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CONSERVATION-BASED DEVELOPMENT  
by  
Jan Hultin  
University of Gothenburg

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1 Background<sup>1</sup>

Earlier soil conservation and community forestry (SC/CF) programmes (eg those based on food wages) have been characterised by SIDA as to a large extent having been undertaken in isolation and as having little popular involvement and support. Hence the Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Study (EHRS, 1986) arrived at two main conclusions:

First, that the problem of land degradation cannot be addressed only by means of terracing and tree planting. It demands an integrated plan of action where soil conservation is integrated with other measures, such as actions (i) to increase production, (ii) to maintain a balance between livestock numbers and feed resources, and (iii) to meet fuel needs.

Secondly, that the SC/CF activities will not be effective unless they are planned with the genuine participation of the people concerned, ie the peasants. Therefore, the FAO's Investment Centre (FAO/IC) has recommended that participative planning at service cooperative (SC) level should provide the framework for conservation-based development in both the North Shewa and Welo projects.

Participative planning assumes that those directly concerned with and affected by the conservation measures have reached a common understanding of the problem and the means to solve it and, most importantly, that they share this understanding with the MOA administration from the central level down to the DAs in the service cooperatives. It does not mean that the problems as well

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<sup>1</sup> SC/CF    Soil Conservation and Community Forestry  
FAO/IC    FAO/Investment Centre  
PA        Peasant Association  
PC        Product Cooperative  
SC        Service Cooperative

as their solutions should be defined unilaterally by experts in some far away office while the participation of the peasantry is limited to the execution of given orders. Participative planning assumes a move from just telling people what to do to listening to them. It is the experience of this Mission that farmers are acutely aware of the problem of land degradation and of the issues involved in conservation-based development and, importantly, that they are capable of defining priorities and strategies for solving the problem.

The basic problem of getting peasant support for soil conservation is not so much how to 'teach' the farmers this and that; they are quite aware of the problems and in search of solutions. The problem is rather that most solutions involve short-term costs which are perceived as prohibitive in relation to the stated long-term benefits and - particularly in a physical environment as hazardous as that of Welo - in relation to the risk-taking involved. Put differently, one could say that the peasants of Welo are caught in a poverty trap where they cannot afford to invest in a better future. This paper will first address some of these 'catch 22' issues in conservation-based development and then analyse some of the causes of this poverty trap.

## 2 Short-Term Costs in Soil Conservation

### 2.1 Hillside Closure

The closing off of steep, eroded hillsides to grazing, cultivation and tree-cutting has been a major feature of SC efforts in Welo. While the benefits of these measures have been unquestionable, there are a number of side-effects that imply very high immediate costs for the individual households.

First, the hillsides were often used as pasture, mainly in the rainy seasons. Closure has therefore necessitated grazing on the

only pasture that is left, ie in the valley bottoms which formerly were used mainly in the dry season. Moreover, this resource is shrinking as the fields expand down the slopes. All-year grazing on swampy areas leads to heavy parasite infestation and lower growth rate and performance of livestock.

Secondly, it is often an advantage to have plots at different altitudes and on different types of soil as this is a way of spreading risks and insuring against a total crop failure. A farmer might for example want to have a plot on a slope above his other fields, even if this is on steep, eroded land, because that particular plot may be less prone to frost than his lower-lying, more fertile fields.

In both cases, the immediate costs of a hillside closure may be perceived as unacceptable by a household which, even before the closure, was living on the edge of existence.

#### Issues to be Addressed

- How to compensate for the loss of pasture?
- How to design an integrated approach whereby closure is combined with measures to increase fodder production?
- How to coordinate closure with other, subsidiary measures so that the costs to the peasants are minimised?
- How to get beyond the routine suggestion of hay production by the 'cut and carry' method? If the fodder is to have maximum nutritional value, it must be cut in September. At that time, however, there is a peak in the demand for labour to weed the fields. There is thus a risk that optimal use of 'cut and carry' will result in a lower yield in the fields.

## 2.2 Terracing and Tree-Planting

Terracing and tree-planting on eroded hills lead to the same short-term costs as in the previous case.

### Issues to be Addressed

- Who is to benefit from the forest?
- Is there a stated government (and MOA) policy with regard to ownership and usufruct right to trees and forests?
- Is there always a clear definition and a clear policy statement regarding the purpose of tree-planting, other than that of soil conservation?
- A defined purpose will have consequences for the choice of species, for the choice of site and for the choice of management system. Is the planting intended to provide fuelwood, or timber (and for which purpose), or fodder?
- Has the purpose of the plantation been discussed with the farmers concerned?
- Have their needs been defined?
- Have they been consulted regarding the choice of site and species?
- If the PAs are supposed to benefit from the plantation, how then is this resource to be managed and utilised?
- Do any guidelines exist for the administration, management and exploitation of so-called Community Forests?
- How can poor farmers be compensated for the very real

economic disadvantages of growing a crop which takes several years to mature? (cf Shepherd, 1985).

### 2.3 Terracing of Fields

There is a long tradition of terracing in Welo and elsewhere in northern Ethiopia. In recent years, thousands of people have been engaged in the terracing of fields within the framework of the FFW programme. Yet, this massive input of labour may sometimes prove to have little lasting effect. In places, farmers plough so close to the edge of the terrace that the structure is bound to be destroyed. What is the reason for this destruction of capital? A clear understanding of this question is absolutely essential for the future success of terracing programmes.

There may be many and diverse reasons for a failure on this front. The farmer may, for example, not have been consulted or otherwise involved; the terrace may have been built by others for FFW wages, without his participation; or, he may have participated in the construction, but only because he desperately needed the food wage.

These types of reasons may be said to relate to the 'attitudes' of farmers towards soil conservation, eg that he is indifferent to the project of conservation because he does not understand the benefits of it. If this is so, the problem would only be one of communication; the solution would be to give the farmers better information through improved extension service.

However, the problem may often be a completely different one. The reason for the neglect of maintenance and the destructive practices may quite often be economic. It may well be that a farmer understands the long-term benefits of terracing his fields. The problem as he perceives it, is that terracing may decrease the arable area by up to 10 per cent. For someone who has got only half a hectare to cultivate, the loss of some 500

square metres may be unacceptable. He just cannot afford to lose even an inch of arable land, he has nothing to spare. Therefore, the problem is not simply one of information, it is a problem of survival. The solution would be a) to compensate the farmer for his short-term loss and b) to stimulate and encourage conservation-based farm development by providing some sort of 'package' of inputs, eg in the form of seeds, fertilisers, perennial fodder plants on bunds, tools, or, perhaps the most important factor of production together with land and labour, an ox. It must be emphasised that it is vital that the components of such a scheme are coordinated. The food wages for terrace building must not come several months after the work has been completed, bunds must be planted with suitable species in immediate connection with the construction of the terraces, seeds, fertilizer, tools or whatever inputs should likewise be provided promptly and without delay.

#### Issues to be Addressed

- What inputs are necessary to compensate for the immediate loss of arable land in terrace construction?
  - Which are the necessary components of such compensatory and complementary inputs? Seeds, fertilizers, tools, capital, fodder plants?
  - How can these inputs be coordinated to have optimal effect?

### 3 The FAO/IC Strategy for Livestock: Socio-Economic Aspects

#### 3.1 Oxen, Capital and Incipient Class Formation

In highland Welo, where access to oxen is a necessary condition for agriculture, cattle-keeping and herd building is geared towards the maximisation of oxen. Before the latest drought, oxen constituted about one-third of the regional herd, in some awrajas as much as 40 per cent. This means that the herd structure was balanced to produce the required number of oxen for cultivation.

The average number of oxen was less than one per household (FAO/IC, Annex 4, and also Annex 4, MOA project document). This means that many farmers have to cooperate and coordinate their actions in order to plough. Average figures, however, obscure the fact that oxen are very unevenly distributed. About one-third of the farmers owned no oxen at all. Another third possessed only one ox, while the remainder owned a pair of their own. A small minority (5 per cent) owned three oxen or more (FAO/IC report, Annex 4, Table 4). The distribution of one of the most critical factors of production (together with land and labour) is thus highly skewed with about two-thirds of the households having to seek capital from outside. Households poor in capital have to cope with the problem by entering into transactions that put them into situations of risk that make them relatively more liable to crop failure.

Thus, farmers who have to borrow oxen have restricted time for ploughing during the key ploughing period immediately after the first rainy days and at other critical times in the cultivation cycle. Farmers with only one ox usually cooperate by pooling their resources and this, likewise, implies a handicap during the critical farm days. Farmers without oxen often prefer to rent only one ox and then cooperate with another who, like himself, has access to only one ox. For many people, it is difficult to rent or borrow an ox during the critical farm days because then the owners quite naturally want to plough their own fields.

The ox owner, on the other hand, can plant earlier than his neighbour without oxen, and his risk of crop failure due, for

example, to frost, is therefore smaller than for the man who must borrow oxen and plant later. The disadvantage of not being able to sow at the optimal time is considerable. A two-week delay in planting may make a difference of up to 50 per cent in the yield obtained (Grynseels and Jutzi, 1986, p 14). Furthermore, restricted access to oxen limits the number of times of farmer can plough a field before sowing. This, in turn, has consequences for the productivity of the field, as well as for the possible range of crops he can chose to cultivate. Teff, which gains the highest market price, requires four or five ploughings, whereas horsebeans, which give a lower yield as well as a lower price, can be planted after only one or two ploughings. In years with a poor harvest, ox owners have the option of converting a given amount of high-price grain into a larger amount of lower-priced food. Thereby he has a certain flexibility in his response to potential crop failure, he has got more options in his strategy for survival and is therefore less vulnerable than the farmer who must rely mainly on low-price crops that cannot be converted into larger amounts.

Moreover, peasants short of oxen not only reap less than owners of a full yoke. Those who have not even got one ox have to rent an ox before they can cooperate with another man and pair their animals for work on alternate days. In north-eastern Shewa, there are a number of different forms of contract for the rent of oxen and similar forms are known from most parts of Ethiopia, including Welo, although there may be regional differences of terminology. In north-eastern Shewa, one of the most common rental agreements is called kolo whereby a peasant rents an ox for one ploughing season in return for 200-300 kg of grain to be paid after the harvest. Many poor farmers enter a domegna, yemoyategna or balegn agreement, whereby labour is given to another farmer in return for the use of his oxen. The common management is to work two days for every day of oxen use (Grynseels and Jutzi, 1986, p15).

Peasants who are not only poor, but also too weak to plough

(eg households with a female head and no males of working age), have to use a yekul agreement by which the peasant without oxen asks another to plough his (or her) land in return for half the crop (ibid).

It is true that the land reform of 1975 has implied that most peasant households have got unconditional access to one of the most important factors of production (even if there are areas with high population pressure and relative scarcity of land where the establishment of new households may be considerably delayed, thereby raising the age at marriage). In spite of this, however, the unequal distribution of farm capital in the form of oxen still generates exploitative relations of production and social inequality. Evidently the latest drought in which many peasants lost animals or were forced to sell them in order to buy food accelerated this incipient process of class formation.

### 3.2 Smallstock and Equines

For farmers who can barely harvest enough to take them from one season to another, or who produce even below what is required to feed the household, and for whom cattle are necessary for breeding oxen or for replacing old ones, sheep are almost the only item that can be sold.

They are the most important source of cash when money is needed for paying taxes or for buying food, clothes and other necessary consumption goods. For most farmers the raising of sheep also offers the only possibility for saving. As the reproduction rate of sheep is higher than that for cattle and other livestock, the return to labour is relatively higher in sheep production than in other forms of animal husbandry. Keeping sheep can therefore be said to be equal to having a bank account that gives a high interest rate. By building up a flock of sheep, a farmer may be able to buy a calf or a heifer or a cow and thereby eventually get access to an ox. Thus sheep are not only important as

'savings accounts', they also play an important part in the process of capital formation for the peasant households.

In some awrajas, sheep raising and wool production also form the basis of a 'cottage industry' for carpet making which provides one of the few opportunities of cash earnings that these areas can offer. Sheep production is thus a sector where the farmers have some scope for cash earnings, savings and capital formation.

Equines are necessary for all forms of transport and distribution. Without them the market would collapse. They also provide a source of income for farmers who engage in local and regional trade (eg between districts in different awrajas) and for owners who rent them to others. Until a decade ago, many peasants from Welo went with their mules and donkeys to the coffee districts of the south-western highlands where they worked on the coffee harvest and transported the coffee to the market place, but this opportunity for cash earning is no longer available. Nor is it possible to engage in grain trade and transport between regions as before. Thus, the people of Welo have increasingly lost access to vital external resources and are being trapped in a degrading environment that cannot support the growing population.

### 3.3 The Socio-Economic Content of the FAO/IC Strategy

It seems that the unequal distribution of farm capital in the form of oxen is an issue that deserves attention in the planning and implementation of the project, particularly as the problem is further accentuated by the present shortage of oxen following the drought. Therefore, the FAO/IC proposal to promote single-ox traction and the use of cross bred cows for traction is not only important as a strategy for decreasing the number of cattle and thereby getting a better balance between animal population and feed resources. Its relevance for the socio-economic context outlined above should also be considered.

If single-ox traction is introduced, its promotion should be combined with a strategy for a more equitable distribution of oxen. Such a strategy could imply a range of benefits for those strata of the peasantry that are now the most vulnerable to the effects of crop failure. It could have the result that (i) more farmers would be able to plough at the critical times in the cultivation cycle; (ii) more farmers would be able to plough their plots more times, which would give better yields and better scope for crop variation and rotation; (iii), the costs of production are reduced for those farmers who otherwise would have to rent oxen either on a share-cropping basis or in return for payment in cash or labour; (iv) it is possible for a larger number of farmers to reap a better crop than they do now; and, (v) make them less vulnerable in periods of crisis. (The main reservation regarding the implementation of this strategy concerns the technical feasibility of single-ox traction) (Gryseels and Jutzi, 1986).

#### 4 Subsistence Production and the Extraction of Surplus

##### 4.1 Patterns of Stratification

The peasantry is not an homogenous mass, equal in their poverty. At least one third of the farmers, ie those who lack oxen, have to rent one or two animals. On the other hand, there are owners of capital who are able to appropriate surplus from the non-owners. Thus, at the end of the cultivation cycle, some ox owners have access not only to the crop they themselves have produced, but also to shares of other peasants' crops or to extra cash, at the expense of other households. Furthermore, the two-thirds of the peasants who have not got a full yoke of their own cannot plough optimally and therefore plough less land (or fewer times, which leads to lower yields or a more limited choice of crops) than those that have full access to oxen. This means that in economic terms the peasantry is highly stratified.

Some of these poor peasants may find a way to improve their lot by joining a producer cooperative (PC). However, it must be emphasised that the SIDA Mission has not been able to find any comprehensive information regarding the recruitment into PCs in Welo (eg which categories of peasants have joined: ox owners or non-owners; young people or older ones; newly established households with a shortage of manpower or households in the later phases of the development cycle with many members of working age). Neither has there been any systematic evaluation of the performance of the PCs, nor of their general role in the PAs and the implications for those who, for some reason, remain outside the cooperatives. Even with the limited information that is available to the SIDA Mission, there seems to be a potential issue that deserves attention.

It may sometimes be the case that the establishment of PCs, with the ensuing redistribution of land in favour of the cooperatives and their members as well as their generally privileged position, will contribute to the creation of a new, additional, cleavage pattern. A SIDA report on the situation in Arsi says:

Peasant associations, which allocate rights to members on a yearly basis, can, and do, move households so as to consolidate land for PCs. Where the chairman of the PA and the chairman of the PC is one and the same person, and where an individual family has the prospect of moving to a barren slope, or joining the PC, the principle of 'voluntary' membership can be violated. The use of such recruitment tactics by PCs may not be common, but the very possibility gives cause for concern. (Leander, ed, 1985, p10).

It may be that membership is not always voluntary. However, equally important would be to enquire why so many people do not join a PC and, particularly, why so many of those who face the alternative of moving to a barren slope do not join. How come that some choose to leave a comparatively good farm site and move to a much poorer one? Or, do they indeed have a choice? What decisions (not only of the peasant in question, but also of the PA leadership and of decision-makers in other institutions) lie

behind such a move? What factors influence the decisions?

These questions are not entirely academic. The establishment of a PC can evidently involve quite a reshuffle of people. Presumably, the relationship between those members of a PA who have had to evacuate their land when it became part of a PC's land and those who moved in to take over is imbued with conflict. One PA in Dese Zuriya visited by the Mission had 682 member households (after the population had been halved by the famine and the ensuing removal to resettlement areas outside Welo). About 80 households were members of a PC that had been established already before the drought. The Mission met and talked with about a dozen men who were members of this cooperative. According to them, some 60 families had moved to the present land of the PC at the time of its establishment. At the same time, between 50 and 60 families, who had lived on the land selected for the PC, had been resettled within the PA territory; in this particular case they had been allotted land on hillsides that were both badly eroded and infertile. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they were in a very vulnerable position when the drought came and, further, that amongst those in this category who survived, many were moved to resettlement areas in other parts of Ethiopia.

Not only with regard to the location and quality of land do the PCs seem to have a privileged position. Also the sizes of holdings differ between members and non-members. Thus, the Mission visited a service cooperative (SC) in Anover in Yeju awraja where the average landholding of PC members was reported to be more than twice the size of non-members: the average holding of arable land is 0.8 ha for PC members as compared to 0.3 ha for the common PA members within the service cooperative.

The PCs do not only get preferential treatment in the allocation of land, access to state loans and inputs as well as prices received for delivery to the AMC. They are also privileged within the service cooperatives. Such a cooperative is made up

of a number of PAs. All members of a PA, whether they are members of a PC or not, pay contributions to a common fund which is administered by the service cooperative. This fund is used for capital investments such as store-house, office, cooperative shop and current expenditure. It is a form of public saving for the benefit of all the members of the SC. The service cooperative is also a credit society in that it is obliged to lend part of its capital as interest-free loans to the producer cooperatives. However, the ordinary PA members (ie those who are not also members of a PC) are not allowed to borrow from the common fund. This means that the common PA member is not only saving for the public good of the service cooperative of which he is a member, but he is also saving for the benefit of a cooperative of which he is not a member, ie the PC.

As already mentioned, there is at present very little systematic information available regarding the role of the PCs within the PAs or about the general performance of the PAs and PCs. Nevertheless, the available evidence makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the establishment of PCs is potentially charged with a conflict of interests between members and non-members. Further, the privileged position of the PCs concerning access to land, credit and agricultural inputs etc, may generate a difference between members and non-members with regard to drought preparedness and vulnerability to famine. This potential cleavage within the PAs calls for attention when it comes to project planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Another cleavage results from the skewed distribution of farm capital that makes it possible for ox owners to extract surplus labour and surplus produce from those lacking in such capital. The ensuing economic stratification leaves the poorest third of the peasantry in an extremely vulnerable position with respect to drought and crop failure.

Yet, this stratification, this hidden class-structure, is ignored by the state when it comes to taxation and other forms of surplus

extraction. Incidentally, the FAO/IC, in a 'Background Paper on a Development Strategy for the Problem of Vulnerability to Famine', indicates that the surplus extraction by the state (through taxes and other dues, unpaid surplus labour in campaign work, quotas sold to the parastatal AMC) contributes to the weakening of the peasants' drought preparedness and aggravates the vulnerable position of the poorest strata of the Welo peasantry.

#### 4.2 The Peasantry and the State

Over the past decade or so, there has been increasing agreement among development researchers who have addressed the problems of hunger and famine that climatic factors alone cannot explain the occurrence of famine. Not even the understanding of the combined effects of a set of physical factors, causing, for example, land degradation and soil erosion, is sufficient. Hunger and famine are social facts and have to be explained accordingly, ie with reference to social, economic and political factors (Mesfin W Mariam, 1984, and Blaikie, 1985). Studies of the Ethiopian famines of 1966 and 1973-74, as well as of the Sahelian famine, have also dealt with 'the political economy' of disasters (Lundstrom 1976, Copans (ed) 1976, O'Keefe and Wisner (eds) 1977, Sen 1981, Mesfin W Mariam 1984, Blaikie 1985). Much recent research suggests that while the root of the problem of famine is often to be sought in the economic and political history of the region, the suggested solutions are invariably technical.

Thus Mesfin (1986, p3) argues that there is no immediate and direct connection between drought and famine. The peasants are facing the threat of hunger even in 'normal' years (if one can ever speak of 'normal' in the case of Welo).

Whatever peasants have produced during the harvest time will be considerably reduced by the inexorable demands of government and non-government institutions, by extortions and by debt payment to leave them not enough for subsistence until the next harvest. As a result, by April

or May, they have hardly anything to eat, at which time they are often forced to borrow money or grain at exorbitant interest rates.

This is the condition of the peasantry before a drought occurs, and the situation is certainly not caused by the vicissitudes of Nature. Yet, it is in this vulnerable condition that the peasantry is situated when the drought strikes. It is a condition that is socially and politically determined.

Drought rarely affects a whole country at the same time and with the same intensity everywhere. Therefore, it would in most cases be possible to distribute surplus food from a region that has got a relative surplus to another one that suffers a deficit. In most parts of Ethiopia the occurrence of drought will be known by August, says Mesfin (1986, p4):

The consequence of drought is crop failure and it can easily be anticipated in August. But famine occurs at least six months after drought, around February or March, and intensifies in the following months. It is, therefore, not drought, but social and institutional non-action that is the immediate and direct antecedent of famine. When we combine the institutionalised exploitation of peasants to a level that sinks them below subsistence before the drought with many ... months of non-action after the drought, it becomes almost impossible to deny the human responsibility of famine.

This sort of understanding is necessary, says the FAO/IC background paper (Mesfin, 1985), if we are to prevent future famines. It may be that there is no simple solution to the problems of food shortage and hunger in Welo. Yet, there are at least some elements that emerge as necessary components in a strategy for drought preparedness and famine prevention. One such component would be to increase farm productivity. A second would be measures to increase the saving capacity of the peasants so that they can be better prepared than they are now to eke out an existence, however precarious, at least for some time after a crop failure. A third would be to build up the regional drought preparedness through drought contingency planning.

Much has already been done by RRC and NGOs in the field of drought contingency planning. Increased productivity is an overall goal of the proposed Welo Reclamation and Development Project that SIDA is to support. The problem of the saving capacity of the peasants, however, has yet to be addressed.

The three components, increased productivity, increased saving capacity and drought preparedness, are systematically related. Thus, Mesfin (1985, p4) states that all we know about peasant societies indicates that "peasants will not raise their productivity if they are not allowed, at the same time, to acquire the capacity to save and to have a good measure of their destiny in their own hands". A major impediment to increased production and saving capacity is the experience the peasants have of the social system: "Life-long experience seems to have taught them that the more they produce, the more will be taken away" (ibid). Clearly, the lack of savings makes the peasantry extremely vulnerable to crop failure. It is also (see Section 2 above) a major impediment to investment in soil conservation in that the peasants have no margins to cover the short-term costs involved.

The peasants' saving capacity is, as mentioned earlier, affected by factors inherent in peasant society, (ie the skewed distribution of farm capital). Moreover, the establishment of PCs with their privileged position regarding access to the factors of production and the correspondingly weaker position of those households that remain outside, has the effect of aggravating the marginality of the poorest strata of the population. Obviously, their saving capacity is also affected by the taxes and other dues in a 'normal' year, ie before a drought occurs. At present, each household pays ETB 20 per year in land tax (PC members pay ETB 15), ETB 5 in tax for institutions and ETB 1 in education tax, ie a total of ETB 26 (ETB 21 for PC members). This year there is a special fee for the support of the national resettlement programme: every peasant household pays a total of ETB 40 (in Welo this fee is

divided into two payments). Finally, there is a number of small contributions, such as membership fees for women's associations and youth associations.

These sums may not seem to be large, but to people in a subsistence economy who can only get a limited access to cash by selling their crops or animals, these expenses may weigh heavily. For those who, even in normal years, reap less than what is needed for survival, they are devastating.

Peasants also make considerable contributions of labour in the form of unpaid campaign work. This should perhaps, strictly speaking, not be regarded as extraction of surplus labour, as most of the work is intended to benefit the local society. Yet, when people (all adult men and women) spend up to 40 days per year on campaign work, it goes without saying that the work must be carefully planned and timed so as not to interfere with the demand for agricultural labour, thus putting the crops at risk. Unfortunately, there is evidence that this is not always the case.

Further, the peasants' input of labour must be matched by the obligations for which various government institutions have assumed responsibility. In Kutaber, however, the Mission was informed by PA leaders that people from 15 PAs had spent approximately 30,000 man days on a campaign for digging pits for tree planting. Reportedly due to lack of transport, no seedlings were delivered. Then the rains destroyed all the pits and so the whole operation was in vain. Such negligence will presumably affect peasant attitudes to soil conservation through campaign work. At any rate, it is a misuse of peasant labour.

The nutritional situation, saving capacity and vulnerability to drought are not only contingent upon the fiscal policy and the administration of unpaid campaign work; another important factor is the policy of the parastatal Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC). The farmers are obliged to sell a certain

quota of their crop to AMC at a fixed price determined by the corporation. The size of the quota is determined by AMC centrally and then divided and devolved down to the awrajas, woredas, SCs, PAs and individual peasants. A peculiar feature of the corporation's price policy is that modern mechanised state farms and producer cooperatives obtain a higher price than that paid to ordinary peasant producers for the same product.

The common peasants are not only paid less for their produce than their fellows who are not PC members. They are also paid considerably less than the current market prices. There is considerable variation in market prices over the year and therefore the difference between market price and official price also varies. In a market in Northern Shewa where ILCA surveyed consumer crop prices in November 1985 and January 1986, the prices deviated substantially from the official ones which were only one-third of the market price (Nov 1985); however, by January 1986, the prices dropped as the supply of grain to the market increased after the harvest (Gryseels and Jutzi, 1986, p28).

The low AMC prices in combination with the obligation to sell a fixed quota can, at times, put a peasant in a precarious position. The Mission found several cases where poor peasants complained that they had, at one time or another, been forced to buy grain on the open market to be able to deliver their quota to AMC. The difference between the market price paid by the peasant and the price paid to him by the AMC for the same commodity is, by definition, surplus appropriated by the state. It is true that the individual quotas delivered to the AMC do not appear to be very large: in 1982/83, AMC bought some 15,000 tons of cereals and pulses, which constituted 44 per cent of the total marketed. Roughly two-thirds were bought from SCs and one-third from private traders (FAO/IC report, Annex 7, p7 and Table 6). However, the issue here is not whether the AMC quotas are excessive or not, or whether the price policy is well-advised. It may well be that the adverse terms of trade, as well as the

taxes, fees and contributions of cash and labour, described earlier, when taken in isolation, do not seem excessive per se. Yet, the combined effect may still be severe for an impoverished population such as that of Welo, and particularly for its poorest and most marginalised strata.

## 5 Summary and Conclusions

This paper began by stating that participative planning assumes a change of attitude from just telling people what to do to listening to them. The problem of getting peasant support for soil conservation is not so much a question of how to change peasant 'attitudes' but rather how to change the attitudes of the policy makers and civil servants towards greater awareness of the peasants' predicament.

It is a major impediment to conservation-based development that a large proportion of the Welo peasantry are so poor that many of the short-term costs of soil-conservation measures are perceived as prohibitive. Some of these short-term costs have been described and issues relating to their possible compensation have been identified (Section 2).

Section 3 dealt with social causes of poverty that are inherent in peasant society whilst Section 4 dealt with external factors. The peasantry is not a homogenous mass, equal in their poverty. In economic terms, the Welo peasantry is highly stratified. The unequal distribution of vital farm capital is one of the causes of this stratification. About two-third of the farmers cannot make optimal use of their land because of a shortage of oxen. Moreover, one-third of the peasants have to pay a substantial sum of money, or a share of their crop, or a considerable contribution of labour, in order to rent oxen. Therefore, large numbers of the peasantry have no capacity to save and no capacity to invest in soil conservation, for example. Finally, they are extremely vulnerable to drought and crop failure. Yet, as is

described in Section 4, this incipient class structure is largely ignored by the state when it comes to taxes and other forms of surplus extraction. The drift of the argument presented in Section 4 is that some features of the present policy may even exacerbate the situation for the poorest strata of the peasantry. These are factors which are beyond the scope of the present development project. Nevertheless, they are of vital importance for its outcome.

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