The four areas where interviews took place were all sites of existing projects. Interviews with farmers in the central provinces of Wollo region were facilitated by the Italian NGO Ricerca e Cooperazione. The interviewers were Yischak Tesfaye, Amelwork Tadesse and Andu-Alem Gubezie, who also acted as a co-trainer and translator. Interviews in the Menagesha, and Yerer and Kereyu provinces of Shewa region were undertaken in cooperation with SOS Sahel and Farm Africa. Andu-Alem Gubezie, Negash Yami, Walansa Fasil and Yeshiembet Chekol interviewed agro-pastoralists, sedentary farmers and local traders. In Harer Zuriya and Gursum provinces of Harerge region, interviewers spoke to farmers and agro-pastoralists at the site of a project run by CARE International. The interview team was made up of extension workers from the project: Habtamu Tadesse, Catie Leman, Mohamed Ahmed Dhag and Zufunworc Solomon. The fourth interview area was in the southern province of Borena, Sidamo region, and was centred around a project run by Norwegian Church Aid. Gimbe Borde and Tirunesh Sitro carried out interviews with pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The coordinator in Ethiopia was Patrick Darling; all interviews took place before the political changes of 1991.

Kebede Bantiwalu (M, 75 years), Cherecha, Adis Alem

I was born here in Cherecha and have never moved. I “served” my parents by looking after their cows, goats and sheep. From them I received all the experience I needed for my later farming activities. I still cultivate the same crops my father grew: mainly t’ef, wheat, barley, broad beans and the zengada variety of sorghum. I am the father of six children: four married daughters and two sons still at school.

I am very concerned about my crops being destroyed by wild animals, particularly baboons, monkeys and pigs. These animals are increasing because of a government ban on killing any wildlife here. In my youth, I hunted these animals with my friends, using spears and sharpened sticks, and so controlled those threatening our crops. According to Levitical law, it was forbidden to eat baboons, monkeys or pigs, but dikulas were hunted
By custom, anyone’s animals can glean the field after my oxen have taken the first crop residues for food. With the present ban on hunting, we farmers are having to stay around our farms the whole day long, just to protect our crops—because a herd of pigs or troop of baboons can completely destroy our fields in a few hours. During the night and in the early morning, it is too cold for us farmers to leave our houses: that is when most of the harm is done. Despite all the damage resulting from this government ban, we get no compensation for crops lost to wild animals, either from the state or the local kebele. I have also seen hyenas emerge from the forests on the other side of the valley—in broad daylight—to kill our animals. This is why I have stopped raising my own livestock.

When I was young, I built terracing to prevent top-soil erosion but I am too old to do that now. Being unfamiliar with fertiliser, I have never used it but I regularly applied manure. Now that scattered settlements are being concentrated together under the villagisation programme, there are no houses or animal stalls near my fields, so I can no longer easily apply manure. I have always practised crop rotation, growing barley, wheat and t’ef for many years, before leaving it under grass for two years. During the fallow period, livestock graze the land and drop their manure. The same is true to some extent on my croplands: by custom, anyone’s animals can glean the field after my oxen have taken the first crop residues.

I was a tenant before the revolution and used to give one-third of my produce as rent to the landlord. My 2 k’erts of land used to produce 4 or 5 quintals of grain when I was young but now I only get 3 or 4 quintals. The reasons are partly my old age—I can’t weed and plough at the proper time—and my inability to manure my fields properly following villagisation. My total production has also declined, because I am allocated only as much land as I can reasonably cultivate at my age: I am unable to till enough to make ends meet.

At a time when food is expensive and the status of farmers is higher than before, I am caught in a poverty trap: it is compulsory for me to sell my produce to the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC). This places me in a terrible dilemma. I have to sell 2 quintals of t’ef, 3 quintals of barley and 1.5 quintals of wheat to the AMC at lower and lower prices almost every year. What is left over is insufficient to support my family. So I borrow money from those who can lend, or sell my livestock to buy grain. I have never had to borrow before. The loans can be repaid without interest. Now that my livestock is finished, I do not have the collateral to borrow any more. There is only one solution: I can only wait for my death.

[Compulsory sale of grain to the AMC was abolished in March 1991, allowing farmers to keep their produce or sell at the current market price.]
I cannot remember my parents. I was born in Ambasel and came here to be brought up by my aunt when I was six years old. My aunt had five women and seven men servants, so I only had to fetch water occasionally and never became familiar with housework. My aunt had three cows in the immediate farm area but I never knew how many livestock she had altogether. She had 1 galameret of cultivated land which she part rented out and part farmed, using her servants. She died six years ago.

I first married when I was 13. Since then I have been married five times but divorced due to disagreements. At the time of the revolution, I was farming with my last husband at Abaselama, 10 kilometres away. My husband had two cows, three donkeys and several chickens. Even then, we had marital problems and he used to stay in his farm area. We would only visit each other occasionally. After the famine, my husband came to Kutaber market and was forced by the police to go to a resettlement area. I no longer know his whereabouts or even whether he is alive or dead.

Since that time, nearly five years ago, I have earned my living brewing and selling arekie. Over the last year, Food for Work schemes have improved my situation as I obtain two sacks of wheat every month. This is enough to feed me but not enough to sell. I use the money I make from brewing alcohol to buy items such as coffee, butter, pepper, salt and soap.

I have one son: he is a prophet, a Qur’anic teacher under a vow of celibacy. He helps me in times of need. The government also helped during the 1974 famine, when I received 9 tasa of wheat and 8 tasa of flour once or twice a month, one can of oil or butter for every two persons, and also a blanket. But during the 1984-85 famine, I stayed here and received no help at all.

Eucalyptus trees were planted here before the revolution but their numbers have increased as each year we collectively plant more trees. Since the revolution, we buy eucalyptus firewood from the kebele: the wood from five trees is enough for my needs and that costs 7 birr.

There have been some other changes to my life. When I was young, I used to eat meat, but not now. I used to make injera using slightly fermented, ground t’ef; now I make them with wheat and maize, sometimes even barley. I still make a spicy wat from peas and lentils. For the last 10 years, I have had piped water. Overall, my life has improved. I particularly appreciate what the Food for Work programmes have done: now I can often buy what I need in the market.
I was born quite near here, in Meskela village. As a young girl, I looked after the cows, helped to grind the grain, fetched water, collected firewood and prepared injera and wat. I did all this from such an early age that I cannot remember when I began. The main firewood then came from juniper, muatie, kesiie and embuacho bushes. The wood ash was used as manure. Dried cow dung was also used as fuel. During the drought, the numbers of trees drastically decreased, though there has been a subsequent increase. Today, from the surrounding hillsides, I collect woyira, bisana, digita, embuacho bushes, and imbis.

When I was 15, I married and moved to Segeret village, 3 kilometres from here. I prepared injera from t‘ef, sorghum, wheat and barley; I made wat from lentils, peas and cabbage; and I baked bread from wheat and oats—I prefer wheat bread. I used to farm, harrowing the soil to a fine tilth for the t‘ef, weeding and digging it. We were particularly busy at sowing and harvest time. Today, my son takes care of the farm because my husband has a severe cough. Because of his illness, I am having to work to bring in income for the family—our four children live in different parts of the region. This is ironic, since only my husband knew the extent of our land and its yields. As the proverb goes: “Women and hoes eat whatever they are given.” In other words, both do what they are forced to do.

I worked for Food for Work, on road construction, for three months but now I am too busy at home. From the Food for Work project, I received 90 kilos of wheat and 3 kilos of oil a month. We also had lessons on how to prepare wat and other forms of vegetable preparation but I was only able to attend one of the two days. I could not translate what I learned into action because I am so busy on the fields, although I do sometimes buy vegetables in Kutaber market. What I know about agriculture has not been gleaned from this project: I learned it from existing knowledge among us peasants and from growing vegetables in the other nursery further down the valley.
The oppression under the previous regime has ceased: now I am free to go out of my house and take part in organising and planning village affairs. I am chairperson of the Women’s Association here, and learn much from joining in its discussions. The government has also given us the chance of education, although I am unable to take full advantage of this on account of my age. Today, too, I can take my grain to a modern mill: the era dominated by the backbreaking chore of grinding grain has come to an end.

Ahmed Elmi (M, 44 years), Degeh Bur, Ogaden

My mother died during childbirth when I was 12 years old. Within a few months my father and brother died of some disease of the lung. I was the oldest survivor but I could not look after the young family and our animals. We had been rich until then, owning 15 cows, 70 goats and numerous chickens. I could not even save one of them: they scattered far and wide and were killed by wild animals, such as hyenas. We used to have fields of sorghum and maize, ploughed with our neighbours’ oxen, but someone else took over our crops and I could do nothing. My young brothers died one by one, until only my little sister was left.

I went to Dire Dawa to live and work in a hotel and then I became apprenticed to a tailor. After eight years, at the age of 20, I returned here to my birthplace: Degeh Bur. In the intervening years I had grown up. My physical appearance had changed and people did not quite recognise me. They remembered my parents but not me, so I never obtained the degree of help which I would have expected in my home area. This lack of support encouraged me to enlist as a soldier. By now I could speak Amharic, Somali and Oromigna, which meant I was easily accepted into the army.

Army life
Thus began a new life for me: I met many people, I learned about government work, and I earned enough money. I married and had eight children: three boys and five girls. Three of the girls and one of the boys died of whooping cough.

Then the Ethiopia-Somalia war broke out. Though a Somali speaker, I fought for Ethiopia because the Somali government came to take our land. We had plenty of food and medicine, everything was on our side. The government provided full support. For seven years I was in the war, but 12 years ago I was wounded. As usual, Somali forces hid on the ground or behind bushes as we chased them. Standing and shooting at them, I was
hit by a bullet. It went through my neck and jaw, knocking out some teeth. For 18 days I was in hospital. My hair went white with the shock and I became like an old man. I have a pension for life, but nothing extra for being wounded.

**E61 Atab Olad (M, 31 years), Ovale, Ogaden**

I have lived in this village for about 20 years, keeping and trading livestock. I have 20 cows, 70 camels, 50 goats, 70 to 100 sheep and a few chickens. The milk from our cows and camels is very important. I have also borrowed some horses. Five years ago, I began to grow maize and sorghum. It's difficult here, as rain is unreliable, though it falls over about half the year.

When I was a boy, things were different. Livestock numbers have declined, because the lower rainfall has not produced enough grass for them. K'ut, debrigor, abeb and other diseases have stricken many of our cows. The rain has been decreasing gradually. There was some last night but not enough. We are expecting more before growing our maize and sorghum. Maize is better than sorghum in dry conditions. When crops fail to thrive, we feed them to our animals and these fattened animals are then sold in the town for money to buy food. We saved some seed from last year’s crop: we always use the same short-season variety of red maize.
Last year, the government provided injections for our cattle and quinine for our fever but there has been no further help this year. When I came here 20 years ago, livestock commanded better prices, and I did not need to sell any. There were more trees then, particularly galol and sogso. Some areas round here were too thick to get through. I do not know why the tree cover has become thinner. When I was a boy, my family had three fields—two in Degeh Bur and one here—with a total perimeter of over 3 kilometres: 35 hectares in all. Now I have two fields in this village with a total area of 20 hectares. The fields in Degeh Bur did better. The soil there gave higher yields and allowed cropping for five years, whereas here one can only use the same field twice in succession before its fertility drops and it has to be left fallow for three to four years. One advantage of having fields in the two areas was that the rainfall was sometimes better here, sometimes there. We use animal dung to make our fields well again, especially for sorghum when we put dung specifically by each plant stand. Trees, not dung, are used for fuel, and the ash is thrown away. Trees are not food, therefore they are not good for us. We have enough food and enough animals to sell: we do not need trees so much now.

I have six children: four boys and two girls. One of my boys died when he was just 10 days old, so we do not know the illness. I married 10 years ago when I was 21 and my wife was 20. For the first three years we had no children: since then my wife has borne a child every year. I do not intend to let my wife rest. The babies are breastfed for four months and then given animal’s milk. Our tradition is to have a child every two years, but my programme is for a child every year. After all, I do not know when my wife is going to die, so it is better that she has many children, so that—if she dies—her life will not have been in vain. Besides, I am going to marry another wife....

Abdulahi Osman (M, 70 years), Ovale, Ogaden

I was born and brought up in Degeh Bur but I came and founded this village. I was 64 years old when Allah told me to settle here. Following my cattle about over the years, I had come to realise that this was a suitable place: there was enough grass for my cattle and enough rain, though both decreased from time to time.

It was always my ambition to have seven wives even when, at 19, I married my first wife. It is part of our culture. I achieved this ambition
and now have 20 children but am left with only two wives...and they both stay in another village.

When farming, I used to grow maize and sorghum. Everyone had different areas of land: I owned 20 kotie. In a good year, I would obtain 10 hundredweight [508 kg] of maize. I only grew sorghum occasionally. Derkey—a worm—used to destroy much of the crop, and there was trouble with birds. We did not report the worm problem to the government but went to a sheki who read the Qur'an and prayed. He used to give us a medicinal plant, but these days he prays in front of a vessel with water which is then sprinkled onto the sorghum. Sometimes the worm is killed; sometimes not.

The most abundant trees around here are galol, sogsog, kansah, mara, hagar, obol, karasho, dirtab, mayo, delol, irgin, liby, bilil and kora. None of these species has disappeared, though the numbers have decreased. Nomads clear trees when they settle somewhere, to make huts and charcoal. Refugees clear trees, too. Farmers have been ploughing more land, using camels—and oxen, which are better and more numerous. Finally, there is a change in the climate: it has been getting hotter over the
last 15 years or so. Also the rain comes only once, between September and November, and even then is unreliable. There is sometimes a little between December and February; the rest of the year is completely dry.

The main changes that I have seen in my life are that I used to be healthy but now I am sick, that we used to travel around but now we must settle, that the government no longer gives medicine or food, and that our wealth has decreased.

**Arden Dimo (M, 80 years), Arero Harodimtu, Borena**

Before the war, I was living in this area, near Arero, keeping 100 camels, 80 cows, and 30 goats and sheep. During the early part of the war, we became caught between the front lines. Both Somali and Ethiopian soldiers took our animals. I was left destitute. One day, Somali soldiers surrounded our village and shot anyone who ran out, killing many of our villagers. I kept inside our house with my wife and four children and we were captured.

We were taken away to a large detention camp at Surea in Somalia. There were thousands of other people there. We were given rations but no work and no animals. It was very hot and dry—impossible land to farm. The Somalis wanted us to join them, even though we were Oromigna speakers. They held us there for nine years.

Finally, the Somalis brought us back to the border for official release. Thousands of others still wait, as this process is being implemented only gradually. First, I went to Negele Borena for rations, then I was resettled here in my old home area. That was just four months ago. The government gave me some money for a few livestock and I have bought three camel calves, which are growing up nicely. In time, we will also try to grow some crops. Our main problems are not owning enough animals and an uncertain future. Now one son and one daughter are married, I want to educate my other two children. To do this, I will need to build up my flocks and herds to their previous numbers. That is my ambition.

When I was a child, we had the same amount of livestock as I had just before the war. Some people grew crops; others, like us, did not. Then more and more crops were grown for general food, additional to milk. I watched others cultivating, then I tried to practise it myself. When the war broke out, I had been growing maize, sorghum, barley and t'ef for five years. In the same way, I had been watching those who used manure on their fields. I noted how nicely the crops grew, their good yields and the
way the land could be used more continuously. I, too, had begun to plough in manure before sowing, though I did not measure how much. Woodash was useless.

I lived on both hills and plains. On the hills, I used to keep my animals around the village and cultivate land down on the plains. When I lived on the plains, our farms lay near the village and our animals were all around, some of them being occasionally up on the hills.

Everything I saw in the landscape when I was young still exists now. The only difference as far as trees are concerned is that more have been cut because of cultivation and there are more villages around. I am unaware of any species having disappeared or of any new ones being introduced.

Before the war, there was every kind of animal around—leopard, elephant, giraffe, mountain nyala, zebra, wild goat and buffalo. We used to hunt the lions that killed our cows and laid traps for the bush fowl. Hunting and trapping are now forbidden. I do not know where all the big animals have gone; maybe the soldiers killed them.

E68  

Godauna Halake (F, 96 years), Kafate, Borena

My parents owned many animals. Everything edible came from our livestock, for we ate mainly meat and milk mixed with blood, taken from a vein in the cow’s neck. We knew nothing about crops or grain.

My husband, too, owned much livestock: cows, goats, sheep, donkeys and camels. He died 56 years ago, when Italy invaded Ethiopia. I have borne only one daughter and she is alive and married, here in Kafate.

As a child and as a married woman, one of my daily tasks was to collect water from the wells at Wachile, 17 kilometres away. I used a wooden container, smoked to seal any leaks. On the outward journey, I carried it over my shoulders in a wickerwork frame, all of which weighed about 10 kilos. On the return trip through soft sand, I carried the additional 20 or so litres of water. As I am now so old, I no longer have to do this, but my daughter and other women from this village still make such journeys daily.

We collect firewood from the immediate locality. Hale, sabansa, dadache and walchama are preferred. They make good charcoal, burn slowly and consistently, as well as giving off a good smell. None of these species is in short supply.

The trees are less dense than before. We used to burn the forest to obtain fresh green grass for our animals. Where we burnt, usually without any
control and well away from the village, the trees and bushes were further apart. If the fire approached the village, then it was controlled. Sometimes we burnt back the bush around our village to stop it encroaching, as well as to kill insects—especially the tsetse fly—and to provide fresh grass for the livestock. Today, all such burning is banned by the government.

The main pasture grasses are still the same as when I was young: mat’agudesa, alalo, alcheso (which cures mouth infections), hido, sericha and ilmogori. During drought, the landscape goes dry. However, when it rains again, there is enough grass. I have not seen any big change in the rainfall pattern over my life.

Wars have taken a greater toll of our livestock than drought. Some of our livestock was taken in the Italian war; more was taken in the recent Somali conflict. It was impossible to hide our animals: the soldiers followed us and surrounded our village. We had to escape for our lives by night, leaving all our livestock behind. We managed to reach Wachile, where we stayed for 13 years. We had nothing to eat. We had to find roots but we did not know what was good to eat and what was bad. We survived. We ate hargassa grass, gurisa fruit, the boiled cabbage-like leaves of rafu, the ground tubers of tuk’u and the potato-like tubers of white pear.

My parents and grandparents taught me the medicinal use of plants. I could spend all day telling you of the hundreds of plants used in traditional medicine. Here are a few examples.

**Medicinal plants**

If the roots of the tree creeper, hamaricha, are boiled and the water drunk, it helps cure coughs and influenza. Rericha is a small plant, the roots of which can be boiled to cure coughs in young livestock and small children. Men also use this for gonorrhoea. I cannot count the plants that are used for this complaint: almost every medicinal plant is acceptable. If the roots of the low-growing arsar plant, the leaves of the big k’obo tree, or the roots of the large awaicho tree are boiled in water, like tea, for about 20 minutes, they produce potions against gonorrhoea. The awaicho potion is also a good remedy for tapeworm. Another cure for gonorrhoea comes from boiling the stems of toticha in butter. This small plant comes from a long way away, growing in very localised spots in Mega and Didleben, in Negele Borena.

Drinking a potion obtained by boiling the roots of the ulicha creeper will ease monthly menstrual pains. Sabako—a broad-leaved, small plant—has roots which yield a medicine to lessen the stomach cramps and morning sickness of pregnant women. Anona are big riverside trees and their bark can be infused in boiling water, for the same time as the leaves,
to make a medicine to help parturition of the placenta in problematic post-childbirth cases. Only half a mugful need be drunk. For more normal deliveries, the leaves of the big *garse* tree are roasted and powdered to make them into a tea. Drinking this helps induce an early birth and ensure clean parturition. This is not done to induce miscarriages.

Stomach pain or gastric disorders can be countered with a potion brewed from the roots of the small *ubacho* plant. If wood-ash is drunk with water, this also relieves men’s stomach pains. *Burate* creeper fruits are boiled and eaten to ease gastric pains and vomiting. The big *kuwa* tree has a white sap, which can be used to stop diarrhoea. Men who eat meat must not take this medicine. The white sap is dangerous for the eyes. This means that great care must be taken in its collection, preparation and administration.

By digging out and boiling the roots of the small *walda* plant, snake-bites can be cured—especially those of Puff Adders. The roots of the small *makafa* shrub and a different kind of *walda* plant can be brewed to help cows drop their milk. For cows refusing to release milk to their calves, another more specific medicine comes from bark infusions of *bik’a*, a big plant like a small tree. The small *butiye* shrub provides a paste, which can be painted on to animals’ legs where they have been attacked by flies similar to the warble fly.

Internal or external pustules or swellings are treated by grinding the roots of the small *furza* plant to a powder, mixing that into an ointment and then applying it externally, like linament, to the cancerous sore or lump. The application is left to dry, uncovered. A powder to heal wounds on animals or people can be made from any part of the big *makanisa* tree. In cases where the infection is an internal one, a paste of ash and water applied to the swelling will help the pus to ooze out. From the spoil of some animal burrows, you can find suitable minerals for pasting onto surface wounds.

This is enough. Only a few men and women now have this knowledge. People travel up to 300 kilometres to see me. In Borena, they come from Teltele, Negele and Leban. I know of others who also practice herbal medicine, but they live far away and we have never met or exchanged information. The closest is my brother’s son in Yabelo. The knowledge I have gained is difficult to pass on to others. I dispense my information willingly but no one has yet taken on my mantle. I am passing on the information to my daughter and her eight children; they are learning by fetching the ingredients.
Jirmo Buda (M, 80 years), Gabso, Borena

The round homes of Gabso village, made from grass and the bent boughs of trees, were loosely clustered together in the empty bush. Women, adorned with bangles and neck bracelets, sat on wooden stools washing and pummelling their clothes. Men gathered around to listen, many standing on one leg as they leaned on their long sticks.

Dure, in the Mega area, is where I was born, though I spent the first 47 years of my life in Haraweyu, eight hours northeast of here. Even though only seven of its 17 wells are working, there was more water there than here. When I was a boy, we had 30 cows, 20 goats, one mule and four camels. Then I spent three years at Leban, Negele Borena. It was not a good livestock area, as sucking flies attacked the cows’ shins and our cattle became thin and weak.

For the last 30 years, I have lived in Gabso, which has the same climate as Haraweyu and enough grass but insufficient water. When we first came here, we lived on milk and butter—food was no problem. Over the last eight years of drought and poor rainfall, our animals have produced little milk. So we are now having to buy food grain from Yabelo, 60 kilometres away, or Mega, 50 kilometres away, by selling livestock. Livestock numbers fluctuate with the rainfall. I now only have 30 cows and 15 goats.

During the drought, we dug ponds and built wells for Food for Work, obtaining grain from Norwegian Church Aid. We tried to find grass and to go where the grain was, but when the drought was hard, we shifted to Haraweyu. Afterwards, we moved back to Gabso, where the grass was better. There were other settlements here but this posed no grazing problems, as there is plenty of room to move about. Today though, we have nothing—not even grain from Food for Work.

There is a water shortage: we make a four-hour journey to the base of a small rocky hill to obtain water, taking the cows there every three days, while women go two or three times a week with donkeys to collect water for domestic use. When I first came here, the wells gave little water. Twenty years ago, two of the wells failed and more had to be dug: there are now four working wells. Up to six people are needed in some of these wells. One person from each herd meets on a set day and works with those from other herds in a cooperative. This labour custom has not changed over time.

Borena wells can be very deep and often have two working levels. A long, narrow cutting slants down to water troughs, 10-15 metres below
ground level. From some 10-20 metres lower down, the herdsmen, perched on loose timber scaffolding in a wide well, pass water up to the troughs. Each herdsman takes a turn at being song-leader, telling of his cattle and his adventures, and the rest join in a chorus. Every now and then, they break into a rapid refrain and pass up the water twice as fast.

We know where to dig wells by looking around rocky hills for seepage and areas where grass remains green. Waterholes dug in the bottom of stream-beds soon dry up. During the rains, our livestock can get water everywhere and there is no need to travel far. Forty other villages use the same traditional wells as us. Well over 10,000 cattle are being served by these wells; 2,600 cattle are watered there daily! Usually, this just takes six to seven hours but, when the water level falls, it can take much longer and we work into the night, burning firewood to make enough light. The level of the spring water drops when drawn but then comes back up again; there has been no change in its recovery level from when I first came here 30 years ago.

E78 Killoya-Silgo Ajambo (F, 80 years), Dillo, Borenà

Livestock converge on Dillo—a village in the crater of an extinct volcano—from far away, descending sheer basalt rock through great splits in the valley walls to reach the wells on the crater floor. Into this pastoral community came a woman with a different way of doing things....

I was born in Konso, Gamo Gofa region. I came here on my own—willingly—about 40 years ago. In Konso, I had been growing sorghum and soya beans. I had my own land, though I cannot remember its size or yields. I had neither cow nor ox; I just dug my land with my hoe. I worked on both red and black alluvial soils. Making bunds was a practical measure to protect the soil and some people terraced their hillside land.

I was married in 1935, aged 24, during the Italo-Ethiopian war and stayed with my
husband for six years. During that time, I ground grain, prepared food, made beer from sorghum, and went to the fields to dig the soil. I used to make kurkurfa out of red sorghum, and mix it with boiled leaves from the shiferaw tree, which cures diabetes.

I started working early in the morning and stopped at noon. I collected sabansa and deka for firewood; I used no cowdung for fuel. I fetched water from the two local elas, which never dried up. I had one boy and one girl, but both died in their early childhood. I thought it was bad luck to live with my husband, for all my children died—and to be with him and just feed him was valueless. So I divorced him and came here alone.

I never married again. Here, I made bordei and arekie. I ground grain, fetched water from the crater and collected firewood. I had to buy grain—maize, sorghum, barley and wheat—from merchants, because the Borena people do not plough or grow cereals. Had they tried, they would have grown. I collected sabansa, sirgirso and hamessa for firewood. They can also be used for house construction. The trees and shrubs around here include sigirso, hamessa, sabansa, dedecca, hidado, sukella, hagarssu, ballanji, ergenssa and oholley.

There have been two droughts in Dillo. As I am not a pastoralist, I cannot recall exactly when they occurred. Those who have cattle will remember. We never had any drought in Konso. There have been no major changes in my life, though the vegetation around here has decreased. I prefer this area to Konso, and I prefer working to receiving aid.

Today, I am practising some small-scale agriculture, growing shumbra, pumpkin, sorghum, abish and a little maize. Borena people do not grow these crops. Ever since coming here, I have tried to teach the people around me about them. For years I failed, then—last year—I succeeded. I even have had to provide seeds to those trying to cultivate. The people around here are very happy with my efforts. They like me. They respect me. As I am growing older and older, the kebele provides me with 45 kilos of wheat and 1.5 kilos of margarine without my having to take part in the Food for Work programme. They gave these to me free, as a sign of their respect and liking, because they came to understand what my efforts meant.

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E55 Nafissa Mohamed (F, 40 years), Ogaden
It is the man's job to seek new pastures where there has been rain. Today, our men are looking for chat and tea in town, not rain.

E50 Hasan Mussa (M, 56 years), Aubera
Chat is like a food to us: it takes away our appetite, yet gives us strength to plough.
E81  Gorlo Jimo (M, 70 years), Ch’ork’asa, Borena

I have been here four years. I originally came from Borbor, near Belale and Wachile. I moved here via Mega and Melbana because of the war. When I was younger, I had 400 cows, 20 camels, 200 goats, a mule, four donkeys and eight sheep. I obtained my food from this livestock. I had eight children to feed: four boys and four girls.

When I was younger, we used to catch giraffe, sala, hidi and guguftu. We hunted them on horses, spearing them when they became exhausted and weak. With giraffes, we first cut the achilles tendon in one of their back feet so they could not get up, then we struck them in the neck with big spears until they bled to death. Other animals we killed by striking them wherever we could. We also trapped some with a rope noose. The animals in the bush when I was a boy also included zebra, mountain nyala and others. The numbers of all the animals have gradually declined over my lifetime. People were hunting them more and more, so they escaped to the big forests and became scarce. During the war, soldiers went everywhere into the forest and shot the animals. That and the drought are the main reasons why there are so few animals in the bush today.

Every year in the dry season, we used to burn the dense, unwanted shrubs to bring up new grass. We did not burn near our homes for safety’s sake. Burning is not good—it destroys...but the problem is that otherwise people do not get fresh grass. It also killed the insects that were bad for cows, and killed snakes—all the other animals escaped.

War

The war [with Somalia] started when I was at Borbor. Somali soldiers came to the village early in the morning, shooting and killing people. Some of us were captured, others ran and hid in the undergrowth and bushes. Borena people captured in earlier raids were fighting with the Somali soldiers against their own villages. God saved me. I picked up one baby; my wife took the other. I led the way without looking. I just ran...even through thick thorns. My body was badly scratched, but my wife and the other children could run after me down the path I made. Once out of danger, I left my wife and children in a safe place and, with a few other men, crept carefully back to our village. Nothing was left. Our houses were burnt to the ground. Our livestock had been stolen. We had saved our lives but lost everything else.

Some of our relatives in Melbe and Golbo helped us. They collected together a few cows for us to start a new life. Then came the drought. By then, I was staying at Dubuluk. The wells here are affected by the decrease
in rainfall and the water was no longer flowing fast enough to water the animals every three days. Day and night the herdsmen toiled at the wells, but the water came slowly and the livestock only drank once every five days. On top of this, there was not enough grass. Our three milking cows died. Once again, we had absolutely nothing. This time, our relatives could not help us. They, too, were suffering. I moved to Yabelo to join Food for Work. It was then that my 20-year-old son fell ill.

He was sick for over a year, during which a herbalist at Dubuluk treated him with boiled plants. I paid the herbalist with milk, coffee, and tobacco from Yabelo market. I was penniless when this happened. I had to join Food for Work to obtain grain, which I then sold to raise the money to buy the commodities to pay the herbalist. Eventually, my son was taken to Yerga Alem hospital and there he died.

New ways
Under Food for Work, I made roads, planted seedlings and constructed ponds. It was all new to me and it was good to learn new things. The work was interesting but exhausting. Today, I would prefer to rear animals, but I am still doing Food for Work. The ponds we make sometimes hold water, sometimes go dry. Some of the tree seedlings we plant survive, but most eventually die from lack of rain—they are only watered in the nursery and are planted out when the rain comes. Something else I have learned: new ideas about cultivating land. Maize, wheat, haricot beans, barley, sorghum and t'ef are some of the seeds I have been given by Norwegian Church Aid. There has been some harvest this year but some has been lost because of the lack of rain. When I say lost, I mean just the crop; the foliage is useful fodder whatever happens. The livestock prefer it to grass. I know nothing yet about vegetables—I have seen but not eaten them. Local farmers here have long experience of growing vegetables.

In my lifetime, there has been no change in the vegetation. The changes that have affected the lives of the people are the extra clinics, ponds and wells. Now I have two cows and four goats. Food for Work pays with both grain and with animals. I want to build up my livestock numbers again...maybe this will take up to 10 years or more. I have a son and a daughter working with me; the others are too young. I want enough milk for my children. If at all possible, I want to keep my children looking after livestock as the Borena people used to. Some of my children are now at school. I do realise that they may become interested in other things. I want to depend on cows again. For the moment, though, it is good to live in a new way...a change.
Further reading on the Sahel