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An Assessment of Rural Poverty: The Case of Selected Kebeles of Shashemane Woreda, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the three dimensions of rural poverty: deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability, and household coping mechanism in the case of selected kebeles of Shashemane woreda in a micro-level perspective. Each of these dimensions are examined individually, and it is shown that the complexity of poverty emerges from the interplay of all the three. The study area is found to be impoverished in all the three dimensions and have employed weak and temporary coping mechanisms. The result of this rural poverty assessment clearly indicates that poverty needs to be understood in a multifaceted manner and its interventions need to focus on the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Effective and appropriate interventions, such as improved access to basic services, social protection, participation, empowerment, integration, better access to productive resources, and expanded and diversified livelihood opportunities are indispensable conditions to alleviate the multi-dimensional domains of poverty.

Key Words: Rural Poverty, Deprivation, Exclusion, Vulnerability

BACKGROUND

Poverty is defined as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The first dimension is material deprivation, measured by an appropriate concept of income or consumption. The second dimension is low achievement in education and health (low capabilities). The third and fourth dimensions of poverty are vulnerability (exposure to risk or low level of security) and voicelessness. An estimated 2.5 billion of the 3 billion rural inhabitants are involved in agriculture, 1.5 billion of them living in smallholder households and 800 million of them working in smallholder households. Furthermore, in most parts of the world, poverty remains mainly a rural and agricultural phenomenon so that most of the poor depend on the rural sector for their livelihoods. The large and persistent gap between agriculture's shares in GDP and employment suggests that poverty is concentrated in agriculture and rural areas and that as nonagricultural growth accelerates, many of the rural poor are likely to remain poor. The Human Development Index (HDI) for SSA countries is the lowest among all developing countries. In 2004, the HDI of SSA stood at 0.472, compared to 0.599 for South Asia and 0.795 for Latin America and the Caribbean Countries (Regional Development Dialogue (RDD), 2007).

Statement of the Problem

An increasing proportion of Ethiopian population became vulnerable to food shortage in the years 2000, 2002, and 2003; and correspondingly 10.3%, 16% and 21% of the country's population needed food aid during the respective years (Degefa, 2005). Attempts to accelerate macroeconomic growth over the last decade did not bring about observable changes in the social indicators, which reflect deteriorating living standards and widespread poverty. The benefits of growth have not been adequately shared by the majority of the population. Household food insecurity and low agricultural productivity continue to persist. Employment opportunities remain limited and labor incomes are low

compared to the high cost of living. Heavy reliance on the agricultural sector, as emphasized in the development strategy of the government, could not sustain rural employment with the limited labor absorption capacity and low productivity. Although, for several decades, poverty has been a big challenge for the country, serious academic research focusing on the matter seems quite scanty and scattered. An effort on the part of government to obtain comprehensive and reliable data on poverty to help address the issue started relatively recently. The present study will explore the three dimensions of rural poverty: deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability, and household coping mechanism in the case of selected kebeles of Shashemane woreda.

Objectives

- To explore the extent of rural poverty in the dimension of deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability, and household coping mechanism in the case of selected kebeles of Shashemane woreda

METHODOLOGY

Primary data was collected by structured and semi-structured questionnaires to generate quantitative and qualitative information. A structured household survey method was employed for primary data collection on the three dimensions of poverty, deprivation, vulnerability and exclusion, and household perception on determinants of rural poverty and coping mechanisms. Secondary data included studies and assessments conducted in the region and documents on the current national and regional policies.

The research strategies employed in this study has combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. Cross-sectional to approximate longitudinal research design was used to collect primary data. The household is the unit of observation and unit of analysis as household surveys are essential for the analysis of welfare distribution and poverty characteristics. Out of the total 42 kebeles in the woreda, ten kebeles were identified as predominantly poverty (recurrent drought) affected areas. Out of these ten kebeles, two kebeles were selected using random sampling for the survey. For the representative household survey, out of the total population of 1577 households in the selected kebeles, a total of 157 households were chosen for the study, which is around 10% of the total households in the selected kebeles. A random sampling technique was employed to select the household to be included in the sample. Since the kebeles do not have the same number of households, the random sampling technique with probability proportional to size was employed to draw the sample units from each selected kebele. The sampling frame for the study was the complete list of households in the selected kebeles obtained from kebele office. The distribution of the sample units to each selected kebele was calculated based on probabilities to size, i.e., the ratio of the number of households in each selected kebele to the total number of households in all the selected kebele. Out of 157 households which were included in the study, 23.56% (37 households) were female-headed households.

The important measures poverty is the Headcount Index, the Poverty Gap Index, and the Severity of Poverty Index. In this study, the Foster-Greer and Thorbecke (FGT) model of poverty index is employed to compute the incidence, depth, and severity of rural poverty. To assess the vulnerability dimension of poverty, a number of questions were forwarded to the households related to shocks and their coping mechanisms in the last ten years. The poverty line was constructed using the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) approach. This poverty line is set by computing the cost of the food basket at regional prices. The minimum requirement of 2,200 Kcal per adult per day is used for the study. Allowance was given to

the non-food component to estimate the total poverty line by dividing the food poverty line by the average food share for households that enabled a food consumption level equal to food poverty line.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the case of basic human needs, deprivation is conceived as inadequate fulfillment of a number of different basic needs relating to nutrition, health, education, shelter, water, sanitation, etc. (Shaffer, 2008). Social exclusion has been defined as the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live. Social exclusion framework reinforces the understanding of poverty as capability deprivation. Vulnerability is defined as the likelihood of falling into poverty and is a function of two main variables; exposure and response to downward pressures. Risk relates to events possibly occurring beyond the direct control of individuals and households.

There are different approaches to determine the poverty line. To compute the absolute poverty line, two methods have been used in developing countries: Food Energy Intake (FEI) and the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) methods. Both methods are anchored in a daily nutritional requirement, but they differ in the procedures used to estimate the resources needed to meet this requirement. The common method of constructing the absolute poverty line is the CBN approach. Under the FEI method, poverty lines are set by computing the level of consumption or income, at which households are expected to satisfy the predetermined normative nutritional requirement of 2,200 calories. Under the CBN method, poverty lines are set by computing the cost of the food basket at regional prices. Relative poverty, in simple terms, means having less than others. It is based on the concept of poverty as a state of relative deprivation, taking into account the general level of welfare in the society. The procedure involves disaggregating the population into various income or expenditure (on any preferred wellbeing indicator) percentiles and then, subjectively labeling the lowest 'x' percentage of the population as the poor. Subjective poverty lines are based on asking people what minimum income level is needed in order to just make both ends meet. Once the appropriate poverty line is constructed, the next step is to obtain the aggregate measures of poverty. The earliest and, perhaps, the most popular measure of poverty is the head count ratio (P_0), which is simply the ratio of the number of the poor, defined in a certain way, to the total population in a community. The head count index measures the proportion of the population falling below the poverty line. Later on, the poverty gap (P_1), or total income shortfall to eradicate poverty was suggested. P_1 is an index that measures the extent to which the income of the poor lie below the poverty line. Head count ratio remains invariant to any changes occurring in the income of individuals below the poverty line. That is, it does not respond to the relative deprivation of the poor and the poverty gap is insensitive to income transfers of equal magnitude occurring among the poor. Another index that has been developed is the Foster, Greer and Thorbecke (FGT) poverty index. The FGT poverty index (P_α) is expressed as:

$$P_\alpha = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{q}(z - x_i / z)^\alpha$$

Where n is the total population, z is poverty line, x_i is income or consumption expenditure of household i, q is the number of the poor, and α is the poverty aversion parameter ($\alpha \geq 0$). The commonly used values of α are 0, 1, and 2. When we set α equal to 0, then (1) it is reduced to the headcount ratio, which measures the incidence of poverty. When α is equal to 1, we obtain P_1, or the poverty deficit. P_1 takes into account how far the poor, on average, are below the poverty line.

Setting α equal to 2 gives the severity of poverty, or FGT (2) index. This poverty index gives greater emphasis to the poorest of the poor, as it is more sensitive to redistribution among the poor. In this study, the Foster-Greer and Thorbecke (FGT) model of poverty index is employed to compute the incidence, depth, and severity of rural poverty. The poverty line was constructed using Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) approach.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Household Characteristics

Table 1.1: Dependency ratio

Age(Group years)	In number	In %age
0-14	437	44.2
14-63	531	53.6
> 64	22	2.2
Total	990	100
Dependency ratio		**86.56%**

Source: Own survey (2009)

Table1.1 shows the dependency ratio, which is defined as a quotient between the sum of the population between the ages of 0 to 14 years and 64 years and above (population assumed to be not economically productive) to the population in the working age group (15 to 65 years). This ratio is usually expressed in percentage terms. The total dependency ratio is computed to be 86.56, implying that in the selected intervention areas, every 100 persons in the economically productive age has to support themselves as well as an additional 86.56 persons for their livelihood.

Table 1.2: Household size

Household size	In number	Percentage	Household size in Adult equivalent unit	In number	Percentage
2 – 4	46	29.3	1.64 - 3.5	42	26.8
5 – 8	82	52.2	3.5 - 5.5	53	33.8
9 -12	24	15.3	5.5 - 8.0	41	26.1
13 -15	3	1.9	8.0 - 11.5	16	10.2
>15	2	1.3	> 11.5	5	3.2
Total	157	100		157	100
Min.=2 Max.=19 Mean= 6.31 Mode= 5 S.D= 2.875			Min.=1.64 Max.=18.28 Mean= 5.357 Mode= 2.67 S.D= 2.67		

Source: Own survey (2009)

Table 1.2 shows that the average household size for the sampled households is about 6.3, which is a high number compared to the national level magnitude of 4.8 and 5.2 for Oromia Regional State (CSA, 2007). The majority of households (66.3%) have household size of 5 to 12 members. The adult equivalent household size was found to be 5.3.

Poverty Lines of Kerara Filicha and Jelo Didda kebeles

In this study, poverty is defined in terms of a poverty line and the Cost of Basic Needs Approach is used to estimate the poverty line. A food poverty line is constructed by valuing a bundle of food items providing 2,200 Kcal. A specific value for this basket is obtained from the regional market and the least price of the items was used. Then consumption per household was rescaled to take into account the household size and composition. World Health Organization (WHO) conversion codes, adopted by Dercon and Krishnan (1998), were used to convert household members of different ages and sexes into adult equivalent unit .To the value of the food poverty line, an estimated non-food share is added to obtain the total consumption poverty line per day per adult.

Table 1.3.: Food Basket that gives 2200 KCAL per adult per month for cereal based farming in rural areas of Ethiopia

Sr. No.	Food items	Quantity	Unit price	Total cost in Ethiopian birr(ETB)
1.	**Cereals (in Kg)**			
1.1	Teff	1.63	8.00	13.04
1.2	Wheat	4.24	3.75	15.90
1.3	Maize	3.82	3.10	11.84
1.4	Millet	4.53	3.80	17.21
2.	**Pulses (in Kg)**			
2.1	Lentils	0.35	7.00	2.45
2.2	Horse beans	1.84	5.70	10.48
2.3	Cow Peas/Grass Pea	0.35	6.00	2.1
2.4	Chick peas	0.71	6.20	4.40
2.5	Shiro (Bean Powder)	0.92	6.00	5.52
3.	**Vegetables (in Kg)**			
3.1	Cabbage	0.21	1.50	0.32
3.2	Onion	0.35	3.70	1.29
4.	**Root Crops (in Kg)**			
4.1	Potato	0.14	2.60	0.36
5.	**Other Food Items**			
5.1	Milk (lt)	0.49	3.00	1.47
5.2	Coffee (Kg)	0.57	18.00	10.26
5.3	Sugar (Kg)	0.14	10.00	1.40
5.4	Salt (Kg)	1.20	3.00	3.60
5.5	Cooking Oil (lt)	0.28	15.00	4.20
5.6	Chilies (Kg)	0.85	14.00	11.9
5.7	Bread (Kg)	0.14	3.75	0.53
Food Poverty Line Per Adult Per month				118.28
Food Poverty Line Per Adult Per annum				1419.36
Total Poverty line Per Adult per month				149.80
Total Poverty line Per Adult per annum				1796.1

Source: Adapted from (Dercon & Mekonnen, 1999, cited in Metalign, 2005)

The value of the non-food share at the poverty line can then be interpreted as representing the absolute minimum basic needs in terms of non-food items, for which households should be compensated, on top of the minimum food requirement. The resulting food share at the poverty line is 73.4% on average. It means that people of the study area allocate 73.4% of their total consumption expenditure to food items and 22.6% of their total expenditure is devoted to non-food commodities, like clothing, educational, health services, etc.

The food poverty line for the study area is found to be 188.28 ETB per adult per month, which is equivalent to 1419.36 ETB per adult per year. The food poverty line for the study area is more than double of the national food poverty line of ETB 647.81 per adult per year (MoFED, 2006), based on a basket of food items that provide 2,200 Kcal per adult per month in 2004/05 prices. Moreover, the total poverty line is 1796.91 ETB per year, which is higher than the national poverty line of 1075.03 ETB (MoFED, 2006).

Poverty Indices of Kerara Filicha and Jelo Didda Kebeles

The total and food poverty lines were applied to per adult household consumption expenditure using FGT model to compute the head count, poverty gap, and squared gap indices of total poverty and food poverty, respectively. The study area head count index of 0.79 is higher than the 2004/05 national index of 0.387 and rural index of 0.393 (MoFED, 2006). The food poverty line determines that more than fifty percent of the households in the study area live below the poverty line.

The poverty gap indexes for the study area were 0.2834 and 0.1705, respectively, for total poverty and food poverty. This means that if the country could mobilize resources equal to the 28.34% and 17.05% of the total poverty line and food poverty line, respectively, for every individual and distribute these resources to the poor, which is the amount needed to bring each individual up to the poverty line, then theoretically, poverty could be eliminated. The total gap of 0.2834 is significantly higher compared to the national and rural average of 0.038 for 2004/05 (MoFED, 2006)

To construct a measure of poverty that takes into account inequality among the poor, the squared poverty gap, or the poverty severity index was used, which gives weight for those households further away from the poverty line. The total and food poverty severity indices were found to be 0.129 and 0.0622, respectively, for the study area. These figures are slightly higher than the national rural poverty severity index of 0.085 and rural food poverty severity index of 0.049 (MoFED, 2006).

Table 1.5: Incidence (P0), Depth (P1) and Severity (P2) of Rural Poverty in Kerara Filicha and Jelo Didda kebeles, 2009

Item	Head count index (P_0)	Poverty gap index (P_1)	Poverty severity index (P_2)
Total poverty	0.796	0.2834	0.1290
Food poverty	0.586	0.1705	0.0622

Source: Own survey (2009)

Expenditure

Real annual expenditure of the study area was found to be 1,188.7 ETB, which is slightly higher than the national rural consumption expenditure per capita of 1147 ETB in 2004/2005. The real annual total expenditure (consumption) per adult of the study area was found to be 1,412.22 ETB, which is close to the national rural real annual total expenditure per adult of 2004/05 (MoFED, 2006).

Table 1.6.: Annual Mean households' consumption expenditure for the Kerara Filicha and Jelo Didda kebeles

Item	Mean in ETB
Real annual total expenditure	1,188.77
Real annual food expenditure	900.02
Real annual total expenditure (consumption) per adult	1,412.22
Real annual food expenditure per adult	1,071.00
Household size	6.3
Adult equivalent household size	5.35

Source: Own survey (2009)

Exclusion Dimension

There are severe social consequences to be experienced when someone is extremely impoverished. In this regard, the household survey disclosed that out of the total respondents, 92.4% (145) reported that they participate in different social and religious ceremonies, while the remaining 7.6% of households do not participate in social affairs like iddir, mahiber and ikub. On the other hand, 91%, 28%, and 20.4% of households belong to iddir, mahiber, and ikub, respectively.

Table 1.7.: Household response on participation in social and religious ceremonies (affairs)

Categories	Participate in social and religious ceremonies (affairs)	Participate in Iddir[1]	Participate in Mahiber[2]	Participate in Ikub[3]
Participate	145	144	44	32
Do not participate	12	13	113	125
Total	**157**	**157**	**157**	**157**

Source: Own survey (2009)

Furthermore, in both kebeles, the local leaders stated that the landless and the young married couples are not taking part in social events, like iddirs and mahiber, as they cannot afford the high costs of participation. Therefore, the poorest of the poor are not full participants in social interactions

To conclude, the findings of the household survey showed that 8.3% (13) of the respondents reported being marginalized or excluded from social services. Similarly, only 5.7% (9) respondents felt that they are left out from active participation of community life. These respondents stated poverty or lack of income as main reason for social exclusion.

Table 1.8.: Household response on exclusion

Category	In Number	In %age	Category	In Number	In %age
Not excluded	144	91.7	Not left out	148	94.3
Excluded	13	8.3	Left out	9	5.7
Total	157	100	Total	157	100

Source: Own survey (2009)

Exclusion, based on religion and ethnic background, seems to be almost nonexistent since the community is predominantly from one ethnic group and religion, Oromo and Muslim, respectively.

Vulnerability Dimension

The vulnerability dimension of poverty has two aspects, namely, external threats to the well-being, internal risk management, and coping capability. Therefore, to assess the vulnerability dimension of poverty, a number of questions were forwarded to the households related to shocks and their coping mechanism in the last ten years. The study shows that, among the major shocks encountered, about 96.8% and 88% of the households had suffered from poor harvest due to drought, pests, and diseases in the last ten years. Moreover, around 62% of the households had encountered loss of oxen as a result of livestock diseases. Around one fourth of the households have experienced loss of oxen due to death and distress sales resulting from drought. Nearly fifty percent of the households suffered from loss of livestock (other than oxen) due to diseases. More than three-fourths of the households have reported shocks related to drought, pests, and diseases as causes of poor harvest. Land is the basic asset for agriculture dependent households. Quarter of the households reported that they had transferred land to family members and relatives. Death is another major crisis that the households face. In total, the study depicted that 44% of the households suffered from loss of labor due to a death of husband, wife, or other family members. On an average, half of the respondents experienced loss of labor due to illness of husband, wife, or other members of the family.

. The major shock events for the last ten years are summarized in table 1.9.

Table 1.9.: Major shocks in the study area

Shock types	Year of occurrence	Year of occurrence	Year of occurrence
Drought and food insecurity	2007/08	2006/07	2004/05
Pest or harm worm infestation	2007/08	2001/02	1999
Chicken disease	2005/06		
Anthrax	2006/07	2004/05	
Malnutrition	2007/08		
Acute diarrhea disease	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06
Flood or heavy rain	2007/08	2006/07	2002/03

Source: Own survey (2009)

In the study area, the level of vulnerability was found to be high. Moreover, in a study done in rural Ethiopia over a five-year period (1999-2004) by Dercon, et al. (2007), it was reported that 95% of the households have experienced a shock

that had caused substantial loss of income, assets, or consumption. Of those, 47% of households reported that drought had affected them. The price of agricultural inputs have increased and living expenses are getting higher, whereas, agricultural productivity in the area is declining due to loss soil fertility due to inadequate use of fertilizers, unfavorable climate conditions, distorted market systems, and lack of improved technology. As coping mechanisms, women are cutting trees and selling firewood, which has negative effect on the environment. Given that the community is dependent on rain-fed agriculture, the lack of rain or insufficient rain inevitably disrupts the livelihood system of the area. Even though the households tried to diversify their livelihood system, the vulnerability of the households in the study area has increased from time to time.

Household Coping Mechanisms

For households in drought prone areas, poverty is more acute and widespread and agriculture is less productive and more expensive. One of the immediate consequences of these shocks is food shortage. From the household survey, 88.5% of the respondents have reported that they have faced food shortage in the last twelve months. When households suffered from shocks, they did not remain passive, but employed several coping mechanisms. The first strategy that households follow when they suffer a shock is to minimize risks and manage losses to ensure minimal level of sustenance. The strategy followed by the households was cutting down the number of meals, cutting down the quantity of food in each meal, and looking for food aid as a main coping mechanism. These coping strategies are retreating mechanisms when habitual means of meeting the needs were disrupted.

The nature of the shock has implications on the ability to cope with its consequences. Accordingly, on average, more than two-thirds of the households experienced drought, pests, and livestock diseases and were forced to seek help outside of the households to cope with the crisis. Whereas, on average, around one-third of the households suffered from loss of labor due to death and illness and requested for help outside the households to cope with the crisis. Some of the households turned to non-governmental organizations, individual relatives, and government for help to cope with the shocks, respectively .Besides, 82% of the households responded that they have not yet recovered from the shocks. For the remaining households, on average, it took more than two years to recover to the position they were in before the crisis happened.

The second strategy employed by households in distress was divestment, or the gradual disposal of assets. Food aid, sale of livestock and livestock products, sale of other agricultural products, and sale of household assets were found to be the household coping mechanisms during shocks and crisis.

CONCLUSION

The study illustrates the three dimensions of poverty: deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability, and household coping mechanisms. The study area is found to be impoverished in all three dimensions and the respondents employed weak and temporary coping mechanisms. With regard to deprivation, the study area is found to be the most deprived compared to the national average and other studies. The area is also characterized by low agricultural productivity, food insecurity, limited access to credit, weak saving habit, low level of engagement in non farm activities, limited land, and livestock holding. Regarding the vulnerability dimension of poverty, the study population experienced various forms of shocks. The main forms of shocks are substantial loss of harvest due to drought, pests, and diseases, loss of oxen and other livestock as a result of livestock diseases, loss of labor from death, and illness of husband, wife, or other family members. When households suffered from poverty, they did not remain passive but used several coping mechanisms.

Likewise, the households have developed ex-ante risk managements and ex-post risk coping strategies. Since the coping mechanisms are only stopgap measures, the recovery of the households to the pre-shock position was found to be hard. Accordingly, in the study area, the majority of the households reported that they have not yet recovered form the recent shocks. Poverty is characterized by factors beyond material deprivation, such as exclusion and vulnerability, and needs to be understood in a multifaceted manner. Its interventions need to focus on the multidimensional nature of poverty. Therefore, improved access to basic services, social protection, participation, empowerment, integration, better access to productive resources, and expanded and diversified livelihood opportunities are indispensable to alleviate the multidimensional domains of poverty.

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