

**CASE STUDY:**

**Demissie Tsegaye from East Shewa in the Great Rift Valley, Ethiopia**



The Ethiopian Highlands

Ethiopia, now a stable multi party democracy, is the oldest independent country in Africa. Its capital, Addis Ababa is the home of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union.

In the north, the Ethiopian Highlands form the largest continuous area of its altitude in Africa, with little of its surface falling below 1500 m (5000 ft). It is sometimes called the 'Roof of Africa' for its height and the large area it covers. The elevation of the district gives an unexpectedly temperate climate helped by the annual monsoon winds from the Indian Ocean that cause rains from June to September. However, it is also prone to droughts and the large rural population struggle to live on less than a dollar a day. Food insecurity is a constant backdrop for the tens of thousands of small farmers. Not far to the north was the centre of the famine of the '80's, started by drought but made much worse by civil war.

The local farmers have very limited access to the technologies that could improve their productivity and income. Their ability to make do with very limited resources is born of necessity.

Demissie Tsegaye is 47 years old and is married with five sons and three daughters. He lives and farms 3 hectares in Bora District, East Shewa. He has no access to rural infrastructure such as roads, water supply or health care. The family is totally dependent on farming for food and income.

His farming system is adapted to his environment, his equipment and his knowledge. He has no irrigation and depends totally on unreliable rainfall which is insufficient and erratic.

Demissie grows a rotation of maize, wheat, teff (a cereal) and white pea beans. His productivity is predictably low. His method is to plough with oxen, then to plant, weed and harvest by hand. No pesticides or fertilisers are used. Crop residues and animal dung maintain soil fertility.

The bean is harvested from October to November. This timing is of great importance as it coincides with the season of food shortage. Beans are grown by all the local farmers as a cash crop to help families get the food they need. He tends to have to sell early in the season when the prices are low.

He says: “I need to sell my crop as quickly as I can because we always need the money. I have no access to credit or information about market prices. What I find difficult is that the traders set the price and I really have no choice. I ask other farmers how they get on but can’t do very much about it. Also, none of us are very confident about the accuracy of the traders’ scales. Unfortunately, this is something that we are unable to check.”

There is mistrust between the farmers and the traders and no official controls. There has been the emergence of farmer’s associations in some areas that does help, but Demissie has no choice at present.

Demissie has benefited from agro enterprise training and inputs from CRS.

*Photo by Andrew McConnell, CRS*



He has some ideas about the improvements he would like to see. “I think I could improve the way I use the rain. I have heard of other farmers that have found out how to capture the water and use it to help the crops. I also think that I could get better results if I had better seeds. Often, many of the seeds that I keep are eaten by pests. In the market, I wish I could get a better understanding of the price. Last year, the bean price really got much better at the end of the season. I don’t know why this happened and it didn’t help me at all, but better prices would make a big difference to our life.”

*Demissie Tsegaye was interviewed by Dr Legesse Dadi of Catholic Relief Services in June 2008.*