PROCEEDINGS

1st Annual Symposium

Tigray Development Association (TDA)

Howard University
Washington, D.C. USA

August, 1990

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Tigray Development Association (TDA)
P.O.Box 987
Adelphi, MD 20783-0987

Prepared by Yasmina Sam Atsbeha and Abraham Teklu

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INTRODUCTION

The central objective of the Tigray Development Association (TDA) is to contribute to the people's development efforts through mobilizing and soliciting support in terms of expertise, material and financial resources from concerned Tigrayans, other fellow Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians. TDA serves as a forum to those concerned individuals, wherever they may be, who would like to contribute their share to national development effort in order to help bring about improvement of the living conditions of the people.

TDA feels that organizing various symposia is one of the ways of galvanizing support to enable the people to help themselves. In view of this , the First Annual Symposium was successfully organized on 18 August, 1990, at Howard University, Washington, DC. The papers presented there are published here as proceedings of the TDA 1st Annual Symposium.

Some of the ideas put forward at the Symposium are being implemented already by TDA. Thus, to put to practice the ideas contained in his paper, "Education and Modern Technology", Desta Asgedom was sponsored by TDA to take three TV sets, 84 video casettes on mathematics and the necessary answer textbooks to Tigray in May 1991. While in Tigray, Desta demonstrated to mathematics teachers on the use of video casettes to teach 9-12 graders.

In an effort to alleviate shortage of water supply, TDA also sponsored Tsegaye Hailu, one of its members, to visit Tigray and study water development problems. Tsegaye, a hydrogeologist, who contributed: "Water Supply and Sanitation Project for Northern Ethiopia: Regional Overview", to the Symposium, visited a large part of rural and urban Tigray in February - March 1991. Currently, Tsegaye and the Water and Sanitation Consultancy Group (of which he is a member), based at Denver, Colorado, are preparing a comprehensive water development program proposal, which will be submitted to the appropriate authorities in Ethiopia. Once the proposal is accepted, it will be submitted to donor agencies for funding.

TDA invites all present and potential members to make their contribution towards developmental efforts of the people in terms of expertise, material and financial resources. The value of the contributions would be measured in terms of how much the people could be enabled to support themselves and improve their living conditions.

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA, TIGRAY'S CASE: AN OVERVIEW

By

Dr. Aseffa Abreha

Paper presented to the TDA First Symposium

Howard University, Washington, D.C.

19 August, 1990

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA, TIGRAY'S CASE: AN OVERVIEW

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the Tigray Development Association (TDA) and myself, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all to its First Annual Symposium.

BACKGROUND TO TDA

The Tigray Development Association was founded on 12 August, 1989, at Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Like everything else, TDA has a background. And I wish to give you a brief outline of its genesis. With your permission I invite you to accompany me on a short journey back home to locate the origin of the idea of TDA in order to put the record straight.

When I went to Tigray in November 1985, it was one of the most critical periods in the history of Tigray and generally in that of Ethiopia. It was during this time that about a million people were reckoned to have perished from the most horrifying famine yet, i.e. the 1984-85 famine crisis. It was during this period too in which there was an unprecedented generosity from the World Public to save lives in Ethiopia.

On the other hand, it was this period which the Derg considered most opportune moment to uproot the people from Tigray and generally the North

through what it called "resettlement programme". It was also at this time that the Soviet Government, instead of providing relief food and medical assistance to the hungry and dying, chose to collaborate in forcibly hauling off people to the Southern part of Ethiopia. It was the time too when, having seen what was in store for them -- designed by the Derg in collaboration with its external allies -- the people of Tigray became more determined than ever before not only to survive as a society but, more crucially, to achieve the objectives of their long running struggle, i.e. peace, democracy and sustainable development.

The determination of the people can be discerned from some of the actions they took at that critical juncture. I interviewed at the time both within Tigray and in the Sudan the following sets of people: (a) displaced families as a result of the war and famine; (b) escapees from the so-called "resettlement" camps in the South; (c) returnees from the Sudan; (d) refugees in Sudanese camps; and (e) peasants in situ.

What follows is a generalized summary of statements expressed by the interviewees [1].

"When we reached a desperate situation during the 1984-5 famine crisis, i.e., when we reached a point where we did not have anything to fall back on", they said, "we determined to call the Derg's bluff. After having heard through the radio that the 'Red Cross' had brought relief food assistance, we went to the towns mentioned in the broadcast. However, we endured three phases of the Derg's mistreatment.

"Phase 1: When we went to the towns to receive relief food aid in response to the broadcast, we were chased away by the Derg's soldiers. But we tried again.

"Phase 2: This time, we were asked by the authorities to pay taxes for the previous 8-10 years in order to receive relief assistance. However, we could not afford to pay. If we had the resources to afford to pay taxes, we would not have gone to seek for relief aid in the first place. The Derg kept on denying us any assistance [2].

"Phase 3: At this stage, we were invited to go to various relief distribution and feeding camps, where some were given relief food this time round. As a result more and more people went to the camps. However, there was a dramatic, tragic change. The camps were used not only as relief centers but predominantly as the main human collection points. The Derg, with the support of its foreign allies, began to forcibly take many people away from the camps for 'resettlement' in the South. We realized that relief food was not meant to help us but to lure us to come to the collection centers in order to be uprooted from our area. This new situation forced us to seek for alternatives to survive as a society.

"We were thus forced to seek other options: Firstly, those of us who were severely affected had to move to less affected areas within Tigray and share with our compatriots whatever means of survival were available.

"Secondly, when the situation became unbearable and beyond control, hundreds of thousands of us together with our families had to cross borders to seek employment/assistance to survive. This proved to be most horrendous because, while we were trekking to cross the border, we were attacked by the Derg both on the ground and from the air whereby many children, women and the elderly lost their lives.

"Thirdly and most importantly, we had to design two-pronged strategies for survival: (a) to brace ourselves for a more concerted struggle against the forces that were bent on destroying us; and (b) to do what we could by way of mobilizing and utilizing our resources for the production of food".

Subsequently, the people took some critical measures. In the first place, the "Baitos" (local counsels) mobilized some 6,000 peasants from Western Tigray, which was relatively less affected by the famine, to construct a dry weather road that stretched to Eastern Sudan. Using their own food, the peasants managed to complete the road within four months [3]. The road served as a 'life-line' whereby relief food assistance was trucked from the Sudan to feed those who could not make it to across the border. Ever since the 1984-5 famine crisis, this road has been serving an essential purpose in what is known as "cross border operation".

The other significant action that the people took was the return, for instance, of some 70,000 able bodied peasants from among the more than 200,000 refugees in the camps in Eastern Sudan. When the rains returned in the spring of 1986, the refugees voluntarily re-crossed the border on foot between April and June to reach their villages in time for the planting season.

This voluntary repatriation was one of the largest refugee returns ever registered in Africa. Yet, it took place not only despite severe obstacles put by sections of the international community, but also without significant international assistance and outside the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The only help was the one provided by the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) of the Sudan and a small number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The returning refugees were provided with all possible assistance and logistical support by the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), which is the indigenous charitable organization, in collaboration with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). REST exerted every effort to provide the returnees as well as those in situ with the requisite means of recovery and rehabilitation such as farm tools, seeds, oxen and relief food till they harvested their own. The TPLF provided security, protection and able and courageous national leadership to the people in the most trying time of their history.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the people and the able leadership provided by their national political organization and relief agency, the Derg's course of action continued to be the destruction of their will through, firstly, military means; secondly, using food as a weapon; and, thirdly, forced resettlement.

The Derg's efforts were aided and abetted by external forces. Thus the Soviet Union ant its allies provided massive weapons and technical advice of destruction. The West gave the economic wherewithal in the name of humanitarian relief assistance, political support and justification through

their media of the almost genocidal resettlement programme. Using its privileged position at various places, a section of the external "experts" or "Ethiopianists" of the Ethiopian studies industry supported the Derg in gagging the people and distorting news of their plight through the media and press outside the country.

One might wonder why so many powerful forces could gang up against poor people whose only crime is the demand of and struggle for peace and progress in a democratic Ethiopia. Clearly, the reason boils down to the issues of common and mutual interests. The Derg wanted to maintain itself in power at any cost to the peoples of Ethiopia. The external forces were, and still are, locked in a struggle to keep a regime in power that serves their own interests. Thus there is a symbiotic collusion of local and external interests.

Confronted with such huge unholy alliance of interests, the people of Tigray had no alternative but to struggle with the utmost determination. They had to summon all their will to fight in order to survive as a people.

The conditions under which they struggled strengthened, rather than weakened as wished for by their enemies, the people's resolve and determination. The process of emancipation, mobilization and organization broadened and deepened further. There emerged a clear and well-developed national and social consciousness leading to full grassroots of the struggle, i.e. cultural, social, economic, military and political dimensions. It can therefore be said that the famine of 1984-5 was a watershed in the struggle of the people of Tigray.

Such was the situation when I went to Tigray in November 1985. And it was when the people were in this situation and spirit that I met the elderly, young, women, men, Muslims, Christians; and Kunamas, Agaus, Afars and Tigrays while travelling up and down the countryside. No sooner would I arrive at an area than all of them, i.e., the elderly, young, women, men, fighters and peasants alike would ask me repeatedly one and the same question: "We are struggling for our democratic rights and to survive as a

people, what are our children, brothers and sisters who live abroad doing at this difficult moment of our history?" This was indeed a pregnant question.

ESTABLISHMENT OF TDA

This question stemmed from a dual weakness. On the one hand, the struggle has managed to mobilize, conscientize and organize the mass of the population at home to fully participate in and serve as the base for the on-going democratic social transformation. The spectacular victories scored so far by the mass-based popular movement are a testimonial to the democratic nature of the on-going struggle. Yet, it has not been able so far to make this fully appreciated by the refugees abroad and generally the outside world.

On the other hand, only a handful of refugees who live abroad have as yet involved themselves in supporting the people's effort for social transformation and progress. The impact has been so little, especially when compared with that of those in the actual struggle who have committed their precious possessions, i.e. their lives, that it led the people to ask, "what are our children, brothers and sisters who live abroad doing at this difficult moment in our history?"

Those weaknesses and the related repeatedly raised popular question inspired me to conceive the idea of a TDA. I took it upon myself as a task and promised to pass on the message, the people's question, to the refugees abroad. If only they would be organized in some form, I thought, the refugees abroad could possibly contribute towards the survival and development effort of the people. In particular, they could help in the areas of agriculture, education, health, technology, cottage industry, environmental protection, etc.. I took slides that reflected to some extent the living condition of the population. The slides focused especially on the fields of education, farming, artisanry, etc. and tried to pass on the message through various meetings held at different times in Europe and North America. Several public gatherings were held in Europe, for instance, Britain, West Germany, etc., and the United States. We organized follow-up

meetings repeatedly, for example, in Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, etc.

In those meetings, the audience would feel tremendous sadness about the plight of the people. On the other hand, the audience seemed encouraged by the people's developmental efforts and felt enthusiastic about the idea of doing something to contribute their share towards the national effort. But when it came to concretize it, it proved to be much more difficult. Some of them were overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems and felt helpless; in effect they seemed to be saying, "what can we do, after all our capacity is limited". This attitude appeared to lead to involuntary resignation.

In spite of such difficulties, the idea of doing something to help our people continued to float till we, finally, managed to establish the TDA. It needs to be underlined here that this was an independent, voluntary response by concerned individuals to the demand, needs and aspirations of the people. It was never an imposition by any group or organization.

Emphasis needs to be placed here as well that the establishment of the TDA was helped by the tremendous victories scored by the people in their struggle against the Derg. The total defeat of the Derg by the people of Tigray and the deepening of the democratic struggle and its expansion to central Ethiopia have shown what can be achieved by a determined, organized and conscious people led by a revolutionary democratic movement.

TDA strives to mobilize and solicit support in the forms of expertise, skills, material and financial resources, ideas, wisdom and experience from concerned Tigrayans, other fellow Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians. TDA seeks support from individuals, groups or organizations to assist the developmental effort of the people. The areas that are focused on include: education, health, technology, agriculture and environmental protection.

The central objective of the TDA is to contribute to the national developmental efforts. TDA creates the forum for those concerned individuals who want to contribute their share in the forms of expertise, technical know-how, experience, material resources, etc. wherever they may

be in order to help bring about development and the improvement of the living conditions of the people.

ISSUE OF DEVELOPMENT

When speaking of development, some questions could be lingering at the back of one's mind: Is the present situation conducive for development? How much is being done currently? What can be done in the future?

The issue of development is difficult enough in peace time, but even more so in time of war.

The concept of development means different things to various people. To some it means growth of production without regard to the issues of distribution, exchange and environmental protection. To others it means all these things to bring about improvement in the cultural, social, political and economic life of people.

Much has been said and written about development of the developing countries, or third world as they are also called, during the last four decades. Consequently, a development model has been generated which is widely used in those countries. Yet, this model has not brought about much development to most of the third world in general and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Indeed, Sub-Saharan Africa has not been able to send its citizens to bed full stomach.

Nowadays even the third world countries are divided into 'newly industrialized countries' (NICs) and others, which are relegated to the 'fourth world'. Sub-Saharan Africa belongs to this fourth category. And our own Ethiopia is at the bottom of the list.

There is a growing body of opinion that feels that the conventional development model currently in use has failed. The fruits of the model are not just, inclusive or sustainable [4]. If development is sustainable, it means in its simplest sense that a process has set in whereby society has the

capacity to manage its resources to fulfil present and future needs. In other words, a sustainable society is one which meets its present needs without endangering the prospects of future generations.

Nonetheless the conventional development model intensifies social and economic inequality and contributes to the destruction of the resource base, i.e ecosystem on which all life is based. This conventional development model stems from the global capitalist economic system.

As an integral part of the global economic system, Ethiopia has not escaped from making use of the conventional development model.

Whatever developmental activity has been taking place has been lopsided and exclusive. The few industrial units that do exist are virtually all concentrated in the light industrial sector, ie mainly textile and food processing. This is in keeping with the import substitution dimension of the conventional model, which finds its main market among the middle and higher income groups who hardly form 10% of the population.

The geographic distribution too of the industrial establishments is limited to few specific areas. If we look at the provincial distribution of social and economic development projects, the inequality is quite staggering. Over 60 percent of factories are, for instance, located in the province of Shewa, while about 25 percent are in Eritrea. Of the 14 provinces in present Ethiopia, seven of them, including Tigray, have no industries. Even by the end of the Ten Year Perspective Plan, ie. 1985-1994, while Gamo Goffa, Illubabor and Tigray would have one factory each, nothing was envisaged for Bale (see Table 1).

Table 1:

Regional distribution of economic and social development projects as of 1976 EC (1982/83).

Region	Factory		Health Services No of persons per doctor in thousands	
	1975 (1983) No	1986 (1994) No	1975 (1983)	1986 (1994)
Arsi	-	8	142.3	45.0
Bale	-	-	196.0	28.0
Gondar	3	2	54.5	25.0
Eritrea	44	19	69.3	20.0
Gojjam	1	6	189.3	29.0
Hararghe	10	9	108.8	27.0
Illubabor	-	1	113.0	27.0
Keffa	-a	9	180.0	26.0
Shewa	97	115	19.7	14.0
Sidamo	1	7	173.9	34.0
Tigray	-b	1	185.4	32.0
Wellega	-	4	112.5	35.0
Wello	3	9	126.6	34.0
Total	159 191c			

Source: Ten Year Perspective Plan, 1977-1986 EC (1985-1994); Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 1977 EC (in Amharic), pp. 144-45.

a: Two factories are shown in the original table (see source above) under Keffa, but it is stated that they are branches for the factories in Shewa.
b: Two factories are shown under Tigray even though there is none in actual fact.

c: The plan includes 25 factories whose site is not yet decided.

As far as health is concerned, the picture is not different. The number of persons per doctor in five of the 14 provinces is over 180,000, while in Shewa it is 19,700.

With respect to the enrollment of pupils in primary and secondary academic schools, Tigray is at the bottom of the list with 70,740, followed by Gamo Goffa with 75,096 and Bale 92,599. Shewa has a total of 591,075 primary and secondary pupils (see Table 2).

Table 2:

Enrollment in primary and academic secondary schools by type of schools and region (1984/5):

Region:	Gov.	Mission	Public	Church	Foreign Community & Organization	Total
Arsi	169514	3324	-	-	-	172838
Bale	91955	644	-	-	-	92599
Eritrea	112185	8734	21194	5208	2022	149343
Gamo Gofa	74484	612	-	-	-	75096
Gojjam	190507	-	-	-	231	190738
Gondar	104355	1138	-	-	-	105493
Hararge	156011	4751	3807	417	519	165505
Illubabor	120740	642	-	38	-	121420
Keffa	170502	-	-	-	-	170502
Shewa	525455	13676	45943	2985	3016	591075
Addis	216552	13808	119466	5107	-	354933
Sidamo	280912	14256	7124	-	-	302292
Tigray	66777	3920	-	43	-	70740
Wellega	253059	7866	19953	168	-	281046
Wello	157861	2370	-	1269	-	161500
Asseb	4270	405	507	102	-	5284
Total	2695139	76146	217994	15337	5788	3010404

Source: Statistical Abstract of the Ethiopian Central Statistics Office (CSO), p. 282, 1986.

The prevailing system treats agriculture, and hence the rural population which is over 90 percent of the total population of Ethiopia, as the source of financing other sectors. The surplus is extracted from the peasants to be deployed for the limited and lopsided industry and administrative-military expenditures.

For the ruling elites, Addis Ababa is synonymous with Ethiopia, and, hence most of the social, cultural, political and economic activities are concentrated in the capital city. Every province is milked to sustain Addis Ababa.

The fact that the monarchical state was replaced by that of the Derg's did not substantially change the situation. On the contrary, it has driven the conditions of the majority of the population from bad to worse. The statist model of development supported by the Soviets did not bring about any improvement to the rural population. Quite the reverse, the terms of trade have been turned against them [5].

The Central Statistics Office conducted a survey of manufacturing and electricity industries in 1980 EC (1987/88). This is three years after the Ten Year Perspective Plan was published in 1977 EC (1984/5). The results of the survey show that the basic structures and location of the industrial establishments remained essentially the same, at least, up to the time of the survey. In other words, the industrial groups were dominated by food and textile establishments, while over 50 per cent of them were located in the capital city and its environ (see Table 3).

Table 3:

Manufacturing industries by administrative regions:

Administrative Region	Public		Private	
	No of Ests.	No of Persons Employed	No of Ests.	No of Persons Employed
Addis Ababa	112	46497	127	4762
East Shewa	16	7889	11	301
West Shewa	2	1142	1	156
North Shewa	1	916	-	-
South Eritrea	46	15401	47	1356
Dire Dawa	6	7776	7	105
East Hararghe	4	1126	-	-
Assab	2	1775	-	-
Arsi	3	491	-	-
South Wello	5	4008	3	109
North Gondar	4	539	3	53
West Gojjam	2	3191	3	57
Sidamo	4	1184	2	43
Illubabor	1	28	2	90
Total	208	91963	206	7032

Source: Results of the Survey of Manufacturing and Electricity Industries, 1980 EC (987/88), the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Central Statistics Office, p. 50.

PEOPLE-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT

As the conventional development model has failed in Ethiopia and generally the Third World, the need to search for an alternative is imperative. This alternative has to be a 'people-centred development' model [6]. It seeks to return access to and control over resources to the people and their communities to be used in meeting their own needs. It seeks to broaden political participation building from a base of strong people's organization and participatory local government.

There could be three main ingredients in a people-centred development model. In the first place, supremacy must reside with the people who are the real actors of positive change. The sovereignty of the people is the foundation of democracy. Secondly, in order to exercise their supremacy and assume responsibility for the development of their communities, the people must control their own resources, have access to relevant information and have the means to hold officials of government accountable. Thirdly, those who would assist the people with their development must recognize that it is they who are participating in the support of the people's agenda, not the other way around.

Through a struggle during the last decade and a half, the people of Tigray have generated an embryonic 'people-centred development' approach, which takes the peasantry as its base.

During the period of struggle, basic transformation has been taking place in Tigray:

- the people have managed to institute local government structures in the form of what is known there as 'baito' or people's councils and administer themselves.

- they have achieved access to and control over their major means of production, i.e. land.

- they are able to use and develop their own language and culture without fear or hindrance.

- there is better awareness of the problems of development and more determination to combat them than ever before.

This writer feels he is in a position to witness the achievements and difference in awareness now compared with the past based on his own experience. The writer was appointed in 1974 jointly by the government of Ethiopia and the World Bank to set up and manage an agricultural and settlement project (TAHADU) in Western Tigray.

There were basically two local reactions to the project. On the one hand, there was hostility from the local potentates who considered the Project as a threat to their fiefdom in the Tekezze Valley (Project area). While on the other hand, there was incredulity of the people targeted as beneficiaries.

They were incredulous because of their experience of a government which only knew how to take away what belonged to the peasants without giving back in return either in terms of social services or socio-economic developmental projects. Hence, it was very difficult to implement the project. And now! Today, the people are better organized, highly motivated, more aware and determined to bring about positive change and improvement to their daily lives. Some of the people who knew about the TAHADU Project would wish it had come today!

There were other problems as well that made implementation of the TAHADU Project difficult. In the first place, genuine support by the central government was lacking; secondly, there was unwillingness on the part of the skilled and trained personnel to leave the capital and work in the conditions obtained at the Tekezze Valley.

What can be drawn from past experience is that a people-centred development strategy can succeed only if there is a democratic and accountable government which fulfils the needs and aspirations of the majority of the people; if there is genuine commitment on the part of skilled

segment of the population; and, more importantly, if the people are conscious, motivated, organized, have access to and control over resources and political power.

The achievements so far that the people of Tigray have scored did not come by easily. The people had to pay tremendous sacrifices. These include huge numbers of lives, damage to property, livestock, infrastructure, even cultural heritage, and most seriously exclusion from developmental activities.

This condition has to be ameliorated. Three phases could be envisaged in the amelioration process.

Phase 1: internally displaced families and refugees as a result of the war and famine have to be rehabilitated. Rehabilitation has two dimensions: (1) enabling people to build their productive capacity by providing them with the means of cultivation such as oxen, seeds and tools; and (2) restoring the productive capacity of the land through reafforestation and soil and water conservation programmes. These programmes are on-going but because of the war, they could not be fully implemented.

Phase 2: strengthening, consolidating and reconstructing those programmes. This needs to be done during the period of the 'interim' or 'transitional' government. Priority should be given to those areas most affected by the war and famine. An additional task that can be undertaken during this period would be assessment of allocation of resources and distribution of developmental activities to the component parts of the country since 1941. Such an objective assessment should serve as the basis of a fair and equitable distribution of developmental activities and allocation of resources among various parts of Ethiopia.

Phase 3: Acceleration of the development process. This is to be carried out during the time of the democratic government.

How full mobilization of domestic resources can make a difference could be seen from the experience of Tigray. The mobilization, conscientization and

organization of the people enabled them to chase the Derg out of Tigray in their struggle for peace, democracy and self-determination. Nonetheless, when all of this is finally achieved there is another more serious and protracted war, i.e. the war against underdevelopment. Clearly, for that the people are ready and a good part of the requirements for development are in place: attitudinal change, awareness of the problems, readiness for a better way of life, institutional framework that the baito system of local government provides. However, other factors such as skilled personnel, technology, financial resources, and above all peace are lacking.

The value of TDA's contribution would be measured in terms of the enhanced capacity of the people to manage their developmental efforts better.

Thank you!

Notes

[1] Interviews conducted both in Tigray and Sudan by this author, between November 1985 and February 1986.
[2] After the refusal by the Derg to distribute relief food to the starving people was exposed by foreign media representatives based in the Northern Ethiopia at the time, the Ethiopian authorities had to change tack.
[3] Interview with Baito members, Sheraro Town, Tigray, February 1986.
[4] See Ifda Dossier, 75/76, pp. 45-50, January/April 1990.
[5] Aseffa Abreha, "Agricultural Pricing Policy in Ethiopia", paper presented at the International Conference on Ethiopian Studies, Paris, August 1988.
[6] Cf. Ifda Dossier, 75/76, p. 47, January/April, 1990.