

EVOLVING MARKETS, RURAL LIVELIHOODS, AND GENDER RELATIONS: THE VIEW FROM A MILK-SELLING COOPERATIVE IN THE KOFALE DISTRICT OF WEST ARSII, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT The study area for this research was the Kofale District of West Arsii, Ethiopia. The people living in villages in this area depend on their own agricultural products for their livelihoods. This self-reliance is now being supplemented through some exposure to local food markets. Their interactions with local markets, however, are selective. They reserve some products primarily for home consumption, while others are intended partly or mainly for sale. Recently, however, people's market interactions have become more intense, as a consequence of market-oriented government development strategies, and infrastructure improvements resulting in easier access to markets. These external influences have led to a change in the types of items made available for sale. Milk, which has been used by the Arsii Oromo primarily for home consumption, is now being commercialized in the research area. Milk has always constituted a major component of the Arsii Oromo's diet and food culture, and it is one of their most ritually, and nutritionally important food items. Responsibility for milk has traditionally been in the women's domain, and women largely control decisions over its distribution for consumption, transfer as gifts, and accumulation for making butter. These patterns of behavior, however, are apparently changing, owing to rural people's exposure (or access) to emerging markets (particularly via cooperatives), and the market's *modus operandi*. Based on in-depth interviews, and a number of case studies including one of a market-oriented milk cooperative, this paper explores how these evolving markets are affecting the Arsii Oromo's traditional relationship with milk, and how they are affecting rural livelihoods and gender relations in the Kofale District.

Key Words: Development policies; Evolving markets; Gender relations; Kofale District; Rural livelihoods.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the evolving markets, rural livelihoods, and gender relations in the context of state development policies. The rural-agricultural sector has been the focus of development policies for past and present Ethiopian regimes alike, notwithstanding the differential emphasis given to various sub-sectors. There is good reason for this focus on agriculture. In the 1990s, the agricultural sector contributed over 85% of rural employment, 90% of total export earnings, and 40% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Asefa, 1994: 574–575). This sector's continuing contribution to rural employment, export earnings, and the country's GDP remains overwhelming (MARD, 2006). Since a comprehensive review of all past governments' rural development policies is beyond the scope of this paper, I will briefly analyze only the policies of the present government, which came to power in 1991.

The present government's first full-fledged development strategy, initiated in the mid-1990s, was the Agricultural Development-led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy. This strategy aimed to achieve the development of both agricultural and industrial sectors with the former leading the development of the latter. Its major objective, however, was "to enhance the productivity of small farmers and to improve food security both in the rural and urban areas" (Office of the Government Spokesperson, 1998). This objective was to be achieved by improving agricultural productivity, which in turn was to be achieved through the dissemination of agricultural inputs mainly chemical fertilizers and "improved" seeds to farmers by the development agents (DAs).

The strategy had pros and cons, a fuller discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Two important outcomes, however, need to be considered briefly. On the one hand, all available evidence suggests that the strategy increased the volume of production, owing to farmers' access to (and increased use of) agricultural inputs. This raised hopes that food security, mainly in terms of food availability, could be realized in the country. On the other hand, a drastic fall in grain prices threatened realization of the benefits the farmers could have gained from increased production. This was particularly important, as farmers could not cover their costs of production, and struggled to pay off the debts they owed the government, for the inputs they had bought on credit through the agricultural extension program.⁽¹⁾

The government, in its subsequent rural/agricultural development strategies, turned its focus from food security (mainly the production of enough food for domestic consumption), to market development. It is not clear if this sharp turn was based on the assumption that the ADLI had achieved its intended goal of food security, whether it was a reaction to the falling grain prices described above, or whether it was just a belief in the market as an alternative route to development. Whatever the reason may have been, an emphasis on the production of market-demanded products was an explicit goal of the strategy that followed the ADLI, that is, Market-led Agricultural Development (MoI, 2001). The Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), a five-year (2006–2010) development plan for the agricultural sector, also followed a similar path—with its major objective being "accelerating the transformation of peasants' agriculture from subsistence to market-oriented," and "increasing the production of high value-added commodities and promoting the commercialization of agriculture" (MARD, 2006). This objective was to be achieved through the development and promotion of such institutions as micro-financing and cooperatives, which could facilitate farmers' access to credit services, and promote saving, both to increase agricultural productivity and the marketing of products (MARD, 2006: 56).

The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), which is the latest plan produced in the series of the current government's development plans, continues this emphasis on commercialization of agriculture:

The agricultural strategy will direct on placing major effort to support the intensification of marketable farm products—both for domestic and export markets, and by small and large farmers. Fundamentals of the

strategy include the shift to produce high value crops, a special focus on high-potential areas, facilitating the commercialization of agriculture, [...]. The commercialization of smallholder farming will continue to be the major source of agricultural growth (MoFED, 2010: 8).

As has become apparent from the above discussions, there has been a shift in policy direction, from the earlier focus on increasing the production of agricultural products with the aim of achieving food security, to the revised objective of increasing the production of agricultural products with the aim of selling them at the market, in exchange for cash income. Notions of “income and high-value products” tend to dominate the content of the most recent development plan, the GTP. It appears that the issues of “distribution and consumption” are not well integrated (e.g., DeWalt & Barkin, 1991) into the agricultural commercialization endeavor. This policy objective, namely improving cash incomes through the commercialization of agriculture, does not seem based on an objective prioritization of this approach, over attempts to improve home consumption. Nor does improving home consumption necessarily follow as a logical sequence, because (or when) the earning cash income is improved. Seasonal food insecurity often faced by cash crop producing communities in the different corners of the country is a good example that high cash income from a certain agricultural product may not necessarily guarantee sustainable food supply for home consumption.

It appears that earning larger cash incomes appeals strongly to policy makers in developing countries for various reasons. First, particularly in Africa, income is used to calculate the country’s GDP, which in turn serves as a development indicator for economic growth (e.g., Jerven, 2009). The expectation that cash incomes would be used for this purpose is consistent with the GTPs first objective: “Maintain at least an average real GDP growth rate of 11% and meet the Millennium Development goals” (MoFED, 2010: 7). Second, cash income can be measured relatively easily; changes in people’s incomes can be assumed by observing lifestyle changes (e.g., ownership of mobile phones or TV sets, and houses of a certain style). Such visibility provides government agencies with opportunities to use the ownership of these items as development indicators (Blaikie et al., 1997 for a similar line of argument). Third, Ethiopia’s ambitious vision for the economic sector, aiming to increase the “per capita income of citizens so that it reaches the income levels of those in middle-income countries” (MoFED, 2010: 7) by 2025, may also have contributed to the policy emphasis on commercialization and income earning.

Partly due to the government’s market-oriented agricultural development policies and improved infrastructure, and partly due to local innovations and a growing interest in cash incomes, rural areas have recently been experiencing economic and market changes. Local producers (and local markets) are now interacting with more buyers and sellers, with diverse interests and goals. There are changes in not only the traditional mode of market operation but also the items being offered for sale. These changes obviously alter local people’s livelihoods and social relations (e.g., gender relations). Therefore, as Bebbington (1993: 278–279) argued, the “well-being and survival” of the local people now depends on how successfully

they handle and negotiate these interactions at the home and local level, and consequently how well they are integrated into the broader economy. This research explores these evolving processes, using a case study of the newly emerged milk market in the research area. Following a brief introduction to the methods and research site, two major contexts are presented in succession: The contexts of local markets, and the sociocultural contexts in which livelihoods and gender relations are embedded. Finally, the case of a milk-selling cooperative is presented.

RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS

Research Site

This paper focuses on the nexus of evolving markets, rural livelihoods, and gender relations, in the context of the Arsii Oromo's socioeconomic life and the government's rural development policies. Fieldwork was conducted in the Kofale District, in the west Arsii Zone of the Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia. The Arsii Oromo people inhabit this district. The majority of the district's population of about 180,000 people follows the religion of Islam, and over 90% of the population is rural (CSA, 2008: 71–72). Kofale is a highland, agro-pastoral area. Enset⁽²⁾ cultivation is important in the southern and southwestern parts of the district, while barley and wheat crops dominate its eastern and northern sections. Despite this variation in the major crops grown across the district, local informants and agricultural extension workers continue to emphasize the importance of livestock and livestock products (milk and butter in particular) for the livelihood and food culture of the people in the area.

Kofale town, the district's headquarters, hosts one of the largest markets in the highland west Arsii on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The Wednesday market, locally known as *gabaa harbba'a*, is the larger of the two, and attracts thousands of people from neighboring districts and towns including Shashamane. The market is known for its supplies of cattle, sheep, wheat, barley, butter, and Ethiopian kale. As a local elder put it, "Kofale is the land of cattle; the land of milk and butter."

The Wamanye-Abosa⁽³⁾ Village⁽⁴⁾ Peasant Administration (hereafter, the PA), the specific site for this study, is also well known for its livestock products. It is for this reason that a milk-selling cooperative called *Walda Hawwii Guddinnaa Omiisha Aananii*,⁽⁵⁾ which literally means "Hope for Development Milk Producers Cooperative," was established in this PA in 2010. Data at the DA office in the area show that the PA has a total population of 6,562 (3,594 males and 2,968 females). Males and females head 969 households—378 and 195 respectively.

The main Addis-Shashamane-Bale-Goba road crosses through both Kofale town and an emerging roadside village called Ganati (about 15 km east of Kofale), where the PA offices and milk selling cooperative are located. Ganati is a few hundred meters from an adjacent market village called Robe-Ashoka. Many other smaller settlements are also emerging along this road. The road has always served as an important link between the district, different markets, and livelihoods. Local



Fig. 1. Location of the research site.

people are generally pleased with recent changes and activities (e.g., improvement in transportation and market) that became possible once the road had been upgraded to concrete asphalt level.

Research Methods

This research is largely qualitative and exploratory. Information describing the general profile and livelihood systems of people in the district, as well as the research site (the PA), was obtained through semi-structured interviews on several field trips in 2012. Data on the nexus of the formation and operation of the milk cooperative, local livelihoods, and gender relations were collected during short field trips in March, August, and September 2012, for a total of 15 days. In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) constituted major methods of data collection. Two FGDs were conducted—one male-only (eight participants), and another female-only (seven participants). Each group included both members and non-members of the cooperative. Three key informants—a male development agent (DA); a male member of the PA's administration; and a woman in charge of the cooperative's shop—were purposely selected and interviewed as key informants. Five case studies were conducted with members of the cooperative, in order to understand the benefits they obtained from their membership. Five other non-member local farmers were also interviewed, regarding their views about the organization and the practice of selling milk.

In addition, I conducted informal interviews with more than 10 men and women, including customers I met in the cooperative's shop, people to whom we gave rides to and from the research site, and household members of our local host. Some of these conversations produced striking information that contrasted with

the views of some participants in the formal interviews and FGD sessions. The multiple views and experiences of these participants revealed complexities at the interface of local norms and political (government policy) domains. Quantitative data pertinent to the research area were gathered from the PA through the Development Agents working in the same PA. These included demographic features, land use patterns, the profiles and sizes of crops produced, and the number and type of livestock in the research area.

LOCAL MARKETS, LIVELIHOODS, AND GENDER RELATIONS

Local Markets

Farmers in the study area participate in a network of rural markets, and interact with diverse actors. Traditionally, each market offers a certain advantage⁽⁶⁾ (e.g., price or diversity of products), to the different categories of participants. Markets serve as a medium of exchange, where agricultural products are converted into cash, and cash into food or other items (e.g., coffee and salt), and necessities (e.g., clothes and household utensils). Local products may also cycle through the markets. For instance, livestock are sold for cash, and seeds and fertilizers are bought with cash during the planting season; agricultural products are sold when the crops are harvested and livestock are purchased. Furthermore, an animal of one species, at a certain stage of maturity or of a certain sex, is sold, so that some portion of the money so earned can be used to buy an animal of another species (stage of maturity or sex), while the balance can be used to secure other necessities. In addition, market sites also often host important institutions (e.g., schools and health facilities). In general, markets serve as means for exchanging goods for livelihoods and services, and for building social networks connecting people with diverse resources. This mode of interaction seems to be the one that dominates rural peoples' perceptions of the market.

Nevertheless, rural people sometimes exhibited ambivalence towards interactions with the market and/or market sites. At times they demonstrated an uneasy relationship with markets for a number of reasons. First, they blamed market centers for the emergence of malicious behaviors (e.g., theft, alcohol consumption, and deception). Markets were then described as sites where people with such behaviors gathered, and temptations for the misuse of resources prevailed. Second, some informants associated the increasing market penetration into rural peoples' lives with increasing prices. From this perspective, the market not only made living conditions more expensive, but also introduced scarcity for traditionally accessible items. Third, market sites were described in relation to increasing political control. Rural market centers often brought government institutions closer to the everyday lives of the community.

A case described by an informant in September 2012 summarizes these views. He narrated how a once-important rural shop, along the major road that crosses through the PA, was pressured to close:

Initially we appreciated the opening up of the shop, as it made some necessities available in close proximity. But, people began to worry when the shop began attracting strangers, and, as local young men started gathering in front of it, spending much of their time without a purpose. All signs suggested that the place would in the near future turn into a market (or a town) and we didn't want that to happen. People feared that the place could breed hooligans and thieves who would disturb our peace. The owner of the shop was discouraged, and warned that he was bringing social vices to the locality. Finally, the owner slowly abandoned the shop.

Both the future expansion of this shop, and its potential contribution to the emergence of a market at this particular site, were clearly suppressed. Nevertheless, the community could not prevent the construction of another shop, just across the road opposite the abandoned shop; nor could it prevent the emergence of a small rural market about 5 km from this site along the same road. This suggests further evidence of the ambivalence mentioned above, and the diversity of interests among the locals *vis-à-vis* their interactions with markets. Obviously, while some blamed the market and attempted to suppress its emergence, others worked to foster its presence. The majority, however, seemed to hold ambivalent attitudes: Appreciating or tolerating the markets with regard to some of its functions, and blaming it or having a cautious approach towards it with regard to other aspects. As a result, the market has assumed the role of a necessary evil in the lives of the local people.

This ambivalence towards local markets seems to be growing as the number of connections between local farmers' livelihoods and the market has been increasing, and as there have been changes in the modes of interaction among actors in the market over the past decade. Traditional, rotating weekly markets are no longer the only settings for diverse exchanges. "Mobile" markets, in which buyers search for commodities (e.g., potatoes, cabbages, and wheat) directly from the sources, are now becoming prevalent. It was in this context that a farmer in Kofale District made the following disapproving remarks about the current trend of markets in September 2012:

When a combine enters grain fields (*maasaa midhaanii*), three types of people may follow it: The owner of the crop, government agents or the DA who would like to know the volume of production, and grain brokers (*dallaala*), or traders who offer to buy the harvest and pour it from the vault of the combiner into the back of the truck.

The above narration may not depict the reality of every farmer's field. Nevertheless, it is an important emerging scenario, one that has managed to capture the imagination of local farmers. The consequence of this development for the livelihoods of local communities needs further enquiries. What is clearly emerging, however, is an increasing number of interactions of the local community and their livelihoods with diverse market actors. This may come with opportunities as well as risks, either complementing or undermining existing local livelihoods, gender

relations, and knowledge systems. This is evident in farmers' perceptions of the unprecedented increases in the prices of grains and livestock on the local markets. My informal conversation with a farmer in the Kokossa District in August 2011 summarizes the views of several informants I spoke to in the Kofale District in September 2012. When I asked him whether farmers were happy about recent skyrocketing livestock and grain prices, he explained:

Yes, the prices of livestock and grains are getting very high. People could now sell a bull for thousands of ETB; some for even tens of thousands ETB. This was unheard of in our area before. But, as you know, we don't sell cattle for the sake of earning money alone. Sometimes, we sell a bull and buy heifers or a cow for reproduction. Sometimes we sell a small male animal and buy a heifer. Even when a person sells a head of cattle in order to deal with a crucial problem, he should "replace the hooves" [of the sold animal] (*qeenssa deebisuu*), using [a] portion of [the] money. In the past, prices for cattle of a different sex or stage of maturity vary from season to season. When bulls are expensive, cows become relatively cheaper and vice versa; when younger male animals are cheaper, heifers become more expensive and vice versa. Now cattle at all stages of maturity are expensive. Under these circumstances, the skyrocketing prices of cattle are not always helpful. Upon selling an animal, you can't use part of the money to meet some needs, and the remainder to replace the sold animal. The present trend is good only for those who raise cattle as a business to earn money.

The above excerpt and the preceding discussions clearly demonstrate the cautious approach that local farmers exhibit towards the penetration of markets into their daily lives, and the subsequent price increases. Caution and ambivalence are responses to the prevailing competing interests associated with the two dimensions of market participation. On one hand, for those who are business-oriented, with the goal of earning more money, the market has brought opportunities. On the other hand, increasing prices are challenging the traditional logic that values both production and market interaction. Farmers are being tempted (by traders or the prices they offer) to dispose of products upon harvest—regardless of what those products could fetch at a later time and regardless of consumption needs at home. It is in the context of these issues that we consider local dynamics, in terms of livelihoods, markets, and gender relations, in the study area.

Local Production Practices and Livelihoods

Being in the eastern section of the district, residents of the research site (PA) are mainly involved in barley and wheat cultivation, in conjunction with raising livestock. The PA has managed to balance crop cultivation and livestock grazing in its land use pattern. According to data from the DA's office in the PA, out of the total 1,682 ha of land, 886 ha were used for livestock grazing, while 776 ha were used for crop cultivation. The remaining 20 ha were used for other purposes,

Table 1. Types and size of livestock in Wamangne-Abosa PA

Types of livestock	Size
Cattle	5,394
Sheep	2,606
Horse	792
Goat	5
Donkey	78
Mule	4
Total	8,879

Source: Compiled from DA office of the Wamanye-Abboosa PA, August 2012.

including “forest” and institutions (e.g., schools). The relatively high proportion of grazing land is suggestive of the importance of livestock to local livelihoods. Cattle are the dominant livestock type, both in terms of their numbers and in terms of their socioeconomic significance (Table 1).

Cattle ownership has long been a source of wealth and social prestige among the Arsii Oromo. Cattle are transferred as gifts and bride wealth payments; they are used in conflict resolution when transferred as blood compensation, and for the performance of rituals. Livestock also provide other sources of subsistence, by acting as a local source of organic fertilizer (e.g., for enset and other garden-based crops). However, livestock are kept mainly as a direct subsistence resource providing milk, butter, and occasionally meat. While cattle milk has traditionally been an important component of Arsii Oromo’s livelihood, its importance as a source of income is just emerging. Butter, on the other hand, has been a traditional source of women’s income. The sale of livestock, and decisions made about spending the income so earned, is still dominated by men.

Crop cultivation is the second most important land use pattern next to grazing. The two dominant crops, barley and wheat, are well established in the area. Ox-plow has been a major technology of production, while grain harvesting was traditionally done manually using sickles, either by individual farmers assisted by their household members, or through work party arrangements known as *daboo* or *jiga*. In recent years, however, tractors and combine harvesters are dominating the landscape of the plains, with the machines rented from private investors.

Although grazing is slightly more important than farming, in terms of land use allocation, grains are more important in everyday meals than are livestock products. Nevertheless, the local diet and food culture often involve a combination of cereals and livestock products. Milk and butter constitute important components of cereal meals, prepared either in the form of bread or porridge. Infants and young children largely depend on milk for their nutritional needs.

Although no agricultural product is entirely meant for market, some are more market oriented than others. For instance, some recently introduced crops (Table 2) like maize, roll-cabbage, and potatoes, are mainly produced for market. Heaps of potatoes and roll-cabbages can commonly be observed along the main road

Table 2. Type of crops and size of land covered by each crop in the PA

Crop types	Size of land covered by each crop in ha	Remarks
Barely	260.0	Both for consumption and market
Enset	36.0	mainly for consumption
Maize	58.0	Both for consumption and market
Wheat	365.0	Both for consumption and market
Roll-cabbage	20.5	Mainly for market
Horse beans	10.5	Mainly for market
Linseed	12.0	Mainly for market
Potatoes	20.0	Both for consumption and market
Others (vegetables & root crops)	4.0	Both for consumption and market
Total	776.0	

Source: Compiled from DA's office of the Wamanye-Abboosa PA, August 2012.

during harvest season, waiting for bulk buyers. Trucks also traverse the narrow blocks between peasant farm fields, in search of potatoes, roll-cabbages and other items right from the field. Wheat and barley are produced for home consumption, and for earning income. As indicated earlier, local people produce most of what they consume at home. Those households that concentrate on livestock farming may sell butter or livestock in order to buy grains for consumption. Butter is also exchanged for processed enset. Grains may also be sold, and butter bought, as butter is an important component of the local food culture.

Gender Relations in Production and Marketing

The Arsii Oromo's sociocultural life is characterized by patrilineal descent and inheritance, patrilocal residence patterns, polygynous marriages, clan territoriality, and exogamy (Mamo, 2006a). Men, compared to women, are more visible and dominant in economic and political spheres among the Arsii Oromo. The gender relations, customary division of activities, resource holdings, and use at household levels, all reflect this asymmetric gender power relation. The family (*mana*), or the extended family (*warra*), is the basic unit of resource holding and decision making. However, the power within the family is not equally distributed among its members. The husband is the breadwinner, and dominates decisions over major resources. In the Arsii Oromo custom, the man (husband) tills the land for all cereal crops, plants, and harvests them. He also constructs cattle kraal, and rotates them from one spot to another for different purposes. The woman (wife) processes enset or grains, prepares food for family members, and takes care of domestic affairs. She milks the cows and makes the butter. This division of activities places livestock products (e.g., milk and butter) in the woman's domain of control and decision-making. This division of activities is still respected by the Arsii Oromo, where men dominate field activities, and women dominate home affairs.

Men and women's participation in local markets reflects this division of activities. Men sell livestock (cattle and sheep in particular), and grains in larger amounts (e.g., in sacks weighing 25 kg, 50 kg, or 100 kg). Women sell butter, fermented enset, and grains in smaller retail quantities. The spatial structure of local markets may also depict the prevailing social division of activities and associated social/gender relations. For instance, in the research area and its environs, the spatial structures, and the types of items displayed, are suggestive of prevailing gender relations. Accordingly, the livestock corners (*hiika loonii*), and the cereals' corners (*hiika midhaanii*), are dominated by men; while enset corners (*hiika worqii*), and butter corners (*hiika dhadhaa*), are dominated by women.

Custom-based gender relations and the associated separation of responsibilities for activities are slowly beginning to change. This is happening in the context of changing practices in rural markets—in terms of access and modes of operation, increased political interventions and rights awareness, and general changes in sociocultural settings. Men are stepping into areas traditionally considered to be women's territory, such as the control of milk and milk products. Women are also slowly engaging in decision making, and participating in markets, as in the case of becoming members of cooperatives, and the collection of income based on their contributions to the cooperative. These shifts may come with challenges to the existing social structure, normative settings, and livelihoods. A case study of the milk-selling cooperative presented in the next section suggests that such a scenario is emerging in the study area. The case study attempts to bring together the major themes discussed in the preceding sections: State development policies, local people's increasing connections to the market, and the implications of these changes to their livelihoods and gender relations.

THE NEXUS OF LIVELIHOODS AND GENDER RELATIONS: THE VIEW FROM A MILK-SELLING COOPERATIVE

Formation of the Co-operative

The milk cooperative discussed in this paper was founded in May 2010 by 20 “voluntarily” organized farmers. By September 2012, when this fieldwork was conducted, the cooperative had 42 registered members. The gender distribution seemed well balanced, with 20 females and 22 males registered. Although over half of the membership was men, the female members were engaged in the whole process of milking cows and delivering the milk to the cooperative. An assessment conducted by local informants' (both farmers and development agents) shows a long-term growth in the cooperative's membership. The cooperative is managed by individuals elected from among the members, based on their “credibility and ability.”

The objective for the establishment of the cooperative was summarized by one of its members as follows:



Fig. 2. A sign board displaying official name of the cooperative and its location.

Like everybody else, we wanted to improve our income (*galii*). We found that forming a cooperative for selling milk was an important way to increase our income. Initially we just wanted to use the cooperative to sell milk. Now, after we have seen its significance, we are planning to develop it into a milk-processing cooperative. This will further increase our income from selling various milk products.

The emphasis on development in general, and income in particular, was evident in the above interview, and throughout our discussions with other members of the cooperative. There is clear concurrence, whether by coincidence or deliberate conjunction, between government development rhetoric and farmers' expressions evident during the discussions. Although members of the cooperative tended to emphasize the voluntary basis of their organization, they also clearly acknowledged the support (mainly in the form of technical assistance and guidance) they had received from the government development agents stationed in the PA.

The beginning of this cooperative, however, was not as smooth and promising as it now appears. Both present members and non-members of the cooperative confirmed that many people had had objections to the idea of selling milk, and to the idea of establishing an organization for this purpose. Members of the community initially discouraged each other from joining such an organization. The pioneers of the idea of milk commoditization were portrayed as “evildoers,” and promoters of a “harmful practice.” Several of my non-member informants

still hold this pejorative view of the practice of selling milk. This attitude, however, has been changing through time as evidenced by the cooperative's growing membership. Many informants were of the opinion that non-members' attitudes towards the organization are now much more positive, compared to the situation upon its inception. The new-found interest in, and increasing support for, the cooperative, is probably a result of two factors: First, the intervention of development agents who promoted the importance of selling milk, and persuaded people to have a positive view towards the practice; and second, above all, the benefits or income from milk sales that members have been earning.

Membership, Milk Collection, and Sale

Data from FGDs and interviews generally suggest that husbands and wives make the decision regarding whether or not to join the cooperative, by mutual consultation. The volume (number of liters) of milk to be contributed daily to the cooperative is decided in the same manner. Ideally the decision will be based on the family's assessment of its need for income, and its need for home milk consumption. Decisions regarding the allocation of money earned from the cooperative are also said to be made jointly by husbands and wives (discussed in the next sub-section). Once the decision has been made to join the cooperative, either the husband or the wife can register as a member of the cooperative, and collect the income thus generated. Nevertheless, some informants emphasized that the cooperative initially targeted women (in the context of gender empowerment and in line with government development directions), but later attracted the interest of men who started registering themselves as members instead of their wives. This seems plausible, given the men's interest in controlling cash incomes. Future membership profiles may change in favor of men, unless some political interventions maintain the current proportion, or one in favor of women.

In its present situation, however, the cooperative's membership depicts two differing dimensions. On one hand, gender profiles of registered cooperative members depict balanced male and female representation. This shows an improvement in gender relations and women's participation. On the other hand, we observe the customary division of activities persisting. Even now, only women milk cows and deliver milk to the cooperative, in the name of the registered member, even though the income may eventually have to be collected by the male head of the household.

At the time of this fieldwork, in August-September 2012, the cooperative collected 200 liters of fresh milk from its members daily. In addition, it also bought fresh milk of varying amounts from non-members. While members delivered a liter of milk (measured in a plastic jug locally called *joogii*), to the cooperative for 12 ETB, non-members sold the same amount of milk to the cooperative for 14 ETB. That means non-members received a price 2 ETB higher than that received by members. Nevertheless, members of the cooperative benefited from the profits the cooperative generated from the overall sale of milk, and received dividends at the end of each month.

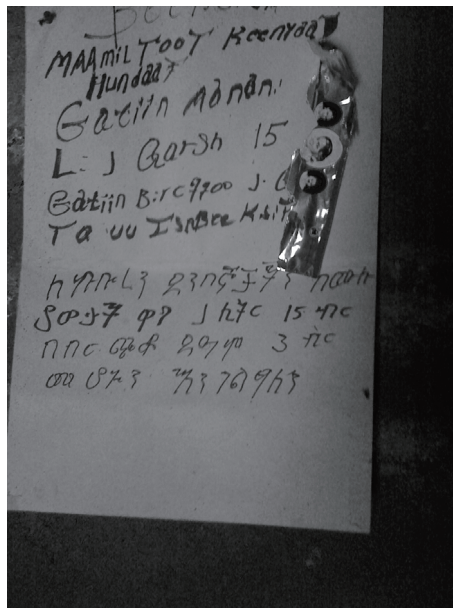


Fig. 3. Notice to the customers on the prices of different volumes of milk at the cooperative's shop.

The above notice (Fig. 3), posted at the cooperative's shop reads: "To our esteemed customers: We respectfully announce that the price of a liter of milk is 15 birr [ETB]; and that the price of a glass of milk is 3 birr [ETB]."

The cooperative sold a liter of milk for 15 ETB. Customers consumed milk in the cooperative's shop or bought milk of a different state for 3 ETB a glass (measuring about 1/5th of a liter). While the cooperative collected (bought) only fresh milk, it sold milk of different states that included (1) fresh milk (*ooituu*, lit. hot milk), (2) one-day-old milk (*qabbanooftuu*, lit. cold milk), and (3) yogurt (*ittittuu*). In September 2012, daily sales from the milk delivered by members amounted to 3,000 ETB (i.e., 200 liters \times 15 ETB). This amounted to an estimated total sale of 90,000 ETB monthly, and 1,080,000 ETB annually. According to a woman in charge of the cooperative's shop at the time of the fieldwork, most of the time, all of the milk collected daily could be sold on the same day. In case some milk remained unsold, it would be sold the next day in *qabbanooftuu* or *ittittuu* state.

Customers for milk from the cooperative come from diverse backgrounds: Local farmers; resident government employees (e.g., teachers, health workers, and extension workers); drivers and passengers; town café owners (e.g., from Kofale town and Shashamane and Awassa cities). Local farmers buy milk from the shop for consumption at home. This is said to be particularly important in the case of families with small children who may not possess milking cows. Local youth also buy and consume milk at the shop. One informant emphasized that people also buy milk from the cooperative as required, to meet social obligations



Fig. 4. A partial view of milk collected at the cooperative's shop by members of the cooperative.

such as attending important rituals (e.g., birth rites and marriage ceremonies), and when transferring milk as a gift. For the civil servants stationed in the PA, the cooperative is serving as an important venue for meeting their needs for milk.

Demand for the milk from this cooperative is reportedly on the rise. Informants attributed the rising demand for milk from this area to its high quality, which they associated with the “natural” quality of grass that the cattle here graze. One informant explained (August 2012) that the quality of milk could be known from its appearance:

You can see the quality of milk from the marks it leaves on the glass as you sip from it. It leaves a thick “fog” (*hurrii*) on the surface of the glass. This tells both the good taste of the milk and its quality or thickness as well. Thick milk can withstand water. So people buy some milk and then increase its volume by adding water. They do this without spoiling the taste. This is one of the reasons why people doing café business in towns like the milk from our area.

It appears that the commoditization of milk is becoming established in the area. This is a significant departure from the Arsii Oromo culture's traditional perspective, which does not view milk as a commodity. Local people's interest in generating income from this “new commodity,” and the increasing demand for milk from local customers and town residents, is driving this trend. The government's promotion of the commercialization of agricultural products and its investment in infrastructure improvements—in particular those applied to the main road mentioned earlier—



Fig. 5. Passengers returning to a minibus after purchasing milk from the cooperative's shop.

seem to have played a major role in the emerging (expanding) importance of this market that links various actors with diverse interests. Earnings from milk could be significant by local standards, and so have the potential to attract the attention of more farmers in the future. Nevertheless, increasing the practice of selling milk, and so increasing a family's income, is only part of the story. These outcomes do not fully describe the effects of this new development on local people's livelihoods and gender relations. The allocation of income from milk sales for different purposes, the perception of different categories of people involved in the practice of selling milk, and its effects on local livelihoods, gender relations, and resource control and decision making are important themes that are explored in the following sub-sections.

Income and Decision over Its Use

The cooperative collects milk from its members on a daily basis, but distributes income to its members on a monthly basis. Each registered member receives money proportional to the total amount of milk (in liters) that he or she delivers to the cooperative during the month. Members also collect dividends from the cooperative's total monthly profit.

Cases summarized in Table 3 suggest that the amounts of money people make from milk sales vary from household to household. The allocation of this money for different purposes similarly shows variations across households. Among the major uses for this money mentioned by most of our informants are: Financing

Table 3. Income earned from milk selling by some members of the cooperative

Case	Contribution (liter/day)	Membership duration (no. of months)	Estimated income earned/month (ETB)	Estimated income earned for the duration of membership (ETB)
1	4	10	$4 \times 12 \times 30 = 1,440$	$1440 \times 10 = 14,400$
2	2	13	$2 \times 12 \times 30 = 720$	$720 \times 13 = 9,360$
3	2	7	$2 \times 12 \times 30 = 720$	$720 \times 7 = 5,040$

Source: Fieldwork in Kofale District, August 2012.

the children's education; buying cattle feed particularly during the dry season when grass is in short supply; buying basic necessities such as salt and sugar for household needs; paying government taxes; buying clothing for family members; and for medical purposes. A few informants mentioned other purposes that included financing house construction, and paying down debts they owed government extension agents for agricultural inputs. Informal discussions also revealed that some households are spending some of the income to purchase items such as mobile phones and radios.

The observation that income from milk sales is used to meet diverse needs was not controversial during group discussions, or during individual interviews. Indeed, some of these needs are new or emerging, while others are basic in nature. It is also understandable that income from milk sometimes protects other major assets that could have been disposed of in order to meet these needs. What drew controversy and produced a mixed picture, however, was the decision-making process at household levels, regarding the allocation of this source of income for the various purposes mentioned above. Informants stressed that although decisions to join the cooperative are generally based on mutual consultations between the husband and wife, decisions regarding the allocation of the income earned from selling milk are still dominated by men. Husbands not only register themselves as members of the cooperative, and collect the income accordingly but are also informally allowed to collect income on behalf of their registered wives. One woman informant's (August 2012) assessment of the issue presents a powerful story in this regard: "We [women] ply the milk; they [men] gather the money." This is a reflection of the role of women as the ones who milk the cows and ferry the milk to the cooperative's shop, whereas husbands could end up collecting the money at the end. A male informant's (August 2012) assessment of the situation also supports this scenario. He said:

People may speak about joint decision making on becoming a member of the cooperative, and the utilization of income from milk sales. I think it varies from family to family. A few may really make a joint decision, while many men just pass what they see as sufficient money to their wives, and spend the rest the way they think appropriate. Other men may set aside some money for themselves, and present the rest for joint decision.

The above excerpt suggests there are differences among individuals and households with regard to how decisions are made. This may not be difficult to understand, given the dominant power structure in the Arsii Oromo social organization; however, it can make the genuine participation of women in decision-making a difficult exercise. However, for an Arsii Oromo woman who is accustomed to power differences between men and women, some degree of consultation over income expenditures could be considered as “joint decision making.” This, however, does not mean that women are content with this level of participation. Rather, women sometimes attempt to counter this power disparity in different ways.

This could be understood as a negative scenario, from the information that some informants provided with regard the practice of selling milk. Informants reported on four cases that resulted in disputes between the husband and wife, when the wives failed to give their husbands the income they had earned from milk sales. One case was that of a woman who became a member of the cooperative without the knowledge of her husband; two cases were about women who were not members of the cooperative, but who sold milk occasionally to the cooperative without their husbands knowledge; and one case was that of a woman who was a member of the cooperative, but who sold more milk than she and her husband had agreed to sell. The intent of these women is not difficult to understand. Theirs was a strategy to limit the intervention of male household heads, who might have spent the money for things not related to the household’s needs. Women might have sold the milk behind their husband’s backs to protect the household’s livelihood and other needs.

Regardless of who makes the final decision on the use of the income earned from milk sales, and the diversity of purposes for which it is potentially used, some emerging dynamics in livelihood and gender relations are evident. These changes are triggering debates even among the local farmers, between those who appreciate and/or cautiously support the practice of selling milk, and those who doubt its long-term benefits. While some see the process from the point of view of the income people are currently making from it, and in the context of the current discourse on development, others take a cautious approach because the practice could compromise the amount of milk consumed at home, and the local food culture. Some cited family troubles that resulted from competition between a husband and wife over the income earned from selling milk as an emerging negative consequence of the practice. The next sub-section briefly considers these points.

Perception and Experience of the Practice of Selling Milk

Local people had mixed views on the emerging practice of selling milk. Members of the cooperative were largely appreciative of the practice, based on their experience. Non-members, on the other hand, generally had critical views and were pessimistic with regard to their perceptions of the practice. Their views are largely based on their observations of the experiences members of the cooperative had, and the presumed effects of the commoditization of milk on the local food culture and the community’s livelihood in the future.

Cooperative members' assessments of the benefits of selling milk were largely associated with the cash income it generated. The view of a male member of the cooperative (August 2012) that "we are now able to meet many of our cash needs without selling our livestock because..." attests to one such value of this practice. It suggests that milk is becoming an alternative source of income to cereals and livestock (particularly sheep), which had previously been major sources of cash income in this rural area. An account given by another male participant of an FGD (August 2012) who was a member of the cooperative depicts this growing importance of milk in the area. He said:

To tell you the truth, selling milk is bringing significant change to people's lives. The changes could be even greater than the changes that crop farming could bring. For instance, unlike wheat and barley production, milk production does not require much cost and toiling (*baasiif-xaarii guddaa hinqabu*). It only requires you to manage the cows well; to keep their night space clean, and feed them properly. In our locality, there are persons who earn a minimum of 1,200 ETB from a single cow in one month. Some of these individuals have rented a shop in Kofale and sell milk. This practice is bringing tremendous change to their lives.

Other participants of the FGD overwhelmingly agreed with the above assessment. The comparative advantage of milk production (or raising livestock), *vis-à-vis* cereal crop production, was clearly expressed in terms of operating costs and labor requirements. Concern regarding costs associated with cereal production is a clear reflection of the recent emerging trend in the area, where people hire tractors for tilling the fields and combine harvesters⁽⁷⁾ to collect the produce. Cereal production also brings with it the cost of using seeds recommended by government development agents, and the almost mandatory use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Therefore, people assess the value gained from selling milk not only against the income they earned from their cereal crops, but also against the relatively lower costs and lesser labor inputs needed to earn such income.

Other members of the cooperative emphasized the experience of using income earned from selling milk to sustain the production of milk. From this perspective, milk production (raising livestock) appears to be a self-sustaining activity. Informants stressed that the income earned from selling milk is used to buy feed for milking cows, particularly during the dry season when grasses are in short supply. An informant remarked:

If you come to this shop [referring to the cooperative's shop] even during the dry months (*bona*), you will get milk. That is how milk is now producing more milk. In the dry season, the land gets dry, and grasses wither away and the soil is exposed. Cows' tits get dry and can only produce a little milk—only sufficient for calves. Even our body gets dry as it lacks cattle products (*waan-loonii*) [literally things from cattle, referring to mainly milk and butter]. Now you can sell milk during the rainy season when the grass

is abundant, save some money in order to buy feed for cows during the dry season, and keep producing milk even during the dry season.

Milk is abundant in the area during the rainy months of the year when grasses are abundant, while the dry months are associated with a scarcity of milk. Now, cows are able to give milk throughout the year, both in the rainy and dry months (*gannaa-bona*), as feed or grass can be bought using the income earned by selling milk. More milk can be sold when it is abundant during the rainy season, and thus its sustained production is ensured using the income earned. Thus, if wisely used, the income from milk could lead to sustainable milk production, and contribute to the livelihoods of people in the area.

The weight of the assessments given above by members of the local community about the practice notwithstanding, a complete picture of the practice could not be seen unless other dimensions of local perceptions are also presented. In this regard, two important areas of concern emerged, particularly from informants who were not members of the cooperative. One concern was related to the consequences of competing interests between increasing milk sales to earn more income on the one hand, and on the other, the household's need for milk consumption as a major component of the local diet. This group of informants felt that the focus on money is compromising milk consumption at home. The other concern is about stresses on gender relations and family harmony resulting from the scramble to control income earned from selling milk.

First, it is clear from the discussion on income expenditures discussed earlier, let alone the consumption of milk at home, that using income from milk to purchase vital food items for home consumption was not mentioned by most of the members we interviewed. That is, expenditure priorities for the income from milk did not include important food items that could replace milk, or supplement it in the household diet. Although it is not clear from this study if milk is sold at the expense of its consumption at home, or the other way around, informant's concerns in this regards need to be noted. This is important in the context of cautions and criticisms expressed particularly by non-members. Informants spoke of "dusty skinned" and "pale skinned" children. As a female informant expressed it: "*Warra loon hin qabanne, ijoollee nafni biifa hin qabu*," literally, "for those families who don't own cattle, their children have dry skin." Informants frequently referred to "*waan loonii*," literally "things of the cattle" (e.g., milk and butter), as essential elements of the local diet, and the lack of which is believed to cause a different state of human "skin." This suggests, among other things, that the increasing practice of selling milk may compromise consumption at home, particularly for children in homes that traditionally depended on milk for their diet in this area.

Second, a statement cited in the foregoing discussion that "women milk cows and deliver to the cooperative while men collect money," is a clear indication of competition over the income from milk sales. Men's involvement, or their control of money from milk sales, would also suggest the possibility that the money might more likely be spent on emerging needs, or needs which are less basic, which in turn could compromise the household's livelihood. This reflects

the concern that men may be grabbing the money at the expense of the family's nutritional interests. The increasing intrusion of men into what has traditionally been women's territory, a territory fundamentally associated with a household's basic consumption needs, could have detrimental consequences, not only on the livelihoods, but also on gender relations and social harmony. Both members and non-members of the cooperative reported cases of disputes between husbands and wives. The disputes either regarded decisions concerning membership and the use of income, or related to secrecy on the part of women when they engaged in selling milk, and/or becoming members of the cooperative and using income without consulting their husbands. In sum, any future understanding of the emerging practice of selling milk in the area needs to take these competing perceptions and dimensions of the practice into account.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The commercialization of smallholder's agricultural products, with the aim of improving their incomes, seems to be a major objective of the Ethiopian government's recent development strategies. This strategy, and the increasing power of the market that is being generated, is resulting in both intended and unintended consequences for rural communities. What is taking place in the research site should also be seen in the same vein. The cooperative described in this paper as a case study emerged amid government development strategies, local people's interests in cash incomes, and infrastructure improvements that also enhanced rural-urban connections. Apparently, the establishment of the cooperative for the commercialization of milk is raising participant farmers' incomes, and the milk market has already emerged as unavoidable for the local community. However, the use of income as an indicator of development in general, and household livelihoods (food security) in particular, is questionable (e.g., Baer, 1991; DeWalt, 1991), unless the allocation of income and its distribution along several categories of household needs, and the needs of several categories of household members, are closely scrutinized. The increasing integration of local communities into a broader economy via the market comes with diverse consequences. A right question to be asked in this context is thus where or how to find ways for rural people to benefit from the market, without their being "taken hostage" by the market forces, where heavy dependence on the market could potentially compromise the sustainable livelihoods of these rural communities.

I am not implying that local communities are always innocent receivers of external ideologies and practices imposed on them, or that they are unaware victims of exploitation by active outside actors participating in the local market. Obviously, there are members of local communities who make careful choices, and participate in emerging processes with the full aim of capturing some opportunities. There are also members of the local community who may choose to approach these processes cautiously. That is, local people themselves are internally diverse, as they are composed of actors with diverse interests, and different levels of awareness regarding the broader economic and political environ-

ment. Interest and ambivalence shown towards participation in the local market in general, and the milk-selling cooperative in particular, shows this diversity within the local community. On one hand, we saw people who were tempted to benefit from the new opportunities, to acquire income in order to meet emerging needs, and to live according to the direction desired and encouraged by government development agents. On the other hand, we met people suspicious of the pace and direction of change, and the pressure from market forces. This internal diversity notwithstanding, rural communities in general may not be fully aware of the multidimensional consequences of participating in the broader political economy characterized by a complex network of events and interests.

This case study of the milk-selling cooperative revealed this diversity of views, interests, and consequences regarding this emerging market for the local livelihoods and social relationships. The organization and operation of the cooperative is rudimentary and basic. Nevertheless, the activity around which it is established is revolutionary, constituting a radical shift in the values and attitudes associated with milk in the Arsii Oromo culture. This small institution appears to be bringing far-reaching changes to more than one aspect of daily life, including local livelihoods, market operations and gender relations as discussed earlier. People were largely enthusiastic and optimistic about the cooperative, mainly because they were impressed by the income it generated from an item traditionally considered as non-commercial. Optimism was also evident among government development agents, who described the institution and the PA in which it was founded as “models of development” in the area.

There were also voices of concern, speaking about the consequences of the practice, mostly from non-members of the cooperative, who pointed to the negative implications of increased milk sales for food security (children’s nutrition, income expenditures); and gender relations (men coming into hitherto women’s territory: Conflicts and tensions). Informants expressed major concerns regarding the implications of milk selling practices for gender relations and nutrition for particular groups such as children and women. Competition, and at times conflicts between husbands and wives over the control of income from milk sales was also noted. The possibility for the commercialization of milk to compromise household milk needs was also suggested. These findings may require further study by a multidisciplinary team, but the importance of women’s participation in household decision-making, particularly regarding issues related to household consumption, may not be controversial. Studies (e.g., Yibeltal, 2011) have already revealed a link between women’s—and by extension children’s—nutritional status, and women’s decision-making autonomy.

Despite these concerns, all evidence suggests that the membership of this cooperative is increasing, and there are more people interested in joining. Competing values regarding milk seem at stake, and farmers may find they have drifted into earning income from milk sales, at the expense of basic needs at home. As Kottak correctly noted, “The goals and values of subsistence producers may at times differ from those of people who produce for cash, just as they differ from the intervention philosophy of development planners. Different value systems must be considered during planning” (Kottak 2006: 50). This indeed is what

qualitative data presented in this paper suggest. As a result of government policies, local people now find themselves being integrated into a broader economy, and consequently find themselves caught between the competing objectives of meeting household consumption needs and the commercialization of their produce. Now, as Bebbington (1993) suggests, farmers and their organizations could be understood to be “situated” in a broader context, embedded in socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures and contexts, which could facilitate or constrain their development and compromise their future livelihoods. The sustainable life, and the survival of rural communities, will depend on how innovative they are in negotiating the diverse interests, actors, needs, and desires in this broader context. What may be required is an attempt to balance competing needs: The need to be connected to the national economy (policy) while maintaining local peculiarities; a need to earn cash income from agricultural products without compromising household consumption needs and disturbing social harmony. The role of researchers, government policy makers, and development agents is, therefore, to examine the intended and unintended consequences of government development strategies, and their connection to the broader environment, while working with local people to minimize the effects of these strategies and connections on their livelihood and social relations.

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NOTES

- (1) The fall in grain prices was particularly acute in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In one rural market close to my research area, the post-harvest prices of barley and wheat (in 2000/2001) fell by about 20% and 50% respectively from the pre-1999 prices (Mamo, 2006b). Maize prices also fell to as low as 20 ETB per 100 kg (WIC, November 2001). During the same period, the Ethiopian Seed Enterprise, the supplier of seeds, reported “falling demand for select seeds” (WIC, March 2002). Similarly, the National Agricultural Inputs Authority reported that “the total sale in fertilizer dropped by about 17% in 2002,” compared to the preceding year, and that almost half of “the imported fertilizer for the year 2002 [was] deposited as carry-over stocks” (WIC, October 2002). The authority attributed the fall in demand for fertilizers to the fall in grain prices. At the same time, the National Bank of Ethiopia slashed interest rates by 50%, claiming to help the peasants out of this grim situation by doing so. These events, taken together, suggest the gravity of the problem

- related to the marketing of agricultural produce at the time.
- (2) Enset is a root crop of the banana family that serves as a food staple for about 20% of Ethiopia's population in southern and southwestern Ethiopia.
 - (3) Wam'anye and Abosa are names of Arsii Oromo clans (*gosa*) that inhabit the PA concerned.
 - (4) Village (officially called *kebele* in Amharic, and also called *ganda* in Oromo) is the lowest (below district) level in the government's administrative structure.
 - (5) *Walda* stands for cooperative (association); *oomishia* for production; *aanan* for milk; *hawwii* for hope, desire, wish; and *guddinnaa* refers to growth or development.
 - (6) A market can be known for cheaper prices (for buyers), or as a place where the high demand for a certain product will fetch a higher price (often for sellers). In this context, products are bought from one market and sold in the other, and vice-versa, thereby creating a network of local markets.
 - (7) In December 2011, I observed a farmer's wheat farm of about quarter of 1 ha, ready for harvest and waiting for a combine to harvest it. The farmer was worried that he wouldn't be able to get the machine as early as he wanted, and he wasn't sure when it would be coming to his field. When I asked him why he was waiting for the machine for such a small field, when he could have harvested it alone or with the helping hands of others, he said, "it may be wrong decision but we are used to this machine now. If I knew that it would delay to this extent, I could have done the harvesting manually. Now it is too late since the wheat is too dry to harvest it manually."

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