years, understanding has developed that watershed management should be seen as an ongoing process (Beard and Ferreyra, 2007). The purpose of such interventions has shifted from simply protecting ecosystems to maximising human welfare without compromising ecosystems. The scope for integration has broadened from environmental resources to include national environmental policy. The rationale for successful management has shifted from the public administration of ecosystems, to involving stakeholders in social and ecological systems in community ownership, to mainstreaming particular environmental resources in national economies, with resource management linked to poverty, national security and trade. In line with this, the ‘locus’ of management has expanded from agencies at watershed level, to include watershed inhabitants and strategic direction from cross-sectoral policy coordination and collaboration (Beard and Ferreyra, 2007: 273).

## Chapter 4 – Setting out the case studies

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the MERET-PLUS project serving as a case study for this research. The project's evolution and operation in its current form is explained in relation to other important food security interventions in Ethiopia. Following this, the operational context, including the agro-ecological, societal and market-based make up of each woreda, is set out. A SWOT analysis of watershed-based development in each area highlights particular aspects of best-practice for watershed-based development. Alongside discussion of potential, however, a major constraint for successful transition identified in case study areas is the risk of project impacts 'collapsing' in Ethiopia's vulnerable and degraded rain-fed watersheds. The combined effects on MERET-PLUS of unplanned budget cuts and withdrawal of support to 260 sites, along with widespread, ongoing seasonal rainfall and harvest failure, have already served to stall progress achieved under MERET-PLUS toward more-sustainable livelihoods. This chapter sets the scene for discussion of the coherence of notions of 'transitioning' participants in Chapters [5](#) and [6](#).

### 4.2 Land-based livelihood-security interventions in Ethiopia

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#### **Box 4.1, MERET-PLUS's Results Based Management system.**

At a global level, WFP began to explore a Results Based Management (RBM) framework in 1999. RBM was first integrated into the management system for MERET in 2004. Action Based Monitoring (ABM) data is used. It has been quickly adopted by WFP. Complementary Government RBM policy and strategy has assisted with uptake, as have joint training workshops in 2004 and 2005.

Since its introduction, RBM has impacted MERET-PLUS in the following ways:

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- Provided a structured, systematic framework for assessing project performance.
  - Structure helps to disaggregate often-overlapping project components, and to assess strengths and weaknesses of specific outputs, outcomes and impacts.
  - Provided a tool for advocacy to demonstrate project impacts to donors, and to partner government agencies and other watershed-level development projects in Ethiopia.
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### 4.2.1 MERET-PLUS

The World Food Program in Ethiopia, alongside the Government of Ethiopia and various NGOs, has funded the rehabilitation of the land resources employed in farming and agriculture-based development since 1971 (Cohen et. al., 2008). The MERET-PLUS project is the current (sixth) stage of “Programme 2488: Rehabilitation of forest, grazing and agricultural land” which began in 1980. This intervention was a crucial intervention for the World Food Programme in

terms of its operation in Ethiopia, and quickly grew to become the second largest food aid intervention of its kind in the world (Keeley and Scoones, 2000: 103). Between 1982 and 1994, phases One and Two provided food aid to

- The tool requires rigorous ‘quality management’ to ensure that indicators are defined and measured in comparable terms.
- The framework does not provide an aggregate measure of progress toward achieving overall watershed rehabilitation in each site.

**Source:** WFP, 2003 (RBM doc.); WFP, 2007; WFP, 2008 (RBM report MERET-PLUS); Ashine et. al., 2009; Messele Gebregziabher, pers. comm. 2009.

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The objectives of the MERET-PLUS project are:

- To improve the condition of land resources through integrated soil and water conservation (SWC) and wider supportive activities for watershed-based rehabilitation;
- To improve participants’ livelihoods through integrating these activities with income-

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<sup>36</sup> This represents between 9% and 16% of Ethiopia’s total population at the time.

<sup>37</sup> In the first stages of MERET-PLUS during the 1980s, the planning unit for developing large watersheds was 30,000-40,000 hectares; as program managers realised that this scope for development was unmanageable, and did not facilitate community participation or ownership, the unit of planning was reduced (WFP, 200X).

generation;

- To encourage and enhance the technical, organisational and program management capacity of community participants and implementing partners at all levels (Yirga, 2008: 1).

Activities supported by MERET-PLUS are common to integrated rural development (IRD) projects worldwide – soil and water conservation (SWC); soil fertility management; biomass production; food-for-asset activities on publicly- and privately-worked land; disseminating improved farming technology; and creating HIV/AIDs conversation and income-generation and savings groups. In addition to these activities, the latest phase of the project –Partnerships for Land Users’ Solidarity (-PLUS)—helps to direct WFP’s attention to the value that it can add by providing technical advice and training to the Ethiopian government offices implementing MERET-PLUS and PSNP (Carucci, 2009: 1). Through proactively engaging overseas donors to MERET-PLUS and PSNP, and Government offices administering the Food Security Programme (FSP), WFP wish to scale-up key areas, and by doing so, to enable a *beyond borders* approach (Carucci, 2009).

The planning approach of MERET-PLUS - CBPWD was developed out of government initiative, with key assistance from FAO, and later from WFP. The approach has influenced parallel watershed-based interventions, and has been awarded by Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, adopted at country level in Government policy, as well as at international best-practice by the World Food Programme. In its current form, opportunities for extending MERET-PLUS’s capabilities into carbon credit opportunities in particular, as well as pro-poor tourist initiatives are being explored. Along with these opportunities, however, is the recognition that there is a need to re-engage donors to back MERET-PLUS as a worthwhile developmental investment (Carucci, 2009; Ashine et. al., 2009).

A simplified framework of the responsible institutions and their roles in MERET-PLUS are set out in [Figure 4.1](#). The World Food Programme has responsibility for procuring food aid, as well as for providing technical advice at federal level and training at federal, regional and woreda level<sup>38</sup>, while MoARD (and offices at regional and woreda level) have responsibility for all aspects of implementation. WoARDs and participating communities are linked through local development agents, and are jointly tasked with

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<sup>38</sup> Advice and training is provided for all aspects of the participation-based watershed activities of MERET-PLUS, including techniques for SWC, soil fertility management and productivity improvement, and training for IGAs (Cohen et. al., 2008: 13)

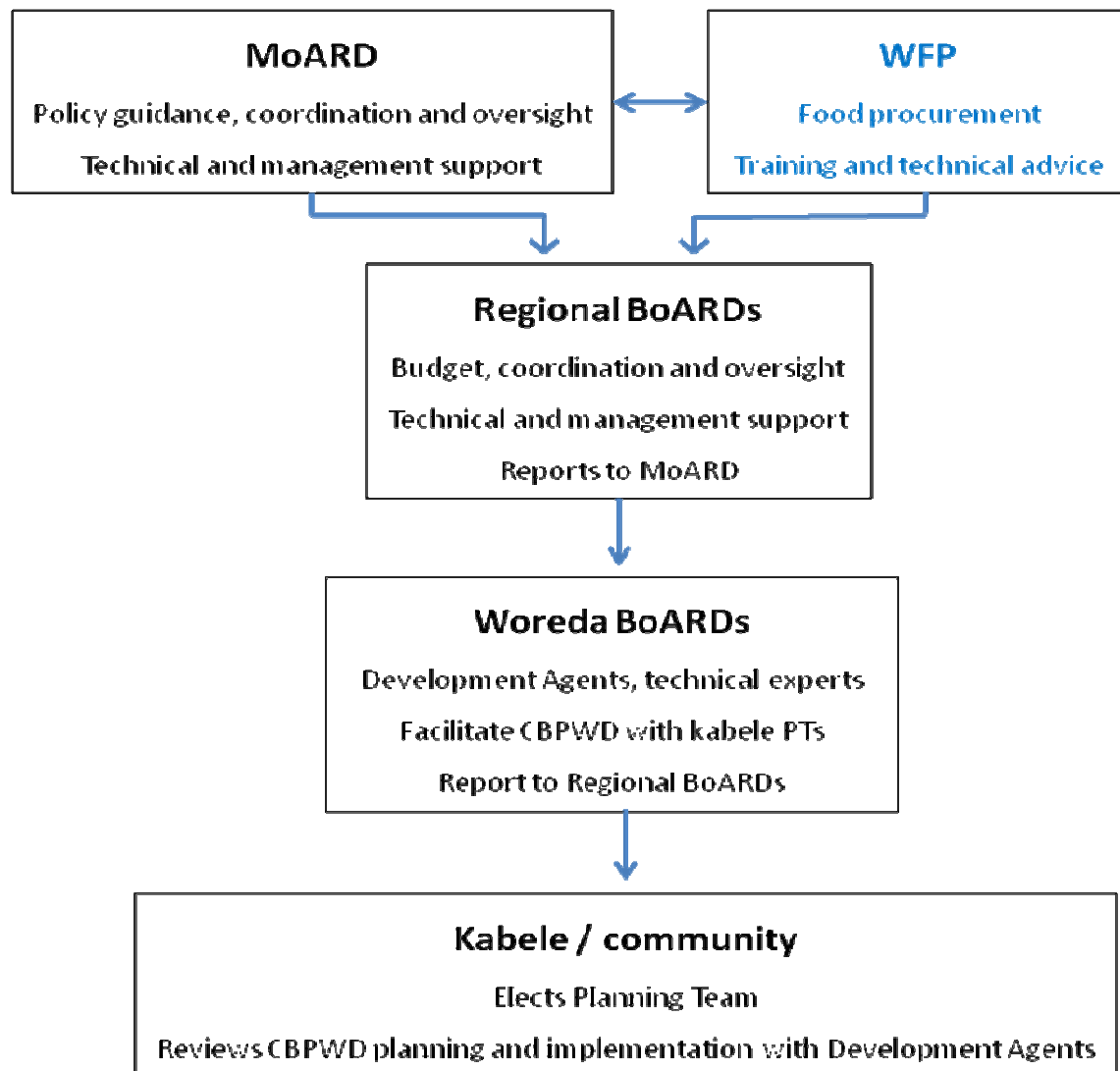
implementation of the participatory planning approach (CBPWD).

Up until recently, the majority of communities participating in MERET-PLUS were in moisture-stressed and drought-prone areas, while the remainder were in areas of medium to high rainfall, but severely degraded and highly populated (Cohen et. al., 2008: 9). Recently, however, budget cuts have led to a significant reduction in the number of sites where land rehabilitation activities are supported (from 610 to approximately 350), and in the number of beneficiaries (from 122,000 to 76,000 in 2008) as a result of a sharp decline in the budgetary allocation to the World Food Programme Ethiopia (Ashine et. al., 2009)<sup>39</sup>. As with trends for development projects worldwide, funding to MERET-PLUS has been recently reduced over consecutive years.

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<sup>39</sup> Shortly after the Country Programme for 2007-2011 was approved in late 2006, a significant shortfall was announced in expected donor financial contribution. Allocations up to 2009 continued the trend of below-average allocation.

**Figure 4.1,** Institutions' responsibilities for MERET-PLUS



**Source:** Cohen, M., Garrett, J., Rocchigiani, M., 2008, 'Empowering Communities Through Food-Based Programmes: Ethiopia Case Study Discussion Paper', IFPRI, WFP, pp. 12.

The immediate withdrawal of support from these sites interrupts the food and technical support provided; the long-term effects of this upon vulnerable areas, in the context of the drought currently affecting the Horn of Africa, are serious. Of the (approximately) 350 sites remaining, less than one-third are actively supported (Ashine et. al., 2009).

#### 4.2.2 Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)



This scale of the funding and operation of PSNP makes it the largest Safety Net (outside of South Africa) in the African continent, with a budget for 2010-2014 of US\$2.3 billion, and supporting between 4.8 and 8 million recipients between 2005 and 2009 (Hoddinott, 2008; Ashine et. al., 2009). This program emerged directly from the shortcomings of an extended period of ad-hoc annual appeals for emergency assistance between 1993 and 2004, made by the Government of Ethiopia in response to chronic hunger. While these appeals did stave-off the immediate threat of mass starvation, the lack of predictability in funding disallowed any longer-term impacts for farmers' livelihoods; this was exacerbated by disintegration between the funding resulting from emergency appeals and the country's economic development (Gilligan et. al., 2009). Recognising this, the Government of Ethiopia, along with a consortium of donors, initiated the PSNP in 2005.

The program is designed to meet the food gaps of targeted households, to boost income-earning at household level, and build collective assets at community level, all funded by grants which are allocated over multi-year periods. The two complimentary components of the program are the Public Works (PW) and entitlement-based transfers, and the Other Food Security Projects (OFSP). Under the former, participants in works projects are remunerated a small amount of cash per day, while labour-poor targeted households receive direct support in the form of food or cash transfers. The OFSP component facilitates access to credit, agricultural extension, technology transfer (such as advice on food crop production, cash cropping, livestock production and soil and water conservation), and irrigation and water harvesting schemes (Gilligan et. al., 2008; MoARD, 2009a). The Household Asset Building Programme (HABP) is designed as a follow-up intervention to PSNP to diversify income sources and to increase the productive assets of targeted food-insecure households once they have graduated from PSNP (MoARD, 2009c). Together, both components of PSNP and the HABP are key interventions in the Government's key drive to fight Ethiopia's pervasive food insecurity, the countrywide Food Security Program.

In addition to the direct outcome of providing food-for-work at large scale to meet households' food gaps, the Program provides cash-for-work to help in creating assets. In the PSNP, graduation is reached when, in the absence of program support, a household is able to feed itself for 12 months a year, and is able to withstand modest shocks. Generally, the value of participating households' assets is used to indicate the point at which graduation has been reached (Lemo SSI1; Konso SSI1). In the latest phase of PSNP (2010-2015), program managers aim to graduate 80% of participants (Federal SSI05). An estimated

18,538 households have been ‘graduated’ from receiving support under PSNP in five years of operation (MoARD, 2009b: 14). However, neither this figure, nor benchmarks for reaching graduation are well known or agreed-upon by all program staff at regional, zonal, woreda or kabele levels. In addition, a number of recent studies have noted inconsistencies in PSNP graduation criteria established at woreda level, and the need for consistent definitions of graduation alongside this (Aberra et. al., 2007; Brown and Teshome, 2007). The ‘twin-track approach’<sup>40</sup> to contemporary safety nets aims to enable recipients to become more credit-worthy, and to access modern inputs and adopt new technologies more easily. This, the argument runs, will allow them to graduate from the safety-net programme. A number of recent studies of the PSNP provide empirical support for this argument. These studies have found that, where participants benefited from both components of the Safety Net, they were more likely to be food secure, to borrow for productive purposes, and receive improved agricultural technology (Gilligan et. al., 2008). Households receiving both components of the Program experienced improved indicators of food insecurity, a very large increase in asset accumulation (by 14.6%), and learned to use improved agricultural technology, and to operate their own nonfarm business activities (Gilligan, et. al., 2008; Gilligan et. al., 2009).

Discussion of forming benchmarks for graduation from PSNP has been carried-out in Ethiopia<sup>41</sup>, leading to a definition of graduation at household level: “A household has graduated when, in the absence of receiving PSNP transfers, it can meet its food needs for all 12 months and is able to withstand modest shocks” (FSCB, 2007: 2). However, devising operational concepts have lagged-behind (Gilligan et. al., 2007; FSCB, 2007). Forming benchmarks for transition assistance to participants in MERET-PLUS is subject to similar difficulties; however, the integration of watershed rehabilitation activities between ‘public’ and ‘private’ land<sup>42</sup>. The problem of forming benchmarks against which to assess progress toward transition is discussed in the following paragraph.

Studies of graduation from, and within, the PSNP have illustrated difficulties in putting the concept into

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Twin track approach’ refers to a form of safety net where a public works component is supported by an extension component, which seek respectively to address both “the shorter-term acute hunger spurred by food or economic shocks, and the longer-term chronic hunger that is symptomatic of extreme poverty” (FAO, 2009b).

<sup>41</sup> Gilligan et. al., 2007; JRIS; GoE-Donors

<sup>42</sup> As all land in Ethiopia is state-owned, and inhabitants have only usufruct rights, the terms ‘private’ and ‘public’ land refer to land use rather than to ownership.

practice (Ashley et. al., 2006; Abera et. al., 2007; Gilligan et. al., 2007; Pankhurst, 2009). Program staff at zonal and woreda level from all case study areas noted that factors such as unseasonal or protracted drought, unpredictable changes in local climate, insecurity and violence, and very small plots of land available, have all served to significantly constrain progress toward graduation, making successful graduation very risky or even impossible for households (Konso FGD01 02 and 03; Hadiya SSI02; Konso SSI02; Lemo SSI01). A recent study of PSNP (Pankhurst, 2009), however, has added weight to recent studies which problematise the assumption that making both safety net components available to participating households will assure movement to graduation. In particular, the study shows that households which “off-the-track” households (those which are particularly vulnerable, and which employ off-farm livelihood strategies) are particularly averse to taking loans under extension packages. In light of these findings, some key areas for improving potential to achieve graduation from PSNP-PW and OFSP centre-around the need for more flexible and nuanced extension activities (Pankhurst, 2009), as well as the need for increased funding to allow larger loans, and loans to more households (Pankhurst, 2009; Federal SSI05). However, while donors are willing to fund PSNP, they are unwilling to fund credit and packages to PSNP (Federal SSI05). Further, these factors necessitated a flexible and context-specific approach to ensuring graduation. Benchmarks at federal level for graduation which had required regions to ‘graduate’ a certain quota of households, were abandoned (Lemo SSI01; MoARD, 2009b), as managers at federal level acknowledged the primacy of conducive factors in the external environment (Federal, SSI05; MoARD, 2009b).

### 4.3 Comparing MERET-PLUS to PSNP

Important differences between PSNP and MERET-PLUS (see [Table 4.2](#)) reflect differences in priorities in food security programming in Ethiopia. By focusing on the differences between the approaches, particularly in what constitutes ‘transition’ in each intervention, this discussion highlights the distinctiveness of MERET-PLUS, and the challenge of transition which is inherent in the project.

Fundamentally, MERET-PLUS and PSNP have different ‘genetic makeup’. MERET-PLUS activities for land rehabilitation have been continually operating since 1980, with sites operating for much longer than PSNP – twelve years on average and up to twenty (Ashine et. al., 2009). MERET-PLUS was originally designed as a land rehabilitation project, and this remains the project’s primary objective. PSNP is designed primarily to meet households’ food and income gaps by engaging them in public works

activities. MERET-PLUS' explicit focus on the primacy of appropriate management of environmental resources places it in a different programming modality to PSNP. With strong and highly evolved systems for technical support, this allows a more intensive focus on whole-watershed and holistic-livelihood improvement. Thus, while the food and cash aid provided through PSNP's public work projects is designed to meet ongoing food gaps of participating households, MERET-PLUS mobilises food 'aid' as an incentive to meet a wide range of land-based objectives, and broader 'more sustainable livelihood' outcomes.

The planning approaches of MERET-PLUS has also pioneered a comprehensive participatory planning approach (LLPPA), and has actively transmitted this to implementing government partners, with great success (Yirga, 2008, Ashine et. al., 2009). An internal study with IFPRI found that the latest phase of LLPPA, Community Based Participatory Watershed Development approach (CBPWD), "clearly enhanced capacity to plan and manage development" at community level (Cohen et. al., 2008: iv). By contrast, the planning approach of PSNP is of a lower technical standard, and does not enable strong community ownership of the implemented activities in the same way as MERET-PLUS' CBPWD approach (Debub Wollo SSI01; Rome SSI01; Carucci, 2009).

Although at site level, improvements to farmed areas under PSNP and MERET-PLUS appear very similar, even near-identical, important differences are implicit. In particular areas, this is evident in MERET-PLUS participants' "sense of spirited involvement and desire to continue to improve their watersheds" (Ashine et. al., 2009: 46). While there are important exceptions to this trend within and between sites – with very different responses to environmental constraints and emerging opportunities (Kalu SSI01; Debub Wollo SSI01) – anecdotal evidence of community mobilization and initiative in SNNP region, for example, illustrates potential for communities to assume responsibilities for enabling their own development (SNNP SSI01; Lemo SSI01). Management staff for both MERET-PLUS and PSNP can point to households which are ready to be transitioned, including (at least in MERET-PLUS), whole-watershed rehabilitation.

Transition modalities for MERET-PLUS and PSNP are also distinct. For MERET-PLUS, the major focus of transition is to bring-about 'more sustainable' (farm-based) livelihoods for watershed inhabitants. As MERET-PLUS is supported and administered at all levels by both Ethiopian and foreign institutions, an important component of enabling participants to transition is a progressive 'handover' of responsibility to indigenous inhabitants. Transition in MERET-PLUS involves both transferring responsibility for

supporting and administering the project at national and regional levels (phasing-over responsibility), and progressively withdrawing food aid and all forms of support provided by WFP (phasing-out assistance). The transition component of MERET-PLUS in its latest phase is now being formed ‘from the ground up’. As management staff reconsider the ‘value added’ by WFP to the project (Carucci, 2009), strands of policy present different strategies for maximising the impact of activities for communities and for environmental rehabilitation in Ethiopia to date.

For PSNP, the major focus of transition is graduation from the program – which has been clearly defined as a component of PSNP from the outset of the program – and transition to complementary components of the government’s Food Security Program. The limitations of asset-based benchmarks which are currently used to measure progress toward graduation are recognised (MoARD, 2009b; NO AUTHOR GIVEN, 2008); as a result, integration with the availability of credit and financial literacy, extension packages, and finally larger loans under asset-building initiatives are seen increasingly as crucial for sustaining independence from chronic food insecurity. A current, important strength of PSNP’s approach to graduation is the formal systems in place for country-wide benchmarking for- and recognition of- graduation. Efforts to meet targets for graduation have fallen far short (MoARD, 2009b; Ethiopia SSI05), with confusion over both the benchmarks for graduation and the means of implementing them, as well as constraints from wider environmental factors (MoARD, 2009b). The next phase of the program is designed to continue progress toward ambitious targets of graduating 80% of the 8 million chronically food-insecure recipients (Ethiopia SSI05; MoARD, 2009b).

#### **4.4 The impacts and distinctiveness of MERET-PLUS**

As of August 2009, 380,000 people received food-for-work through MERET-PLUS (Ashine, et. al., 2009). This makes it a relatively small-scale project in relation to PSNP. In spite of its small size, a number of important successes of the MERET-PLUS project have been well-documented throughout the lifetime of the project. Through the extensive community-based participatory watershed development approach (CBPWDA), demonstrations of technical excellence, and initiatives to fund scholarships for project staff, MERET-PLUS has managed to overcome problems which typically affect such projects (Muhumuza and Toner, 2002: 6), including a lack of ownership among project management, problems of overly rigid prior planning, competing priorities of stakeholders and limited local capacities.

Activities under MERET-PLUS have been extremely successful in ‘adding value’ to participating households (WFP, 2005). Since the beginning of initial activities in 1980s, the project has treated at least 400,000 hectares of degraded land in Ethiopia. Specifically, project activities have helped to sustain food availability among 90% of participating households, to facilitate the creation of accessible household assets, and to improve SWC practices among large majorities of households (Ashine et. al., 2009; NPSU and WFP, 2009). Initiatives introduced into food-supported communities with advice from WFP and FAO – including soil and stone terracing (see [Image 4.3](#) and [Image 4.4](#)), drought-resilient grasses, shrubs and tree species (see [Image 4.1](#) and [Image 4.2](#))– have demonstrated success and benefits for both soil quality and household food supply and income. In Anabalesa and Lisana Sene sites in Lemo woreda, a large number of income-generating groups had been established around the demonstrated efficacy of these initiatives (Lemo FGD01, Lemo FGD02), leading, in two sites, to between Birr20,000 – Birr28,000 being generated per year from sales of assets such as desho grass, fish and vegetables on local markets (Lemo FGD01). Together with information from and evidence indicates that information about the number of households ‘phased-out’ of project assistance is not currently available. A recent study (Ashine et. al., 2009) found that, despite the vast majority of MERET households reported as having successfully generated and maintained SLM assets and technologies, “no comprehensive watershed rehabilitation treatments were observed that had fully achieved all of the MERET guidelines” (Ashine et. al., 2009: 86).

The fact that these benefits accrued in contexts of extensive and protracted drought and significant funding cuts has been described as ‘phenomenal’ (Ashine et. al., 2009), and points to important, progressively *empowering* effects of activities on communities over time. In addition to these groups for income-generation, successful practices for community organisation under MERET-PLUS have led to grouping for HIV/AIDs conversations, produce marketing, credit and savings, and water resource management. In support of these practices, farmers, planning teams, DAs and partner staff from offices of Agriculture and Rural Development have received training from WFP in natural resource and human resource management through participatory approaches institutionalised at federal level.

**Image 4.1,** Drought-resilient seedlings in a MERET-PLUS nursery, Lemo woreda, 12 June 2009



Credit: Peter Jackson.



**Image 4.2,** Drought-resilient crops in a MERET-PLUS site, Lemo woreda, 12 June 2009



Credit: Peter Jackson.



**Image 4.3,** Soil terracing in Konso woreda, 10 June 2009



Credit: Erkeno Wossoro.



**Image 4.4,** Hillside terracing, en route to Konso from Hadiya zone, 10 June 2009.



Credit: Peter Jackson.

**Table 4.2, Comparison of PSNP and MERET-PLUS**

PARAMETER	MERET PLUS	PSNP	REMARK
<b>1. Program objective</b>	<p>Bridge the temporary food gap of targeted food insecure and vulnerable households by extending incentivised food-for-work;</p> <p>To improve livelihood and food security opportunities for targeted households through sustainable use of the NR base<sup>43</sup></p>	<p>To help bridge the income gap of chronically food-insecure households;</p> <p>To engage targeted households in community based asset-building in exchange for the income they earn<sup>44</sup></p>	<p>Only MERET-PLUS has an explicit focus on improving the condition and use of the environmental base</p> <p>PSNP is focussed on closing the income gap of households, while MERET-PLUS aims to close the food gap.</p>
<b>2. Watershed approach</b>	Strictly a watershed approach	Only recently advancing to watershed approach	PSNP has been influenced by MERET-PLUS' watershed approach; will be a more common approach in the future
<b>3. Payment modality</b>	Food-for-work as “incentive”	Food/cash transfer as “entitlement”	PSNP operates on the basis of the primacy of food transfers; MERET-PLUS prioritises wider watershed outcomes
<b>4. Public – private land</b>	Continues to support food-for-works both on public and private land holdings	Influenced by MERET-PLUS, PSNP recently began operating on public <i>and</i> private land	Restriction to public land has undermined whole-watershed treatment through PW
<b>5. Geographic targeting</b>	Food insecure regions/woreda /kabele (as identified by the Ministry of	Chronically food insecure regions/woreda/kabele	MERET-PLUS uses more holistic targeting criteria, based

<sup>43</sup> WFP, 2006, *Country Programme Ethiopia 10430.0 (2007-2011)*, World Food Programme: Rome.

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2006, ‘Ethiopia: Building on Progress: A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), Volume I: Main Text’, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development: Addis Ababa.

PARAMETER	MERET PLUS	PSNP	REMARK
	Agriculture and Rural Development)		on a broader definition of food insecurity
6. Beneficiary targeting	Inclusive: all food insecure and able bodied individuals in the kabele are eligible	Exclusive: Chronically food insecure HHs with food gap 3 months and above. Able bodied member of the family works and receives transfers on behalf of the labour poor family members.	Entitlement in PSNP leads to pressure to include food secure households
7. Scope of area coverage	Relatively focused: 72 woredas in six food insecure regions	Extensive areas: 282 woredas in six food insecure regions	Program manageability is complex for PSNP; Funding to PSNP is more predictable; recent cuts in budget allocated to MERET-PLUS have reduced number of sites by 40%
8. Scope of intervention	Bio-physical-economic-institutional activities integrated within targeted watersheds	Varied types of public works from NRM to different social public infrastructures. No plantation activities. PSNP also lacks livelihood / IGAs element	Lack of IGAs in PSNP undermines the economic gains from regenerated natural resources.
9. Community empowerment	Community sensitisation and well-equipped project Planning Teams, coupled with successful NR regeneration and economic incentives from livelihood diversification, enables communities to take ownership and control over the program.	Inadequate community sensitisation and engagement, slow NR regeneration and lack of economic incentives has resulted in loss of drive for the ownership and sustainability of the public work projects in watersheds.	Communities through PSNP benefited from the immediate transfers, but unlike under MERET-PLUS, have not been empowered to control and sustain the public works for NRM, and the benefits resulting.
10. Self help community labour mobilisation	Communities have learned the value of rehabilitating watershed areas, and thus increased their free labour contribution by manifolds.	Communities simply value what they received (food/cash) in exchange for their labour. No more, no less.	In PSNP, a sense that additional, 'unfunded' work is "none of my business", leading to a sense of dependency.

PARAMETER	MERET PLUS	PSNP	REMARK
11. Results & impacts	Results and changes in terms of NR regeneration, livelihood improvement and community empowerment are visible	Results and changes over the lives of the target group remain unclear; The NR regeneration is also of poor technical quality, and unlikely to be sustained.	Deliberate efforts to influence PSNP policymakers with MERET-PLUS' best practice for planning site-level activities, and placing NR activities at 'centre-stage' in food-supported livelihood improvement
12. Phasing out and sustainability	Yet no end point for watershed rehabilitation and other program supports; however, phasing-out strategy co-drafted with Government. Because of the community empowerment attributes there is a high chance of sustainability (which is yet to be verified)	Graduation is reached at a certain income / asset level. This functions as the end point of PSNP, and the transition point to complementary interventions (OFSP; HABP). The exit and sustainability strategy from the watershed sites is not clear, and is inadequate.	Neither intervention has an adequate, defined transition strategy; there is very limited and inadequate progress toward transition either through phasing-out or graduation.
13. The ability to ensure sustainable food security	It enables target communities both to bridge short-term food gap and to engage in long-term livelihood security and improvement. This enables communities to produce and develop through natural resource improvements.	It simply enables target communities to bridge short-term food gap. PSNP-PW component by itself will not enable communities to ensure and sustain food security, let alone growth.	MERET is a food security project while PSNP a 'consumption smoothing' transfer programme, with uncertainty regarding sustainable management of public works in the watersheds.

**Source:** Modified from: Ashine, S., Ashine, S., Ferguson, A., Riley, B., and Torres, C., 2009, Mid-Term Evaluation of Ethiopia Country Programme 10430.0 (2007-2011), August 12 2009, World Food Programme: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: 99-100.

As Alemu et. al. (2006: 2) note:



While it is increasingly clear that the success of watershed management programs rest on the integration of conservation within livelihood goals, and technical with institutional interventions, few programs have effectively achieved such integration in practice.

As a development project promoting a set of food-incentivised SWC activities for improving the 'life' of land and its inhabitants, MERET-PLUS is a rare example of successful 'integrated' watershed management.

The broad range of developmental activities performed by farmers and facilitated by MERET planning teams in the past seven years have been demonstrably effective in achieving objectives at community level, and in establishing key capacities among project participants. Ostensibly, these activities have included: a more holistic set of developmental activities integrated together by communities themselves; the selection of sites and participants through the use of watershed logic; the use of an incentivised approach to supporting public work activities; and with the latest phase of the project, a focus on complimentary off-farm development interventions such as tourism, the effects of global climate change upon farmers in Ethiopia, and integrating MERET-PLUS activities with other SWC and developmental interventions.

## Chapter 5 – Findings and discussion from case study areas

*“In studying the connections between humans and their environment, one is really studying everything”*  
(Aggarwal et. al., 2008: 49).

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines findings from the quantitative survey of households in four case study woredas. Key indicators of food security for the vulnerable rural households surveyed from each of these woredas, including local climates and land holdings, household size and available labour power, assets and debt, land entitlement, and shocks and coping strategies, are set out here. These measures are related to households’ belief in achieving independence from food support. I use descriptive statistics to compare and contrast contextual factors from each of the case study areas, and the chi square statistic and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to indicate significant relationships between variables. These indicators of household food security are discussed in relation to existing strategies for development in Kalu, Worebabu, Lemo and Konso. Finally, conclusions are drawn about how best to conceive of and measure transition in case study areas.

### 5.2 Key characteristics of case study areas

#### 5.2.1 Worebabu

Worebabu is a relatively asset-poor highland woreda. Livestock are the highest value component of household asset holdings in Worebabu, making up a higher proportion of total assets than in any other woreda. Significantly, therefore, agreement has been successfully established between communities and traditional institutions and authorities in Worebabu for establishing community by-laws to abandon the practice of free-grazing cattle (Mekonnen, pers. comm. June 2009). Local government institutions involved in soil and water conservation were particularly strong in Worebabu, contributing to The Planning Teams were highly motivated, and that this factor, along with a similar motivated ‘spirit’ among communities, contributed to the impacts and potential for sustainability of project impacts.

### **5.2.2 Kalu**

In Kalu, similar practices are employed for protecting croplands, with agreement to establish closed areas. Over a five year period, these initiatives have benefitted all-women groups responsible, leading to feed for cattle, and generating income. A particular factor in scaling-up these activities is the ‘dependency spirit’, which has persisted from poorly targeted blanket distributions of food aid in the past. As in other woredas, the assistance of local government offices has been important in the success of these activities, but particularly in this context. Woreda officers’ initiative in establishing watershed structures, and in planning for the Productive Safety Net Programme, is particularly strong in Kalu. In spite of the long-term benefits of SWC activities, however, households in Kalu were the most indebted of all households surveyed.

### **5.2.3 Lemo**

Households in Lemo stand out from Worebabu, Kalu and Konso because of their highly productive farmlands, and significantly larger asset holdings. The lush, green farmlands of Lemo allow faster and more visible results from soil and water conservation activities. Along with strong, expert and timely support from the Woreda Office of Agriculture, these factors make Lemo a “high potential” area, and a visible “model” of the assets created under MERET-PLUS. In spite of confidence from woreda officials that transition for MERET-PLUS can be scaled-up, households and project planning teams were generally more sceptical.

### **5.2.4 Konso**

Konso is the only lowland case study area for this research. Konso’s fragile and particularly degraded soils, and lack of irrigated land, places severe constraints on crop growth. As a result, farmers in Konso face uncertainty, and narrow thresholds for successful production. Farm yields and livestock quality in Konso are known to be low, leading to higher levels of subsistence farming than in any of the other woredas. Farmers are particularly vulnerable to damaging livelihood impacts of drought shocks. Konso households were most likely out of all surveyed households to reduce the quantity, quality and frequency of their food consumption.



### 5.3 Constraints upon ‘enabling transition’ in case study areas

The four areas chosen as case studies for this research – Kalu, Worebabu, Lemo and Konso woredas – (see [Map 5.1](#)) – reflect some of the diversity of agro-ecological areas in Ethiopia<sup>45</sup>. Kalu and Worebabu are located in the northern highlands, Debub Wollo (South Wollo) zone, Amhara region. This area has been characterised as the ‘buckle’ of the famine belt of Ethiopia (Castro et. al., 2004), ‘infamous’ as a site of impoverished and destitute livelihoods (Amare, 2003; Sharp, 2003; Devereux and Sharp, 2004; Devereux and Sharp, 2006). Of all Ethiopian households affected by historic famine crises of 1971-1974 and 1983-1984, and droughts of 1999-2000 and 2002-2003, households in this area have been most severely affected. In contrast, Lemo and Konso are located in Southern Nations’, Nationalities’ and Peoples’ (SNNP) region. In dry-land Konso, production is fundamentally limited by climatic/agro-ecological conditions, leading to high levels of hunger and chronic food insecurity. Coupled with fragile and degraded lands, and impoverished inhabitants, land-based production in Konso is fundamentally limited. By contrast, farmers in Lemo have benefitted from more-favourable conditions for agriculture, leading to more steady and reliable production.

#### 5.3.1 Climatic factors

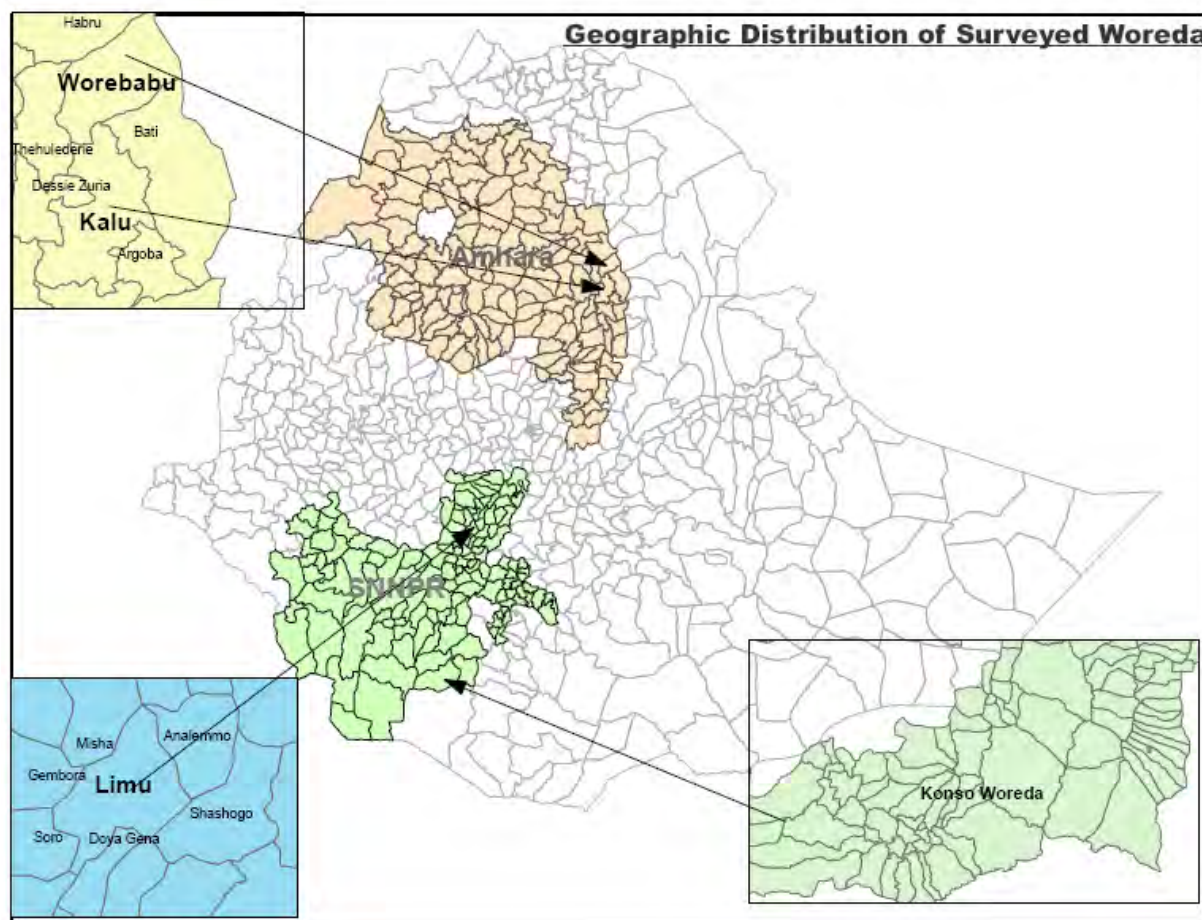
Field visits and discussions in the four case study areas revealed quite different climatic conditions. Across all four woredas, Lemo and Konso have the longest and shortest ‘windows’ for crop growth respectively<sup>46</sup> (CSA, 2006: 25), with Konso producers reliant on the shorter and smaller Balg seasonal rains. As a result, Konso is the driest of the four case study woreda, with rather erratic and very scarce rainfall accounting for 80% of annual crop production (KARDO, n.d.). By contrast, climatic conditions in Worebabu and Kalu are temperate year-round, and rainfall in these highland areas is reasonably high and sustained over Balg and Keremt seasons.

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<sup>45</sup> Annex [A.1](#) presents detailed information about each of the four woredas.

<sup>46</sup> Defined by the Length of Growing Period (LGP), which is defined by the FAO as the number of days per year that sufficient moisture is available in the soil profile to support plant growth (CSA, 2006: 25). LGP captures rainfall, potential evapotranspiration, and soil moisture storage properties, and is a good aggregate indicator of productive potential.

**Map 5.1,** Geographic distribution of surveyed woreda, prepared by Solomon, VAM Unit, WFP Ethiopia, September 2009



Climatic conditions – including seasonality, and the volume, timing and reliability of rain disbursement – are significant in planning transition from food support. Without sufficient ‘enabling conditions’ for agricultural production, households must draw-on household assets and all other livelihood options. Households in areas such as Konso which have low ‘thresholds’ for moisture shortage are particularly vulnerable to drought and other shocks, and will not achieve benchmarks for transition in the same time frames as higher-potential agricultural areas. Unsurprisingly, informants from Konso were emphatic that transitioning participants from MERET-PLUS food support in periods of drought was not viable (Konso FGD01; 02; 03), which was echoed by project managers at higher levels (Hadiya, SSI02; ETH SSI06). During periods of protracted rain failure and drought, strategy to transition households is unviable (ETH SSI06), or at least must be changed in light of increased demands placed upon livelihoods.

### 5.3.2 Characteristics of land holdings

Informants for this research characterised the size and condition of plots of land, as well as the ways that land is used, as important for both ensuring watershed rehabilitation, and for enabling self-reliant land management among inhabitants (Showat, SSI01; Konso FGD02; Hadiya SSI02; Hadiya SSI03). However, a major challenge in transitioning participants from food-supported land rehabilitation projects is that of balancing the concerns of conserving land condition with those of enhancing human livelihoods.

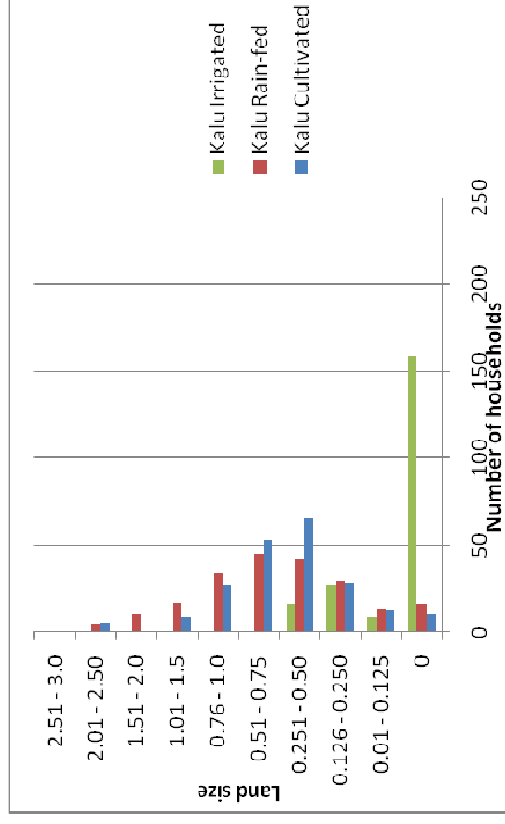
The types and qualities of soil for agricultural production are a key indicator of the ‘agricultural potential’ of farmed areas (Ashley et. al., 2001). Soils in Worebabu and Kalu, as with the vast majority of north-eastern Ethiopia, and almost 30% of Ethiopia’s total land area, are typically Leptosols, shallow (<30cm in depth) and with limited agricultural potential (CSA, 2006: 26). In Konso, soils are Calsisols, which are relatively productive, as well as thick, clayey Vertisols, which are difficult to work, and can easily become waterlogged (CSA, 2006). Here, as in many woredas in Ethiopia, continuous cultivation over many years, particularly in mid-altitude areas, has led to thin soils (<5cm) that are low in fertility (KARDO, n.d.; Bishaw, 2001; Kassie et. al., 2005). De-vegetation has been significant in these areas. In Kalu, historic evidence from aerial photography, and more recent field-based surveying found that shrublands, forests and riverine vegetation decreased by between 30% and 60% between 1958 and 1986. Available shrubland in particular had decreased following the change of government in 1991 (Hedlund and Tekle, 2000: 46), as a lack of political stability nationally served to ‘de-stabilise’ communities’ efforts to conserve vegetation. Although comparable data for levels of biomass in Worebabu is not immediately available, a pattern of insecure tenure, famine and chronic food insecurity across the Debub Wollo zone has led to de-forestation and de-vegetation. In much of Ethiopia, only 5-10% of land has any tree cover. Land in poor condition places particular constraints upon production.

An analysis of land entitlements reveals key differences between woreda (see Figures 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4). Overall, the average household’s land plot size was largest in Lemo, and smallest in Worebabu. Larger land holdings, of 1.5HA or greater, were an exception in Worebabu, tied to steeply sloping and heavily degraded land. Lemo also held larger plots of cultivated land than households in other woredas. The size of landholdings is important, as the size of a household’s plot of land is related to the size of its food gap, a key measure of food security (Gilligan et. al., 2007). Landholdings are highly fragmented in

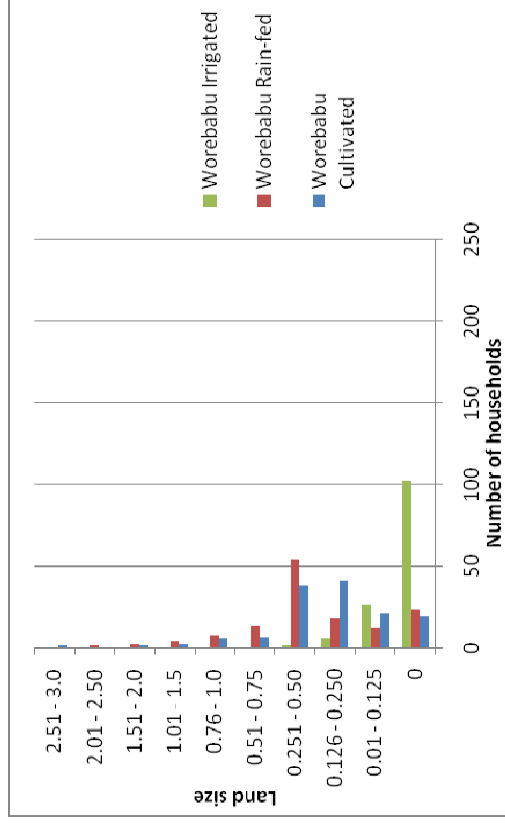
Debub Wollo, with plots in Worebabu and Kalu divided into five or more parcels on average – significantly higher than the country average, and almost twice that of Lemo or Kalu (CSA, 2006: 53). Further, land holdings in Debub Wollo are particularly affected by practices of free-grazing cattle, where households herd their cattle over publicly-held land (Mekonnen, 2009; Mekonnen pers. comm.). This practice causes damage to already-degraded land, and can undo progress achieved under SWC activities over many years.

In all four woredas, the majority of land holdings were not irrigated; this was a particular problem in the two southern woredas, with between 84% and 92% of households having no irrigated land. In dry, rainfall-dependent areas such as Konso, the chronic shortage of rainfall makes irrigation systems essential to safe-guard project impacts against low or failed rains (Konso FGD01; FGD02; FGD03). Even in highland areas such as Kalu and Worebabu, which experience higher levels of more-reliable rainfall, irrigation systems are important. Without sufficient rainfall for agricultural production, the impacts of pro-poor, environmental rehabilitation (ER) interventions such as MERET-PLUS and PSNP are fundamentally limited (Kalu, SSI01). Irrigated farmed land is more resilient to drought-shocks, and in the context of these case study areas, represents progress toward ensuring that land- based livelihoods can be sustainable, without food support. An example from Kalu woreda is a local college - Kamboche Agriculture and Veterinary College - which represents potential for project administrators to ‘decentralise’ responsibility for irrigation and other support activities (Kalu, SSI01). Students from this college who are carrying out field trips or conducting field research can provide advice and support to project communities for soil and water conservation, irrigation, and soil fertility and integrated pest management. Such partnerships foster local initiative, and at the same time improve crop yields. In Lemo, households employed small-scale irrigation on their homestead land (Lemo SSI01).

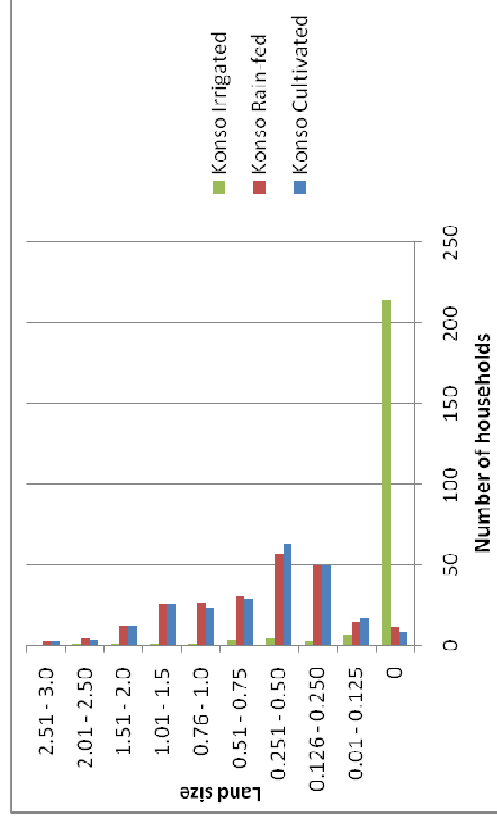
**Figure 5.1, Land entitlements (HA) in Kalu woreda**



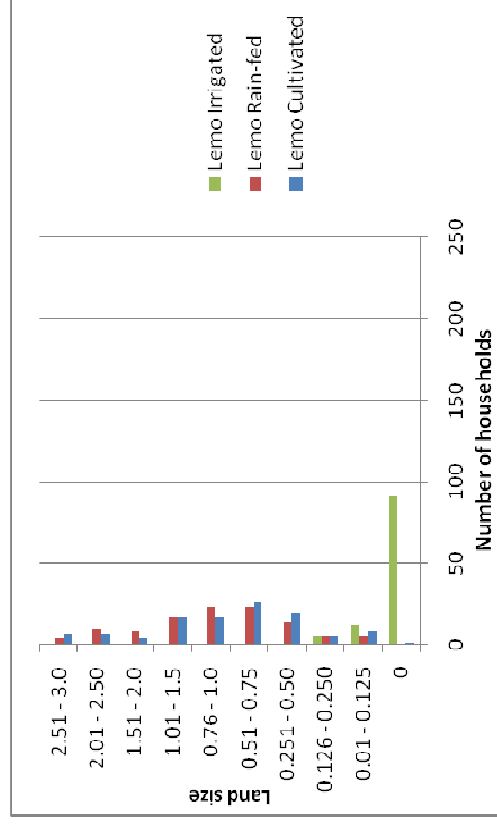
**Figure 5.2, Land entitlements (HA) in Worebabu**



**Figure 5.3, Land entitlements (HA) in Konso woreda**



**Figure 5.4, Land entitlements (HA) in Lemo woreda**



### 5.3.3 Demographic characteristics

[Table 5.1](#) sets out the employment – by profession – of households in case study areas. In rural areas of Ethiopia, households' occupations reflect the kind of livelihood strategies employed. In turn, these livelihood strategies are influenced by agro-ecological factors. The inhabitants of case study areas engaged in a wide range of occupations. There were particular differences between woreda in the proportion of people working in food cropping ( $X^2=108.385$ , 3 d.f.,  $p<0.0005$ ), livestock ( $X^2=53.125$ , 3 d.f.,  $p<0.0005$ ), mixed agriculture ( $X^2=100.344$ , 3 d.f.,  $p<0.0005$ ) and domestic labour ( $X^2=22.479$ , 3 d.f.,  $p<0.0005$ ).

**Table 5.1,** Proportion of households with one or more member employed, by profession

Area	Food cropping	Cash cropping	Livestock	Mixed agriculture	Retail trade	Student	Domestic labour	Unemployed	Waged labour	Retired	Hunting
Kalu	18.1%	0.5%	11%	70%	2.9%	1%	12.4%	1.4%	1%	0%	0%
Worebabu	3.7%	1.5%	0.7%	63.4%	0.7%	0%	3.7%	0.7%	0%	0%	0%
Konso	39.7%	0.8%	23%	33.9%	2.9%	5.9%	18.8%	0.4%	2.1%	2.9%	1.7%
Lemo	0%	0%	2.8%	83.5%	0.9%	0.9%	6.4%	0%	0.9%	0%	0%

As a 'low potential' area, farming in Konso is constrained by thin fragile soils, an arid environment, and a lack of irrigated land. In response to these constraints to successful farm-based production, a number of soil, land and water-source management practices have been employed. These include: intercropping – with up to fifteen crops planted on one plot of land at one time – and construction of dry-stone terraces, ridges and river dams (Beshah, 2003). Nevertheless, Konso households employed the least-diversified livelihood strategies of all woredas, with only one in three (33.9%) engaged in mixed agriculture. By contrast, Lemo woreda had the highest rates of mixed cropping (defined for this survey as food and cash cropping, and raising livestock) of all woredas, with 83.5% of households employing these practices. These differences are significant ( $X^2=100.344$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). While single household production strategies increase the risk that households will suffer from shocks such as drought and crop pest outbreaks, multiple cropping and off-farm strategies typically indicate a "higher-potential" agro-ecological context. More-

diverse livelihood options – particularly ‘off-farm’ – also serve to insure households against shocks which lead to crop failure. However, more diversified production strategies also require greater labour power, and a new division of labour.

Along with the productive strategies employed by households, the availability of labour is an important component of household food security. Substantial ‘person power’ is required for farming the kinds of the steeply-sloping highland plots in Worebabu and Konso, and the clayey soils in Konso (see Carucci, 2009: 33). Households with greater labour power have higher levels of resilience to depressing shocks such as disabling illness, drought, reduced income or price inflation. However, changes in available household labour, whether from sudden exogenous shocks or from debilitating illness such as HIV/AIDs, have a significant effect on households’ ‘vulnerabilities’. While demanding strategies may have been sustainable with high levels of available labour, a sudden decrease in labour power can render these strategies unsustainable. As [Table 5.2](#) shows, the labour capacity of households was greatest in Lemo, and least in Kalu.

**Table 5.2, Household labour power**

Area	Available labour power <sup>47</sup>	Independency ratio <sup>48</sup>
Kalu (n=210)	2.8 (± 1.2)	.23 (±0.13)
Worebabu (n=134)	2.9 (± 1.3)	.24 (±0.15)
Konso (n=239)	3.5 (±1.8)	.32 (±0.24)
Lemo (n=109)	4.2 (±2.3)	.44 (±0.36)

### 5.3.4 Asset- and debt-holdings

The kinds of assets owned by households, and their monetary value, is important in assessing potential for transition from food-support (Gilligan et. al., 2007; MoARD, 2007). When used as measures of transition, assets have the advantages of being simple, easily understood by households, and a key indicator of resilience to food insecurity and shocks (Gilligan et. al., 2007). However, both climatic shocks and other cross-cutting constraints remain a problem in seeking to transition beneficiaries (Hadiya, SSI01; ETH SSI06). The asset ‘benchmark’ must be flexible, and adjusted to reflect the changed productive environment for households.

<sup>47</sup> This is defined by as the mean number of people aged between 15 and 64.

<sup>48</sup> This is defined as the number of people aged 15-21 divided by the number of people younger than 15 and older than 65.

**Table 5.3, Household assets and debt by category**

Form of assets	Mean value of assets (Birr)	Mean value of debt (Birr)
Land and agricultural assets	450 ( $\pm 2,040$ )	66 ( $\pm 373$ )
Non-land / non-farm assets	1295 ( $\pm 15,481$ )	48 ( $\pm 215$ )
Livestock assets	4,833 ( $\pm 4,823$ )	828 ( $\pm 1,653$ )
Total	6,760	942

Table 5.3 disaggregates asset information across all four case study areas by category. The asset holdings of the average household were worth Birr6,760 at the time of the survey<sup>49</sup>. Across all households, farm stock assets were valued the highest in monetary terms, homestead-based were next-most valuable, while farm-based assets were the least valuable. The relatively low value of household assets emerges from shocks which affected surveyed households. Between late 2007 and 2010, Ethiopians have been affected by a drought cycle, including the majority of households in each of the four case study areas for this research. As a result, particularly in rain-dependent areas, crop yields have declined significantly. Impacts on households direct and exchange entitlements to farm produce have been exacerbated by the macro-economic downturn, and food- and fuel-prices shocks resulting (Ashine et. al., 2009: viii). Significantly, livestock holdings are the largest component of households' total assets. Households must therefore factor-in the condition of livestock as a major part of preserving their assets.

**Table 5.4, Household debt holdings by case study area**

Case study area	Mean value of assets (Birr)	Mean average value of debt (Birr)
Kalu (n=204)	6,924	1,630
Worebabu (n=134)	6,009	907
Konso (n=239)	3,418	653
Lemo (n=109)	11,928	132

Table 5.4 presents aggregate measures of asset wealth by the four case study woredas. With higher levels of rainfall across longer periods, and more diversified land-based production, Lemo is a "higher potential" area. Lemo households had the greatest levels of income wealth, with the least debt. The larger asset holdings and lower debt in Lemo signal more than increased levels of productivity. Of the 24

<sup>49</sup> The survey was administered between June and August 2009.



income generation groups that were formed in Lemo, 23 of them were formed out of the initiative of communities themselves (Lemo SSI01). This initiative represents a level of awareness and confidence among residents that time and labour which they invest in land-based production will lead to benefits for their livelihoods. By contrast, the two northern woredas – Worebabu and Kalu – were ‘poorest’ and most indebted.

Asset holdings and levels of indebtedness in households are crucially important in serving as benchmarks for assessing potential for transition. As Table 5.5 shows, livestock, as well as key farm tools, are the most highly valued assets of the 44 assets measured in this survey.

**Table 5.5, Top ten most valuable farming assets**

Asset	% of households owning this asset	Subjective value of asset during a shock	Aggregate rank of asset’s value
Cow	58.5	7.5	1
Young cow	34.7	6.6	2
Plough yoke	68.4	6.6	3
Goats	44.1	6.4	4
Sheep	46.0	6.4	5
Axe	84.4	5.2	6
Sickle	83.2	5.2	7
Hoe	76.9	5.9	8
Poultry	62.9	5.3	9
Young bull	20.4	6.7	10

Table 5.6 disaggregates this information by woreda. The significant differences between woredas’ asset-holdings reflect the outcomes of households’ productive strategies. Livestock ownership in Lemo woreda was significantly higher than in any other woredas, particularly for the assets most valued during a shock - cows and oxen. Although very few (only 2.8% of sample households) households in Lemo employ livestock rearing as their sole livelihood strategy, households’ comparatively large plots of better-quality, ‘higher potential’ land make it possible to sustain higher numbers of cattle. As in Kalu in the north, Lemo’s households’ significantly larger non-farm asset holdings reflect larger, freer incomes. By contrast, in Konso, households were least-likely of all case study areas to own cows, bulls or oxen, in spite of the large proportion (23%) of households dedicated to livestock rearing. Instead, Konso farmers owned mostly *shoat* (sheep and goat) and poultry (Jackson, 2009b). This is partly due to a general shortage of draught animals, and a continuing shortage of grazing land (Beshah, 2003: 34). However, as

Tables 5.4 and 5.6 show, households in Konso had the lowest value assets across all categories, indicating substantially smaller incomes than other woredas. Thus, Konso households cannot afford to purchase the same levels of livestock holdings as households in other woredas. Further, because of comparatively low crop production<sup>50</sup>, households can't feed large livestock holdings.

**Table 5.6, Household asset and debt holdings by category and case study area**

Area	Form of assets	Mean value of assets	Mean value of debt
Kalu (n=206)	Farm	541 (± 3,174)	158 (± 579)
	Non-farm	2,466 (± 27,946)	100 (± 315)
	Livestock	3,917 (± 4,038)	1,372 (± 2,354)
Worebabu (n=133)	Farm	386 (± 481)	76 (± 424)
	Non-farm	354 (± 1098)	27 (± 151)
	Livestock	5,269 (± 3,856)	804 (± 1,127)
Konso (n=234)	Farm	314 (± 1,634)	11 (± 37)
	Non-farm	229 (± 683)	30 (± 165)
	Livestock	2,885 (± 3,101)	612 (± 1,044)
Lemo (n=109)	Farm	643 (± 570)	3 (± 23)
	Non-farm	2,496 (± 2,949)	10 (± 96)
	Livestock	8,789 (± 6,596)	119 (± 615)

### 5.3.5 Wider social and political factors

Households' levels of ownership of resources, while important in measuring transition, is mediated by social arrangements and norms, and by political factors. As discussion of the concept of transition in [Chapter 1](#), and of food-supported development in [Chapter 3](#) has shown, rural producers in Ethiopia have been neglected in national development strategy. In spite of advances in policy, chronic levels of vulnerability, and a lack of education among rural households leaves them susceptible to political coercion from powerful business people (Wossoro, pers. comm.), and politically-appointed representatives of the ruling political party.

In 1995, Konso was defined as a culturally-distinct woreda, home to “culturally and linguistically distinct

<sup>50</sup> Average annual household food production in Konso is around 500kg (KARDO, n.d.)

minority nationality” (Watson, 2009: 173). The Konso people are viewed – and view themselves – as distinct from all other ethnic groups in Ethiopia in terms of both their strong work ethic, and their artisan skills constructing dry-walled terraces<sup>51</sup> (Watson, 2009). Konso is classified as a special woreda, recognition which occurred in the years following the reordering of the state structure in Ethiopia, a shift in the form of government from unitary to federal, and a relocating in the locus of government from central to decentralised (Assefa and Gebre-Egziabher, 2007). Government administrators noted benefits from closer connection to the state in terms of simplifying bureaucratic processes, easier access to state resources (including job positions), and invaluable local knowledge from newly-employed locals (Watson, 2009). The cumulative effect was to reverse “decades of government policy that celebrated northern Amharan culture and viewed all others as inferior” (Watson, 2009: 173).

At woreda level, socio-political factors have important implications for potential to transition. There are distinct ‘cultures’ between households in Amhara and SNNP. In Amhara region, rural (land-based) producers are particularly affected by strictly hierarchical social and political cultures of submitting to authorities (Tronvoll and Vaughan, 2003: 32; Zewde, 2001). By contrast, SNNP region is characterised by a different political culture, with potential for more-equal relations between government representatives and farmers. Particularly in times when there are significant constraints upon crop production, relationships with neighbouring woredas is important (Beshah, 2003). Historically, Konso people and neighbouring groups such as the Boran formed agreements for a division of labour between crop and artisanal production from Konso, and livestock products from neighbouring groups. In response to covariant, debilitating shocks, farmers in SNNP region initiated ‘Farmers’ days’ to share response strategies (SNNP SSI01), and income generation groups after seeing the successes of other households (Hadiya, SSI01). This practice was endorsed at federal level by the Government (SNNP SSI01), lending political support to farmers’ initiatives. Farmers’ days were attended by households in all four woredas, ranging from one in ten households in Konso, to one in two households in Kalu (Jackson, 2009b).

More contemporary practices, promoted by local Agriculture offices, include planting drought-resistant improved crops, the formation of savings and other groups, and the provision of food aid under Food for Work projects (Konso FGD02). Of the 24 income generation groups in place in Lemo, only the first group

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<sup>51</sup> The dry-walled terraces in Konso are acknowledged and admired as among the best in Ethiopia, and have been nominated as World Heritage sites.

was formed from the initiative of the woreda agriculture office; all others were formed from the initiative of kabele Planning Teams, Development Agents and willing community members (Lemo SSI01). At Lisana Sene site, the immediate managerial and technical support from government officials, and the role of Development Agents as intermediaries for responsible communities, was formative in establishing fledgling income-generation groups (such as Kemechaka). In the first year, the group formed failed to generate any income from vegetable beds that were planted. However, with support, the second year saw them generate Birr28,000, and an average of Birr20,000 in annual income from that point onward (Lemo FGD01).

In addition to substantial strengths in self-help and income generation, Lemo is a standout woreda, particularly in terms of sites such as Lisana Sene and Ababalesa, which have been established as model sites through government initiative (SNNP SSI01), and are visited regularly by decision-makers from woreda through to Federal levels (SNNP, SSI01). During focus groups, Planning Teams from both sites emphasised the role of their site as a model for other peasants, and as an “educating college” for high quality farming techniques and activities (Lemo FGD01; Lemo FGD02). In Lemo, members of the Planning Team for Lisana Sene site unanimously agreed that withdrawing food aid would have negative consequences (Lemo FGD02). As it stood, food aid boosted the morale of communities, and increased productivity of funded activities.

### **5.3.6 Shocks and coping strategies**

The shocks experienced by households have been measured as a key aspect of households’ and communities’ levels of vulnerability, which is itself a key components of a contemporary definition of food security (Dilley and Boudreau, 2001; Barrett, 2002; Yaro, 2004). Descriptive statistics about the shocks experienced and coping strategies employed by households can be found in Annex [A.1](#).

Reflecting the significant spike in the prices of food, and particularly cereal, on the Consumer Price Index between May 2008 and January 2009 (MoARD, 2009b: 6), households in all woredas were substantially affected by increases in food and fuel prices. In Worebabu, households experienced higher levels of crop pests and disease than other woredas. Responding to this, households decreased the amount spent on farming inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, sold productive assets, and even consumed seed stocks held for the next season. In Konso, households were significantly affected by drought, with only 8 (or 3.3%) of

the 239 households surveyed not reporting that they were affected by drought. In the context of Konso's fragile agro-ecology, and relatively un-diversified household production strategies, this led to the majority of households adopting consumption-related 'coping' strategies, with less food, of lesser quality, consumed less often, with adults in particular consuming less so that children could have more<sup>52</sup>. This fits with the fact that Konso is a drought-prone woreda, and is particularly prone to moisture-stress (Beshah, 2003). As such, households in Konso were clearly the most hungry of all case study areas. By contrast, relatively richer households in Kalu – a higher potential agriculture are for agriculture - were least-affected by drought, and least-likely to adopt consumption-related 'coping' strategies. Finally, Lemo woreda stood out from all other case study areas as particularly well-off, resilient area. Emerging from higher and more reliable rainfall, larger asset-holdings, well-established asset-building agriculture, and high quality homestead irrigation, Lemo households were least affected by price-, employment- and income-based shocks. While almost every Lemo household did adopt coping strategies, Lemo households consistently had the lowest rates of adoption for almost every coping strategy.

## 5.4 Relating potential benchmarks to households' own perceptions

**Table 5.7,** Belief in sustained benefits following independence from food aid program

Response	Konso	Lemo
Yes	30.1% (n=50)	42.9% (n=21)
No	69.9% (n=116)	47.1% (n=28)
Total responses	166	49

Participants in food security projects in Konso and Lemo were asked if they believed their household could become independent from the food security projects they participated in and continue to sustain the benefits which resulted. Results show that a greater proportion of participants did not believe that benefits would be sustained after becoming independent. [Table 5.6](#) presents the results, showing that, while households in Lemo were more likely to believe that they could transition from food support, such households were a minority in both woredas. However, given results from focus group discussion with project planning teams (presented earlier), the number of households that believe benefits can be

<sup>52</sup> Adults in Konso were three times more likely than those in Lemo, Kalu or Worebabu to consume less food so that children could consume more.

sustained post-transition is surprisingly high.

Multiple analyses of variance (ANOVA) were run to test which demographic and asset-based household factors were related to belief in independence (see [Table 5.7](#)). Significantly, while the total value of household assets was not found to be significantly related to belief in independence (ANOVA,  $p=.073$ , with 1 and 213 df), the total value of land-based and livestock assets was significantly related (ANOVAs,  $p=0.013$  and  $p=0.016$  respectively, with 1 and 213 df).

**Table 5.8, ANOVA of variables related to belief in sustained benefits**

Variable	F statistic	d.f.	P-value
Number of people in HH	0.741	1, 213	0.390
Dependency ratio	2.656	1, 209	0.105
Total HH debt	0.100	1, 213	0.752
Total land	1.193	1, 207	0.276
Total value of land and agricultural assets	6.212	1, 213	0.013
Total value of non-land / non-farm assets	0.006	1, 213	0.939
Total value of livestock assets	5.862	1, 213	0.016
Total value of land, non-land and livestock assets	3.235	1, 213	0.073
Ownership of Top Ten Assets	1.647	1, 213	0.201
Top Ten Assets Value	3.374	1, 213	0.068

Then, with the same method, we tested which shocks were related to belief in independence (see [Table 5.8](#)). Four commonly experienced shocks were found to be significantly related to belief in independence: high levels of crop pests, lost or reduced employment, insecurity and/or violence, and floods ( $p=.002$ ,  $.020$ ,  $.014$ ,  $.002$ , all with 1 d.f. respectively). Significantly, experiencing drought in the months prior to survey enumeration was not significantly related to belief in sustained benefits. In addition, an aggregate of the five most-commonly experienced shocks ('Allshocks') was significantly related ( $p=.003$ , 1 d.f.).

**Table 5.9,** ANOVA of variables related to belief in sustained benefits

<b>Shock</b>	<b>Chi square</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>
'Allshocks'	8.580	1	.003
Drought	0.788	1	.375
High Food prices	0.020	1	.888
Reduced income	2.011	1	.156
High fuel prices	3.563	1	.059
High crop pests	9.831	1	.002
Serious Illness/ accident	0.555	1	.456
Lost / reduced employment	5.419	1	.020
Insecurity/ Violence	6.095	1	.014
Floods	9.886	1	.002
Assets stolen	.000	1	.992

## 5.5 Relating proxy benchmarks to existing efforts in woredas

During discussions with woreda project managers, it became clear that measures of transition under MERET-PLUS, and a strategy for its implementation, were not well understood. Further, while national managers of PSNP were able to report that 225,000 people had graduated from the program during 2009<sup>53</sup>, no comparable figures exist for MERET-PLUS. As noted in Chapter 4, the difference between interventions emerges from the fact that graduation has been planned-for from the beginning of the PSNP, including benchmark studies of targeted areas, and specific guidance on staged transition into complementary food security programming.

By contrast, understanding of transition from MERET-PLUS was more eclectic. Key informants from Offices of Agriculture and Rural Development in case study areas provided various indicators that a household is ready to transition, including composting (Lemo SSI01), whether crops can be sold to generate income, particularly for all-women income-generating groups (Kalu SSI01; Kalu FGD); whether livestock fattening programs are in place, as well as indicators such as children attending school suitably equipped with study materials, and farmers having bank accounts (Hadiya, SSI01). A number of respondents highlighted the importance of training in key initiatives for improving the performance of MERET-PLUS, including the use of farm tools (Lemo SSI01), improved land and water utilisation (Konso FGD1; Konso FGD02; Showat, SSI01; Elsa pers. comm.), and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) (Konso,

<sup>53</sup> As of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2009, source: ETH SSI06. At Woreda level, managers were able to report specific numbers of participants graduated, as well as reporting the status of households following graduation.

SSI01; Lemo SSI01). Even in Lemo, the ‘greenest’ of all case study woredas, support from government and extension agents for fledgling income-generation groups was crucial for their success<sup>54</sup> (Lemo SSI01). Members of a MERET-PLUS Planning Team in Kalu woreda presented their views of how targeted households and areas would look at the end of the project (Kalu FGD01). Participants emphasised the importance of steady asset-building over time, as well as the presence of key assets such as livestock, and trees, fruit- and other cash-crops. Members also emphasised that income-generation activities which particularly benefit women were important.

## 5.6 Conceiving of and measuring transition in case study areas

This discussion has compared interrelated factors in the four case study woredas for this research. The comparative approach has helped to contextualise key measures of food security. The principal finding is that asset-formation is an essential prerequisite of successfully ‘enabling transitioning’ from MERET-PLUS. Beneficiaries of food security interventions – including MERET-PLUS – from four quite different case study areas consistently emphasised that asset-formation is a central desired outcome of these interventions. Outcomes of quantitative research have helped to highlight the important distinction within asset-based approaches between farm-based and livestock assets, and house-based (non-farm) assets. Households with higher value farm-based and livestock asset holdings were more likely to believe that the benefits of food security projects could be sustained after becoming independent from food-support. Thus, these proxy ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ indicators of food security and transition were compatible with each other. The importance of farm-based and livestock assets as measures of food security is reinforced in other studies (Gilligan et. al., 2007; MoARD, 2009b).

The significance of this discussion for exploring the notion of ‘enabling transition’ is two-fold. Firstly, factors such as available labour power, drought shocks, and levels of household indebtedness were not correlated with greater levels of belief in becoming independent from food support. Secondly, in terms of methods for measuring progress toward transition, it is clear that benchmarks based on farm- and livestock-based asset benchmarks are singly important as indicators of progress and readiness for transition.

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<sup>54</sup> Kemechaka income generation group was the first such group established in Lemo, and subsequently served as a model for other households in Lemo woreda, as well as in neighbouring woredas.



## Chapter 6 – Evaluating the coherence of ‘transition’ in MERET-PLUS

This chapter evaluates four aspects of policy and intention for transition in MERET-PLUS. Firstly, the notion of transition which is inherent in the MERET-PLUS project is evaluated in terms of its coherence with the ‘logic’ of project policy at federal level. Secondly, transition is considered in terms of the contextual realities of both project areas and stakeholders’ interests. Thirdly, transition is considered conceptually, as the ideal ‘end point’ of food-supported interventions. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the potential under MERET-PLUS for ‘enabling transition’.

### 6.1 The concept of transition in MERET-PLUS

Policy efforts of MERET-PLUS management personnel to deal explicitly with ‘transition’ – and accompanying modalities of phasing out and exit – are a recent phenomena in MERET-PLUS, having been addressed explicitly and for the project as a whole since 2002, around 20 years after the project first began. Related to this is the fact that transition has not been well studied, either as a concept or in practice, in literature on food aid and food security.

#### 6.1.1 Different views and motivations in transition

As noted in [Chapter 4](#), while the notion of ‘transition’ as an end point to MERET-PLUS is an inherent part of the project, the concept has not been clearly tested or defined at federal level or at site level. A number of project administrators for MERET-PLUS and PSNP were interviewed for this research. Responses indicated that the concept of transition has been peripheral in programming. Different interim WFP or joint WFP-Government policies for ‘transition’ (WFP, 2006; NPSU and WFP, 2009; Carucci, 2009) are not well-aligned with each other.

The broadest modality, exit, is briefly outlined in overarching project policy by the World Food Programme. In this policy, the basis for WFP ‘exiting’ from MERET-PLUS is the “enabling impact of multiple assets” established among project participants, the ability to meet consumption needs when food aid is not being provided, and a transition to cash aid – particularly cash aid which is provided by the Government of Ethiopia (WFP, 2006: 14-15). These benchmarks help to measure a common asset-

based perspective on the progress made by participating households toward independence from requiring food support. In addition to being measures of capacities for self-reliance of ‘treated’ households, these benchmarks for exit also measure wider responsibility for procuring food aid, and the extent to which this responsibility has been handed-over to the Government of Ethiopia. Building ability in beneficiary households and engaged government offices to resource development under MERET-PLUS activities is a ‘trigger’ leading to WFP exiting from this role<sup>55</sup>. Resolving the tension between the withdrawal of assistance and commitment to the goals of sustainable development lies at the heart of successful exit strategies” (Levinger and McLeod, 2002: 1). However, exit from MERET-PLUS has not been confirmed as currently viable by WFP in Ethiopia, and has not been incorporated in project policy by the Country Office (Zoutewelle, pers. comm.).

At another level, the recently-developed phasing-out strategy (NPSU and WFP, 2009) articulates a very different rationale and set of benchmarks for transitioning participants and supported watershed sites. The strategy seeks to ensure transition through the modality of phasing-out, which is seen as a means of introducing time-limits for support provided to participating communities. Phasing-out should crystallise overall timeframes and goals for ‘completing’ the rehabilitation of sites and transition of project participants, and free-up resources for other degraded and food-insecure areas needing support, maximising the impact of watershed activities in the process (NPSU and WFP, 2009). This view of ‘transition as an instrument’ is closely related to policy goals of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in programming.

A third line of policy (Carucci, 2009) is focussed-on the technical excellence of many aspects of participatory watershed development which have been developed under MERET-PLUS. This policy proposes that MERET-PLUS influence watershed rehabilitation in Ethiopia through its model sites, namely by influencing practice in the much-larger and better-funded PSNP. However, fundamental differences in how food is used – as an incentive, allocated by targeted MERET-PLUS communities versus an entitlement, transferred to all households which meet PSNP’s targeting criteria – complicate potential for phasing over responsibility (Ashine et. al., 2009). The concern is that the methodology of MERET-PLUS, which has pioneered and refined community-based participatory watershed development among government officials and participating communities over a long time, will not be adopted and preserved

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<sup>55</sup> MERET-PLUS’ Results Based Management report for 2008 includes as an output: “capacity of implementing partners to identify food needs, carry out food based programs, develop strategies and mechanisms for exiting improved”.

in the midst of the comparatively new PSNP. This policy is particularly forward-looking, and aims for MERET-PLUS to be positioned as a scaled-back operational model of best-practice in key watershed areas.

The different modalities for transition lack coherence with one another. This is linked primarily to the fact that transition strategies are being formed retrospectively – after decades of continuous project operation – which creates fundamental constraints for effective, aligned strategy (Rogers and Macias, 2004; Gardner et. al., 2005). Project coordinators at regional level emphasised that phasing-out support to site(s) cannot be implemented quickly, but achieved key capacities were needed for phasing out food-support at site level (Amhara SSI01). While there are existing standalone capacity-strengthening efforts in the project, a lack of concerted planning for transitioning sites from receiving food support does result in lost opportunities for building sufficient capacity among implementing partners and at site level for ‘handing over’.

## **6.2 Transition and the contextual realities of project areas**

### **6.2.1 Constraints to transition**

Closely related to the fact that transition has not been included in project strategy, the particular context for food aid programming in Ethiopia is not friendly to attempts to withdraw food aid, and ‘hand over’ responsibility for administering development to in-country partners. As of 2009, crop production in case study woredas –particularly in rain-fed Konso – had been significantly affected by drought. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in case study areas emphasised the fundamental importance of drought in the performance and impact of MERET-PLUS. Incidences of drought can effectively ‘disqualify’ households, watershed sites and communities from being transitioned from food support. Informants from kabele- to federal-level emphasised that key shocks – particularly consecutive rain failures in moisture-stressed areas – effectively undercut benefits from SWC activities to participants’ livelihoods. However, in the quantitative component of this research, drought and belief in sustained benefits of project-transition were not found to be related. In such sites, notions of phasing out and exit exist only on paper – in the logframe and policy for the project.

However, even in ‘higher potential’ areas which have been treated comprehensively by MERET-PLUS

SWC and extension activities, with soil bunds, gully treatments, bund stabilisation, vegetable production and animal fattening all in place, differing rates of adoption of these activities (“fast, slow and laggard”) by households constrain treatment of the watershed as a whole (Lemo FGD02). In Anabalesa, Lemo woreda – which is widely acknowledged as a model of MERET-PLUS’ successes in SWC and asset-creating activities for the country as a whole – the level of uptake varied significantly between households within the site (Lemo FGD01). This is important to transition from MERET-PLUS for two reasons. Firstly, because of the holistic nature of targeting in MERET-PLUS, ensuring sustained rehabilitation requires that all inhabitants of degraded land in a given watershed adopt conservation activities. Secondly, situations where project beneficiaries initiate project activities, without requiring assistance from ‘outsiders’, indicates potential for transition.

As discussion of contextual factors in [Chapter 5](#) has helped to highlight, significant agro-ecological differences in Ethiopia manifest in different forms of ‘productive potential’. Beyond these distinctions, however, are ‘person’, social, cultural, spiritual and resource constraints at kabele and woreda levels (Cohen et. al., 2008) which necessitate a highly nuanced approach to transition (see [6.2.3](#) below). A particular ‘capacity’ issue for transition from MERET-PLUS is the support and incentives available from community-level extension agents and agencies, as well as support at social and wider institutional levels (Cohen et. al., 2008). A study of woreda offices’ capacities in Amhara region (Atalay et. al., 2007) highlights key gaps, which leads to a shortage of qualified personnel, and loss of key experience among staff. In light of consistent emphasis on the importance of support from offices of agriculture and extension agents, these gaps in capacities hold-back potential for transition.

These constraints are common in vulnerable rural environments. A particular, arguably more definitive consideration for enabling project participants to transition is the understanding that they have of the purpose and intended end-point of the interventions that they benefit from. As evidence from Lemo has shown, fuller potential for transition exists when the livelihood-benefits of activities are self-evident, leading to communities choosing to adopt these activities. Communities’ ownership of project activities – seen through the project Planning Teams – is still contingent upon initiative from extension staff for aspects of needs assessments, organisation, leadership and management (Cohen et. al., 2008).

More broadly, the process of researching strategy for transition in case study areas has highlighted the limitations of methodologies for measuring ‘sustainable livelihoods’ in practice, and of determining

potential and readiness for transitioning participants. Difficulties are both conceptual (highlighted in Chapter 1) and empirical (Alinovi et. al., 2008). Almost all methodologies for capturing ‘sustainable livelihoods’ up until very recently have been “static, and unable to predict future events (Alinovi et. al., 2008: 137). Empirical data are limited by “the absence of longitudinal data over a sufficiently long period to enable the various sources of risk to express themselves, thereby not allowing the analysis of risks and trends” (ibid: 137). Field research for this research is similarly limited - merely a ‘snapshot’ of the potential for transition in case study areas.

### **6.2.2 Potential for transition**

MERET-PLUS’ Community-Based Participatory Watershed Development (CBPWD) approach to targeting and planning is a crucial component of the project. The importance, for the success and sustainability of watershed-based development, of including watershed inhabitants in participatory planning and in watershed development interventions is undisputed (see for example, Davenport, 2004; Dougill et. al., 2006; Iyer et. al., 2004). By giving project participants the opportunity to elect community representative to plan conservation activities on their behalf, this approach represents key long-term potential for ‘enabling transition’ from MERET-PLUS. Field informants reported that when activities are planned by community members themselves, successes are shared ‘organically’ – without any added incentive from projects or ‘outsiders’. Further, visible successes which emerge primarily from communities’ own plans and efforts have greater potential to be sustained. This significantly increases potential for transitioning households in affected areas from project support. Evidence from MERET-PLUS, and from historic practices in Ethiopia, demonstrate that community-driven approaches are most effective in addressing cross-cutting challenges such as resolving ethnically-based disputes over land, or implementing by-laws to eliminate destructive practices such as free-grazing of cattle (SNNP SSI01).

### **6.2.3 Responding to diversity through ‘contextual’ transition**

In the context of significant limitations which are inherent in watershed-based development, particularly in marginal and poverty-stricken areas, understanding the trade-offs between livelihood strategies and other impacts of interventions on participants’ livelihoods is crucial (Alemu et. al., 2006; Gilligan et. al., 2007; Pankhurst, 2009). Vulnerable rural households must decide between different livelihood strategies, in contexts of uncertain factors within households, and in external environments. These

ranged from distinctive farming contexts – including weather patterns – to the varying degrees of accessibility and quality of project activities. This is reflected in the differences apparent in the distinctive coping strategies adopted by households from the four case study areas for this research.

### **6.3 Transition as an end-point to MERET-PLUS**

Broadly, the purpose of every transition modality is to be part of ensuring – and measuring – the sustainability of project outcomes for communities, and over time (Gardner et. al., 2005; Rogers and Macias, 2004). The nature of externally-provided food aid is that, once the crisis situation which led to an initial emergency response has been averted, the project resources will be re-directed to an appropriate intervention, or a (government or non-government) development agency (WFP, 2004). Ongoing debates over the concept of linking relief, rehabilitation and development (Anderson, 1985; Bergman, 2003; Christopolos et. al., 2003; Crisp, 2001; Macrae and Harmer, 2002; White and Cliffe, 2001) wrestle with the reality that no ‘golden standard’ exists for indicating when a ‘disaster’ or ‘emergency’ situation has shifted to become a situation requiring efforts to ‘rehabilitate’ or to ‘develop’ strong livelihoods. In most cases, ‘transition’ occurs as a result of external constraints such as funds drying up; more commonly, with sophisticated methodologies and institutional cooperation, indices of different indicators of human welfare and livelihood, and comparative environmental stability, are employed. Similar issues to those operating in disaster response and rehabilitation efforts underpin modalities for transition from food and cash support to development efforts. While studies have significantly increased knowledge of the benchmarks which indicate sustained progress toward food-security in populations receiving food support (Gilligan et. al., 2007; Gilligan et. al., 2008; Gilligan et. al., 2009), there is limited evidence of cases where recipients/participants in developmental programs have been successfully graduated *en masse* (see for example, Gilligan et. al., 2005). This is also true of MERET-PLUS.

As the findings of mixed method research have emphasised, contextual factors faced by households differ markedly between different areas of rural Ethiopia. In some areas, agro-ecological factors fundamentally limit potential for agricultural production, and subsequently for building-up household asset holdings. Nevertheless, the value of ‘productive’ (farm- and livestock-based assets) were strongly correlated to households’ belief in potential to become independent from food support. This indicates significant potential for asset-based measures of transition.

## 6.4 The value of transition in case study areas

This research has found that particular benefits for participating communities may be catalysed and enhanced – with ongoing technical support from government and multilateral institutions – through an emphasis on transition in strategy and in practice. These include:

- The formation of trained community groups for building physical-, financial- and social-based assets;
- Greater levels of access to created assets among households, particularly for normally excluded people (women; ethnic minorities; elderly or the disabled/chronically unwell);
- Greater levels of self-reliance, including adoption of self-help activities;
- Administrative, financial- and human-resourcing, and specialist vocational capacities in government offices and among government staff;
- Opportunities to test the relative levels of sustainability of the project's activities, and benefits accruing to people's livelihoods;
- Opportunities to strategically re-position both the project, and the institution more widely.

The value of transition is contingent-upon a range of factors, many of which are determinative in successfully phasing out aid and withdrawing all associated assistance provided by foreign humanitarian institutions. The type of intervention to which food and cash are allocated is an important consideration. The watershed-based interventions which are evaluated in this research present distinctive difficulties in terms of measurement, tied in with the chronic vulnerability of inhabitants. The time frame for transition is also important. When a strategy for transition is planned from the onset of an intervention, identified factors which serve as prerequisites for phasing out can be incorporated throughout its lifetime. Lastly, the forms of control (Scoones, 2009) that project participants have over both the processes of watershed management (Beard and Ferreyra, 2007) and the outcomes from watershed activities (Abel et. al., 2003) is a crucial component of success:

Without their participation, achieving a collectively and socially desirable outcome is not possible, because key information resides in the knowledge and mental models of stakeholders, and because, without the inclusion that comes from participatory approaches, any proposed solution would face a legitimacy

problem” (Abel et. al., 2003: 17).

As with the concept of empowerment, transition in food security programming can be conceived of both as an instrumental and as an inherent goal (Bartlett, 2008). In development approaches at micro scale, such as participatory research and action (PRA), the emphasis is on ‘handing over the stick’ (Chambers, 1994). The end results of participatory exercises are that local people are empowered with specific skills in aggregating, ranking and mapping the resources available to them. In this sense, a movement from participation through to greater human agency is a ‘built-in’ part of the activities. Transitioning participants from receiving input from outsiders is a goal inherent in the approach itself. There are critiques of participatory approaches such as PRA, which focus on firstly, that such approaches struggle to effectively create room for inclusive and truly representative discussion; and secondly, that the activities and decisions emerging from PRA require – but often lack – follow-up which involves “socially-disaggregated processes and explicit management of trade-offs to diverse groups” (Alemu et. al., 2007: 14). Deeper critiques with regard to transitioning in food security projects note that such forms of empowerment are trivial in comparison to deeper, structural issues of poverty. These critiques are especially salient to contexts of rainfall-dependent, fragile districts, such as three of the four serving as case studies for this research.

Whether institutions work toward transition as an instrument for completing a project funding cycle, or as a goal inherent in program objectives, the practice of progressively involving participants is a key factor in ensuring that impacts are carried over after transition. Efforts to improve the efficiency of an intervention requires a clearly spelt-out plan for ensuring that activities will endure even after support is withdrawn (Gardner et. al., 2004). By not involving participants from the outset of operation, opportunities for concerted capacity-building, such as progressive phasing-out of external assistance, are potentially neglected. Participation by stakeholders in the definition of problems, planning of development activities, and evaluation of outcomes (Alemu et. al., 2007), leads to greater commitment to activities from participants, and supplements gaps in central knowledge with farmers’ local knowledge (Abede et. al., 2008). Alongside the necessity of ensuring participation, interventions where beneficiaries participate in processes of project planning and administration have greater in-built potential for becoming independent, and for being successfully transitioned.

## 6.5 Conclusion



The question of how agreed and emerging progress indicators and outputs of MERET-PLUS are refined into more intangible measures of ‘more sustainable livelihoods’, or benchmarks for phasing-out sites or exit from involvement, is an important one. In broad and conceptual terms, definitions of key concepts which undergird discussion and measures of progress and sustainability in development interventions (as discussed in [Chapter 1](#)) continue to be problematic, particularly as measures of progress toward various modalities and aspects of transition remain elusive. Tied to these difficulties, transition from MERET-PLUS, as in many similar food-supported interventions, is often peripheral in programming. In integrated development projects such as MERET-PLUS, which privilege beneficiaries’ participation, and which operate in vulnerable environments, these difficulties are enhanced by the complexities of ‘trade-offs’ between different livelihood options and strategic opportunities. In this regard, the comparative case study approach has highlighted the diverse range of interests in transition which exist in transition, from site- through to national or policy level. Approaches to ‘enabling transition’ can be characterised as either ‘instrumentalist’ or ‘inherent’. Lastly, this research has highlighted the primacy of farm-based and livestock assets in households’ livelihoods, and in assessing potential to ‘enable transition’ among rural producers. In order to expand upon and refine the findings of this research, critical questions need to be asked about the nature of sustainability. Which activities and benefits are most important to sustain? To what extent are intended short- and long-term benefits being accessed by project participants? (German and Taye, 2009). Are there trade-offs involved in this with other activities and benefits? (Pankhurst, 2009). Which actors and institutions have assumed – and will assume – responsibility for project administration? Perhaps, with further investigation, these questions will open-up new opportunities to enable rural producers in Ethiopia to live resilient, prosperous lives, independently of protracted foreign humanitarian assistance.

## References

**Table R.1,** Field Interviews for this research (*referred to throughout this work*).

Code	Area conducted	Date of interview	Nature of interview	Location of interview
Konso SSI 01	Site	14 June 09	Interview with farmer	Konso Special woreda, SNNPR
Showat SSI01	Site	18 June 2009	Interview with member of MERET-PLUS Planning Team	Showat sub-catchment, SNNPR
Lemo FGD01	kabele	12 June 09	FGD with PSNP Development Agents, MERET Planning Team, kabele Manager and kabele Chairperson	Surveyed kabele, Lemo woreda office of Agriculture and Rural Development, SNNPR
Lemo FGD02	kabele	16 June 2009	FGD with MERET-PLUS Planning Team	Surveyed kabele, Lemo woreda, SNNPR
Kalu FGD01	kabele	23 July 2009	FGD with MERET-PLUS Planning Team	Surveyed kabele in Kalu woreda, Amhara
Kalu SSI01	kabele	2 June 2009	Interview with Sewinet Gebretsadik	Kambolche Agricultural and Veterinary College, Kalu woreda, Amhara
Konso FGD01	kabele	18 Aug 2009	FGD with kabele Development Agents	Surveyed kabele, Konso special woreda, SNNPR
Konso FGD02	kabele	19 August 2009	FGD with kabele Development Agents	Surveyed kabele, Konso, SNNPR
Konso FGD03	kabele	20 August 2009	FGD with kabele Development Agents	Surveyed kabele, Konso, SNNPR
Worebabu SSI 01	woreda	June 2009	Interview with Asfaw Demissi, Mohummad Adim, Fantau Emris, Said Mokonna	Natural Resource Section, Worebabu Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, Amhara
Kalu SSI02	woreda	June 2009	Interview with Alemu, Zerihnnun and Bsir	Natural Resource Section, Kalu Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, Amhara
Lemo SSI01	woreda	2009	Interview with Solomon Berkanu	Lemo Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, Lemo, SNNP
Konso SSI02	woreda	June 2009	Interview with Yared Tagegn	Natural Resource Section, Konso Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, SNNP

Konso SSI03	Woreda	9 June 2009	Interview with Kara Maino, Kasfalinso, Ayledo Tesfarseon, Gewado, Gezahegn.	Konso Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, SNNP SNNPR
Hadiya SSI01	Zonal	11 June 2009	Interview with Adebacho Watchiso	Natural Resources and Land Administration, Hadiya Zonal Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, SNNP
Hadiya SSI02	Zonal		Interview with Windimo Amise	Head of woreda Administration and Chairman of Safety Net Taskforce, Hadiya Zone, SNNP
Hadiya SSI03	Zonal		Interview with Solomon Berkanu	Lemo Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, SNNP
Debub Wollo SSI01	Zonal		Interview with Wondale Habtamu	Vice-Head, Debub Wollo Zone Agriculture and Rural Development Office, Amhara
SNNP SSI01	Regional	15 June 2009	Interview with Fisseha Gizachew	Head, MERET Project Regional Coordinator, RPSU, SNNP
Amhara SSI01	Regional	28 July 2009	Interview with Birara Chekol	Head, MERET Project Regional Coordinator, RPSU, Amhara
ETH SSI01	Federal	May 2009	Meeting with Peter Zoutewelle and Arega Yirga	WFP Country Office, Addis Ababa
ETH SSI02	Federal	25 June 2009	Interview with Tesfaye Mebratu	National Coordinator, SUN programme, GTZ, Addis Ababa
ETH SSI03	Federal	3 June 2009	Interview with Betru Nedessa	National Program Service Unit, Kazanches, Addis Ababa
ETH SSI04	Federal	7 August	Interview with Betru Nedessa	National Program Service Unit, Kazanches, Addis Ababa
ETH SSI05	Federal	10 September	Interview with Betru Nedessa	National Program Service Unit, Kazanches, Addis Ababa
ETH SSI06	Federal	23 June 2009	Interview with Berhanu W/Michael	Director, Food Security Coordination Directorate, DPPA, Addis Ababa

ROM SSI01		17 September 2009	Interview with Volli Carucci	Programme Officer, WFP HQ, Rome, Italy.
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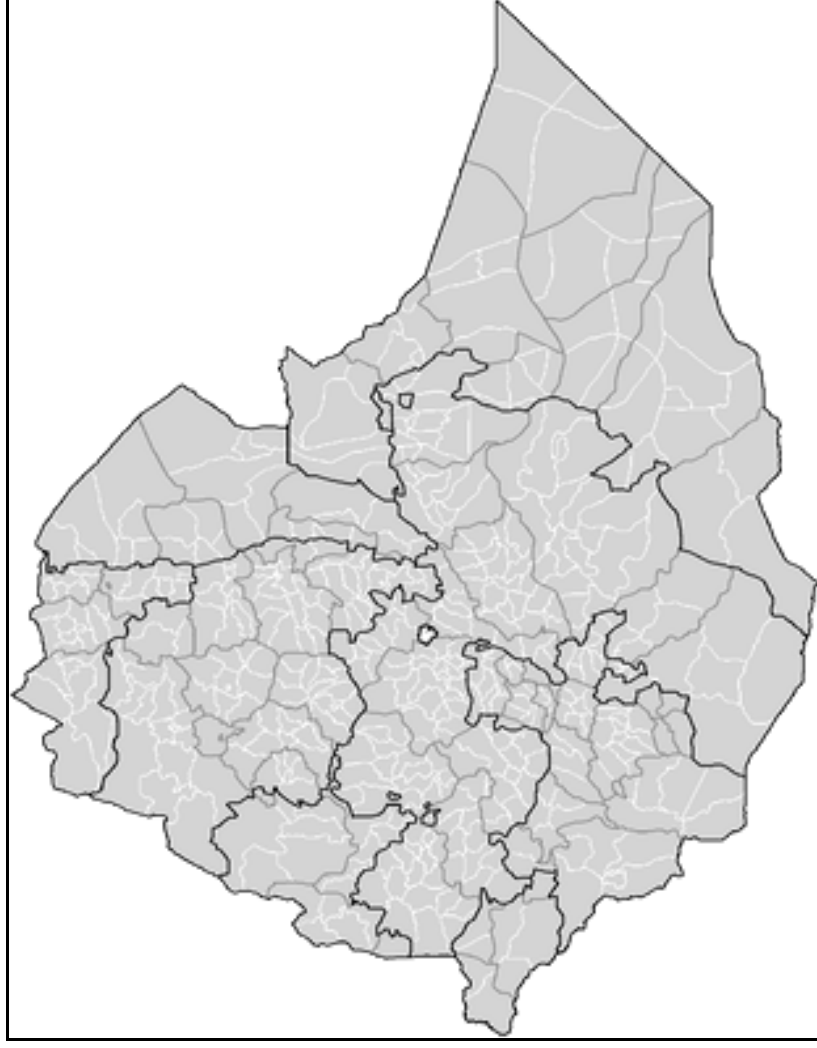
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## Annexes

Map A.1, Detail of regions, zones and woredas of Ethiopia



**Source:** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/woredas\\_of\\_Ethiopia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/woredas_of_Ethiopia), accessed November 2009.

Killil: or 'region': the largest administrative area in Ethiopia, ethnically-based, and governed by a (regional) state authority. There are nine regions and two chartered cities in Ethiopia. *Regions are outlined in dark black lines in [Map A.1](#)*

Zone: The second-largest administrative area in Ethiopia, sub-division of region. There are sixty eight zones in Ethiopia. *Zones are outlined in grey lines in [Map A.1](#).*

Woreda: A sub-division of zones. *Woredas are outlined in white lines in [Map A.1](#).*

Kabele: The smallest administrative area in Ethiopia, made up of approximately four to five villages (Little et. al., 2006).

## A.1, Characteristics of case study areas in Amhara and SNNP regions, Ethiopia

Debab Wollo Zone, Amhara		Hadiya Zone and Konso, SNNPR	
Worebabu	Kalu	Lemo	Konso
Agro-climatic conditions <sup>56</sup>			
Altitude (m above sea level)	2,000-2,500	2,500-3,000	1,000-1,500
Average rainfall (mm per year)	801-1200	801-1200	650-750
Rainfall seasonality	Balg and Keremt	Balg and Keremt	Balg and Keremt
Months of rainfall per year	2-3	6-7	2-3
Average slope of land	6%	10%	4%
Crop land per holder (HA of crop land per land holder)	0.5 - 0.6	0.5 - 0.6	0.5 - 0.6
Types of crops produced (from largest- to smallest quantity)	Wheat, Teff, Barley, Maize, Sorghum, Chickpeas, Oilseeds, Pulses	Wheat, Teff, Barley, Maize, Sorghum	Sorghum, Sesame, Finger-millet, Cowpeas, Groundnuts
Demographic characteristics			

<sup>56</sup> From Central Statistics Agency, 2006, 'Atlas of the Ethiopian Rural Economy', Central Statistics Agency, Ethiopian Development Research Institute, International Food Policy Research Institute: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Washington D.C.



	<i>Serious illness or accident of HH member</i>	23.1%	20.5%	21.1%	52.3%
	<i>Loss or reduced employment for HH member</i>	32.8%	26.2%	31.8%	6.4%
	<i>Insecurity / violence</i>	46.3%	5.7%	25.7%	22.2%
	<i>Floods</i>	35.8%	23.8%	18.3%	1.7%
	<i>Having one or more of your productive assets stolen</i>	22.4%	9.0%	5.5%	7.9%
Coping strategies	<i>Sell more of your animals than usual</i>	66.4%	66.6%	17.6%	49.0%
	<i>Increase working hours</i>	64.9%	58.9%	40.0%	45%
	<i>Limit portion size at meals</i>				
	<i>Rely on less-preferred and less-expensive food</i>	42.5%	48.7%	23.2%	60.3%
	<i>Reduce number of meals eaten in one day</i>	26.9%	24.8%	44.4%	76.6%
	<i>Borrow money to buy food</i>	65.7%	26.6%	15.7%	59.4%
	<i>Seek alternative or supplementary work</i>	38.8%	40.9%	19.4%	42.3%
	<i>Reduce food consumption among adults so small children have more</i>	22.4%	24.6%	15.7%	64.4%
	<i>Decrease expenditure for fertiliser, pesticide, fodder, animal feed, veterinary services</i>	67.9%	25.0%	40.0%	27.2%
	<i>Consume stocks held for the next season</i>	54.5%	26.2%	16.7%	31.4%

**Source:** Jackson, P., and Sim, D., 'Survey of households in four woredas in northern and southern Ethiopia', enumerated by Development Agents from woreda Offices of Agriculture and Rural Development, assisted by the World Food Program Ethiopia, June-September 2009.



## A.2 Positionality in research, and response required

Aspect of positionality	Effects on data and data gathering	Response required
Extensive scale of research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Minimal in-depth communication with enumerators and informant communities</li> <li>2. Important micro-aspects of information about informant communities in case-study areas can be lost</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Assistants already working in communities being surveyed are employed for surveying</li> <li>B. Background work completed ahead of research initiator's arrival by Assistants.</li> <li>C. Where retrospective input from Assistants and Enumerators has been possible, this is applied generally to all relevant results</li> </ol>
Constraints upon communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research requires much more time to complete</li> <li>2. Misunderstanding and miscommunication with informants and enumerators impacts quality of results</li> <li>3. Along with extensive scale, only minimal discussion of results and input from Assistants and Enumerators is possible</li> </ol>	
Context-specific properties of field sites and livelihoods of inhabitants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Causative plurality" in interpreting results of quantitative research (Cartwright, 2007)</li> </ol>	
Inter-subjectivity due to socio-economic differences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Misperceptions from research initiator and respondents, leading to only partial understanding of information required to answer research objectives</li> <li>2. Research initiator unaware of the implications findings may have for lives on an ongoing basis</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Onus on research initiator to demonstrate goodwill, and willingness to respond to perspectives shared by informants</li> <li>B. Importance of in-depth understanding of the case study areas: the histories, socio-economic and political situations, and future outlook for residents' lives.</li> </ol>

<b>Respondents and enumerators and vested interests (perceived or actual)</b>	<p>1. Because of researcher(s)'s affiliation and the subject of research, respondents and enumerators may report that respondents' livelihoods are more food-insecure and impoverished than they are in reality</p>	<p><b>A.</b> Particular importance of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and that respondents understand and trust that information will be treated this way</p> <p><b>B.</b> Particular information is treated with caution, and in light of background qualitative research</p>
<b>Inter-subjectivity due to differences in immediate world views</b>	<p>1. Miscommunication, as phrases used when discussing with or surveying communities do not always refer to what the research initiator assumes</p>	<p><b>A.</b> Questions and responses are situated in very different frameworks, and are evaluated as such</p> <p><b>B.</b> Understanding local descriptions of the world through discussion and background information is important</p>
<b>Inter-subjectivity due to my own vested interests</b>	<p>1. Pressure to gather significant results to serve as an evidential base for meeting research objectives</p> <p>2. Pressure to uncover 'new knowledge' as well as to gain sufficiently broad background understanding</p>	<p><b>A.</b> Flexible approach to following initial objectives in Terms of Reference</p> <p><b>B.</b> Scope of research is managed</p>