



Figure 2: shows Agave Sisalana (Sisal/Kacha) and Manihot esculenta (Cassava tree/Muka dekika) taken during the survey at Belinarba and Nega Umarkulle kebeles

4.2.4 Migration

Fedis district farmers are known by their migration to the nearby towns and cities during drought. Owing to regular occurrences of drought, the farm households lost their purchasing power, economic and ecological base in their native place of residence. Thus, some people migrated to distant places outside the district to pursue livelihood strategies other than agriculture.

Of the total sample households, about 33 % (48) reported that they migrated to the surrounding urban environment in search for better livelihoods during harvest failure. In relation to agro ecology, nearly 21 % (10) of Mid land and 38.4 % (38) of low land areas reported that they engaged in migration to cope with drought induced food shortage. From this, it is possible to deduce that the Low land areas were more engaged in migration because of low coping options and capacity to cope with adversity. This is consistent with the information obtained from key informants that the low land agro ecological zone was more engaged in this strategy than its counter parts. With respect to sex of the households, the survey result indicated that equal proportions of both sexes migrated in search for better livelihoods.

The survey result also revealed that among the total poor headed households surveyed, 48 % (28) migrated to urban areas for employment opportunities where as 20 % (9) of the medium and 21 % (6) of better off similarly engaged in this strategy for better livelihoods during drought. Thus, it is possible to deduce that poor household heads migrated to the surrounding urban areas as compared to medium and better off which are mainly attributed to limited asset bases to withstand the problems arising out of rainfall shortage.

According to the information obtained from key informants and also during the discussion with the respondents there are two distinct types of migration observed at their locality. The first one is the type of migration in which the male household head migrated to the surrounding urban areas like Harar, Aweday, Hargeisa, Jijjiga, Diredewa, Bable, Haremaya, Kobmolcha and to other districts where crop production is relatively better. It is the common type of migration carried out mainly during normal and moderate drought years to bridge the annual food deficit encountered their family. The second type of migration is under the situation when the whole families leave their places of residence and migrate to the nearby urban areas. It is spontaneous migration arising as a result of recurrent production failures.

4.2.5 Selling firewood

Selling firewood is a common practice in the study areas during normal as well as bad agricultural years especially for poor and female headed households. Unlike the normal agricultural years, it has been intensified during bad years by all household categories. According to the information obtained from the district's food security office head, increasing number of fire wood sellers has been served as an indicator for food shortages in the last several agricultural years.

As per the survey result about 29 % (29.3) of Low land and 14.6 % (7) of Mid land respectively reported that they engaged in selling firewood to cope with drought induced food shortage. The proportion was higher for low land due to the fact that the low land areas are more accessible to Gobelle and Erere mountains where the natural forests are relatively abundantly available. Besides, the low land areas have limited coping options and thus restored to selling firewood. With respect to sex of the households, about 43.8 % (7) of female headed households engaged in this activity during drought which is higher proportions as compared to male counter parts.

Of the total poor headed households, about 31 % (18) reported that they sold firewood to cope with drought induced food shortage. On the other hand, relatively small proportions 16 % (7) and 14 % (4) of the total medium and better off households respectively similarly engaged in this practices to cope in adversity. This shows that the poor headed households have limited asset bases and easily resort to selling firewood as compared to other wealth categories.

4.2.6 Pulling out children from school

Children's school dropouts were one of the common drought coping strategies at the study area. As survey result indicated, equal proportions of farm households pulling out children from school regardless of agro ecology and sex during drought years. During focus group discussions, the farm households noted that they do not care about their children's education during food shortage. Rather, they prefer to engage them in casual labor in order to obtain cash income or they send to other districts to live with their relatives or friends deemed crop production are better.

As per the survey result, of the total poor, medium and better off households, about 29 % (17), 20 % (9) and 18 % (5) respectively responded that they withdrew children from school during drought. This shows that all wealth categories did not want to teach their children during drought. The farm

household were asked to state reasons for school drop outs in their order of importance. Accordingly, about 49 % (17) and 37 % (13) responded that to engage in casual labour and lack food, to engage in casual labour alone were among lion share reasons to withdrew children from school at the study area during drought.

4.2.7 Petty trading

According to the livelihoods study report by East Harerghe Zone (2008), the road access and market conditions of the study area are rated as good. The district is accessible to major towns of Harar, Dire Dewa, Haremaya, Aweday Kombolcha and Jijjiga. Groundnut and Khat are the main cash crops traded from local markets to Harar, Dire Dewa, Aweday, Haremaya, Kombolcha and Jijjiga. It also traded among different Kebeles within the districts and among different districts. Apart from these, biscuits, tea, bread, sugarcane, banana, onion, tomatoes, buying and selling of small ruminants are small trading activities carried out during the normal period along the major transportation routes and market places around the villages. These activities were intensified during drought years. Specifically, food related items were said to be highly traded. Despite of its variations among the Kebeles, the numbers of peoples engaged in these activities were increasing during harvest failure. During field survey, there was hot marketing of Khat and other products at the Nega Umakulle Kebeles throughout the week before mid- day. It is the most accessible market area for towns of Haramaya, Babile, Harar, Diredeba and located along the road from Harar town to Midega tola (other district). These created an enabling environment to widely engage in trading activities for farm households resides in the area. Farm households at Belina arba and Agudora were similarly engaging in these activities at market places found at their villages.

The survey result shows about 14.6 % (7) of Mid land and 24.2 % (24) of Low land reported that they engaged in petty trading during drought whereas about 18.3 % (24) of male and 43.8 % (7) female headed households engaged in similar strategy. From this it is possible to deduce that the Low land and female headed households more engaged in this activity as compared to Mid Land and male headed households. The survey result also shows that of the total better off households, about 35.7 % (10) engaged in petty trading

where as relatively small proportions of poor 12 % (7) and medium households 16% (7) also reported that they engaged in this activity during drought. From this, one can understand that the better off and female headed households were more engaging in the activity during drought years. According to the information obtained from key informants and own observation, female headed households are highly engaging in petty trading during normal as well as drought years which is mainly associated with traditions. The traditional Khat dealers are mostly female headed households at the study area. Thus, it is the matter of maintaining their businesses during adversity. But for better off and medium headed households, petty trading is not common activity during normal period since they are mainly obtained income from crop and livestock production sales at different scales. The poor less engaged in petty trading activities during normal as well as drought years. This might be attributed to lack of start up money or financial constraints. This is contradictory with the findings arrived at most of the petty traders were poor during drought at Humbo woreda, SNNP (Getahun, 2006).

During focus group discussions, the farm households noted that the large numbers of petty traders were females during drought. Females were less active in searching for local labour outside the district (land preparation, weeding, harvesting) and migrating to far distant in search for employment rather they preferred to engaging in small businesses at their locality. This is consistent with the finding that most females were petty traders during drought at the pastoralists' areas of Shinile districts (Mulu, 2010). On the contrary to this, the farm households noted that female headed households immediately stops after getting married since they become busy in routine activities and caring for their children.

One focus group discussants shared his life experiences as follows:

".....Before I got married to my wife, she was Khat traders. I thought that she will continue after marriage so that our family could lead successful and happy life. But everything has been changed after marriage. She immediately stopped to engage in such activities and started to wait for income from crop and livestock sale....."



Figure 3: shows petty traders along the road from Harar to Midegatola at Umakulle Kebeles

4.2.8 Preferred future coping mechanisms: discussions

In order to minimize the effects of frequent drought, households identified the preferred future coping strategies

specific to their district. These are petty trading (like Khat , livestock, food items, and cereals trading), temporary migration of male headed households to urban centres (for

works like construction, Khat processing, and for employment opportunities like guards), migration to other districts (for works like land preparation, weeding and harvesting), fattening livestock, strengthening the culture of interdependence during adversity (borrowing from friends, gifts), small scale irrigation agriculture (which is very difficult to really exercise it), cultivating short cycle and drought tolerant sorghum and maize, diversification of livestock and crop types, saving and educating children were raised preferred coping options suggested by the farm households during discussions.

5. Conclusions

The study revealed that the frequency and intensity of drought has been increasing while the farm households' drought coping options has been decreasing in the last few years. The livelihoods of the study population getting deteriorated 1970s afterwards and thus the farm households exposed for chronic food shortage. In line with this, dependency on external food sources has been increasing. In addition to frequent drought, vulnerability to food shortage has been increasing owing to low entitlement to productive resources like farm land, livestock resources and farm oxen which are the determinant factors for food availability at household level. Despite of positive relationship between availability of food from own harvest and productive resources, the study findings revealed that the farm households have low entitlement to these resources because of frequent drought that decreasing livestock ownership, increasing population pressure on limited land which further undermines crop production and productivity and coping capacity of the households. The problems are found to be severe for poor and female headed households and low land within agro ecology.

In response to frequent drought and subsequent food shortage, the farm households adopt different coping strategies to smooth food consumption patterns. Borrowing, selling livestock, eating wild foods, migration to urban centers, selling fuel wood, pulling children out of school to engage in casual labor and small business activities are the identified strategies adopted to increase food availability during drought. The finding shows that though all strategies are adopted during drought at a different degree by all household categories, the wealth status regardless of agro ecology determines the specific strategies that the farm households first resort to. Thus, borrowing, migration, selling firewood and eating wild foods are mainly adopted by poor and female headed households whereas selling livestock is strategies mostly pursued by better off and medium households. Petty trading is strategies highly pursued by better off and female headed households. Besides, the farm households do not want to send their children to school regardless of wealth status during harvest failure.

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