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## *Network Paper 11*

### **Cash-for-Work and Food Insecurity in Koisha, Southern Ethiopia**

**Penny Jenden**

*September 1995*

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ISSN: 1353-8691

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# Cash-for-Work and Food Insecurity in Koisha, Southern Ethiopia

Penny Jenden

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## Preface

"Why did EuronAid support the Kindo Koisha project?"

EuronAid is one of the institutions which took an active interest in and gave financial support to the Kindo Koisha project. In 1992-93, at the beginning of the project, it was not possible to finance the cash-for-work project out of EC food aid proposed by SOS Sahel. Instead, the project went on the road with a contribution of the local EC counterpart fund, complementing EuronAid finance.

EuronAid's support for the project was motivated essentially by two considerations:

First, in September 1992, EuronAid conducted a seminar in Ethiopia which highlighted the need for innovative approaches to relief in the country. While the seminar recognised the continued need for traditional relief operations, it also examined how the international community could pave the way for rehabilitation and development activities.

Employment based safety nets' were among the subjects discussed, and the Kindo Koisha Food Security Project offered a refreshing look at this approach, coupled as it was with a strong research component. Impact analysis rarely features in food aid/food security interventions, the attitude tending to reflect the 'better to be in time than to provide a nice report' approach. But the result is an obvious lack of feedback and reflection on the impact of different methods.

EuronAid's second major interest in the project was the early emphasis on cash interventions. In the context of topical discussions about monetisation, and the effectiveness of food as a transfer mechanism, it was interesting to compare the impact of cash distributions to interventions with food.

I welcome the discussion this report will generate on an issue which is increasingly central to the need to link emergency relief programmes with rehabilitation and development needs.

Robert Hynderick  
EuronAid

## Executive Summary

This paper provides a description of the Food Security Research Project (FSP) implemented by SOS Sahel in Wollaita in the southern region of Ethiopia. According to even the most conservative estimates, over 45% of Ethiopians are chronically food insecure even in a 'normal' year. To date, efforts to tackle this problem have depended heavily on annual emergency relief operations. The FSP was designed in the context of a new direction in disaster management in the country which stresses preparedness and prevention, and which explicitly attempts to link relief with development. The key mechanism for linkage will be a major reduction in the free distribution of relief in contrast to the past and the introduction of Employment Generation Schemes (EGS). Under this approach, the bulk of relief will be distributed only in return for participation in public works programmes using food-for-work and cash-for-work. The model is similar to that employed for famine relief implemented elsewhere: the emphasis is strong on community participation in all phases of programme design and implementation. To date around 10% of food aid has been distributed through food-for-work programmes in the country. The declared intention is to increase this over the next five years such that 80% of relief food aid will be distributed through employment programmes.

The short-term objective of the FSP was to provide an employment programme at the agricultural slack period to provide poorer families access to additional income to improve their food status and to rehabilitate a critical infrastructural asset, and so improve marketing opportunities for agricultural producers in Koisha. The primary concern for the FSP was to examine the feasibility of the new disaster management strategy in a specific context. The following key questions have informed the direction of the research which was carried out during implementation of the road programme.

- ! Can employment programmes improve food security?
- ! Can vulnerable households be targeted effectively and is the mechanism for targeting sustainable?
- ! Can assets created through FFW and CFW provide sustainable long-term benefits?
- ! What are the realistic costs of such programmes?
- ! Can employment schemes provide a useful mechanism to link relief and development?

The following major issues emerge from the FSP experience:

- !** It is unrealistic to expect EGS to provide a critical linkage between relief and development if these programmes are seen only as a short-term disaster management measure in food deficit areas. To be effective as a mechanism for addressing chronic food insecurity, these programmes need to be longer term, and fully integrated into ongoing development activities.
- !** Provided vulnerable households can be effectively targeted, guaranteed employment can make a significant contribution to food security.
- !** With appropriate support and training, accountable community structures can take major responsibility for planning, labour recruitment and management of EGS. Effective involvement in this respect will have a major development impact.
- !** A significant number of vulnerable households (15%) cannot participate in EGS because they do not have the necessary labour. These households will need alternative forms of support even in a normal year.
- !** Initially the costs of implementation are likely to be significantly higher than conventional relief unless cash payments and local purchase predominate.

# Cash-for-Work and Food Insecurity in Koisha, Southern Ethiopia

## 1. Background to the SOS Sahel Food Security Study

### 1.1 Food security in Ethiopia

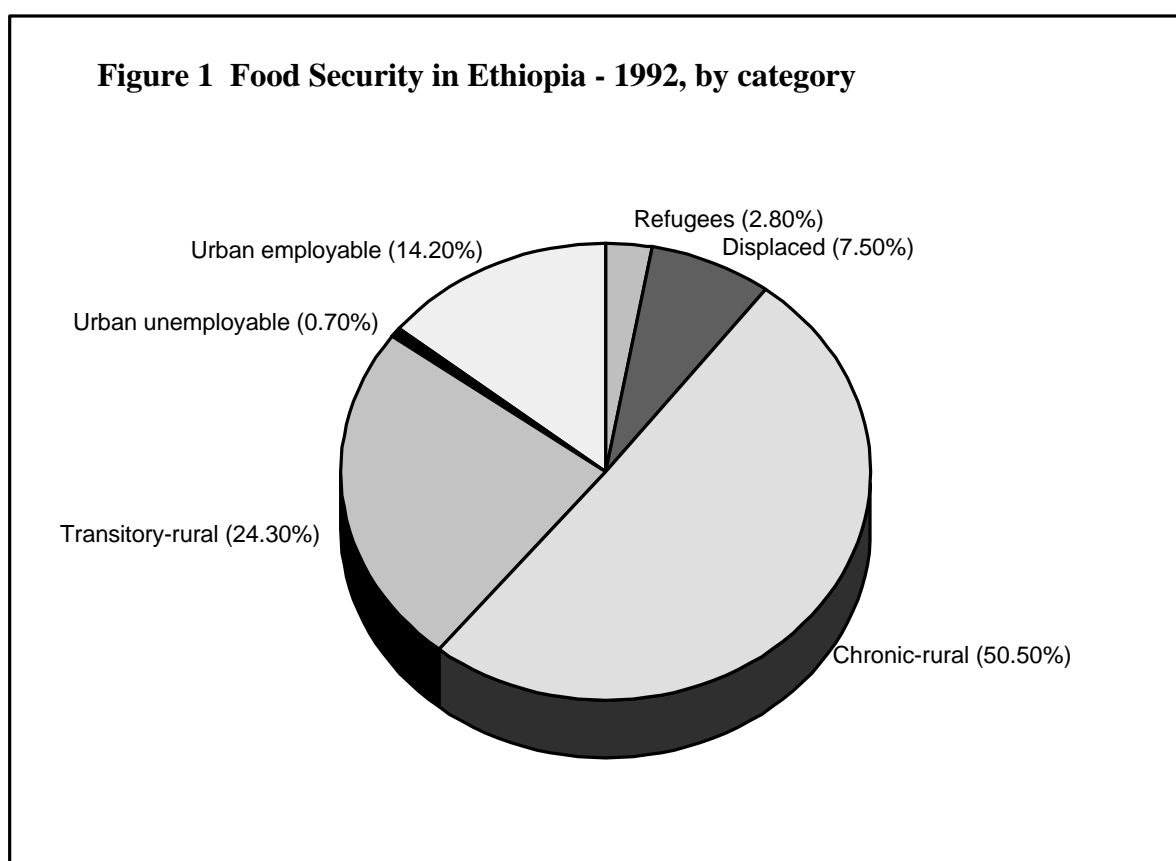
Food insecurity is endemic in Ethiopia. Confronting this issue is not only a moral imperative, but will have to be a central component of economic development strategy for the country. Malnutrition, even in non-drought years and in surplus producing areas is rife. The estimated daily average food intake per person is 1,518 calories which is only 72% of the recommended 2,100 calories necessary for an active healthy life. According to government data, child malnutrition has increased over the last ten years such that nearly 50% of children are underweight (National Rural Nutrition Survey, Core Module, Addis Ababa, 1993). Malnutrition is recognised by the World Bank (1992) as a major development problem in Ethiopia today: "...it is the leading cause of ill health and mortality among children and women and interferes with cognitive development, learning capacity and income earning potential".

Food security or insecurity can be understood at the national level or at the household/community level. At the national level, it is now accepted that Ethiopia does not produce enough food to meet the minimum consumption requirements of the population. Civil war and repeated droughts, an inappropriate policy environment for agriculture, low productivity of the agricultural sector, environmental degradation, and lack of infrastructure are cited as causal factors. There is a general recognition of a growing structural food deficit as a consequence of the steady increase in consumption generated by the country's rising population (2.9% over the last decade) while cereal production has risen by only 1.2% per annum on average, although the net production is subject to significant fluctuations in good and bad years. To a certain extent these national production shortfalls have been compensated for by increased imports, the bulk of which have been in the form of food aid from the international community.

Since agriculture is predominantly rain-fed, a decline in rainfall results in a corresponding shortfall in production. In the Ethiopian context, where markets are poorly integrated,



alternative income generating opportunities are limited and the household asset base has been severely eroded; a shortfall in production for poor households means malnutrition. In response to food insecurity, vulnerable people, estimated at up to 60% of the population in an 'average year', engage in a complex series of coping activities related to production, asset holdings, income and consumption, which have been classified under three simple headings: risk minimization, risk absorption, and risk taking (Webb et al, 1992). Many of these strategies have a potentially erosive effect on production capacity, at both household and national levels.



## 1.2 Linking relief and development

Linking relief and development has become an increasingly prominent international issue over the past decade. As has been argued elsewhere (Duffield 1994) certain basic assumptions which underlie the discussion need critical re-examination. The logic of conventional relief activity derives from a natural disaster model that is unable to accommodate potentially disruptive social or political factors. In this 'world view' the scenario is simple; the development process is an evolutionary process of social change, interrupted only by external shocks. The conventional response to these shocks follows a linear sequence; development activities are suspended and substituted by the provision of short-term relief, focusing on the provision of basic survival commodities. This is then followed by rehabilitation inputs to allow a return to the *status quo ante*. The inadequacy of the model has become increasingly apparent in the face of the increase in the number, scale, complexity and costs of emergencies in recent years.

The Ethiopian experience is a stark illustration of the problem. Under Mengistu, the natural disaster model was politically expedient for both donors and government. Massive annual relief programmes, in the absence of investment in rural livelihoods has meant that poverty and food insecurity have continued to escalate. The evidence suggests that the problems of access to food at the household level are increasing. A review of data prepared by the RRC indicates that the numbers of beneficiaries at risk of malnutrition has not dropped below 2 million since 1979. These figures suggest that little has been achieved to date and that the conventional relief response is inadequate to deal with a structural food problem which has complex political and social causes. Certainly, from the perspective of the vulnerable, the distinction between relief and development is meaningless.

Since the fall of Mengistu in 1991, the policy direction has moved towards the development of a liberalised market-based economy. In terms of improving access of the poor to food, the long-term development strategy of the TGE of agricultural development-led industrialisation (ADLI) and liberalization of the economy will be necessary, but not sufficient measures to address the problem. As has been argued, "There is no single public intervention that can alone eradicate famine. Nor is there a universal market-based solution just waiting to be tapped by vulnerable households. Indeed, many of the latter no longer have the ability to take advantage of the new potential for private initiatives. It is specifically these households that must be targeted through appropriate public action". (Webb, et al, 1992).

While it is evident that considerable external assistance will be needed for Ethiopia in the medium term, most of the government/donor discussions have to date revolved around the modalities of macro-economic support to the economy, including an increased use of programme food aid. This should make a positive contribution to the problem of national level supply. However, in terms of access at this stage, there are limited suggestions on the table relating to the need for sustained targeted support to the food insecure.

The most significant initiative from the government side has been the formulation of The National Policy on Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Management (NPDPPM) (*TGE, 1993*) which is to be implemented in the context of a major programme of political and social change in the country. The approach links relief to ongoing development activities, and emphasis is placed on community participation in planning, implementation and evaluation of the relief response. The policy is designed to achieve a major reduction in the free distribution of relief through the introduction of Employment Generation Schemes whereby relief is distributed in return for participation in public works programmes using food-for-work and cash-for-work.

An important feature of the new policy environment in Ethiopia is the decentralization of disaster management. Since the change of regime in mid-1991, Ethiopia has moved steadily away from the centrally-planned political and economic model espoused by the Dergue regime towards a decentralized model of governance, which has in effect transformed Ethiopia into a federation of relatively autonomous states.

In this context, the new NPDPPM has acknowledged the primary role of regions and sub-regions in analysis of relief needs and implementation of aid responses. But decentralization is not without problems. It is a process which has to be built upon gradually. At present, regional capacity in disaster management is low. Regional offices (RRB and other Line Departments) suffer from:

- ! shortage of skilled manpower and inadequate exposure in managing disasters
- ! inadequate physical assets
- ! budgetary constraints

Regions are expected to handle the bulk of future relief programmes. It is obvious capacity building efforts will focus more on the regions.

The new government's approach to disaster management is an explicit attempt to utilise relief resources for longer term benefits. However, the provision of relief to vulnerable households in the manner envisaged in the NPDPPM will not be simply a question of providing basic survival commodities through food-for-work as opposed to free food distribution. If local communities and their representatives are to be involved in disaster management, a radical change from traditional relief activity is implied. Few precedents exist, within the country or elsewhere, of mechanisms to ensure effective integration of relief with an ongoing, locally-defined development agenda. Given the current lack of institutional capacity in the regions, assistance, support and training at all levels will be needed as a matter of urgency. Although donors are explicitly supportive of the new policy, there has been little evidence that they are willing to explore alternatives to food aid nor to provide the necessary additional financial resources for training and capacity building.

In 1995, the government has attempted to move directly to implementation in spite of the fact that dissemination of the policy and guidelines to newly created local government and community structures has been very uneven. In many areas there have been problems. In a desire to conform to the 80% food-for-work target apparently set by the central RRC, relief distributions to needy households with able-bodied labour were suspended until work plans could be drawn up and approved. The line ministries responsible for drawing up the work plans have no budget for effective planning or supervision. Inevitably, community involvement has been minimal under this kind of pressure; works have been undertaken essentially as a means to distribute relief with limited consideration for longer-term sustainability and impact, and many needy households did not receive relief assistance at a time when it was desperately needed.

There has been considerable experience of public works in Ethiopia using food-for-work as payment. In terms of design, management, scale, specific objectives and useful documentation, this experience has been very varied. The critical difference between conventional food-for-work programmes and the employment schemes being proposed in the new policy is that the former are not designed specifically to target the vulnerable as an alternative to providing relief. In Ethiopia in the 1980s, food-for-work tended to be used in a rehabilitation context and infrastructural development was the overriding priority. Because of the international unpopularity of the Dergue regime, food was often the only available resource for any kind of rural development activity. Flexibility between cash and

food was virtually impossible for implementing agencies, because of donor fear that cash aid could be used to subsidise the regime.

Evaluations of food-for-work programmes have tended to be positive in terms of their effects in reaching the poorest. However, doubts have been raised regarding the replicability and cost-effectiveness of this approach. Studies which have explicitly addressed the potential disincentive effects of FFW indicate that labour disincentives in particular could be a problem; in other words that labour on food-for-work programmes is being used by participants as a substitute for, rather than as a complement to, other income generating activities. Finally, the relevance and sustainability of the assets created through these schemes appears to be problematic. Many were implemented hastily in the immediate aftermath of a famine situation, and careful planning and community consultation regarding such issues as ongoing maintenance and asset ownership/use/access, was rare. In most cases, therefore, participants not unreasonably appreciated the short-term benefits of involvement and payment in food, but did not share the implementing agencies' commitment to the longer term objectives of the programmes.

The new policy stresses the use of employment programmes in an emergency context, community participation in planning and management and the use of cash or food as payment depending on local conditions. There is an urgent need for alternative approaches to the annual food shortages faced by millions of households throughout the country and the government has shown a remarkable openness to engage in constructive debate and dialogue. Under these circumstances, NGOs, government and communities should be able to collaborate much more systematically in experimenting with new approaches, in exchanging information and resources and in planning, monitoring and critically evaluating the results. As a result of implementation of the FSP and the findings of the research, it is clear that in Koisha there will be a permanent food security emergency for some time to come. Therefore, any relief response has to be viewed as a continuous process, fully integrated into an ongoing development agenda.

In their analysis of policy implications of national and household coping failures in Ethiopia, Webb, et al (1992) make the point that, "...in the chain of planning events, strategy formulation only provides for the first, albeit crucial, step. The next step in the chain depends upon a sharpening of priorities and on feedback from experience provided by public action at the programming and project implementation levels. Without this feedback, strategy design

risks becoming irrelevant".

In this respect, we hope the FSP experience will be of some value and can make a contribution to this process of moving from strategy formulation to practice. The project and this report have been designed in this spirit. Through the process of implementation, we have attempted to evaluate continuously the contribution of the FSP to food security within the woreda<sup>1</sup> and to highlight some of the issues in linking relief and development which will need resolution both locally and nationally. Many of the lessons we have learned should be relevant to other institutions who are interested in implementing similar programmes.

### 1.3 Food situation in Koisha

Koisha woreda, Wollaita is part of the ensete zone of Ethiopia. Ensete or false banana is an important food security crop which has given rise to an intensive production system involving year round cultivation of the land, crop diversification with a particular emphasis on root crops, a greater integration between cattle raising and crop cultivation and a reliance on organic soil management to maintain soil fertility. The system is characterised by small landholdings supporting high populations, and a low mobility of population because of the high demand for labour on farm throughout the year. The oral testimonies and other information collected by the FSP researchers suggest that significant changes have occurred to many elements of the productive system in Wollaita relatively recently. Access to ensete, livestock and labour have all come under threat almost simultaneously with profound repercussions on food security.

Towards the end of the 1970s, bacterial wilt of ensete appeared, spreading rapidly throughout Wollaita and destroying many plantations. It is widely agreed that the causes of famine in Wollaita in 1984/85 can in part be attributed to this devastating disease rather

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<sup>1</sup> A woreda is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia to which paid government employees are assigned. Each woreda is made up of a number of Peasant Associations who elect representatives to the woreda council. Koisha woreda covers an area of over 700 square kilometres. The total population has been estimated at over 150,000 people. SOS Sahel is working in 25 PAs with over 13,000 households.

than exclusively to the drought. Although in the FSP survey ensete was considered, particularly by women, to be the most important food crop grown, it now constitutes only 25% of the diet compared with cereals (predominantly maize) 46%. Certainly the oral testimonies, conducted as part of the study, point to a significant reduction in consumption of ensete compared with the past.

Farmers in Koisha also talk about the appearance and spread of new cattle diseases during the 1970s. At the same time the land redistribution programme complemented by the Mengistu regime, had the effect of increasing the total area under crop cultivation, and significantly reducing grazing and forage resources. In the FSP survey, lack of cash and animal disease were cited as the two major constraints to livestock rearing. The lack of decent grazing and forage is seen to be a major factor in increasing susceptibility to disease. Without cash, owners have no access to veterinary drugs and cannot purchase replacement animals. Figures available for Bolosso, a neighbouring woreda, indicate that in 1971 only 65% of rural households were landowners. 100% of households owned land in the FSP survey although 27% of these households lacked the capacity to cultivate it all. Shortage of labour and of oxen were given as the main constraints.

The rural labour supply in Wollaita also seems to have undergone significant changes in this same period. The Wollaita population is divided into three 'caste' groups which do not intermarry: *Goga*, the farmer/warrior caste, *Chenesha* made up of artisan clans and *Aylia* who are former slave clans. The *Chenesha* and *Aylia* in particular benefitted from the land reform. In the past, these castes could not own land, although the *Aylia* farmed the land on a sharecropping basis and provided a ready pool of agricultural labour when local demand was high. From the mid-1970s on, this labour was diverted to their own smallholdings. In addition the accelerating conscription of young men into the army and throughout the 1980s must also have had an impact on the rural labour supply. Wollaita is said to have contributed a disproportionately high number of young men to the Dergue army, further draining the productive system as a whole of a critical resource.

The current food situation is in striking contrast to accounts of the productivity of the system in the past which figure prominently in the oral histories collected during the FSP research (see Box 1). The bulk of the population lives in the intermediate zone, where, in spite of considerable local agricultural innovation and a massive investment in labour, farm sizes are too small to feed most households. Those who have moved to the lowlands have much

larger holdings, but face major problems with drought and livestock diseases. Few of the lowland landholdings are fully cultivated.

The views expressed in Box 1 overleaf are common. In our many discussions with individuals and groups of people in Koisha during the course of the research, again and again we were told of a fundamental deterioration in the standard of living of entire communities, and a progressive erosion of household resources to the point where even basic traditional norms of reciprocity can no longer be observed. A profound sense of despair is evident.

Box 1

*Changing Patterns of Production in Wollaita:  
the Testimony of a Female Farmer*

"Our parents era was a time of plenty where milk from a single cow used to be enough for many children to drink... The ensete plantation used to be so big and dense that the hyenas used to make it their den. An ensete takes five years to mature but now it does not get the chance to reach that age because the moles destroy a lot of what we plant and we also cut the leaves to sell making it hard for the plant to grow properly... I used to get enough milk from my cows that I was able to give some to my neighbours. I even had excess ghee that I used to give to some of the women as hair oil... Our diet is not as good as our parents. They had nourishing food made from sorghum, teff, gerara tuzuma variety of ensete and plenty of ghee for butter. Our diet now is like the wind it disappears so quickly".

*Meskale De'a from Gununo quoted in SOS Sahel (1994).*

## 14 Coping strategies

In the FSP household survey of 244 households, 215 household heads described themselves as farmers, 19 as farmer/traders and 10 as craftsmen. Nevertheless only 21% of the farming households said that they were normally able to meet household consumption needs from on-farm production. 56% needed to supplement their food supply from the market and 20%



are almost totally dependent on the market to meet household food needs.

Two critical responses were identified by both men and women as being of primary importance in coping with seasonal food shortages, selling animals and reducing consumption. However the relative importance of these strategies relates to the economic situation of the households concerned. For more affluent households, reducing consumption would be an indicator of genuine distress whereas animal sales prior to or during the hungry season are pursued as an annual insurance strategy. Conversely, the first measure taken by poor households with few assets would be a reduction in consumption, which happens every year during the hungry season and animal sales would be resorted to only in extreme circumstances. During periods of food availability most households eat three times a day, during food shortages this is reduced to twice a day or even once a day for the poorer households.

A further important coping strategy identified particularly by women is an intensification of petty trading in local markets. Increasing the number of days a week engaged in marketing is the most immediate response, followed by the involvement of more family members, including children, in marketing. As the situation worsens, women try to diversify wherever possible by adding value to the goods traded, visiting different markets and through production at home; brewing of *areki* for example, cotton spinning, making *injeera*. Although men, particularly younger unmarried men, also practice this kind of petty trade at slack periods and during a food crisis, women say they are now forced to engage in this activity all the year round to make ends meet and to feed the family.

The last resort for poor households, because of the social shame involved, is begging and the selling of grass and firewood. Social shame has critical economic consequences, as Dessaegn (1992) points out in his study of households in Bolosso. As he shows, the poorer the household the greater the demand on the members to invest time in non-productive social obligations to preserve critical social assets, kin relations and membership of neighbourhood and other traditional associations as a form of insurance against total destitution.

The oral testimonies refer repeatedly to significant shifts in perceptions concerning kinship obligations, marriage, gender relations and family planning. Overall, some of these changes may well be exacerbating the food problem, although not necessarily directly related to

seasonal food crises *perse*. In a context of accelerating food crisis, they can be seen to be strategic insurance strategies which offer the promise of greater security in the long-term for the individual households.

The average household is large in Wollaita (7.5 people). This is not a new phenomenon. Yet, in spite of the apparent contradictions in terms of food availability and recognition that population pressure and shortage of land are major constraints on the agricultural system, the impetus to increase the size of households as rapidly as possible seems to be increasing. Children are an important household resource and are often shared between households. Most commonly between neighbours or kin. Usually when a child is given to another labour-poor household, the assumption is that in return the child will inherit land and/or other resources.

In the past, girl children were not valued and female infanticide was fairly common among the Wollaita. Informants suggested this practice was related to women's right to inherit land from both husband and father, which caused many problems. Although sons are still valued the most highly, it is clear that now girl children are welcomed by men as well as women. No doubt this is at least in part due to the vital role women currently play in ensuring food security. In fact, the poorer the household, the more critical the female responsibilities. In a household without girl children, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that boys have to help with what are seen to be women's jobs: petty trading, basket making, harvesting of root crops and ensete, care of livestock. The converse is not true. Women cannot plough, sell livestock or work on crops which are on fields further from the house. But these are not essential daily activities.

In spite of an apparent improvement in the valorisation of women's labour in other respects, women consider their position has deteriorated significantly. Polygyny has always been practised in Wollaita, but informants suggest that the practice is very much on the increase. Polygyny potentially increases the size of the household from the man's point of view, but women from polygamous households are most often deeply unhappy with the arrangement. They say that in the past only rich men would take more than one wife but now even poorer men try to do so. While men stand to benefit from the arrangement, in most cases women do not, yet they appear to be powerless to prevent it.

The most obvious strategy for increasing the size of the household is to have more children.

Although large families have always been sought after, the striking feature characterising many of the women's oral histories is the perception of profound changes in traditional conventions of birth spacing. It is not only men who want more children; women cannot manage without children to help them. In interviews on this subject with several women, 8 children was commonly seen to be the ideal number to aim for. However, older women in particular often complain that women are not being treated 'properly' after childbirth. For the birth of the first child, women go to their parents home and may stay there for up to two months. For subsequent births they stay at the marital home, but are still supposed to be looked after and relieved of arduous work for several weeks. Although in the main this care is provided by close female kin and neighbours, the husband is expected to play his part by providing special food and other small presents for the new mother. Women say that these old customs are now rarely observed; they have scarcely finished delivering one child before the pressure is on them to conceive the next. It is not unusual for grandmothers to still be producing children, a phenomenon which it is said was inconceivable in the past.

Box 2

*Testimony on Attitudes Towards Reproduction  
and the Family*

"I think women get pregnant only looking at men's pants! I did not give birth until I was 16 years old. Then when my first child died as an infant I had to wait another five years to give birth to my second child. That was what women did in those days. Women do not want to wait a long time to give birth because if she does the husband is likely to go to another woman that could bear him children. So for fear of losing their status the women give birth soon after they get married. Look at Workie she gave birth to four children in just four years. I say that is too many mouths to feed. There is a saying in Wollaita "gellaeya guluwaw buy geldo samonta yayi", meaning a girl returned to give birth only a week after she got married. That is the present situation. I say to friends that the birth rate has caused food shortage but they tell me I say it because I am an old woman, but it's true, women are in competition to give birth."

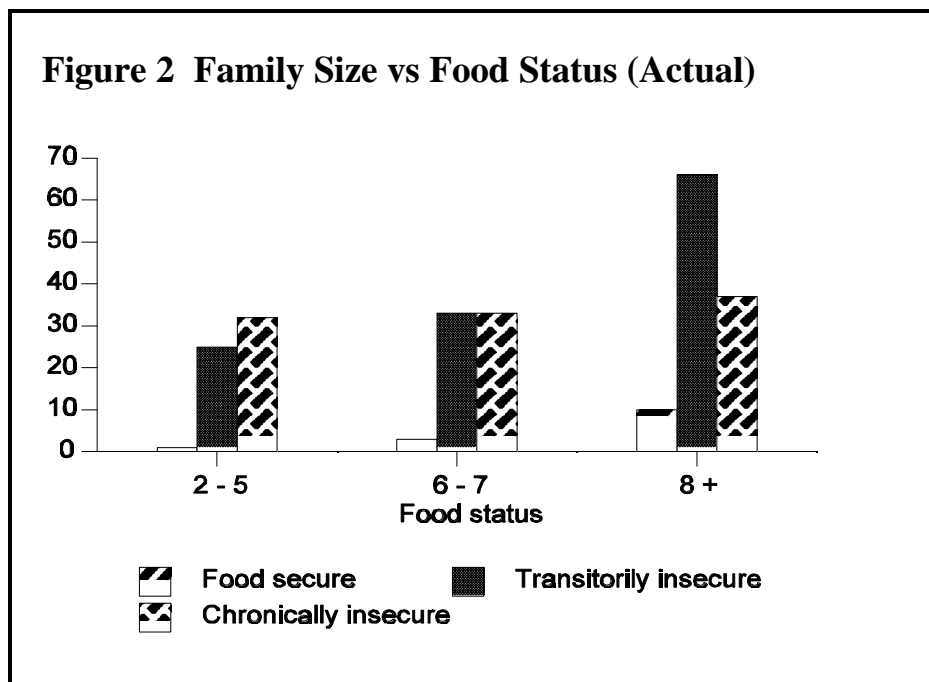
*Annette Argana quoted in SOS Sahel (1994)*

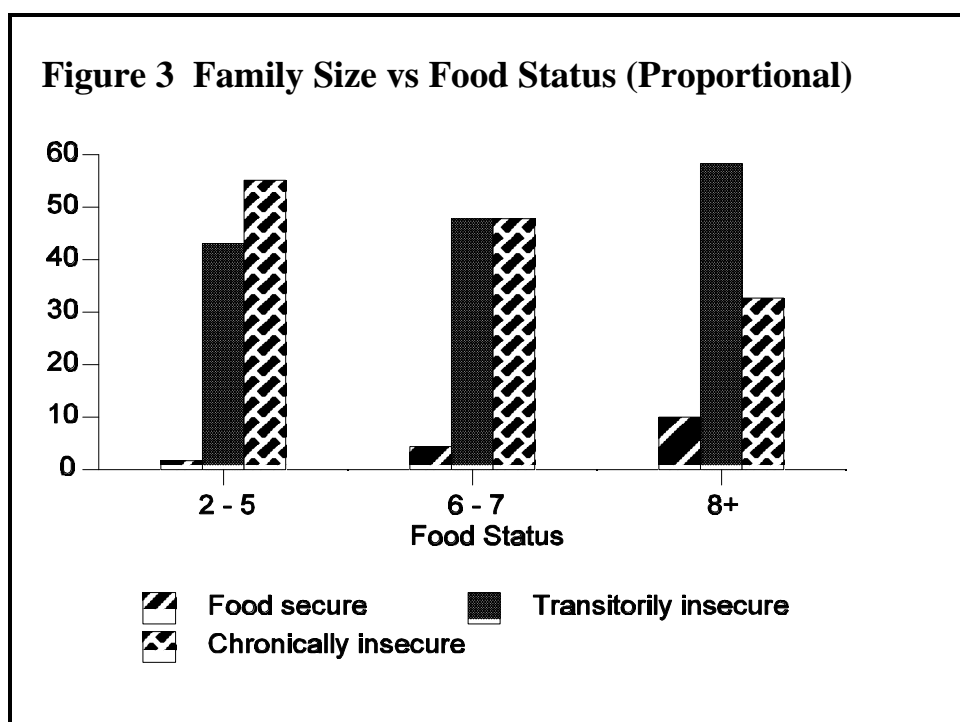
None of these changes is surprising in the context of accelerating demands on labour to make ends meet in the short term, even though the viability of productivity in the long term is further undermined, a danger which people clearly recognize. The first six months of the

year, which are the food shortage months, are also critical for sporadic, but intensive, land preparation. To take maximum advantage of the unpredictable rains, maize is planted as early in the year as possible followed by sweet potato, haricot beans, teff and cotton in the lowlands. If the rains are late or inadequate, there is little to do on farm. But the labour needs to be available should the rainfall be favourable. The coping strategies which are consistent with maintaining present levels of agricultural productivity in Koisha are potentially 'erosive' in the long term and seem to be actually exacerbating the pressures at the household level to increase family size. Over 55% of the households with small family size are chronically insecure. This is not surprising. Both production and marketing are highly labour intensive. In times of food scarcity access to labour becomes even more critical. For poorer households, the periods of food shortage are simultaneously the period of greatest labour demand on all members of the household and the period of lowest household consumption. In these circumstances, smaller households face greater difficulties; households with larger numbers can exploit a wider range of 'coping options', and have the potential to spread their labour resources to cover farming, marketing and other

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Part of the FSP research agenda was to look at the significance of local forms of assistance and support available to households facing difficulties. Sharing of food between relatives and neighbours is widespread and most arrangements for sharing of other resources like livestock and land are also most commonly negotiated between kinsmen or neighbours. However, new forms of institutionalised support seem to be increasing in importance; institutions are proliferating, diversifying and becoming more formalised, perhaps at the expense of traditional norms of reciprocity.

By far, the most common association, to which everyone is said to belong, are the *edir*, which were traditionally burial associations. The cost of funerals can be prohibitive; through the *edir*, regular contributions from members are used to cover the costs of the large feasts culturally required after a death. Only very few households do not belong to *edir* at all, and the majority of households attempt to have membership of many different *edir* along with other similar savings and credit institutions like Shufo, Mehaber and Banke. Pankhurst suggests that, although each has its own particular characteristics, what is surprising is the plethora of societies to which individuals and households try to belong. "All these separate institutions are becoming more and more indistinguishable from one another. In particular they all lend money; they consist of a social grouping, generally rotating both the place at which the event takes place and the beneficiary of the separate individual contributions.

Administrative and organisational structures are almost identical, and they generally show the same pattern of organisation and growth. Finally, their religious dimension is becoming more visible."

Membership of these associations does not come cheap, yet clearly people consider the expense worthwhile. Membership provides individuals and households with an instant reliable social group to which they unequivocally belong, a group with formally defined (often to the extent of being written) reciprocal rights and duties, including immediate sources of support, not only in financial terms, but also often in the form of labour for critical activities like housebuilding, harvesting, funeral and wedding preparations etc. It is perhaps not surprising that in a situation of increasing vulnerability for many households, people seem to no longer feel confident of relying exclusively on kinship and clan affiliations, which are by their nature always negotiable and that they are prepared to invest significant sums to guarantee the membership and support of a group, whose rules of behaviour are explicit.

## 1.5 The relief experience of Koisha

In 1984, Wollaita was critically affected by a famine from which the area has never recovered. For at least the past decade, the people of Koisha have faced chronic and seasonal food shortages. For up to five months in every year their most pressing need is for additional food supplies. Vulnerable households express a need for relief food every year, and almost all households need relief in bad seasons. Long-term development work therefore has to be pursued against a background of continuing need for short-term relief assistance. Despite the need, Koisha has been only thinly and inconsistently covered by relief programmes. As elsewhere in Ethiopia, crop assessments are made yearly in order to indicate likely relief requirements. These have proved to be an unreliable basis for planning, and actual relief deliveries have depended more on external factors such as availability of supplies than on need.

The deterioration of the only access road into Koisha has been an additional significant factor in reducing supplies of relief food into the area. In 1992, relief supplies could not reach Bele, the woreda town, and recipients had to walk to the boundary of the woreda. In 1991, relief deliveries were ill-planned and timed and reached the area when the seasonal shortages had ended and the local harvest was just coming onto the market. In most years,

supplies have been inadequate and have reached only a small proportion of the population, leaving most households facing acute problems.

The main road through Koisha, built in the 1970s, is a dry weather earth road which forms part of the national highway network, linking Soddo (the capital of Wollaita and a major town with estimated population of 100,000) and Areka (an important market town) to Bele, Waka and Chida and thence to Jima. It provides the only road access into Koisha from both the Soddo and Waka sides, and thus serves the entire population of Koisha. By 1992, the main road was no longer passable even to 4WD vehicles during heavy rains. Rainfall in Koisha can occur at any time of the year. Heavy vehicles such as food aid and fertiliser trucks could no longer use the road even during dry periods. Very few private or commercial vehicles ventured to make the journey from Soddo to Bele, and those that did charged high rental prices.

Historically there has been little coordination of relief and development initiatives in the woreda, and the lack of communication between agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, involved in the different kinds of activities in the past, has led to serious misunderstandings, duplication of effort and a potential loss of credibility with the local population. For example, past attempts to provide relief assistance to farmers may well have had a negative impact on local food and labour prices at certain periods. Certainly the movement of heavy trucks carrying relief food has been a major factor in the deterioration of the road surface between Soddo and Bele, the only means of access to bigger markets. Relief aid rarely arrives on schedule and consequently has had a low or even negative impact on the coping capacity of vulnerable households during periods of food shortage. The mortality rate and incidence of malnutrition-related diseases continue to increase significantly at these times and reduced consumption and household asset stripping are regularly adopted survival strategies.

## 2. The SOS Sahel FSP

### 2.1 The origins and objectives of the project

SOS Sahel began working in the woreda in 1991 on a programme of agricultural development. The agency views itself as a 'development' NGO and has had little involvement and

experience in the provision of short-term relief. However given the changes in the policy climate in the country and in response to the chronic food insecurity in the project area, it was decided to explore the feasibility of an integrated strategy of relief and development to address the problem of seasonal food insecurity in the project area. It was against this background that the Food Security Project (FSP) was planned in 1992. The FSP was explicitly designed to link a number of issues of vital importance in Koisha. The project included a cash-for-work programme of road rehabilitation and an intensive research component.

## 2.1 The food security project

SOS Sahel had been implementing KRDP (Koisha Rural Development Project) in Koisha for some eighteen months prior to the start of the Food Security Project. Most of the elements of the employment scheme were decided during the planning phase, and in many respects the technical demands of the work and the compatibility of the approach used in the FSP with the ongoing KRDP project determined project design. So, for example, the scale of the employment opportunity was fixed in advance, (about 600 jobs, 200 from each SC) the project was never in a position to scale up and down in response to demand, nor was there the institutional flexibility to use food instead of cash. Nevertheless, in discussions with participants and non-participants the research has tried to focus on certain key issues around which much of the debate relating to employment programmes has centred. The project was financed by Comic Relief and the EC Food Aid Division, channelled through EuronAid, and also benefitted from EC counterpart funds held by the Government of Ethiopia.

The short-term objective of the FSP was to provide an employment programme during the agricultural slack period. This would allow poor families to have access to additional income and so improve their food status. It would also enable rehabilitation of critical infrastructural assets which would improve marketing opportunities for agricultural producers in the area.

In addition to the rehabilitation of the road, the ultimate objective of the project was to provide a sound basis for informing future responses to addressing the problem of seasonal food insecurity in Kindo Koisha:

! through the collection and processing of basic data on such economic phenomena



as asset ownership, production, marketing, income, consumption and other factors that have a bearing on food security, to ascertain the current food security situation in Koisha; and a more effective integration of relief and development initiatives

- ! by building on the experiences gained from the Soddo-Bele road rehabilitation programme, to arrive at some indicative conclusions regarding the feasibility of employment programmes as an appropriate mechanism to address the food problem effectively.

The project began immediately after the main 1992 rainy season (October) in Koisha, with a programme of major road repairs using local labour from the woreda. During these months planned for road construction, there is food available in the local markets and prices are relatively low. Additional cash income at this time, when household expenditures are at their highest, should have allowed farmers to retain more of their own food harvest for consumption during the hungry season when food is not readily available in the market and prices are high.

Local researchers living in the communities which provided the labour for the road rehabilitation examined in detail the ways in which different households participated in the programme, the impact on inter and intra household spending and consumption, and the effect of the project inputs on the local economy. It was assumed the direct benefits resulting from the project would be an enhancement of household income both in the short and the long term, and an improvement in the food security situation of the most vulnerable groups.

Fieldwork began in December 1992 with communities (over 5000 households) who were involved in providing labour for work on the road rehabilitation. Some preliminary findings were discussed at a workshop with farmers, project staff and local government representatives in Koisha in June 1993, further work was carried out between June and December 1993 and additional issues were raised at a national workshop in March 1994 in Awassa. During the research, a number of different methodologies were used - household surveys, formal questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews, PRA exercises and oral histories. The research design was developed on an ongoing basis, rather than being fully elaborated at the outset. This allowed the agenda to develop in response to issues as

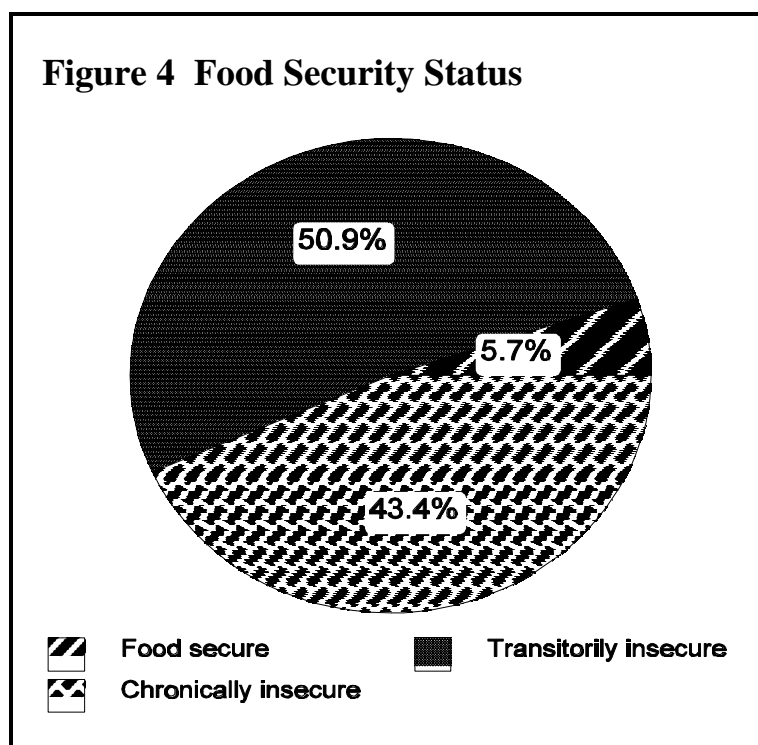
they emerged.

## 2.2 Findings

The FSP research findings indicate that:

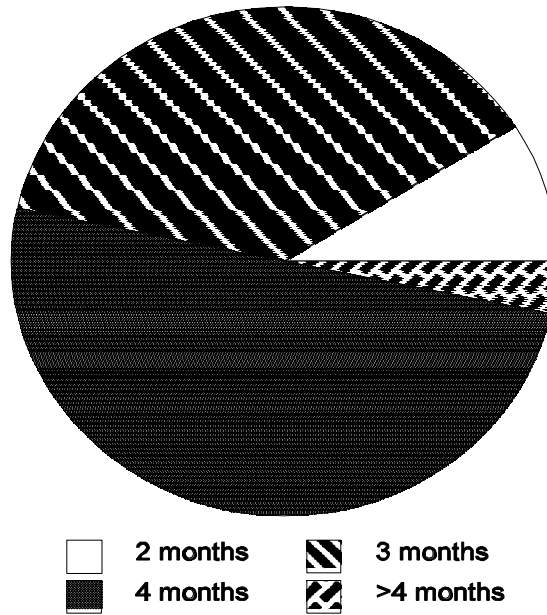
- ! Less than 6% of households in Koisha could be classified as food secure, over 50% experience transitory food problems and over 40% are chronically insecure. The able bodied labour supply and livestock holding of the household are important indicators of vulnerability. In general, small households tend to be more vulnerable.

! Even in a good year 45% of households face food shortages for 3 months or more. In a bad year, 90% of households report food shortages for more than

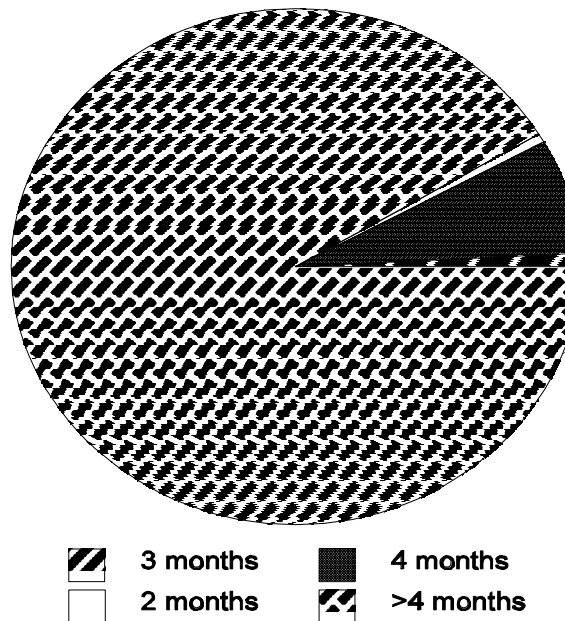


a good year households face food shortages for 4 months and 34% for more than four months. In a bad year, 90% of households face food shortages for more than four months.

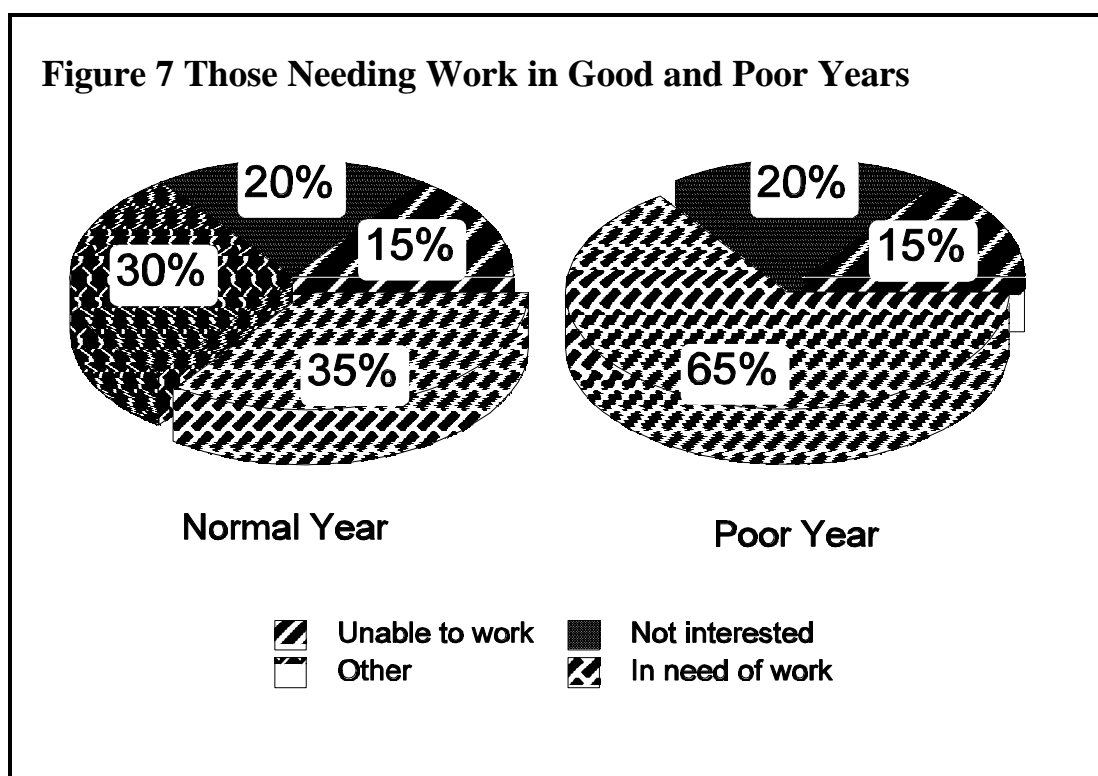
**Figure 5** Duration of Food Shortages in a Normal Year



**Figure 6** Duration of Food Shortages in a Bad Year



- ! Almost all households expect their families to face food shortages every year and attempt to supplement household production with other forms of income generation. Reliable income generating alternatives to agriculture are not available locally. Petty trading is for most households the most important means of supplementing the household food supply. The last resort is cutting of firewood and grass for sale.
- ! In 1992, only 6% of those interviewed managed to find paid employment locally. Yet, despite the high demand for seasonal employment, less than 10% of the sample had sought jobs outside the area; labour is needed on farm throughout the year and manual labour is said to be more important now than in the past due to a shortage of plough oxen.
- ! 15% of households do not have the able-bodied labour necessary to participate in an employment scheme. These households need assistance annually. The bulk of relief assistance for these households is currently provided by relatives and neighbours.
- ! The employment opportunity provided critical cash income for many households. However, in relation to the scale of the needs, the overall impact on food security has been limited. On average 30% of households need work even in a good year. In a bad year the numbers needing work rises to 65%.
- ! In the 21 PAs covered by SOS Sahel, it is estimated that in a good year 4,000 households are in critical need of employment; in a bad year this figure rises to nearly 9,000.



**Table 1 Demand for Work in a Normal and a Poor Year**

SC	Bele	Hanaze	Gale Hamus	Sorto	Gununo	Zamine Nare	Total
A. Total No of HH	1532	2276	3734	2166	1781	1666	13155
B. No of chronic deficit hh @45% av.	689	1024	1680	974	801	749	5917
C. No needing food aid every year @ 15%	229	341	560	324	267	249	1970
<b>D. Potential demand normal year (B-C)</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>683</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>3947 30% of total</b>
E. No of non job seekers @ 20%	306	455	746	433	356	333	2629
F. No of additional jobs in bad year	537	797	1308	759	624	584	4609
<b>G. Total jobs in bad year</b>	<b>997</b>	<b>1480</b>	<b>2428</b>	<b>1409</b>	<b>1158</b>	<b>1084</b>	<b>8556 65% of total</b>

N.B. We have only done these calculations in the SCs covered by SOS Sahel in 1992/93

- Total number of hh needing work in good year: 3947 hh
- Total number of hh needing work in bad year: 8556 hh

- ! In 1992/93 which was a relatively good year in terms of food supply, coverage was only 32% of need. There was moreover no provision for those unable to work. Those who worked earned on average 210 birr (US\$35) over the period. This would have purchased at prevailing prices about 280 kgs of maize, enough for nearly three months food supply.
- ! In 1992/93 dry season, (a very bad year), coverage was 28%, and the average household wage was 75 birr (US\$12.50) which in the context of escalating maize prices would have barely covered one month's food needs. Given that the necessary administrative and management structures were in place SOS Sahel was able to continue with the employment programme through the rainy season as an emergency measure.
- ! Almost all participants claimed that the employment on the road did not interfere with their farm labour requirement because work was finished by midday. The work was carried out over a four month period during a relatively slack time of year; in fact the great majority of interviewees saw a need for employment opportunities lasting for a longer period of up to 6 months per year or even throughout the year.
- ! On the basis of the infrastructural, human and financial resources available, cash-for-work was selected as the mode of payment. No problems were encountered in terms of financial management and accountability. Payments were effected regularly and punctually and correct financial procedures were strictly observed.
- ! The main food crop bought in the market is maize, followed by sweet potato. In a normal year food is available to buy in markets in the project area and grain prices were not affected by the increase in money supply. In bad years food supply, particularly in smaller markets, is unpredictable.
- ! 77% of labourers would have preferred payment in food.

- ! Farmers' preference for payment in kind appears to relate to the fear of losing on the conversion of cash into food and the greater potential liquidity of cash. With cash payments, creditors become more insistent and young unmarried household members are likely to make a smaller contribution to household food supply.
- ! 48% of 1992/93 earnings were spent on food at a time of year which is supposed to be relatively favourable in terms of food security. Debt repayment and clothing were other major items of expenditure.
- ! Over 40 kms of woreda roads were rehabilitated through the activities of the FSP programme. The improvement of the main access road did have immediate economic impact. The flow of both commercial and relief traffic into the woreda significantly increased; transport costs decreased by over 50% and access to markets and services has greatly improved. A regular bus service now operates between Bele and Soddo. The direct economic benefits of the smaller feeder roads is less clear.

### 3. Issues and Implications

#### 3.1 Can an employment programme improve food security?

On the basis of the FSP research results and the practical experience of implementation there are good grounds for pragmatic optimism in terms of the relevance of an employment programme within Koisha. It must be stressed however, that this optimism is based on a combination of factors peculiar to the area.

Firstly, the area is characterised by a high degree of underemployment of agricultural labour all the year round. Underemployment in the agricultural sector is not uncommon and is true for most other areas of Ethiopia. However, what is particular to Koisha and probably Wollaita generally, is the fact that given that rain may fall at any time throughout the year and that when it does cultivation must take place immediately, the productivity of the agricultural system depends on labour being available within the area throughout the year. In other ensete growing areas, Gurage in particular, family sizes are equally large and population is also growing rapidly, but at the household level there has been a significant movement away from reliance on income from agriculture alone and most households rely

for food security as much, if not more, on remittances from urban migrants. In Wollaita this has not happened.

Before the revolution in 1974, seasonal employment opportunities existed on large mechanised farms and within several agro-industrial enterprises. Since employment was seasonal, it could only supplement, not replace, dependence on agriculture. These opportunities are no longer available. The combination of changes in land tenure, recruitment into the army and the decrease in the livestock population seem to have created a situation whereby the need for a reliable source of labour locally has been increasing dramatically since the 1970s. Under these circumstances, households have not been prepared to take the 'risk' of exporting labour to urban centres and elsewhere and the pressure to increase household labour supply to ensure existing levels of agricultural productivity has intensified.

In spite of considerable local agricultural innovation and a massive labour investment, farm sizes are too small to feed most households. As discussed above, the results of the FSP survey on the extent of food shortages in the woreda indicate that, even in a good year, 45% of households face food shortages for at least 4 months. In a bad year, 90% of households reported food shortages for more than four months. Vulnerability in these conditions of endemic food crises on an annual basis is relative. Nearly all households are food insecure even in a good year for at least three months and have to reduce consumption, sell off household assets and divert productive household labour in order to cope. The last resort is begging and the cutting of firewood and grass for sale. The long-term implications of these coping strategies are obvious. Malnutrition-related diseases are prevalent, further reducing the productivity of labour, most households are unable to retain and accumulate productive assets such as livestock and vulnerable households are forced to divert labour from on-farm productive activities at critical times of the year to satisfy basic consumption requirements. The intensified cutting of trees and grass for sale particularly during the hungry season has had an impact on forage resources and soil conservation and significant erosion is observable in many areas.

Under these circumstances, providing effectively targeted support to the most vulnerable and to improve the access of the able bodied to employment would seem to be both urgent and critical. Employment programmes will have little direct impact on the most vulnerable households. At present, the full burden of responsibility for support for these households



is being shouldered by others within the community, further depleting their own scarce resources. It is critical that alternative support for these 'disabled' households takes place in parallel with any employment programme.

*Key finding 1 Can an employment programme improve food security?*

Provided vulnerable households can be effectively targeted, guaranteed employment can make a significant contribution to food security. Nevertheless a significant number of vulnerable households (15%) cannot participate in EGS because they do not have the necessary labour. These households will need alternative forms of support even in a normal year.

### 3.2 Can vulnerable households be targeted effectively and is the mechanism for targeting sustainable?

There are two possibilities for targeting food insecure households. The first is self-targeting, whereby the employment offered is rendered as unattractive as possible, usually by providing very low wages. In this way it is argued only those who really have no employment alternatives will come for the work. The second is administrative targeting, which, as the name implies, identifies food insecure households through administrative instruments, such as means-testing or nutritional criteria. The choice between one or other of the two systems has implications for other aspects of the programme.

At the beginning of the project the self-targeting option was considered very carefully, but finally rejected for a number of reasons. The project had little information relating to local wage rates for unskilled labour or the level of cash needs for subsistence; there was a real fear that the demand even for employment of last resort would prove overwhelming. Finally, project staff felt strongly that utilising community structures to identify vulnerable households would be more palatable to communities than a self-targeting approach paying low wages, and was more consistent with the approach used by KRDP in development work.

A major challenge during implementation of the project was to ensure that the work that was available was provided to those households who most needed it. Through a process of trial and error and continuous participatory review, a recruitment system involving locally-

elected committees has been developed which is now targeting the vulnerable very effectively. The system involves several levels of community representation and the participation of local government development institutions and NGOs. The same structure could also be used to target support to those households who are unable to work. Current levels of community participation and responsibility are impressive and have had additional benefits in that a forum for dialogue and discussion between government, NGO and the community on longer-term issues relating to food insecurity is now established within the woreda and within each participating PA.

One of the major problems with administrative targeting is that the system is open to corruption by powerful local interests and/or there is a real danger of collapse of local institutions under pressure from potential participants. Whether the current elaborate system will be sustainable will depend upon how effectively responsibility for monitoring can be handed over to credible and accountable local institutions, both governmental and non-governmental and the extent to which the political climate, both locally and nationally, remains sympathetic and supportive of the endeavour.

With regard to the replicability of the Koisha structure, there is greater pessimism. Clearly, an NGO project well-resourced in terms of both funding and skilled, motivated staff, with commitment to, and significant training in, community participation, is likely to be less bureaucratic and has a greater capacity for a flexible response to changing conditions and experience. Currently, in terms of targeting, SOS Sahel is playing a facilitating role and also performing an 'audit' function. In the long term, these functions need to be undertaken by local institutions.

A reduced administrative burden is the major advantage of the self-targeting model, whereas the demands of the current system in Koisha are certainly considerable. If the programme is to be scaled up as suggested, and the scope of works widened to include greater participation in identifying other activities in addition to road building, these demands are likely to increase. However, in development terms, increased community involvement in decision-making and an employment programme which responds to local priorities is likely to have greater impact. Self-targeting through payment of a lower than market wage or an increase in work norms was rejected by both project staff and community members in Koisha. In the context of limited and unreliable alternative income generating opportunities, if employment is made unattractive through lowering payments

or increasing work norms, the more vulnerable households with high daily cash requirements and low labour supply, would inevitably lose out in competition with less needy households.

What the Koisha experience does begin to demonstrate is that given a favourable 'political' environment and adequate resources for training and support, and an external audit body in which people have confidence, community groups are perfectly capable of taking on greater administrative and management responsibilities. Self-monitoring mechanisms can be built into the management system to safeguard against corruption. An explicit objective of the next stage of the project in Koisha will be the development of appropriate and credible monitoring structures which do not rely for their legitimacy on the continuing involvement of an international NGO.

*Key finding 2 Can vulnerable households be targeted effectively and is the mechanism for targeting sustainable?*

With appropriate support and training an accountable community can take major responsibility for planning labour recruitment and management of EGS. Effective involvement in this respect will have major development impact.

### 3.3 Can assets created provide long-term benefits?

As indicated previously, there is strong evidence of positive economic impact with the road rehabilitation. Evidence from elsewhere in the country would indicate that yields could be significantly improved through the introduction of appropriate soil and water conservation practices, and more sustainable natural resource management. Certainly in Koisha in the future, emphasis will be primarily in this direction.

To date, there has been virtually no community involvement in the selection of works to be undertaken and mechanisms to ensure effective maintenance are still at the discussion stage. Given the scale of the food deficit in Koisha, employment programmes are likely to continue for some years once established. Yet, if works are limited to public goods to ensure the equitable sharing of benefits, and if labour is employed on the scale that matches the

food need, the problem of a shortage of suitable projects is likely to arise relatively quickly.

It is possible that, with greater community participation in identifying suitable projects, additional ideas will emerge. However, the apparent paucity of suitable projects does beg the question of the feasibility of implementing employment schemes as an income augmentation strategy in the long term. Selection of appropriate projects is far from easy. It is clear from the FSP experience that the administrative and technical demands of the works can often compromise the objectives of providing additional income to those most in need at an appropriate time.

In spite of the problems discussed above, we would suggest that there is still considerable room for manoeuvre and further experimentation, providing effective channels of communication can be developed between community groups and governmental or non-governmental agencies with the necessary resources, and there is scope for ingenuity in creating new opportunities. If the objective of the programme is to develop infrastructural assets which can generate and raise incomes in the long term, it may well be appropriate to reconsider the current restriction to working on public assets only, and to encourage proposals from PAs for smaller projects with the potential to benefit groups of households rather than the entire PA. Certainly this change of emphasis from large scale public works to micro-level planning, presupposes a greater investment in staff, appropriate training and resources to allow for effective community consultation, participation and evaluation. But building institutional capacity is, of course, also a form of asset creation and is a critical prerequisite for development.

*Key finding 3 Can assets created provide long-term benefits?*

Participation in planning and in selection of works will be a critical factor in ensuring asset creation has long-term benefits.

### 3.4 What are realistic costs?

Total expenditure on the road building component of the FSP over two years was 552,186 birr (US\$92,031). Wage costs amounted to 44% of the total. The major item of non-wage expenditure was machinery hire in Year One. The costs do not include other support costs

from KRDP and SOS Sahel London, which have been estimated at 15%. Once these costs are included the total expenditure rises to 636,014 birr (US\$106,002), reducing the proportion of wage costs to 38% of the total. There were considerable differences in the proportion of wage to non-wage costs in Years One and Two, primarily because of the heavy expenditure on machinery in year one. Even including the 15% SOS Sahel support costs in 1993/94, wage costs were 59% of total costs. On the basis of experience in 1993/94 the project in future will be aiming for a proportion of 60% wage to 40% non-wage costs.

Table 2 Total costs for FSP road component over two years

	Total Cost in Birr	Total Cost in US\$	% of total
Labour	240,906	40,151	44
Machinery	211,161	35,194	38
Administration	73,683	12,281	13
Materials	26,436	4,406	5
Total	552,186	92,031	100
SOS Sahel support cost at 15%	82,828	13,805	
New Total	635,014	105,836	
Wage costs	240,906	40,151	38
Sub-total of non-wage costs	394,108	65,685	62

There is still very limited experience in Ethiopia of using cash payments as opposed to food-

for-work. The majority of participants on the road work expressed a preference for food. Nevertheless, in spite of farmers' preferences, to avoid potential disincentives, and from an administrative and financial point of view, continuing with cash payments is justified, provided that markets are carefully monitored to ensure parity with a food wage and to watch for excessive inflation as a result of the increase in money supply. On purely economic grounds the advantages of using cash as payment are obvious (see Box 3). Ideally, strategies for market intervention should be explored rather than resorting to direct food payments. However, this would demand great caution and a level of administrative and planning support which was not available to the FSP project.

Farmers face serious difficulties in transporting grain from distribution centres to their homes, and often have to sell some grain immediately to traders. Unless recipients are very close to distribution sites, a minimum of two kgs of food will be sold to pay for transporting the relief home. Some beneficiaries in the 1994 relief programme were forced to pay up to half their ration in transport. Very few

## Box 3

*FSP Project Statistics*

	1992/93 (good year)	1993/94 (bad year)
Total number of PAs in Koisha woreda	36	
Total number of PAs in SOS project area	21	
Total number of HH	13155	
Number of PAs covered by FSP	10	13
Total number of HH	5479	7145
No of HH needing work	1643 (30%)	4644 (65%)
Number of participating households	681	1302
Number of days worked	47452mds	32850*
Average person days worked per HH	70days	25days
Average hh wage (in birr)	210	75
Food equivalent @.75birr per kg '93 prices	280kgs	
Food equivalent @1birr per kg '94 prices		75kgs*
Total cost of programme inc. 15% support costs	467242 birr	167772
Cost per Km (in birr)	13906	11184
Total cost per manday (in birr)	9.8	5.1
Nonwage cost per manday (in birr)	6.8b**	2.1
Equivalent requirement in food aid @ 3 kgs per md	142357	98549
Equivalent wage bill in food aid @ 1.3USD per 3kg	308440	213525
FSP wage bill	142357	98549b***

\* Given that the emergency programme followed on immediately after the FSP programme, participating households will in fact have earned much more in 1994.

\*\* Due largely to 50% machinery costs in 92/93 programme.

\*\*\* Sterling equivalent @ 10 birr to £1 therefore comparative wage costs for year one and two would be in food aid £52196 and in cash £24090. Paying wages in cash therefore would appear to represent a saving of over 50%.

households in Koisha own pack animals (donkeys and mules); these are brought in by merchants from Soddo and high rates are charged. Many of the relief beneficiaries will also sell some of their food to buy other necessary items of household consumption or to pay back loans. The research findings suggest that about half the food aid is sold either immediately or within a month and grain prices fall when relief food has been distributed in the area. There are good reasons to continue with cash payments therefore, even in a context of food shortages.

In Koisha, we are proposing an employment programme as an additional input alongside ongoing development activities, and are also arguing for an alternative form of support to vulnerable households without able-bodied labour. This is by no means an economy measure, which to some extent is the rationale underlying the whole relief/development debate. If donors were to be flexible and allowed the use of cash wherever possible both for wages and for local purchase, the costs of implementing employment programmes, even including the non-wage costs could be kept to a minimum. It is difficult to accurately compare costs of cash-for-work programmes with those conventional relief operations, since relief figures tend to exclude many hidden costs to donors, such as administrative overheads.

*Key finding 4            What are realistic costs?*

Initially the costs of implementation are likely to be significantly higher than conventional relief. However, the use of cash payments and local purchase could significantly reduce costs.



**Box 4**

**Costing Relief Safety Nets**

In our experience in costing safety nets, consideration of the following is needed:

**1. Free food costs**

Support to vulnerable households unable to participate in employment opportunities. The most effective way of determining the size of this group is through discussion at the PA level.

**2. Wage bill**

This will vary in good and bad years and should be calculated on the basis of number of able bodied households which are chronically insecure even in a good year and expanded to accommodate those households who are transitorily insecure and who will need work in a bad year. Again the most reliable way of identifying these groups is through discussions at the PA level. PRA techniques provide a useful methodology in this respect.

**3. Non-wage costs**

*Pre-planning*

- i) Training. Given the current lack of institutional capacity this is likely to be a heavy initial investment and should include appropriate training in community participation techniques and management training for community representatives. However, it is worth stressing that this investment will reinforce ongoing development work, and these costs should properly be covered from development budgets.
- ii) Technical assistance. E.g. road and site surveys, accounting, community development work, nutrition surveys.

*Implementation*

- i) Materials. Tools, machinery if necessary.
- ii) Other resources, transport, office equipment etc.
- iii) Management costs adequate to allow for effective participatory monitoring and evaluation. These costs again should be covered by development budgets.
- iv) Technical supervision and support costs.

## Box 4 (continued)

*Research and evaluation*

At this stage when there are limited relevant experiences to draw from in the country, it will be important to allocate enough resources to ensure project experience is well documented and critically evaluated by all participants, and that findings are widely disseminated. An important area for research will be clearer understanding of the local food security situation in different areas and the implications of household coping mechanisms on household labour supply.

### 3.5 Can employment schemes provide a useful mechanism to link relief and development?

It is clear that long-term household food security in Koisha will not result from improvements in agricultural productivity alone: alternative income generating opportunities are critical to complement agriculture. The objective of the employment scheme in Koisha must be not only to provide a reliable supplement to existing coping strategies, but also to develop infrastructural assets which can generate and raise incomes in the long term. Whether this will be possible has yet to be tested.

The logic of a relevant employment programme in Koisha is clearly quite different from that which is advocated in the Disaster Management Policy. In terms of current thinking, employment schemes are seen as short-term measures to be implemented prior to, and during, an emergency food crisis as an alternative to relief distributions.

Certainly from the Koisha experience, it is our conviction that it would be unrealistic at this stage to imagine that even a small programme can be started up from nothing within an emergency context and then reduced to nothing once the crisis is over, even if a shelf of appropriate projects were to be ready and waiting and the necessary technical skills were available at the local level.

If these programmes really are going to be effective in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, sensitive planning needs to be followed by careful monitoring and flexible management and objectives need to be very clear. We suggested earlier that the Koisha experience indicates that effective community participation in planning and

implementation, almost by definition, presupposes a higher wage rate and an administrative approach to targeting the vulnerable. But genuine community participation is a process that takes time to establish. Furthermore, once suitable projects are identified with communities it is unlikely that food insecure groups will allow these projects to be left 'on the shelf'; the pressure to move to implementation will be intense. Even if the self-targeting option is used, given that in food deficit woredas, there will be large numbers of households who are chronically insecure even in a good year, once started it is unlikely that demand for work will cease once the emergency is over.

Realistically then, in order to have any significant impact and to justify the essential inputs in terms of training and resources, an employment scheme is a medium- to long-term investment. It is probably necessary for employment programmes to close down annually during peak periods of demand for agricultural labour to avoid competing with agriculture for labour and, if adequate early warning information and local planning and institutional capacity is in place, it would be feasible to scale up and down in good and bad years.

On the basis of the two years of the FSP programme in Koisha, we would not want to claim that employment programmes are the panacea for bridging the relief and development gap. A political and bureaucratic environment that allows for a flexible response at the local level, a reliable mechanism for relief for those unable to work and a coherent long-term development strategy will be critical, if such programmes are to have a chance of any meaningful impact on food security. The real challenge will be integrating these initiatives with development activities which promote sustainable economic growth, and ensuring that responsibility is appropriately shared between government and non government institutions.

The FSP experience has only begun to answer some of the practical questions that have arisen and will continue to be raised through the process of implementation and development of the employment programme.

Nevertheless, there is enough confidence within SOS Sahel to pursue a strategy over the next few years of expanding both the scale and the kind of works covered with progressive devolution of responsibility to local governmental and non-governmental institutions in terms of planning and implementation.

However, this will only be feasible if the political climate remains favourable to effective

collaboration, and adequate resources allow effective participatory evaluation of progress with the beneficiary groups on an ongoing basis and the option of a flexible response at the local level. This also implies a continued commitment on the part of both government and donors to continue to develop locally appropriate alternatives to conventional forms of famine relief which are more consistent with longer term development efforts.

*Key finding 5 Can employment schemes provide a useful mechanism to link relief and development?*

It is unrealistic to expect EGS to provide a critical linkage between relief and development if these programmes are seen only as a short-term disaster management measure in food deficit area. To be effective as a mechanism for addressing chronic food insecurity, these programmes need to be longer-term programmes fully integrated into ongoing development activities.

#### 4. Conclusion

While we are optimistic that employment schemes have the potential to function as an important interim measure, their implementation depends on the availability of external resources. Employment schemes cannot be the only solution for food deficit areas. In the longer term, food security will depend on sustainable agricultural, economic growth and an equitable distribution of the benefits. Although recent policy changes have improved conditions to some extent for the poor, the impact has been limited. The reality is that for millions of households in Ethiopia today, food security depends on the amount of rain which falls and the amount of relief food which comes from abroad. The ingenuity of poor peoples' responses are increasingly exhausted. There have to be other solutions.

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## Acronyms

CFW	Cash-for-work
EBSN	Employment based safety net
EC	European Commission
FFW	Food-for-work
FSP	Food Security Project (SOS Sahel)
ILO	International Labour Office
KRDP	Koisha Rural Development Project (SOS Sahel)
LLPP	Local Level Participatory Planning
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MCH	Mother Child Health
MNRDEP	Ministry of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
NDPPC	National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee
NDPPS	National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPDPMP	National Programme for Disaster Prevention Preparedness and Mitigation
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (British Government)
PA	Peasant Association (lowest administrative unit of the Ethiopian Government)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RA	Research Assistant
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
RRB	Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SC	Service Cooperative
SWC	Soil and water conservation
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WADU	Wellaita Agricultural Development Unit
WFP	World Food Programme

## Relief and Rehabilitation Network

The objective of the Relief and Rehabilitation Network (RRN) is to facilitate the exchange of professional information and experience between the personnel of NGOs and other agencies involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation assistance. Members of the Network are either nominated by their agency or may apply on an individual basis. Each year, RRN members receive four mailings in either English or French. A Newsletter and Network Papers are mailed to members every March and September and Good Practice Reviews on topics in the relief and rehabilitation field every June and December. In addition, RRN members are able to obtain advice on technical and operational problems they are facing from the RRN staff in London. A modest charge is made for membership with rates varying in the case of agency-nominated members depending on the type of agency.

The RRN is operated by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in conjunction with the European Association of Non-Governmental Organisations for Food Aid and Emergency Relief (EuronAid). ODI is an independent centre for development research and a forum for policy discussion on issues affecting economic relations between the North and South and social and economic policies within developing countries. EuronAid provides logistics and financing services to NGOs using EC food aid in their relief and development programmes. It has 25 member agencies and four with observer status. Its offices are located in the Hague.

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