

HPG Background Paper

Poverty, power and relief assistance: meanings and perceptions of 'dependency' in Ethiopia

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Dependency and humanitarian relief: a critical analysis
A research study by the Humanitarian Policy Group

About HPG

The Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice. It conducts independent research, provides specialist advice and promotes informed debate.



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About this paper

This background paper forms part of a study by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on dependency in humanitarian aid. It focuses on the different meanings of dependency as the term is used in the context of Ethiopia.

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Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005.

Contents

Acronyms

1 Introduction

2 Categories of dependency

3 Responding to food crises

3.1 Policy and institutional framework

3.2 The annual appeals

3.3 Productive Safety Nets Programme

3.4 Workfare schemes to reduce dependency

4 Institutionalising relief? Dependency in the aid system

5 Case study of Delanta Dawunt

5.1 Background

5.2 Livelihoods and vulnerability in Delanta Dawunt

5.3 Relief needs

5.4 Perceptions of dependency and the dependent

5.5 The local political economy of relief assistance

6 Conclusions and discussion

Endnotes

Bibliography

Acronyms

ANRS	Amhara National Regional State
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
EBSN	Employment Based Safety Net
EC	European Commission
EGS	Employment Generation Scheme
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Forces
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FFW	Food for work
FSCB	Food Security Coordination Bureau
FSCO	Food Security Coordination Office
FSP	Food Security Programme
FSS	Food Security Strategy
GR	Gratuitous relief
GOE	Government of Ethiopia
LIPW	Labour intensive public works
MT	Metric tons
MOARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NPDPM	National Policy on Disaster Preparedness and Management
OGB	Oxfam Great Britain (GB)
PSNP	Productive Safety Nets Programme
RFSP	Regional Food Security Programme
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SCUK	Save the Children (UK)
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

1. Introduction

Debates on relief assistance in Ethiopia are replete with references to 'dependency'. The ways in which dependency is discussed matter because they have an observable influence on the policies and practices of various actors involved in relief in Ethiopia, including aid agencies, donors and the Ethiopian government. For example, concerns about creating dependency influenced Ethiopian government policy that requires able-bodied aid recipients to work for relief assistance. An interest to minimise dependency on humanitarian aid has influenced the development of a new national safety net. It also ties into the government's controversial resettlement strategy. These and other practical implications of the use of the term are explored in this paper.

The concept 'dependency' is loosely applied to refer to a wide variety of situations. Yet there is relatively little discussion of its specific meanings. Broadly, a first set of meanings refers to the dependency of those who receive relief assistance. 'Dependency syndrome' is used to describe a condition of intent to receive aid and lack of initiative in pursuing other livelihood options, such as small-scale agriculture or wage labour. Historically, there has been substantial debate on the possible disincentive effects of food aid in Ethiopia in terms of aid depressing prices for local agricultural products and leading to greater dependency. Destitution characterised by a lack of options to escape from severe poverty and genuine need for aid has dominated recent discourse on relief assistance. In the Ethiopian context, the presumed dependency of beneficiaries has strongly influenced the direction of food aid policy and programming. A second set of meanings refers to the growing predominance and institutionalisation of relief assistance. The entire aid apparatus, consisting of various government institutions, NGOs and donors, is alleged to be dependent on flows of relief assistance for its very existence.

The prominence of dependency in relief discourse reflects a broad-based concern with the aid juggernaut. The need for relief assistance in Ethiopia is extensive.

Amounts of relief assistance being provided have been expanding. In terms of both the number of people judged to be affected and the size of the relief resources handled, the largest emergency operation in Ethiopia's history was in 2003. The needy population was an estimated 14.3 million people. The amount of food aid distributed was 1.5 million MT (UNOCHA, 2004). However, Ethiopia has been structurally food deficit since at least 1980 (Devereux, 2004). Between 1989 and 2004, the average annual food gap was 700,000 MT. Taking just the years between 1996 and 2004, the annual food gap averaged 820,000 MT (see Figures 1 and 2). The average annual proportion of food aid to total grain production between 1985 and 2000 was 9.7%, meaning that Ethiopia produces 90% of its own food (Robinson, 2003). Importantly, this figure does not account for commercial imports or for non-grain foodstuffs. Although in recent years the country has avoided mass mortality linked to famine, there are continuing threats to food security and nutrition and an upward trend in the needy population requiring food aid (Figure 1). The chronic case load, or those that are not able to meet their annual food needs even in 'normal' years, is estimated at between five and six million.

Reducing the predominance of relief assistance is a shared aim of many relief actors. For the Ethiopian government, this has meant fighting what they label as the dependency syndrome. Policy requires aid recipients to work on public works in return for relief assistance. Recent policy seeks to scale back relief assistance further by resettling the most dependent (destitute) and establishing a national 'safety net' to graduate to food-secure status farming households that are deemed to have the potential to be self-sufficient where they currently reside.

Dependency is also seen as an issue at the level of the various actors involved in relief in Ethiopia. Government officials perceive aid agencies as dependent on relief, and some donor and aid agency officials identify dependency in government institutions. However, destitution, or deep and severe poverty in part characterised by dependence on relief assistance, is becoming a key policy issue for various

donor and aid agencies. The focus is on finding ways to move beyond a need to provide annual relief assistance to the destitute population. Relief assistance is synonymous with food aid in Ethiopia. However, certain donors and NGOs are promoting the use of non-food alternatives as a way of decreasing the need for relief assistance in the long-term, although such alternatives remain relatively overlooked and under-resourced compared to food.

This is a simplified but indicative overview of the different interests and concerns around dependency. The aim of this study is to unravel and examine the meanings and perceptions of dependency in Ethiopia that influence broader policy and programming decisions and their implementation at the local level. Interviews were conducted with a range of aid and donor agency staff and government officials at the federal and regional levels. Key policy documents, research papers, project evaluations and impact assessments were reviewed. Local government officials and field staff of NGOs were also questioned about their views on dependency. These interviews helped to uncover the communication of key policy messages downwards through the political-administrative hierarchy, and their translation into particular developmental, humanitarian and political actions at the local level.

An important component of this study was to assess how beneficiaries of relief assistance themselves perceive and understand dependency. Interviews were conducted with forty individual beneficiaries in Delanta Dawunt, an administrative district located in Ethiopia's northeast highlands. Small focus group discussions were also held to identify and clarify locally important issues around relief assistance dependency.

The study is an analytical piece on different views of dependency in Ethiopia. The views presented in this study are opinions based on the small number of interviews and discussions just described. It does not intend to be comprehensive or give a complete presentation of all views.

The study begins by outlining the main ways in which dependency is discussed in the Ethiopian context (Section 2). Various meanings and perceptions coming out of interviews conducted for this study are pulled together into a simple categorisation. Section 3 summarises government institutions and policies pertaining to relief assistance. Important among these is the annual appeal, which is the main mechanism for raising relief resources, the new programme on Productive Safety Nets, which aims to graduate the chronically food insecure from dependency, and workfare schemes that put beneficiaries to work on public works in return for relief assistance. Dependency in the aid system is discussed in Section 4. Various government officials questioned during fieldwork suggested that NGOs are reliant on aid flows to prolong their operations, while some aid and donor agency officials worry that relief assistance has become entwined with governance and politics.

Section 5 is a case study of different 'dependencies' in Delanta Dawunt. The case study draws on the practical experience and views of Oxfam GB, which has worked in the area since the 1984 famine, as well as interviews and discussions with recipients of relief assistance. The section focuses on the local political economy of relief, referring to decentralised government authorities and local elites who rely on aid for continued dominance and decision-making power. The concluding section discusses the significance of the many ways in which dependency is understood, and the lasting impact of a discourse on dependency on relief aid policy and programming.

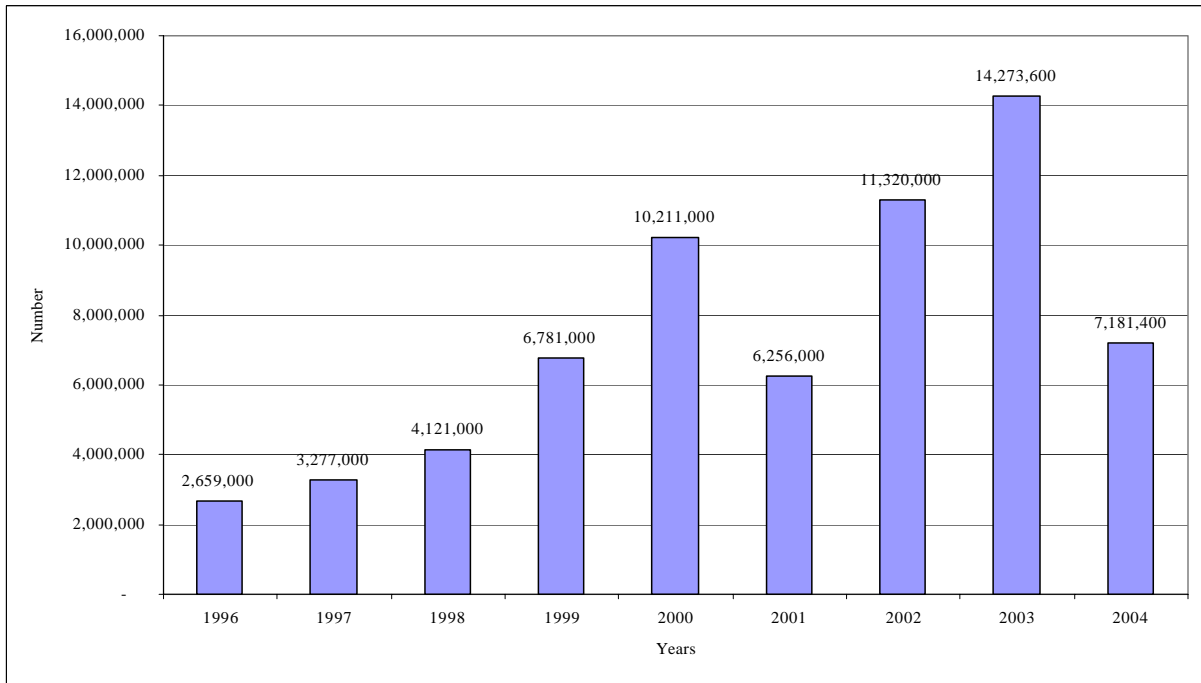


Figure 1: Population in need of food aid, 1996 – 2004

Source: DPPC Annual Appeals

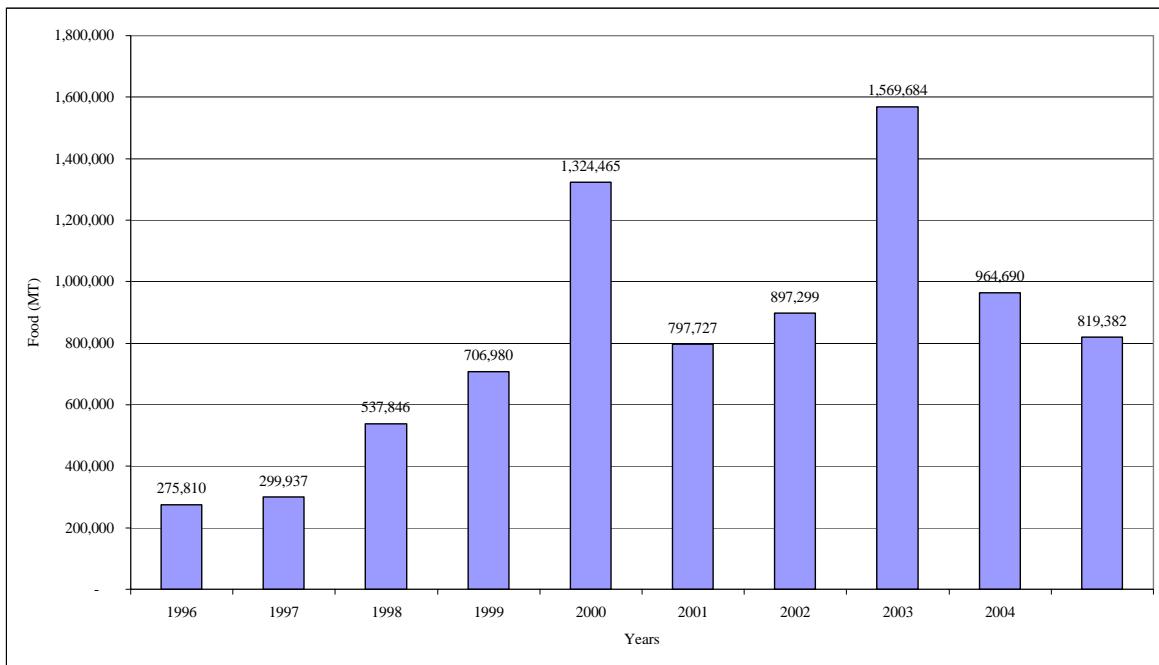


Figure 2: Food required (MT), 1996–2004

Source: DPPC Annual Appeals

2. Categories of dependency

Discourse and debate on relief assistance in Ethiopia is deeply influenced by notions of 'dependency'. Yet the concept of dependency in usage is indefinite. It is a shorthand reference to describe a range of different situations. This section seeks to clarify the meaning of the concept as it is used in the Ethiopian context. It will do so by drawing together the different meanings of dependency into a short categorisation that is based upon the fieldwork carried out for this study.

A first category of dependency is 'beneficiary dependency'. It refers to the condition of dependency in which long-term beneficiaries of relief assistance choose to continue receiving assistance over their own ways of coping. In Ethiopia, the element of choice is important to perceptions of dependency syndrome. It is thought that beneficiaries count on assistance to the extent that they reduce their involvement in activities such as smallholder agriculture that may lead them to self-sufficiency. In turn, different explanations are given for the apparent lack of interest shown by recipients of relief assistance in engaging in other activities. A concern for the possible existence of dependency syndrome has influenced the Ethiopian government's policy to restrict the distribution of free food aid by making all able-bodied recipients work for assistance. From the interviews with relief beneficiaries conducted for this study, it is suggested that some recipients do regard relief assistance as an entitlement that the state provides. However, relief assistance is provided erratically, and levels of assistance to households vary according to political alliances and social connections at local government levels.

Dependence in the sense that continued and long-running relief assistance creates disincentives to agriculture or labour is a second category. Historically, a key focus of discussions on dependency in Ethiopia has been the possible disincentives of food aid in terms of decreasing the price of local farm produce (Maxwell, 1986, 1994; Hoddinott 2003). The market distortions of food aid imply that farmers are less able to sell their crops at a profit, prolonging their dependence on external

relief assistance. Another concern is that the requirement that beneficiaries contribute to public works projects in order to receive relief assistance takes them away from other ways of making a livelihood. Some local government authorities also worry that workfare schemes may undermine government efforts to mobilise free peasant labour on rural development projects. However, the evidence about these outcomes of relief assistance continues to be mixed and contradictory.

A third category refers to leakage errors in the targeting of relief assistance. Individual recipients of relief assistance interviewed for this study accuse *kebele* (sub-district) leaders and *Mengistawi Budin* (village leaders) of registering their family members, friends and supporters as beneficiaries on relief public works projects. The picture that emerges from interviews and discussions with recipients is that relief assistance is an important political currency in local settings. The same observation has been made in other studies.¹ Local government authorities depend on relief resources as patronage to bolster client networks and expand their influence. This is seen in beneficiary lists that include many middle and better-off households that do not require assistance to meet their food needs.

A fourth meaning of dependency in Ethiopia refers to the dependence of government institutions and aid agencies that are involved in the distribution of relief and other types of aid. Some UN and donor officials worry that aid resources have become entrenched in the government's budgetary planning.² Authorities at all government levels that were asked about dependency claim that local governments depend on relief assistance to subsidise development projects. According to NGO sources, *woreda* (administrative district) officials routinely judge relief needs to be greater than they actually are in order to access larger quantities of aid.

According to several people interviewed for this study, agencies that distribute relief assistance are also dependent, primarily on flows of food aid. Some Ethiopian

government officials refer to an 'emergency culture' to characterise the dependence that they presume exists among aid agencies. However, sources in aid agencies acknowledge that certain NGOs use the annual appeal as a mechanism to raise funds to cover high recurrent expenditures. Some local NGO staff allege that the problem of NGO dependency is worse among international organisations that distribute relief in Ethiopia. The role of expatriate aid workers is also contested.

A fifth meaning is dependence on relief assistance as a feature of destitution. Some aid agencies believe that possibly rising levels of destitution are masked by the annual appeals, which permit stakeholders to avoid adopting measures to address underlying structural causes of destitution.³ Some donor and aid agency staff interviewed for this study put it slightly differently: that the current relief system centred on the annual appeals has not adequately responded to the needs of the chronically food insecure, and that new approaches and commitments are required. Others stress that relief assistance is a poor substitute for insufficient development assistance.

But this leads to different policy prescriptions from the Ethiopian government, donors and aid agencies. The twin essence of the government's Food Security Programme (FSP) is the ongoing resettlement process and a new programme on Productive Safety Nets (PSNP). The main concerns influencing the government's positions embodied in the FSP are to decrease national aid dependence and reduce dependency at the beneficiary level by promoting self-sufficiency. The Ethiopian government's concern and understanding of dependency are influenced in part by debates around national pride, nationalism and struggles for independence. Ideas of self-reliance at both the national and individual levels are bound up in national identity and a long and proud history of resisting colonialism and revolutionary struggle against the *Derg*.

The central concern of donor and aid agency staff that were interviewed is the situation of destitute groups, and especially those that fall out of current safety net systems. Donor officials expressed reservations with the implementation of the PSNP. In particular, donors have sought clarification from the government on the linkages between PSNP, which donors support, and the ongoing resettlement process, which they oppose. The Ethiopian government intends to resettle 2.2 million people over a three-year period that began in 2003 under its resettlement plan. Donor opposition to resettlement centres on the planning process, benefit packages and accompanying services and improved infrastructure in resettlement areas, and the institutional set-up for resettlement. The European Union has questioned whether resettlement of highland farmers will significantly improve access to land and other economic resources for those who remain behind.⁴ Officials in donor and aid agencies are focused on the need for additional and different types of assistance to enable the chronically food-insecure to become less dependent on relief.

The following section looks at the different ways in which a concern for creating dependency has influenced government institutions and policies. Following from this, the remaining sections aim to understand better different meanings of dependency.

3. Responding to food crises

This section gives factual information on Ethiopia's policy and institutional framework for relief assistance. It will also identify how dependency has been an issue in the formulation of particular policies and institutions.

3.1 The policy and institutional framework

The current policy and institutional framework for emergency response in Ethiopia came into being following the end of the civil war in 1991. Since then, the Ethiopian government has steadily expanded its disaster prevention and

preparedness capacities to prevent a recurrence of the mortality levels seen during the famine in 1984 and 1985.

In 1993, the government adopted a National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM). A central plank of the policy is to ensure that relief assistance addresses the root causes of food shortages and famine and reduces people's long-term vulnerability to disasters (TGE, 1993). The idea of labour-intensive public works (LIPW) using the labour of the food insecure was enshrined in the policy, which prohibits free food distributions to the able-bodied.

The government body in Ethiopia responsible for relief assistance is the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC). It was formed in 1995 to replace the old Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) and was associated with a shift towards decreasing vulnerability and linking relief to development (Devereux, 2000). These objectives are encapsulated in the NPDPM, the main policy directive of the DPPC.

Relief assistance features in the federal government's Food Security Strategy (FSS), introduced in 1996 and revised in 2002. The updated FSS reflects the concerns of some that food aid has become 'an institutionalised response to chronic food insecurity' (Devereux, 2000). A gradual reduction in the scale of external food aid, and a shift from assistance in kind to cash, is envisaged in the revised FSS. It also seeks to scale back emergency assistance to focus on addressing acute food needs, and introducing an employment-based safety net (EBSN) to address the needs of the chronically food-insecure. There were significant discussions involving aid and donor agencies and analysts on potential social protection measures before the proposed safety net was included in the 2002 FSS.

3.2 The annual appeal mechanism

The annual appeal is the primary mechanism for raising funds to support aid structures in responding to emergencies. The main appeal is issued jointly by the government and UN in December or January following the *Meher* harvest, which spreads over November and early December.⁵ A revised appeal is issued in June or July around the time of the *Belg* harvest.

The appeal mechanism has worked relatively well at raising emergency resources to cover relief operations. The aid system can be credited for helping to prevent a recurrence of the mortality levels seen in the 1984 famine, although other factors are also important, notably greater political stability and the avoidance of civil war at the level seen in the 1980s. However, there is much disquiet and critical reflection on whether the appeal is sufficient as a response to the nature of food security in Ethiopia. Debate centres on the adequacy of relief assistance to respond to the problems of the chronically food insecure. Compared to the transitory food insecure, who are able to cover their annual food needs outside of crisis years, the chronically food insecure require food aid to meet their annual food needs.⁶ Those that argue against the appeal mechanism contend that relief assistance (and food aid in particular) is an inadequate response to the structural problem of the chronically food insecure, which is manifested as a low level of productive assets. Raisin (2001: 4) explains: 'whilst food aid may save lives, it does [not] and cannot replenish productive assets that would permit people to take off from their poverty'. This last point is questioned by some humanitarians involved in food aid distributions, who point to the successful use of food aid as a developmental resource in some projects.

Traditionally, the needs of the acute and chronically food insecure were lumped together in the appeal to come up with an aggregate figure of all those that were judged to need relief assistance to cover their food needs. Raisin (*ibid.*: 7) likens the nature of the appeal process to a 'merry-go-round', '[b]arely will the last of the food

aid have been delivered, when next year's appeal will be launched ... In this sense, another year of "disaster" will guide us to next year's appeal, without the breathing space to truly evaluate the nature of and response to food insecurity in Ethiopia'.

With the support of donors and UN agencies, for the first time a distinction was made between acute and chronic food needs in the 2002 annual appeal. This distinction is regarded as the first step towards devising more adequate responses to the problem of chronic food insecurity. Support for the acute/chronic distinction is broad-based. For example, Oxfam GB in Ethiopia will not distribute food aid in areas of chronic food insecurity. Oxfam officials in Ethiopia view this position as an advocacy instrument to support the government's decision to distinguish between chronic and acute needs, and to develop new strategies to assist the chronically food insecure population.

Pressure to reform the annual appeal relates to concerns for the extensiveness and depth of rural poverty, manifested in growing dependence on relief assistance (Sharp et al., 2003). This concern underlined the insistence of many donors that something needed to be done about the merry-go-round to more effectively respond to the needs of the chronically food insecure. In principle, as an alternative to replying to the annual appeals, donors favour multi-annual funding commitments, initially to a new government programme on safety nets and, over time, to public sectors. The reasoning behind multi-annual funding commitments is to equip the government with resources to provide predictable resources to chronically food insecure households as a way of building up their productive assets.

3.3 Productive Safety Nets Programme

The Productive Safety Nets Programme (PSNP) is a five-year social protection scheme being implemented by the federal Food Security Coordination Bureau through regional and *woreda* level FSCOs. Ethiopia's leading bilateral and

multilateral donors have played an important role in driving the current debate and advocating in support of new strategies to assist chronically food insecure households. USAID's strategy document for Ethiopia states, '[d]epleted coping strategies have not been restored because of a few months supply of food. Relief provided on an emergency basis has barely kept the poor above water. At best, it has simply kept people in a holding pattern. It has not built assets nor has it secured livelihoods' (USAID, 2004a: 12).

There are two main components to the PSNP. The first and the crux of the programme is intensive public works to build community assets using the labour of the chronically food insecure. The programme focus is on building community assets through public works. The suggestion of some donors to build household assets through public works was rejected by the government, which was concerned that transfers to food insecure households to work their own land would create the wrong incentives and promote dependency (World Bank, 2004: 12). An important exception is female-headed households working on their own land. The concern is that, if transfers are tied to work that farmers must do anyway, this may create dependency by making people less likely to work their own land without being paid. The PSNP bundles existing workfare programmes into a new programmatic framework and approach that is centred on regular and reliable transfers of food and cash to programme beneficiaries matched to their contribution to LIPW. The programme is intended to have substantially greater capital input and technical support to public works than did either FFW or EGS programmes.

A secondary component of the PSNP is direct support to the non-able-bodied. A concern for creating dependency has featured in discussions between the Ethiopian government and donors over the specific modalities for implementing direct support. The government opposed the inclusion of direct transfers to labour-poor households that would be conditional on their participation in health, nutrition or education interventions. Although donors voiced strong support for conditional

transfers, the government reasoned that they would promote dependency among recipients.⁷ The thinking was that people would begin to view participation in social programmes as something they should be compensated for, and thus would not participate without being paid.

The PSNP represents a significant institutional transformation of the aid system in Ethiopia. A critical design feature is multi-annual funding commitments by donors that will enable the government to provide predictable resources to a targeted beneficiary population defined as chronically food insecure. There is broad donor support for the government's decision to address chronic food insecurity through a budget line rather than the annual appeal.

A widely perceived weakness of the annual appeals was that levels of relief assistance and the timing of transfers rarely were certain. Rations were inadequate in size and often delivered after many food insecure households had already depleted their assets, further entrenching their dependence on relief assistance. One senior government official explains: 'emergency needs were never fully resourced. In a given year we would maybe get only 60% of what was asked for in an appeal. Therefore we could only give a partial ration to beneficiaries. The result was destitution since households would deplete their assets'.⁸ The intention of safety nets to provide reliable transfers to chronically food insecure households over a specified period of time rests on the expectation that donors will fully support the PSNP. However, matters of implementation divide some donor missions and the government and have affected the timely delivery of donor commitments to the PSNP, resulting in a delay in the start-up of the Programme.

Another design feature of the programme is the 80/20 rule: 80% of the funds to PSNP are for direct support to beneficiaries through food and cash transfers. The remaining 20% covers capital and administrative costs to run public works projects.

Cash transfers are a third important design element. The government and European donors prefer cash transfers to food aid. European donors have voiced concerns that food aid pledged and distributed under the system of annual appeals has worsened destitution of the chronically food insecure population (EU, 2003). This view is contested by officials from a humanitarian organisation involved in food aid distributions, who point out that food aid has saved millions of lives even though it is not the best response. USAID, the top bilateral donor to Ethiopia, gives primarily in kind. Many government officials and staff of European donor agencies suggest that cash is more suitable than food to move the food insecure out of dependence on relief assistance. This opinion corresponds with the weight of evidence from earlier studies on cash interventions Harvey, 2005; Brandstetter, 2004; Jenden, 1995). A recent review of cash interventions in Ethiopia finds that cash has more 'multiplier effects' than food and a greater potential to lift people out of poverty (Adams and Emebet, forthcoming).

In addition to covering consumption shortfalls, PSNP is intended to build the assets of chronically food insecure households to a level where they will be capable of meeting their own annual food needs outside of crisis years without depending on relief assistance. The concept of 'graduation' is built into the programme, referring to the 'determination that a household no longer requires support from the food security program, based on its level of income and asset possession maintained over a period of time'.⁹ A Safety Net household will no longer qualify for assistance under the Program when this point is achieved. However, the desired goal of beneficiaries 'graduating' within the programme's five-year timeframe is widely and openly regarded as unachievable by officials outside the government. There is growing recognition that the food and cash transfers will be inadequate and will continue to supplement other ways of meeting food needs, much like they do now. For example, the standardised wage is 6 Birr/person/day (or 30 Birr/person/month), which is below the market wage for unskilled labour in many areas of the country.

A further concern for some donor officials is that 'graduation' is too ambiguously and simply defined.¹⁰ For the government, graduation implies reducing dependence on food aid.

3.4 Workfare schemes to reduce dependency

Concerns that dependency syndrome is deeply rooted and extensive have informed the operationalisation of relief assistance in Ethiopia under both safety nets and pre-existing government workfare programmes. The policy that no able-bodied adult can receive gratuitous relief (GR), or free food, highlights official concern about dependency. The government's past and current strategy to reduce dependency involves enlisting the food insecure on LIPW. These are encapsulated in the government's Employment Generation Scheme (EGS), which provides temporary employment during crises.¹¹

The essence of EGS was to reverse the perception among beneficiaries that they were entitled to receive food aid. This was an elite assumption, backed by many local government leaders. LIPW were viewed as a way to change the mentality of beneficiaries and create popular awareness that relief assistance was something to work for, in other words not a right but a wage earned for one's contribution to development projects. LIPW in turn tied into government ideology and intent to mobilise the poor to lift themselves out of poverty.

The EGS guidelines, which were first introduced in 1997, required able-bodied adults from needy households to work five days per month on public works projects with links to development objectives and *woreda* development plans. Officially, the ration size for each labourer was 15kg of grain per month. In practice rations were often reduced to 12.5kg due to shortfalls in the overall amount of food aid and a desire to reach a greater number of beneficiaries.

Ethiopian government policy on EGS further dictated that 80% of relief resources must be used for LIPW, with the remainder set aside for GR to support needy households that lacked able-bodied adults to participate on public works projects. However, the population eligible for GR frequently exceeded the resources available for free food distributions allowed by the Ethiopian government. An evaluation of an Oxfam GB relief operation in Delanta Dawunt in 2000 found that the proportion of food required for meeting the needs of the population eligible for GR was much greater than the 20% ratio allowed under the EGS policy. Food allocated to the needy was inadequate (Dadi, 2000). Officially, policy guidelines were flexible and permitted *woreda* DPPC officials to adjust the ratio according to need. But in practice many *woreda* officials were reluctant to diverge from the federal policy.

The intention was that EGS would reduce people's vulnerability to disaster by building up their productive assets. The consensus view among aid and donor agency officials that were interviewed is that EGS has failed to achieve this due to inadequate levels of donor assistance and because of project liability issues. Selection criteria are ineffectual and subjective, in the view of some donor and aid agency officials. *Kebele* (sub-district) leaders are given ultimate responsibility for identifying beneficiaries. But even among government officials it is acknowledged that targeting problems are pervasive. *Kebele* leaders rarely follow the National Food Aid Targeting Guidelines issued by the DPPC, which stipulate that selection criteria should be locally identified and agreed upon by the community (DPPC, 2000). It is presumed that, in most localities, selection criteria are based on a household's relative wealth or poverty, typically determined by its ownership of productive assets such as land and livestock. Definitions of wealth are location-specific, however, leading to inconsistencies in the targeting of households.

4. Institutionalising relief? Dependency in the aid system

It is alleged that the consequence of expanded disaster prevention and preparedness capacities is that the aid system in Ethiopia requires greater and greater amounts of relief assistance in order to support larger relief operations. The colossal extent of aid is borne out by the fact that Ethiopia is the largest food aid recipient in the world (Lentz and Barrett, 2004). In 2003, which was a crisis year, it received more than \$500 million in food aid flows from the US alone (*ibid.*). Between 1992 and 1995, food aid provided 34% of Ethiopia's foreign exchange resources (Benoliel, 1998). At the same time, levels of overseas development assistance to the country remain low. Bilateral assistance was stopped in 1998 following the outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and did not resume until 2002.

The common perception that emerges from people in government institutions and aid and donor agencies interviewed for this study is that both opportunity and need have contributed to the institutionalisation of relief assistance. One concern is that the expectation of relief assistance has become entrenched in the federal government's budgetary planning. A senior UN official remarked: 'Is the more important issue macro-level dependency or beneficiary dependency? ... The attention is on getting farmers off dependency but there is no attention on the government's dependency.'¹² Decentralised levels of government below the regional level are also accused of depending on food aid to subsidise development projects that are underfunded. It is alleged that they inflate actual food needs in order to increase the volume of food aid intended for this purpose. In most years, the number of those identified as in need of food aid is reduced at ascending levels of government on this assumption. However, the typical pattern was reversed in 2004, when the estimated needy population was revised upwards in the federal appeal (compare the right column in Table 1 with the columns to the left). The 2004 appeal was delayed until after a meeting of donors in December 2003 to pledge funds to the government's poverty reduction proposals. The suspicion of

some sources that were questioned is that central-level authorities increased the number they estimated needed food aid in the federal appeal after receiving disappointing levels of support from donors.

Table 1: Estimated population in need of food aid for *woredas* in North Wollo, 2004

<i>Woreda</i>	<i>Woreda</i> DPPB	Zonal DPPB	Regional DPPC and Federal DPPC	Federal appeal
Gubalaf to	5,000	5,000	5,000	-
Kobbo	39,600	10,000	10,000	55,200
Habru	25,000	18,000	12,000	57,800
Bugna	6,500	6,500	6,500	84,600
Meqiet	15,003	8,000	8,000	70,200
Gidan	7,806	7,806	7,806	53,100
Wadla	-	2,000	2,000	48,100
Delanta Dawunt	3,347	3,347	3,347	50,100
Total	102,256	54,653	54,653	419,100

There is also strong criticism of international NGOs, who are accused by some government officials and staff of local NGOs of opportunism by using the annual appeals to raise funds to cover high recurrent expenditures. Critics of NGOs allege that they use the appeals to maintain their capacity to work in emergencies, even to the extent of running unnecessary relief operations in years when there is no crisis. Many NGOs operating in Ethiopia have their origins in responding to emergencies in the 1980s. Since then, many have steadily enlarged and refined their relief response capacities, while also supporting a variety of development projects. A recent phenomenon is the proliferation of NGOs in Ethiopia, many of them

operating with a relief mandate. The number of local NGOs grew nearly six-fold between 2000 and 2004. The number of international NGOs operating in Ethiopia has increased as well. In the 2003 emergency, NGOs managed more than 48% of the relief resources donated to the country.

The issue of NGO dependency is a strong factor bearing on the poor state of relations between NGOs and the government, with various federal officials pronouncing that NGOs are profiting from disaster and contributing little to development. A senior government official contends that 'there is no dependency among beneficiaries. The dependency problem lies with implementing agencies (NGOs). The expectation is there that the government will appeal for food. There is an emergency culture in Ethiopia among NGOs looking for resources'.¹³ The government is determined to gain greater control of relief resources through policy and programme reforms that see the introduction of a national safety net. While the overriding justification for a national safety net is to reduce the dependence of the chronically food insecure on relief assistance, another type of dependency informing the government's position is to rein in what some government officials see as the excesses of international agencies involved in distributing relief assistance.

The government position is that PSNP is a government programme. Funds for PSNP are mostly channelled through the government, with the important exception of USAID, which has virtual prohibitions on direct budget support, and thus works primarily through NGOs and contractors as well as, to a more limited extent, the government (USAID, 2004b). The position of NGOs in the PSNP is a sensitive issue. The government's guidelines for PSNP closely define the terms under which NGOs can be involved in the programme. NGOs can help to implement only where their activities represent additional resources for the Programme to those that are allocated to the Safety Nets line in the government's budget, and if they implement activities within the government programme framework.¹⁴ On the eve of

launching PSNP, some NGO officials were confounded by the government's position and unsure how their efforts might complement the programme.

Dependency is also an issue in discussions of the role of the World Food Programme (WFP). There are tensions in the UN system in Ethiopia over the appropriate role of food aid and whether WFP is doing enough to encourage a shift away from (imported) food aid. Some officials of donor, and even UN, agencies suggest that, by continuing to seek outlets for food aid, WFP is discouraging structural reforms intended to reduce the country's dependence on food relief. Given the large volumes of food aid coming into Ethiopia over the years, and the central role of WFP in co-ordinating food aid distributions, some aid officials that were interviewed for this study believe that WFP has been able to form a close working relationship with the government. Officials in one aid agency point to the ability of WFP to sustain its field operations from decentralised offices as evidence of the comparatively good relations between WFP and the Ethiopian government.

Officials with WFP counter that there are people in desperate need and therefore it is legitimate to have close relations with the government to help those who face immediate threats to their food security and nutrition. Officials with the agency also view the close relationship as helping to build the capacities of government institutions. While supportive of government institutional reorganisation and programme reform through safety nets, WFP officials that were interviewed for this study stress that needs may be above the safety net buffer, and that relief assistance is still required to respond to unpredictable crises. They also point out that they have provided input into the design of the PSNP through their participation in the New Coalition for Food Security that helped to devise the Programme. The position of WFP in Ethiopia is that food aid is a visible target and scapegoat for development failures (WFP, 2004).

5. Case study of Delanta Dawunt *woreda*

5.1 Background

Delanta Dawunt is a remote *woreda* situated in the northeastern highlands. It is part of North Wollo Zone in Amhara National Regional State (ANRS). Amhara is one of the most food insecure regions in Ethiopia. Delanta Dawunt is one of 52 *woredas* in ANRS that are categorised as structurally food insecure. Between 30 and 50% of its population of 172,630 (2003 estimate) require food aid annually. An estimated 61% live below the monetary poverty line, while more than 36% are considered to be destitute. An estimated 32,041 people in Delanta Dawunt are included in the government's PSNP (FDGE, 2004). The *woreda* is also included in the ongoing resettlement process.

The first reported distribution of relief assistance in Delanta Dawunt occurred in May 1973. At the time it was considered shameful to accept assistance and many people refused, according to a focus group discussion with local elders. Others in need of aid accepted to receive assistance but only secretively, fearing that receiving relief assistance would somehow go against the tradition of self-reliance. Food aid was distributed on an unprecedented scale during the famine in 1984 and 1985. During this time, the *Derg* military government instituted a policy of forced migration of several hundred families from Delanta Dawunt to resettlement areas in southern and southeast areas of the country. Their lands were redistributed to remaining households. Elders report several years of above-average rainfall in Delanta Dawunt and good harvests following the process of resettlement and land redistribution.

The coalition of armed groups that overthrew the *Derg* in 1991 granted resettlers the right of return to their home areas. There was an exodus of resettlers back to Delanta Dawunt in 1992. Most returnees had no access to their former lands, which had been redistributed. Some were able to gain access to land through sharecropping arrangements, or were given land by relatives and friends. The ruling EPRDF-led government redistributed land in the 1990s to landless households,

including returnees. But the land redistribution policy excluded households headed by men and women younger than 25, leaving significant numbers of youth with no access to land. The *woreda* government also resettled some landless returnees but mostly on small and infertile plots. The *woreda* was never able to absorb the pressure on land induced by the return of thousands of resettlers in 1992.

In popular perception, food aid is strongly associated with the current EPRDF government. Food aid has been distributed every year in Delanta Dawunt since the overthrow of the *Derg* in 1991. Most relief was distributed freely through the *woreda* DPPC before the introduction of EGS in the district in 1999. Poor monitoring of EGS activities and the lack of interest of beneficiaries in public works meant that many people continued to receive *de facto* gratuitous relief until 2002. Since then there has been closer monitoring and supervision of EGS activities and the enforcement of work norms. Local informants also report that gratuitous relief was stopped in 2003, in effect excluding some labour-poor households who cannot participate in EGS from receiving relief assistance.

5.2 Livelihoods and vulnerability

There are significant complexities built into Delanta's food supply system owing to its diverse physical environment, ecology and agricultural systems. The main harvest of teff, barley and wheat occurring between November and January is based on the *Meher* growing season, which follows the primary *Kremt* rains lasting from June until August. In some years and in certain areas there is also a second growing season corresponding to the *Belg* rains that stretch from February until March or April. Short cycle beans, maize and vegetables are planted in the *Belg* and harvested in May.

Broadly, Delanta Dawunt can be divided into three agro-ecological zones: the *dega*, *woina dega* and *kolla*. The *dega* consists of the intensively cultivated highland plateaus that rise to above 3,000 metres. The distinctive plateaus

dominate the landscape. Farmers in the *dega* zone are regarded as dependent on *Belg* rainfall. If the *Belg* rains fail there is typically hunger during the long *Kremt* rains. The pockets and strips of arable land at mid-elevation located on the steeply descending slopes of the plateaus make up the *woina dega*. Compared to the *dega*, the cropping system in the *woina dega* is more diversified, with higher yields for a greater number of crops including oats, wheat, teff, lentils and vetch. Farmers in the *woina dega* depend on both *Belg* and *Meher* rainfall. The low elevation area between the plateaus is the *kolla*, the third zone. Farmers in this zone are dependent on the long *Meher* growing season that follows the *Kremt* rains.

A 2003 baseline survey of livelihoods commissioned by Oxfam GB highlights the breadth and nature of vulnerability in Delanta Dawunt.¹⁵ Among a sample of 345 households the mean landholding size across all agro-ecological zones was 1.18 hectares. Fewer than 5% report acquiring land through the rental market, sharecropping or as a gift, even though the rental market is crucial for redistributing land between land-constrained households and those willing to rent.¹⁶ Nearly 33% of households own no oxen, while 47% report owning only one. Controversially, the ownership of oxen has been used as a targeting criterion in food aid distributions. It is alleged that this has encouraged poor households to dispose of oxen in order to qualify for relief assistance.

The average annual household income was only 1,475 Ethiopian Birr, or around \$130 per year. The average household size is 5.3 members in Delanta Dawunt. This means that the average annual per capita income level in the *woreda* (\$25) is an estimated 7% of the international monetary poverty line (\$1 per person per day). Crop production was the largest source of income, followed by livestock and off-farm sources. Only 11.4% report wage labour as a source of income, while 29% report other off-farm activity, although there are variations in these percentages across the different agro-ecological zones. But, taken together, the contribution of wage labour and off-farm activities to overall income levels was less than 5%. Only

31.2% reported receiving food aid in the previous year at the time of the survey. The limitations of income diversification detailed in the Oxfam livelihoods survey are confirmed by another recent survey in Wollo, which found that only 26% of household heads had a second occupation (FSCO, 1999 cited in Sharp et al., 2003: 133).

5.3 Relief needs

The volume of food aid and those judged to be in need of relief assistance in Delanta Dawunt have expanded since 1991. Between 1998 and 2003 the food gap, measured as the difference between the production and requirement of grain, averaged 44% (see Table 2). The mean annual number of food aid beneficiaries in Delanta Dawunt between 1996 and 2003 was 61,000, with the highest reported number of beneficiaries (101,228) occurring in 2000. During the same period the mean annual amount of food aid distributed was 7,650MT.

Since 1999 the Regional DPPC in Amhara has delegated to the Organisation for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), an NGO allied to the ruling EPRDF coalition government, the responsibility for managing and distributing relief assistance. ORDA has built up a large distribution capacity. It administers a total of 192 warehouses in 64 *woredas* in ANRS with a total storage capacity of 99,720MT. ORDA distributes an estimated 90% of all food aid in ANRS.

Some international NGOs also distribute food aid, such as Save the Children (SCUK) in North Wollo Zone, World Vision Ethiopia in South Wollo Zone and Family Health International in South Gonder Zone. Although the number judged to be in need of relief assistance is increasing, most agencies in North Wollo, among them Oxfam GB in Delanta Dawunt and CONCERN and SCUK in South Wollo Zone, have abrogated the responsibility to do relief to ORDA (Figure 3). For example, relief is a minor part of Oxfam's current activities in Delanta Dawunt. Since Oxfam began emergency assistance to the district during the 1984 famine,

the focus of its assistance has incrementally shifted from relief to rehabilitation and, more recently, development. Humanitarian interventions undertaken by Oxfam in the area in the past have consisted of relief operations, constructing warehouses for food aid, early-warning training, and linking relief resources to development. The last relief operation to involve Oxfam was in 1999 and 2000, when the organisation gave food to ORDA to carry out EGS activities. It also assisted with monitoring and training.

Table 2: Annual number of food aid beneficiaries and food distributed (MT) in Delanta Dawunt (1996–2003)

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Beneficiaries	25,000	47,698	48,876	80,246	101,228	78,300	46,670	59,700
Food distributed (MT)	3,125	5,962	6,109	10,300	12,653	9,787	5,833	7,462

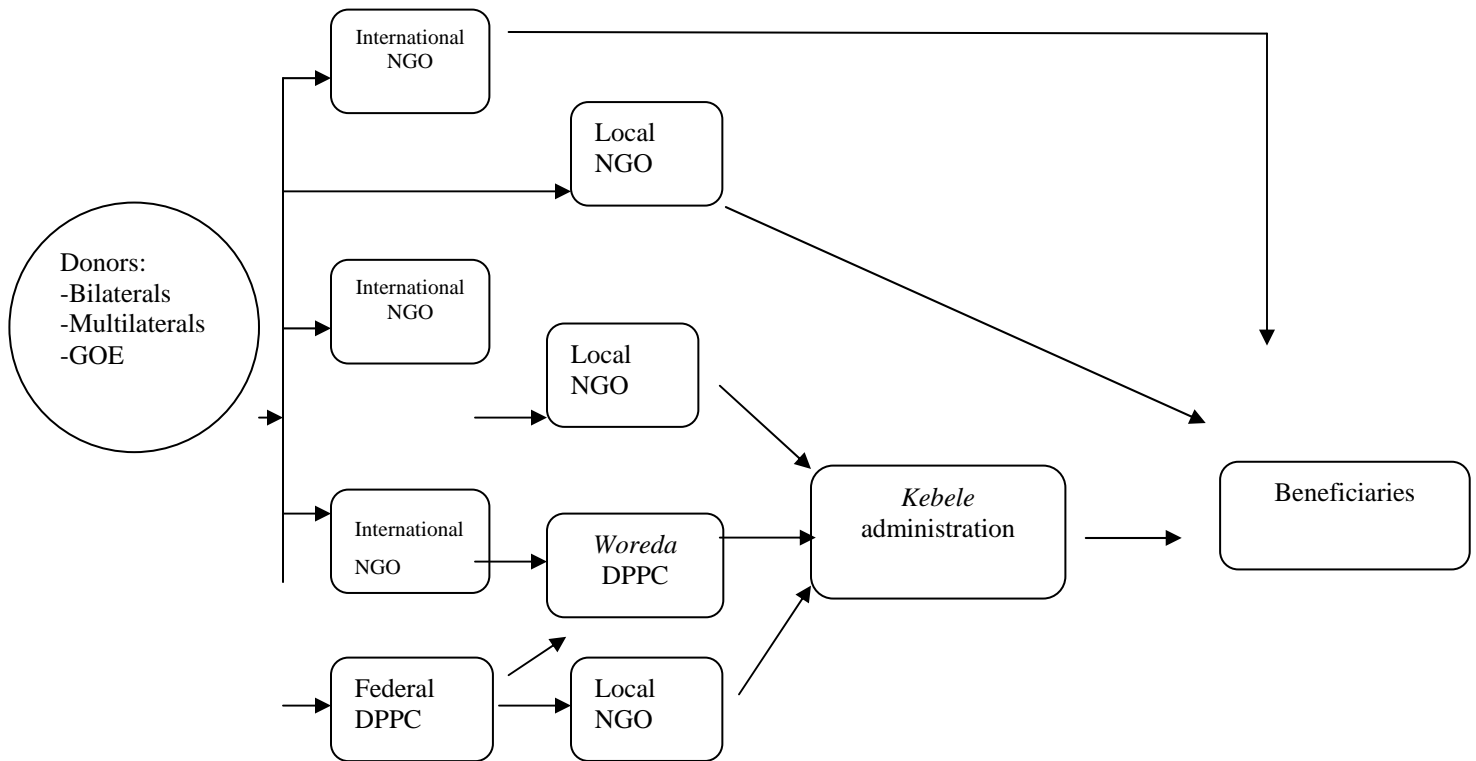
Source: ORDA archives, Delanta Dawunt

Table 3: Grain requirement versus production in Delanta Dawunt (1998-2003).

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Grain requirement (MT)	25,52 6	26,29 1	27,08 0	27,89 2	28,72 9	31,505
Grain production (MT)	12,36 0	7,034	12,79 0	16,47 3	12,34 6	13,373
Food gap (MT)	13,16 6	19,25 7	14,29 0	11,41 9	16,38 3	18,132
Percent gap	48.42	26.75	47.23	59.06	42.97	42.45

Source: Oxfam GB archives, Delanta Dawunt

Figure 3. Pathways for transferring relief assistance in Delanta Dawunt.



5.4 Perceptions of dependency and the dependent

The dependency debate is highly politicised in Delanta Dawunt. Discussions on dependency are entwined with the government’s revised food security strategy centered on the resettlement of destitute farming households and the establishment of a safety net for chronically food insecure households that are considered to be potentially food self-sufficient where they currently reside. Relative dependence on relief assistance is used to differentiate among households, with the most dependent targeted for resettlement. This policy is implicit at the *woreda* and *kebele* levels, and was acknowledged by regional and local officials that were interviewed. Current perceptions of dependency and dependence must be understood in this context.

While senior officials in the federal government interviewed for this study tended to de-emphasise the possibility of dependency syndrome, *woreda*-level administrators and some NGO field staff consider the issue to be a serious problem. The trickling down of new policy messages and stances takes time, implying that there may be a disconnection between officialdom in Addis and perceptions and attitudes in the *woredas* and *kebeles*. A common refrain is that farmers have lost confidence in their own cropping systems, and therefore find it easier to rely on food aid. Dependency claims are important to elite perceptions and attitudes of the poor.

Another prominent view is that local traditions are an obstacle to development. The implication is that tradition is one reason for people's continued dependence on relief assistance. The very existence of such views suggests the continuing strength of the modernisation paradigm and the idea of the backward peasant. Officials recall instances in which farmers, believing that further distributions of food would cease upon completion of public works, sabotaged soil and water conservation terraces constructed through EGS in order to perpetuate the need for food aid. However, there is a lack of systematic evidence to suggest that such instances are anything more than isolated occurrences, even though they continue to influence policy. Officials also refer to an Amharic proverb to justify their belief in the existence of dependency syndrome among farmers, which is translated as '[i]t does not matter whether it rains here as long as it rains enough in Canada'.

Woreda officials contend that the problem of dependency runs deep in local government offices as well. Officials acknowledge that relief assistance subsidises the budgets of line departments that often lack the requisite technical capacity and capital inputs to implement development projects that they are responsible for under the decentralised system of government. *Kebele* leaders often exaggerate crop failure in their area to legitimise a greater amount of relief assistance: political reputation can hinge on the volumes of food aid that are distributed. It is established practice for the *Woreda* DPPC (WDPPC) to inflate the number of

people requiring assistance as a way of securing a greater amount of food aid for the district.¹⁷ Many *woreda* officials accept such practice as standard and equate food aid with budgetary support.¹⁸ In this form, food aid is used as payment to labourers on public works projects. According to an NGO source, *woreda* and *kebele* officials also gain political leverage by increasing food aid flows to their constituencies. A recent example was the large distribution of food aid in Delanta Dawunt in 2003, even though conditions were relatively normal. *Woreda* officials used the national emergency to claim food aid for the *woreda*. Farmers were selling food aid to merchants the same day it was distributed.¹⁹

The experience of relief assistance beneficiaries in Delanta Dawunt stands in contrast to the received wisdom of local officials who claim the existence of dependency syndrome. The view of local officials rests on two assumptions. The first is that farmers who receive relief assistance have lost interest in crop production. A second assumption is that beneficiaries do not engage in other work activities in the expectation of receiving aid. This in turn assumes that aid rations are both sufficient in size to meet a household's food needs, and reliable to the extent that beneficiaries can count on receiving assistance.

To test the accuracy of these assumptions and better understand local attitudes and perceptions of dependency, interviews were conducted with farmers in four different *kebeles* in Delanta Dawunt. The criteria used to identify the study sites were the distance of the *kebele* to food aid distribution sites, and whether Oxfam had recent or current projects in the area. Respondents were identified according to their sex and wealth category (better off, middle, poor and destitute). A total of 39 interviews were conducted. Focus group discussions were organised before beginning interviews with farmers in order to establish important issues and clarify the local context around the issue of dependency. A follow-up discussion was held at the end of the interview process to discuss trends in dependence and destitution.

Farmers in Delanta Dawunt that were interviewed for the study identified a range of livelihood problems that contradict the first assumption underpinning the dependency thesis, namely that they are indifferent to crop production levels on their farms. It is clear that most of the farmers interviewed think in terms of wider livelihood security and not narrowly on having enough food. Few people explicitly mentioned a shortage of food as a livelihood problem they face. Many problems related to crop production, such as insect pests, frost, shortage of *Belg* rainfall, unpredictability of rainfall, soil moisture scarcity, waterlogging, low soil fertility and failure of improved seeds. From the interviews that were conducted, it is evident that farmers were concerned with crop production. Most were highly knowledgeable and able to speak intelligently of the factors constraining crop production.

Concerning the second assumption underpinning the dependency thesis, it is questionable whether beneficiaries of relief assistance do not work in the expectation of receiving aid. The Oxfam livelihoods survey found that most income for households in Delanta Dawunt came from crop production (67%) followed by livestock rearing (24%). There is contrasting evidence on the significance of relief assistance in meeting household needs. The Oxfam survey found that contributions of remittances, defined to include food aid, amounted to an average 2% of household mean annual income (Demeke et al., 2003: 43). Oxfam field staff in Delanta Dawunt that were interviewed emphasise that the irregularity of distributions and the wide sharing of relief rations within communities mean that relief assistance is less important than it may otherwise be. A WFP official stressed the same point citing evidence from lowland pastoralist areas.²⁰ Lentz and Barrett (2004) found that the median food aid receipts of pastoralist households in southern Ethiopia that were interviewed during the 2000–2001 drought was 5%. Food aid comprised 25% or less of the income of 66% of households they surveyed.

Contrasting evidence comes from SC-UK household food economy baseline data, which shows that 45% of the population in the highland *Belg* in North Wollo (which includes Delanta Dawunt) are dependent on relief assistance for more than 20% of their annual food supply (Sharp et al., 2003: 32). What is clear is that many farmers do not rely exclusively on relief assistance, even during crisis years. Dependence on relief assistance is one of many mechanisms farmers use to get from one hungry season to the next (see Table 4).

Table 4: Coping mechanisms in Delanta Dawunt

Sell animals	Money from credit lenders
Slaughter weak animals for dried meat	Migration in search of wage labour
Sell animal products (milk, eggs, butter)	Send children to better-off relatives
Depend on friends and family	Collection and use of wild foods
Relief assistance (FFW, EGS)	Production and sale of coffee
Reduce consumption (number and size of meals)	Change diet
Purchase and resale of grains and animals	Seasonal labour in Afar salt mines

If beneficiaries do not work in anticipation of receiving assistance, this assumes that the ration amount is adequate to meet a household's food needs. It also assumes that the ration amount and the time when aid is distributed are reliable. However, 82% of farmers that were interviewed for this study indicated that aid transfers are unreliable. Farmers reported that distributions of food aid are often untimely, with the aid arriving after the end of the critical hunger season.

5.5 The local political economy of relief assistance

The limitations and problems around relief assistance that were identified by farmers interviewed in Delanta Dawunt show how aid becomes entangled in the web of local-level power relations that determine access to support.

The size of relief rations varies greatly. In part this is because in most years the amount of relief assistance that is allocated to the *woreda* is below what is required, as local government officials explain. A common way that *woreda* administrators have managed a shortfall in food aid is to reduce the size of rations, from the official minimum of 15kg of grain per month per person to 12.5kg. Reducing the size of rations to individuals in order to accommodate a greater number of beneficiaries overall pertains in other regions of Ethiopia as well. A key finding of the Lentz and Barrett (2004) study of food aid among pastoralists is that food aid volumes are very modest. The average daily per capita food aid value in their study sites in southern Ethiopia was less than \$0.015 per person per day. A humanitarian source claimed that, in 2004, he observed up to 20 families sharing a single 25kg bag of grain per month in Somali region.²¹ Public transfers to individuals who participated in workfare projects were not of sufficient size to prevent needy households from depleting their assets. Relief assistance contributed an insignificant amount to meeting annual food needs for most beneficiary households. The need for income outweighed what most beneficiaries could get from food aid under workfare schemes such as EGS.²² People had to engage in other activities to make up the difference. Many were not able to make up the difference.

Many farmers that were interviewed for this study explain that leakage errors in targeting, referring to the registration of middle and better-off people as beneficiaries on workfare projects, have contributed to processes of destitution by not preventing the depletion of assets. The participation of middle and better-off households on workfare projects implies that fewer household members are registered among households that are genuinely in need. According to the EGS

guidelines, priority must be given to ensuring that employment is provided for one eligible person from each needy household having up to five members, two for those having between six and ten members, and three for those having 11 or more members (DPPC, 1997). But *kebele* officials often ignore the guidelines by registering fewer members from needy households in order to enable a greater number of households overall to participate. Since it is a customary practice in Ethiopia to share hunger within a household, even when a full ration is provided to an EGS labourer, the ration is divided among other household members who are not registered.²³

Targeting problems in distributing relief assistance raise the spectre of dependency. The participation of middle and wealthier households in public works is entrenched in Delanta Dawunt. Even wealthier households find it beneficial to participate in LIPW. To some extent this suggests the pervasiveness of poverty. Nearly everyone is poor.²⁴ Wealth is a relative category in rural areas of Ethiopia. For many farmers, 'reliance' on food aid is seen as the rational exploitation of all available resources. Asking for support, or simply receiving support, is a way of coping that is often labelled as 'dependency' (WFP, 2004). Several farmers indicate that relief aid can bridge the food gap, particularly when *Belg* rains fail. Many add that aid also prevents distress migration in crisis years and, in extreme circumstances, saves lives. Nearly 77% of farmers who were interviewed also note that there is a noticeable decrease in the price of grain in local markets at the time of distributions, but add that prices typically stabilise within a few weeks. However, for cash-poor smallholders who are net grain purchasers, lower food prices are a positive outcome of relief distributions.²⁵

Up to now, government institutions and some aid agencies involved in relief have not been able to disentangle the distribution of aid from the web of local-level power relations that determines people's access to internal and external forms of support. The targeting process in *kebeles* is marred by accusations of favouritism

and nepotism by the administrators and *ad hoc* committees responsible for targeting. According to the government guidelines for community-level targeting, the *Mengistawi Budin*, or village leadership, registers eligible beneficiaries and presents the list to the *kebele* leaders, who call a general assembly to review and approve the list to submit to the *woreda* officials.

In practice, targeting is politically negotiated and social contacts matter greatly in determining final beneficiary lists. Some farmers that were interviewed in Delanta Dawunt expressed concern that poor households had been excluded from food aid distributions since they are not close to *kebele* leaders. This would tally with evidence from other regions in Ethiopia that shows significant problems with targeting (Clay et al., 1998). Farmers also reported that *kebele* administrators and *Mengistawi Budin* are known to register a greater number of their own family members on workfare projects than the average number of beneficiaries among poorer households of a similar size. Such tendencies are recalled in an Amharic proverb that goes 'the Government has sent us the relief food but the *kebele* leaders have taken it'. The implication of the middle and better -off being counted as beneficiaries is that rations are spread across a larger beneficiary population, with smaller rations distributed to those genuinely in need.

Relief resources are patronage for *kebele* leaders who are alleged to register their better-off family members and friends on workfare projects. Within communities that were visited for this study, it was acknowledged that it is common for local authorities to share out relief assistance to those that are judged not to be needy. A female beneficiary complained that vulnerable groups do not benefit from relief assistance: 'aid is provided to wealthy people. We poor receive a small ration. The aid comes in the name of the poor of our community but the poor do not receive the aid'.²⁶

The *woreda* administrator for Delanta Dawunt admitted that distributions of food aid have created enmity between local people and *kebele* administrators.²⁷ But criticism was muted among farmers, with the exception of a few dissenting voices. There was tacit acceptance of ration spreading, particularly among those who regard relief aid as a type of welfare that the government provides to all. This in turn relates to a view voiced by some beneficiaries that relief assistance is an entitlement that the government is obligated to provide. Of course, governments are obligated to prevent their citizens from starving. One NGO field staff member familiar with this local perception observed, 'the government would not stay long if it failed to deliver food aid. People think the government delivers for the sake of its own legitimacy'.²⁸ As explained earlier, many local people in Delanta Dawunt who were interviewed for this study associate relief assistance with the current EPRDF government. Political interests can help create and maintain dependency in the sense that relief creates opportunities for patronage. In a more ambiguous sense, relief assistance can be a form of social control in that dependent populations are in some ways more easily controlled. One example of this is the use of food aid as a political weapon in Zimbabwe.

Feelings about receiving relief assistance in Delanta Dawunt are mixed, however. Several beneficiaries expressed shame and regret. Others perceived relief assistance as a wage for providing labour on public works projects.

Relief assistance is important, but is rarely if ever a sole source of food, nor even the most important. 82% of farmers that were interviewed as part of this study reported receiving relief assistance within the last year. However, 68% of farmers reported they are 'not dependent' on relief assistance, and a further 19% claimed they are only a 'little dependent'. Only two respondents claimed they are *tigegna*, or 'very dependent', one a disabled elderly man and the other a divorced woman whose only source of income was selling wool. However, it is very difficult to interpret farmers' perceptions of their own dependence in view of the uncertainty

caused by macro policy changes and the determination of the government to move forward with controversial resettlement plans. People are reluctant to admit dependence on relief assistance for fear that this may qualify them for resettlement.

The views and experiences of some farmers in Delanta Dawunt suggest that the threat of withholding food aid is being used as a weapon to coerce destitute households to resettle. *Woreda* and regional officials alike have proclaimed that food aid will no longer be available as a way to pressure reluctant farmers to resettle. Many farmers that were interviewed were noticeably intimidated and feared being resettled. There are reported instances of farmers holding *kebele* and *woreda* officials to account for their position on food aid through the nomination process in elections. A local source reported that certain *kebele* leaders have also refused to nominate any households for resettlement. There is an impasse on the issue of resettlement. In 2003, during the first year of the current resettlement programme, 15,000 households were resettled and 2,500 of these returned in ANRS, short of the intended target of resettling 20,000. The number decreased to 5,000 in 2004 and mostly constituted households from more food-secure *woredas* outside of the highlands.

The dominant view in government is that the intransigence of households in the highlands to resettle is due to relief assistance dependency. But the conditions for dependency do not exist in many areas. The Oxfam GB livelihoods survey notes:

The assumption of some woreda and regional officials [is] that the resistance expressed in the unwillingness of the overwhelming majority to be relocated is partly precipitated by the continuous flow of food aid over the last several years. The assertion does not appear to be plausible due to the fact that the contribution of food aid as a major element of sustenance of family livelihood is marginal. The apparent irregularity of food distribution marked by frequent delays and the meagre amount

received by beneficiaries whenever distribution takes place does not make the assumption tenable (Demeke et al., 2003: viii).

In interviews, farmers reported that rations are insufficient to meet their households' food needs, but that relief assistance complements other work activities. A female beneficiary of relief assistance succinctly expressed the dominant view among farmers: 'I am not dependent. Aid complements other activities like selling wool or cow's milk and butter. But aid is not a big issue for me'.²⁹ Few people who have received relief assistance in Delanta Dawunt admit that it has improved their livelihood. Officials concerned with the possible existence of dependency among beneficiaries have systematically overestimated the significance of relief assistance to those receiving aid. People who have received aid emphasise as a matter of greater importance that public transfers of food are nearly always inadequate and of minor significance in comparison to other sources of food and livelihood.

6. Conclusions and discussion

The analysis presented here has shown that notions of 'dependency' have strong resonance in a range of policy and programming decisions on relief assistance in Ethiopia. However, there is no singular or straightforward meaning of dependency, and therefore no single response to address the perceived problem. A variety of situations and/or possible outcomes of policy and programmatic action are labelled as 'dependency'. The different ways in which dependency is discussed in Ethiopia include:

- Dependency syndrome referring to recipients of relief assistance who count on receiving aid over their own ways of coping.
- Disincentives in terms of food aid decreasing the price of local farm produce and thereby discouraging farmer investment in their own production.
- Leakage errors in targeting attributed to local government authorities that show preferential treatment in registering middle and better-off extended family members, friends and other supporters on workfare projects.
- Government institutions and aid agencies involved in the distribution of relief assistance that depend on continuing flows of humanitarian aid.
- Destitution, which is a state of severe and deep poverty characterised in part by dependence on public and private transfers of food and other types of assistance.

'Dependency' holds great discursive power. The presumed dependency of beneficiaries was an important concern influencing the restructuring of aid structures and the formation of new relief policies in Ethiopia in the post-war period after the overthrow of the *Derg* military government in 1991. Debate centred on creating new systems for early warning and the distribution of relief assistance while fighting dependency syndrome by promoting greater individual responsibility and self-sufficiency. The aid system in Ethiopia has become

increasingly effective at distributing relief assistance, a judgement confirmed by the response to the 2003 emergency.

However, although relief assistance is saving lives, livelihoods are deteriorating and levels of destitution are increasing. This conundrum underlies the shift of emphasis in the debate on aid in recent years. Attention is now centred on rationalising the role of relief assistance in addressing the needs of the chronically food insecure. This is observed in the distinction made between acute and chronic needs in the annual appeal since 2002 and the discussions leading up to the establishment of the national safety net in 2005.

A constellation of interests has converged around efforts to reduce dependency. But very different meanings of 'dependency' feed into aid policy and programming changes in Ethiopia, as was apparent in discussions on reorienting the aid system that preceded the introduction of the PSNP. An interest in reducing dependency because of the presumed disincentive effects of relief aid is clearly distinct from wanting to fight the 'dependency syndrome', or from an emphasis on dependency as part of a strategy to help the destitute to lift themselves out of a situation of severe poverty.

It is right to raise and discuss issues out of a concern to improve the effectiveness of relief aid. Some legitimate concerns are labelled 'dependency', such as dependence on relief as a characteristic of the destitute, market price effects of food aid, and targeting problems in relief distributions. However, this study finds the use of 'dependency' language to be unhelpful and confusing. 'Dependency' is used too loosely in discussions on relief assistance, with possibly damaging consequences for a constructive dialogue on pertinent issues. There is a need to more clearly identify and precisely define problems in the aid system and responses to food crises. Use of dependency claims can also have practical effects such as on coverage of a relief operation, size of relief rations distributed, and the length and

timing of an intervention. It is therefore a concern that dependency is used so freely in discussions on relief assistance with little apparent consideration for the possibly negative outcomes of the use of the term.

In all the discussion on dependency it is easy to lose sight of the imperative of the Ethiopian government supported by humanitarian agencies to save lives and reduce human suffering. Dependency debates should not affect the rights of the food insecure to receive assistance. There is a need for actors involved in debates on 'dependency' to reaffirm their commitment to meeting minimum standards in humanitarian assistance. Policy and programme changes should seek to increase the effectiveness of relief assistance. This does not necessarily imply a reduction in relief in the short and medium term. It could even mean an expansion in coverage and greater quantities of relief being distributed over a longer period of time, if doing so enhanced the dependability of assistance for people faced with threats to their food security and nutrition. People confronted with such threats should be able to depend on relief as a reliable form of livelihood support.

There is a need not only to disentangle the various ways in which dependency is problematised and discussed, but also to consider the 'side effects' of policies and programmes that arise from dependency arguments. It is important to go beyond spoken intentions and scrutinise the underlying context of debates and how certain dependency claims link to particular institutions and political struggles. This study has examined meanings of dependency in relation to the Ethiopian government's broader Food Security Program that incorporates resettlement of the most destitute households. The case study on Delanta Dawunt shows how dependency claims give leverage to particular political objectives. Cutting back or stopping relief aid on the basis of dependency arguments is a political action. Official exhortations that dependency must be minimised conceal the considerable political and social consequences of the ongoing resettlement process. While it is questionable whether resettlement will reduce dependence on aid, dependency claims justify

government intervention to resettle destitute households, if necessary by threatening to withhold food aid as a tactic to coerce the unwilling.

This study also examined concerns that relief assistance has become institutionalised among various government departments and aid agencies that are involved in distribution. Different government officials have problematised what they allege to be dependence on aid flows among agencies doing relief to justify new government guidelines that narrowly define the role of NGOs in implementation of the national safety net. Some sources questioned for this study regard the new guidelines as an assertion of governmental power over civil society.

At the same time, there is a broad-based and genuine concern among most aid actors that levels of destitution are increasing. However, there is no consensus on what longer-term measures should be adopted to enable the destitute to escape poverty. The Ethiopian government views resettlement as a necessary measure to reduce dependence on relief assistance among the destitute population.

Though they are contested and challenged, notions of dependency are instrumental in providing grounds for changes to aid policy that in turn tie into a new calculus of power and control. Issues of poverty and power are interwoven in debates on relief assistance in Ethiopia, with dependency featuring as a central and recurring theme.

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Notes

¹ See Elliesen (2002) and Pankhurst and Bevan (2004).

² Notably, emergency food aid is off-budget.

³ Personal communication with Stephen Devereux, 12 February 2005.

⁴ 'EU Common Position on Resettlement', draft, September 2003.

⁵ The government and UN began issuing a joint appeal in 2002.

⁶ The number of people defined as chronically food insecure has grown to an estimated 5–6 million.

⁷ Interview with donor official, Addis Ababa, 6 December 2004.

⁸ Interview with senior government official, Addis Ababa, 17 November 2004.

⁹ Joint Government–Multidonor Appraisal Mission, 13–20 September 2004, aide memoire, p. 17.

¹⁰ Interview with donor official, Addis Ababa, 16 November 2004.

¹¹ In the Ethiopia context, EGS is distinguished from food for work (FFW). EGS is supported by humanitarian aid through the DPPC, although it was not certain which government office was ultimately responsible for projects undertaken through EGS. FFW had a more explicit developmental focus, and was implemented within a clear programmatic framework. It was run through the former Bureaux of Agriculture and drew most of its support from the WFP.

¹² Interview, Addis Ababa, 19 November 2004.

¹³ Interview, Addis Ababa, 17 November 2004.

¹⁴ Aide Memoire, 10–27 May 2004.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Panel presentation by Stephen Devereux on 'Food Security in Ethiopia: How Much Progress?', School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2 November 2004. See also Rahmato (2004), who cites contrasting evidence from other studies that show a higher prevalence of rentals and sharecropping.

¹⁷ Interview with *woreda* official, Delanta Dawunt, 24 November 2004.

¹⁸ Interview with NGO official, Delanta Dawunt, 24 November 2004.

¹⁹ Interview with NGO official, Addis Ababa, 8 December 2004.

²⁰ Interview with humanitarian official, Addis Ababa, 8 December 2004.

²¹ Interview with humanitarian official, Addis Ababa, 19 November 2004.

²² Interview with donor official, Addis Ababa, 17 November 2004.

²³ Interview with humanitarian official, Addis Ababa, 15 November 2004.

²⁴ The IDS-SCUK destitution study shows that the number of better-off and middle households in North Wollo has decreased significantly.

²⁵ Personal communication with Stephen Devereux, 12 February 2005.

²⁶ Interview with female beneficiary, Delanta Dawunt, 29 November 2004.

²⁷ Interview with *woreda* official, Delanta Dawunt, 24 November 2004.

²⁸ Interview with NGO official, Delanta Dawunt, 23 November 2004.

²⁹ Interview with female beneficiary, Delanta Dawunt, 26 November 2004.