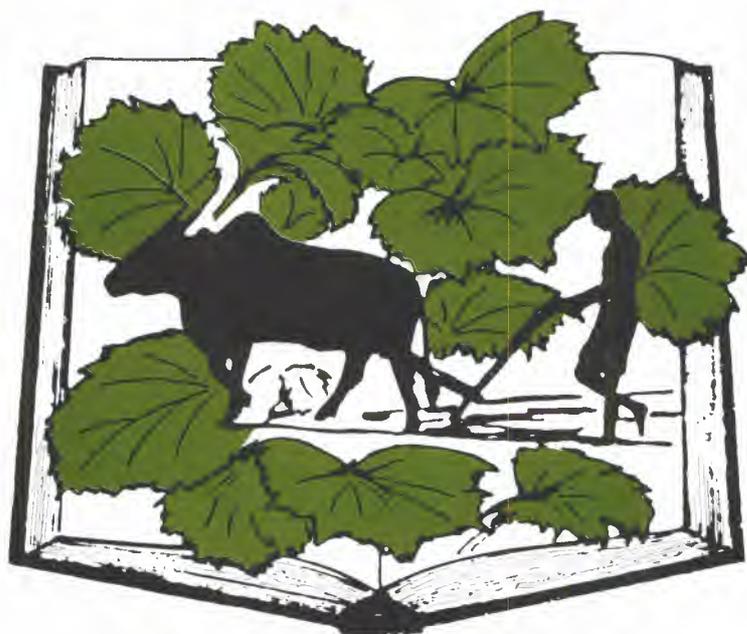


**REPORT FROM AN EVALUATION MISSION TO
MAHMIMET RESETTLEMENT PROJECT, APRIL 1996**

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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Team:

Shushan Ghirmai, Redd Barna Eritrea

Asgedom Tewelde, Ministry of Agriculture

Ghirmai Seium, Commission for Relief and Refugee Affairs

Gebremeskel Fessaha, Redd Barna Eritrea

Jon Kr. Øiestad, Noragric, Agriculture University of Norway

Arne Olav Øyhus, team leader, Noragric

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Dr. Arne Olav Øyhus from the Centre for International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, at the Agricultural University of Norway with substantial contributions from Ms. Shushan Ghirmai, Redd Barna Eritrea. Valuable inputs have also come from Mr. Gebremeskel Fessaha, Redd Barna Eritrea, and Mr. Jon Kr. Øiestad, Noragric. The content and outline of the report is, additionally, very much inspired by the two other team members: Mr. Ghirmai Seium from the Commission for Relief and Refugee Affairs (CRRA) and Mr. Asgedom Tewolde from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Both the plan and programme for the whole mission and the content of the report were thoroughly discussed and agreed upon by all team members. I therefore believe it is safe to claim that this report reflects the common opinion of the whole team.

To perform an evaluation mission in such a remote and inaccessible area as Mahmimet is not an easy task. To be perfectly honest, this whole mission would not have been possible without the assistance from one particular person, Mr. Mulugetha Gebreyesus, CRRAs Site Manager in Mahmimet. He really took us by his hand and led us around in Mahmimet. He engaged the interpreters, without whom we could not have communicated with the local people. He arranged all meetings and group discussions, and he functioned as a go-between between the team and the local community. We are so much indebted to you!

A special thanks to Mr. Gebremeskel Gilazghi, Mahmimet *wereda* administrator, who met us for discussions at several occasions, and to the *adidat baito* (village council) who gave us most valuable information about both the past and the present, and who assisted us in drawing a map of the village area.

Lastly, thanks to the local community of returnees in Mahmimet who have come back from a long period of hardship in the Sudan, and who are trying to establish a viable livelihood under very tough circumstances in Eritrea. They were all so open, honest and patient during our interviews. After finishing the interviews we asked if they wanted to ask us a question. And the question they asked was: So many people have interviewed us both while we were in the Sudan and after we returned to Eritrea. But nothing has come out of it so far. Will something happen now? Our answer is: We really hope so, and we really hope that you will succeed!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Mahmimet is one of the districts in Eritrea with the most desperate and urgent need for outside assistance. Yet, it is an area that has not been able to attract the attention of international donors, be it multilateral, bilateral or NGOs. We believe that the reason for this is that the area is too remote, too difficult and too vulnerable. Besides an almost negligible presence of UNICEF, Redd Barna is presently the only international organization working in the area, and its support is highly appreciated and deeply regarded by the local people and the local administration. In many respects the efforts and services supported by Redd Barna represent the main glimpse of hope for the local people. It is on this basis the recommendations we have suggested below must be read and understood.

We have presented the recommendations one by one as if the problems and the needs of the local people can be separated from each other and solved individually. This does not really represent a true image of the local situation. It is quite easy to state the basic and common problem for the Mahmimet community: - **food security**. But the solution to this problem both on a short and long term basis entails a complicated process including intricate social, economic and environmental factors. On the social level, for instance, most of the young people grew up in refugee camps in the Sudan. They do not know the environment and have never learnt how to live in it and with it. The adult generation might still know the natural environment, but the social environment with its networks and institutions which they earlier depended so heavily on, is today totally demolished. On the economic level, there are no employment possibilities whatsoever; the livestock component is insignificant; and agriculture is not possible because people lack tools, seeds, and arable land ready for cultivation. Environmentally, the area is extremely arid and inhospitable with vegetation only along the streams.

The problems and the needs of the local population have to be understood in a more or less full context where each problem and need is highly integrated with other needs and problems. It is not possible, for instance, to solve health and nutrition problems without solving the agricultural problems; and *vice versa*. It is not possible to give the children a better future if the households can not sustain a living in the area. Further, it will be **no** future for the community if the children are not properly catered for. Therefore, it is important when reading the recommendations to view them in connection with each other.

If the recommendations are accepted and if future Redd Barna support to Mahmimet will be based on them, Redd Barna will have to cooperate closely with national institutions like CRRRA (Commission for Relief and Refugee Affairs), Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and the Asmara University for planning and implementing the activities and projects developed from the recommendations.

We have found it convenient to divide the recommendations into three categories representing the following activity areas: social services; agriculture; and institution building.

1 Social services

1.1 Due to the present situation with no food production and no employment opportunities, the families in Mahmimet have no chance to cater for their own needs. Therefore, food relief has to be continued or food aid in the form of food/cash-for-work has to be introduced if at all the community shall survive. This is the most immediate need of the community. Food aid as cash/food-for-work should be seen in connection with many of the practical activities recommended below.

1.2 On a short term basis the management capacity of the local community should be strengthened in order to take care of simple social services, e.g. water supply and grinding mills. This will be a good training for future development of the management capacity of the community.

1.3 The socio-economic role of the women in the Mahmimet society was not very prominent before the escape to Sudan. Today, their role is even more marginalized as there are very few activities both within and outside the household in which they can participate. If this continues the power and influence of women will be reduced even from the present state of affairs. To counteract this process income generating activities for women should be created, e.g. handicraft training, poultry and home gardens. To facilitate this a women's training centre should be established.

1.4 From experience we know that illiteracy is a serious constraint on any type of development. On the other side, we also know that literacy creates both dignity, self-respect and motivation among poor people. In Mahmimet the great majority of people belonging to the generations of parents and grandparents are illiterate. We recommend that the on-going adult education activities should be continued, and substantially expanded and improved as this can be an important development incentive for the community. The first step must be to find ways to stimulate higher participation in education among the local people.

1.5 The Mahmimet Elementary School seems to be in good function, but there is a serious educational constraint that most students lack adequate training means. We therefore recommend that students will get materials, e.g. exercise books for free as long as the economic situation is so bleak as it is today.

1.6 To learn properly any student needs a minimum of energy. Today, this is a problem among students in Mahmimet. It exists a supplementary school feeding programme, but it is highly insufficient and irregular. We suggest that it should be continued, but that its needs substantial expansion and improvements to make sure that the students have enough energy to exploit their learning capacity.

1.7 For the majority of children and youngsters in Mahmimet the school represents the only area of activity where they can do something that can bring benefits to themselves and the society. The school is very popular both among students and their parents. Today, the oldest students have reached grade 4, but as far as we could see there are no plans to develop the school into a full elementary school covering the grades 1-6. Such plans must be developed instantly, and facilities built so that the students do not come to a halt in their elementary education. If this should happen it will represent a serious set-back for the young generation as idleness would be the only alternative.

On a medium term basis, also a junior school must be planned and built.

1.8 The clinic has meant a big improvement to the local people. There are however some problems that have to be solved urgently. Firstly, the laboratory does not function as there is no laboratory technician presently employed. This means patients are referred to Nacfa more than 100 km away for simple tests. A laboratory technician should thus be employed immediately. Secondly, today people have to pay 5 birr for the card lasting one month, plus 1 birr for each day of admission into the hospital. This is a heavy amount of money for the people of Mahmimet who have almost nothing. Together with the Ministry of Health, some solutions must be sought to solve both these problems.

1.9 The housing component has not been a success so far. The houses are not considered by the locals as very adaptable to local social and ecological conditions. We will not recommend to proceed with this type of housing. One reason for using cement blocks to construct the present houses was to protect the local environment. This is a valid argument. In the future alternative housing has to be developed based on local materials without destroying the environment. As grasses and trees are scarce, the construction must be based on locally available clay or other suitable material. We know that GTZ arrange training to build such houses in other parts of Eritrea. Redd Barna should take contact with GTZ to get assistance in this field. The wood needed for the construction of roofs etc of the alternative houses must, at least on a medium to long term basis, be produced in local plantations along the river.

2 Agriculture

2.1 In the present situation with no food aid and no employment opportunities, food production must be given the highest attention. On a short term basis farmer groups should be established to dig their own wells along the river on a food/cash-for-work basis. These wells can be used for watering small family gardens. Since these wells will contain water during the whole year, a continuous production of food stuff is possible.

2.2 Water is the most important constraint for agricultural development in Mahmimet. Therefore, a study of various water harvesting techniques, e.g. earth dams, check dams, river diversions, spate irrigation etc that can be applied in the area should be performed. Based on this, a plan of operation for developing the water component should be worked out.

2.3 Traditionally, grain production and livestock development were integrated elements in the mode of adaptation performed by the Mahmimet people. This combination must also form the backbone of future development of this community. On the livestock side the following actions are required: targeted restocking to increase the livestock component among the poorest; pasture development by, for instance, introducing adaptable and high producing grasses and fodder trees (e.g. *Prosopis* spp.) that can increase the production of animal feeds.

Two practical components which will stimulate this development are: (1) a nursery to try out new grass and tree species, and propagate the best varieties. These trials should be performed by officers from Ministry of Agriculture and researchers from Asmara University. (2) Credit facilities to increase the rate of restocking even to the extent that animal husbandry can become a business for some families.

2.4 Establishment of a community nursery is essential not only to produce new types of grasses and fodder trees, but also to produce fruit trees to families for their own consumption,

and to produce quick maturing trees to be used for alternative house construction.

2.5 The nursery should also be used to propagate root crops such as sweet potatoes, cassava, and Irish potatoes. Production of root crops in the sandy soils along the river can possibly improve food security in the area substantially.

2.6 Families that have been allocated the new type of houses should be assisted to plant a fruit tree and construct a small home gardens adjacent to the houses where they can plant vegetables etc. The water point is close, and the families can use household waste, goat dung etc as fertilizers.

2.7 Between the rows of new houses, alleys with a combination of shade, insect repellent (e.g. *Neem*) and fodder trees should be planted both for beautification and practical use.

2.8 Animal diseases and losses are common in the area. Veterinary services should be provided to people both inside and outside the settlement area as a means to support livestock development

3 Institution building

The Mahmimet society is in a precarious situation. The standard of livelihood is far below the level necessary to secure the most basic needs. This implies that the community has, at the present stage, no chance to embark on a self sustained development process. The reasons for this state of affairs are, as explained above, manifold but mainly that the community has neither the necessary organizational structures or economic resources. An important step to secure that the community can start the process of taking control over its own situation is that it can be assisted in a process aimed at increasing the management capacity of the society. In practical terms this will imply the following items:

3.1 Strengthen the managerial capacity of local groups within the community to perform co-operative efforts for their common good, for instance the construction of village wells and nurseries.

3.2 Supply credit facilities to farmers groups (informal co-operatives) for specific tasks, e.g. purchasing of water pumps, building of channels, restocking the herds, digging wells, and constructing water diversions. Through this farmers must learn how to handle credit, make budgets, calculate income and expenditures, etc.

3.3 Support the local administration and line ministries with training, tools and equipment so that they can assist the local community on an adequate level.

3.4 Improve the management capacity of the *baitos* so that their role and influence in the society can be expanded.

3.5 Basically, what we are talking about under the heading of institution building is **community empowerment** though training and competence building activities. Introductory wise, the agencies which Redd Barna have to cooperate with in this respect are the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Local Government.

1 INTRODUCTION

The original aims and objectives of the Redd Barna's Mahmimet Resettlement Project were proposed by Redd Barna Sudan in May 1992. It was stated that the overall aim of the project was:

- I. With financial assistance to improve the living conditions of returning Eritreans and the local inhabitants so that particularly children and youth can be given a good start in the new-born nation.
- II. With technical support ensure that the assistance rendered follows an integrated and coordinated path with relevant PGE (Provisional Government of Eritrea) bodies and international organisations and that the process of integration is properly documented.

The following specific objectives were identified:

1. To provide proper shelter for 500 families (returnees/local) in Mahmimet.
2. To provide education facilities for the area in question.
3. To improve drinking water conditions for the area.
4. To render advice to any main party involved in the process.
5. To increase Redd Barna's knowledge of repatriation

At that time 6.000 people were estimated to have spontaneously returned to Mahmimet. Today, we know that this number was greatly exaggerated as the present population (April 1996) of returnees in Mahmimet is less than 2.500.

The project was originally intended to start in 1992 and be completed in 1993. In reality, most project activities started in 1993 and were completed in 1995. The delay was, according to Redd Barna, caused both by the weak administrative capacity of the Commission for Relief and Refugee Affairs, CRRRA (at that time called CERA, Commission for Eritrean Refugee Affairs); the struggle between PGE and UNHCR regarding the planning and financing of the repatriation and rehabilitation activities; the delay in obtaining full financing from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and, finally, the remoteness and haphazardness (i.e. land mines) of the area which made project activities, especially construction, difficult and cumbersome.

From the beginning, CERA was the responsible implementing partner for the project. Redd Barna's role was that of providing advice and finances.

During the project period, it has been a concern for both Redd Barna and CERA that the project design was incomplete, and that the assistance could hurt rather than assist the people of Mahmimet. As Redd Barna writes in "Sluttdokument" to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Uds DUHs ref.nr.:A-203/93 Pol. Eritrea, page 5): "The major concern we have in Mahmimet is a community with relatively good housing and educational and health services compared with other...settlements, but without a sustainable economic base. There is only one answer to this at present; food aid...Food aid is...a temporary measure, not a lasting solution. Work therefore needs to continue in Mahmimet...to ensure long term sustainability of the project community."

It is now well documented that food aid is not a lasting solution: From the beginning of 1996,

food aid to Mahmimet was discontinued by the government. The most serious problem related to this situation is not that a sustainable economic base has not yet been established, but that the process of establishing such an economic base has not even started.

As Redd Barna is well aware of, the project can obviously be criticized because there was no baseline study carried out before the project was planned and implemented. Such study could have directed project activities more in line with the returnees' own perceived needs, problems and aspirations. Based on our present knowledge, there are reasons to believe that an initial baseline study would have geared project activities more towards income generating activities, such as horticultural and livestock activities, than towards the construction of cement houses.

Nobody who know the local conditions in Mahmimet will question the fact that there is an obvious need for a continuous support to the area for at least the decade to come. Redd Barna has here a particular responsibility since it has fostered the baby into childhood, and as no other organization, be it national or international, has shown any interest in taking over the responsibility. Redd Barna must accept the present state of affairs and admit that it is too early to leave this child on its own.

The present report has a baseline study approach where the needs, problems and wishes of the Mahmimet people are described; where locally available resources are mapped; and where future possibilities, as perceived both by the team and the people themselves, are outlined. In addition, the report describes some technical solutions adaptable to the present socio-economic situation and ecological conditions. In general, the evaluation team believes that the proposed recommendations will be of importance in generating development activities proper. It is our sincere hope and honest belief that the report can be a useful tool for future Redd Barna activities in Mahmimet.

2 RESPONDING TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToR)

Questions asked in the ToR

According to ToR the team was asked to answer the following questions:

1. To what degree have the activities implemented so far met with their objectives as specified in the original project document?
2. What impact has the project had on the resettlement community in Mahmimet?
3. To what degree will the Mahmimet community presently be able to continue its development process towards sustainability without major external input?
4. What alternative strategies should CERA and Redd Barna consider in a possible extension of the co-operation in Mahmimet?

Answers to the questions in the ToR

Answer to question 1: Based on the original project document from May 1992 the specific

objectives of the Mahmimet Resettlement Project¹ (from now on called the "project") were the following:

1. To provide proper shelter for 500 families (returnees/local) in Mahmimet.
2. To provide education facilities for the area in question.
3. To improve drinking water conditions for the area.
4. To render advice to any main party involved in the process.
5. To increase Redd Barna's knowledge of repatriation

Later, the project has been expanded with two additional components:

6. A grinding mill.
7. Support to the Mahmimet clinic

The project was originally to be started in 1992 and completed in 1993. In reality, most activities started in 1993 and were largely completed in 1994 and 1995.

Presently, 58 houses have been erected, each containing 4 units ("apartments") implying shelter for 232 families. Partly due to the high building costs for each house (33.000 birr), and partly because the houses are no longer perceived to be so suitable to local conditions, it has been decided to discontinue the building programme. Most of the beneficiaries have by now been allocated their shelters, but so far only about 10% of them have moved in. The explanation given for this behaviour was that the houses were too small and too hot, and that they have not had any means of transport to move their grass houses and other things to the new settlement.

Regarding the provision of support to education and health facilities, the objectives have been met. The grinding mill was also in function. The water supply system was completed but not fully operational as people have not yet moved into the houses covered by the water system.

Answer to item 2: Generally, it is all too early to properly evaluate the impact that the project has had on the Mahmimet community as most components were not completely finalized before last year. It is, however, possible to argue that the project has had a positive effect on the community. During our questionnaire survey the people unanimously said that they were very happy for the various project components. While some appreciated the health component highest, others replied that schooling was most important. But all said that the project had substantially benefited them. The components that got the lowest scoring was the water supply as water was available in the river; and housing since few had so far moved in.

Even though the people were happy for the project and meant that it had improved their living conditions, they also mentioned some constraints in the usage. For instance, the user fees both to the health and grinding facilities were too high so that many people could not utilize them properly. In the school the students could not afford to buy exercise books. Additionally, if a big influx of returnees should now appear on the scene, it is obvious that the capacity of many project components will be too small.

Regarding items 4 (render advice to any main party involved in the process and 5 (increase Redd Barna's knowledge of repatriation) in the original project document we feel that they are

¹The project is called "The Mahmimet Multi-Sector Repatriation Programme" by CERA.

a bit too vague and thus difficult to measure. We have therefore chosen not to go deeper into them.

Answer to question 3: The answer to this question is very clear: Presently, the Mahmimet community is not at all able to continue a development process towards sustainability without major external input. Through surveying the area and interviewing both heads of households and all relevant authorities and agencies, including the local baito (council of representatives), the team landed on a unified and compact conclusion: this community will need substantial assistance for many years ahead if a process of sustainable development is to be created.

Answer to question 4: To answer this question the team is proposing a set of means of both long-term, medium-term and short-term nature.

The over all strategy should be related to agricultural sustainable production included livestock development. Based on the extreme low rainfall in the area, water development activities should be developed and utilized to its maximum.

Institutional building must also be a main strategy for the future development of the Mahmimet community. An institutional development plan should be worked out where responsibilities are clearly defined.

3 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MAHMIMET

Mahmimet village is situated on the hot and arid plains in the Sahel lowlands (378 meters above sea level) along Mahmimet river² (called Felket river in most maps). The river comes down from the Sahel highlands. The distance from the village to the mountain range in the west is about two-three km; the distance to the Red Sea coast in the east is about 30-35 km; and the distance to the Sudanese border in the north is about 50 km.

Mahmimet village is according to the present set-up³ a part of Mahmimet *wereda* (district), which again is part of the part of the Mahmimet *nus-zoba* (sub zone) within the North Red Sea Region. The total population of Mahmimet *wereda* is 14.600 divided between 2.256 households (*sidra bet*). About 75% of the population belongs to the Tigré ethnic group, the rest are mainly Rashaida. The Tigré and the Rashaida live in separate areas within the *wereda*.

Out of the total population, 12.114 individuals (1.780 households) have lived in the area during the whole war period. The majority of these people are pastoralists with a transhumant settlement pattern. Others are traders and agriculturalists (about 10%). The rest of the population, i.e. 2.486 people living in 536 households are returnees from the Sudan. All returnees live in Mahmimet village. Of the 536 returned households, 316 households have come as spontaneous returnees, the rest (220 households) are organized returnees. The female headed households comprise 243 units (45%), (1.125 individuals) of the returned

²The river change name as it passes through various geographical areas, e.g. Felket, Alghen and Mahmimet.

³The administrative structure for the whole country has recently been changed. According to the new set-up, the *wereda* level will be omitted. The new structure is however not in full operation so far.

households. The overwhelming majority of the returnees are Tigré. Today, the main difference between those who remained behind and those who went to the Sudan is that the former have managed to keep up their livestock population while the latter have lost most of theirs.

Within the wereda there are, besides Mahmimet, 6 other villages: Medagih, Meba´a, Asrai, Alghen, Meba´abi, Rihib (Dighe Rihib). Each of these villages has its separate *adidat baito* (village council containing 5 representatives), in addition there is a *wereda baito* (district council containing 25 representatives).

Mahmimet is, according to the opinion of the team, the poorest and most destitute community we have ever seen be it from an ecological, economic or social point of view. The economic deprivation can be spotted immediately as one enters the huts made only from grasses and a thin wooden frame. Here you see no ornaments, to beautification objects, not even a small grain store. The houses of the female headed households are even poorer than the houses of the male headed ones. The former have only one room, while the latter have two. Looking around you see only empty kettles and burned out fireplaces. Socially, we discovered no groups in the society that tried to undertake any communal efforts. Even though people co-operated to survive, there were no social networks that could be used for development purposes. Ecologically, the area is both extremely marginal and vulnerable. To typify our view, an expression from a team member is illustrative: "Mahmimet is more hostile than any of the other settlement areas in Eritrea." In other places of Eritrea, e.g. in Tessenei, the returnees could immediately start farming at their arrival to Eritrea since the local environmental conditions are substantially better. In Mahmimet, five years after returning from the Sudan, virtually no farming activities take place among the local families, and a family's average livestock herd is still not more than 4-5 goats and a donkey. Very few owns a camel. In Asmat, an other Redd Barna supported project area for returnees, agricultural activities are now running at a significant level.

The main problems affecting the situation in Mahmimet is not only that the environmental conditions are poor due to the fact that rainfall is insignificant (107.6 mm in 1995, 218.3 mm in 1994) (Source: MoA, Mahmimet), but also that it is a very remote and inaccessible area. This has meant an obvious economic disadvantage to the community.

In many ways it is correct to state that people are caught in a trap: It is possible to go to other areas for farming and herding, but it is in Mahmimet that facilities like a market, water, school, clinic, grinding mill and houses are found. People have become used to these services, and want to live in areas where they are available.

Regarding the future economic life for the community, it is obvious that development must be based on arable farming and animal husbandry. In a longer development perspective, fisheries and fish processing activities along the Red Sea coast can become important economic activities.

Regarding the administrative set-up, the *wereda* administration consists of three local governmental officers: (1) The administrator; (2) the asst. administrator; and (3) the village follow-up and public relations officer.

The responsibilities of the local administration are to build and maintain the link between the national government and the local structures; to implement government policies; and to co-

ordinate education, health, agriculture and repatriation activities.

There is a monthly meeting including the *adidat* (village) and the *wereda* baito. The administration always join these meetings.

In Mahmimet is also found a local branch office of the Ministry of Agriculture with responsibilities for the whole wereda. The office is staffed with the following personnel:

2 animal technicians; 1 natural resource and wildlife officer; 1 soil and water conservation technician; 1 home economist; and 1 extension agent. All of them have completed their 12 grade (senior secondary school), and they have in addition attended a six month intensive training programme arranged by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Mahmimet Elementary School has 13 teachers out of which 1 is the director. All of them are men. Nine teachers are qualified with a diploma from Teachers Training Institute (TTI), Asmara. The teachers are equipped with adequate living quarters at the school.

The Mahmimet clinic has 4 certified nurses, 2 certified health assistants, 2 barefoot doctors and 4 cleaners. All health personnel are Tigrigna speaking with some knowledge of the local language.

Prices on some core items at the Mahmimet market 15.04.1996

Type of commodity	Price (in Et. birr)	Type of commodity	Price (in Et. birr)
Mature she camel	2500	Mature she sheep	250
“ he “	2000	“ he	300
“ she donkey	500	“ cow	1800
“ he “	400	“ bull	1000
“ she goat	150	1 Qt (100 kg) wheat	300
“ he “	100	1 “ sorghum	260
		1 kilogramme sugar	7

Other items such as millet, maize, beans, peas etc. were not available at the market.

4 DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process included the following components:

(1) **Socio-economic survey** comprising interviews with 33 individuals (28 men and 5 women) regarding their evaluation of the project components, and on general social, economic and agricultural factors characterizing their present way of life. Since women both presently and traditionally are only marginally involved in agricultural and general economic affairs within the community, these interviews focused mainly on men.

(2) **Women and health survey** comprising interviews with 10 women covering more typical female issues.

(3) **Group interviews** (altogether 6): 2 with the village *baito*; 1 with a group of old women; 1 with a group of old men; 1 with a group of young/middle aged women; and 1 with a group of young/middle aged men.

The *baito* was asked about general communal matters, and in addition they drew a map of the Mahmimet village area and the surroundings. Through the interviews with the old women and men we were informed about life in Mahmimet before the people went for refuge in the Sudan. The idea behind these interviews was to find out how people organized their lives and managed the environment before the refuge to see if we could learn some lessons to be used for the future. The interviews with young/middle aged men and women concerned the concrete causes that made them leave Mahmimet to go to the Sudan; their lives in the refugee camps; what was the direct reasons for returning to Eritrea; their present lives in the settlement; and their hopes and prospects for the future.

(4) In addition we interviewed the local wereda administrator (twice); the health personnel at the local clinic; the teachers at the school; and officers from the local Ministry of Agriculture.

5 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY

Introduction

The information presented here must be read with some precaution, especially certain types of quantitative information. For instance, when we asked about the age of the interviewees and the other members of their households, the actual age mentioned will not always be accurate since this issue is not very important in the local context.

We also know from experience that people do not always tell the "truth" regarding number of livestock and other belongings they may have. This is also probably the case for the Mahmimet community. But still we feel sure that the livestock numbers communicated to us are within reason as we ourselves could observe the actual livestock situation, and as we had the numbers confirmed from several sources (administration, *baito*, Ministry of Agriculture and group interviews).

When it came to other valuables the households might possibly own we visited more than 30 homes on a random basis, and it was obvious to us that these people owned next to nothing. In their houses we did not even see a simple grain store.

We believe that our sample, the 33 interviewed households, is basically representative for the Mahmimet settlement community as interviewing took place on a perfect random basis. The only variation in the sample we know that is not fully statistically representative is the ratio between male and female headed households. While in the actual Mahmimet community 45% of the households are female headed, in our sample only 15% are so.

Findings

Of the 5 female heads of households we interviewed, 4 were widows. The last had a husband who was a fighter living in another area. She was living close to her parents and was partly a member of their household.

Together, the 33 households we interviewed comprised 185 individuals, their age and sex distribution is described in table 1 (below)

Table 1: Age and sex distribution of the members of the 33 sample households in Mahmimet

Women					Men					Tot
0-6 years	7-15 years	16-30 years	31-50 years	50+ years	0-6 years	7-15 years	16-30 years	31-50 years	50+ years	
18 (9.7%)	20 (10.8%)	27 (14.6%)	9 (4.9%)	11 (5.9%)	24 (13.0%)	29 (15.7%)	22 (11.9%)	9 (4.9%)	16 (8.6%)	185 (100%)

Children (comprising the age groups 0-6 and 7-15) compose about half of the population (91 out of 185 individuals, or 49%).

What might seem a bit strange reading these numbers is the rather skewed sex ratio with 100 men (54%) against 85 women (46%). The biggest variation is found among the two youngest age groups where the boys constitute 58% and girls only 42%. We can not explain if this difference stems from random sample variation; sampling errors; if more boys are born; or if more boys survive because they are more properly catered for. It has to be added in this connection that infant mortality seems to be extremely high in this society. Almost every family we came across had lost at least one child. One man we interviewed said that his two wives have given birth to 11 children, but that only 2 have survived.

Table 2: Distribution of children between households (percentage in brackets)

0-2 children	3-5 children	6-7 children
18 h.holds (55%)	9 h.holds (27%)	6 h.holds (18%)

As we can see, the number of children per household is rather moderate with an average of 2.75. While 4 households were completely without children, 2 households had as many as 7.

Table 3: Distribution of sample households according to size (percentage in brackets)

1-3 members	4-6 members	7-9 members	10+members	Totally
7 (21%)	16 (48%)	7 (21%)	3 (9%)	33(100%)

The average household size was 5.6, ranging from 1 (the single woman married to the fighter mentioned above) up to 14. The latter household comprised a man with three wives. Two of them he had married himself, the last one he had "inherited" from a deceased brother. This latter wife brought four children, all sons, into the household, bringing the total number of children up to 10 (out of which 6 were 15 years of age or younger)

It was common that relatives outside the nuclear family lived in the household. Most often it was the mother or father, or father/mother-in-law of the household head. But it could also be brothers and sisters, nephews, nieces, grand children, cousins etc.

When asked about which of the project components (education, health, water, grinding mill, housing) they appreciated most, the responses can be seen from table 4 below.

Table 4: Distribution of households according to priority given to the various project components (percent in brackets)

Project component	Priority No. 1	Priority No. 2	Priority No. 3	Summing up 1,2 and 3
1. School	14 (42%)	7 (21%)	4 (22%)	25 (30%)
2. Clinic	13 (39%)	13 (39%)	1 (6%)	27 (32%)
3. Water	-- (0 %)	1 (3%)	1 (6%)	2 (2%)
4. Gr.mill	4 (12%)	12 (36%)	11 (61%)	27 (32%)
5. Housing	2 (6%)	-- (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (4%)
Sum	33 (100%)	33 (100%)	18 (100%)	84 (100%)

Even though only about half of the sample gave an answer to priority 3, we see that school, health and grinding mill were the project components people appreciated most (gave the highest priority).

When we asked the interviewees about what additional (new) project components they would particularly welcome, half of the sample responded that they would give highest priority to assistance to start their own food production since agriculture is the only thing they could depend on in the future. Five respondents (15%) said that food aid/relief had the highest priority since they had no other means to cater for their own livelihood. It is also interesting that 5 respondents mentioned that the highest priority should be given to the clinic laboratory. The background for this answer is that today there is a fully equipped laboratory at the clinic, but there is no laboratory technician employed to take necessary tests. People are therefore referred to Nacfa to take simple tests.

Of other answers given to this question, some mentioned employment possibilities as their highest wish; others mentioned rural credit to purchase camels, water pumps or other items they could utilize to generate income; while yet a couple of others mentioned improved marketing facilities. One mentioned that electricity should be supplied to the settlement.

It could be added here that when we interviewed the *baito* and the groups of men, it was frequently mentioned that if the fishing possibilities along the Red Sea coast could be developed, it would bring valuable income to the community.

Nineteen (58%) out of the 33 heads of household owned land, several of them in Naro and Karora far away from Mahmimet. Some of them had tried to cultivate their land, usually with pearl millet and cotton, but with little success due to lack of rains. One farmer said that he tried to cultivate his land both in 1992, 1993 and 1994, but with no results. Due to this he did not try in 1995, and he do not think he will try this year either.

The heads of households that did not own land said that this was not a problem as land was freely available to everybody. The reason why they had not acquired land was that they saw no reason to do so as they could not cultivate it anyway. Besides lack of rains, they did not even have the simplest tools.

Reading the statistics from the local Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) we can easily see that agriculture has been a failure in Mahmimet the last years. In 1994 MoA assisted the farmers

with 39.300 kg of various seeds (cotton, pearl millet, and groundnuts). In 1995 no seeds were distributed. (Source: MoA, Mahmimet).

In 1994 MoA ploughed 619,2 ha of land for 505 farmers with tractors. In 1995 this was reduced to 15,3 ha for 8 farmers. (Source: MoA, Mahmimet).

When we asked the sample households to mention the three most important constraints for agricultural production, most of them mentioned only one: Lack of rains. Some added cost of inputs and lack of inputs (e.g. seeds, traction animals and plough shares) as additional constraints. A couple of others also mentioned lack of agricultural knowledge as a constraint.

Before the Mahmimet people fled to the Sudan, livestock was for many families their main economic activity. Today, the livestock component is almost insignificant. Regarding the present state of affairs regarding the local households' ownership to different livestock species, we found the following:

Table 5: Distribution of households according to ownership of various livestock species (percentage in brackets)

Type of animal	Goat	Donkey	Camel	Poultry
No. of h. holds owning	26 (79%)	7 (21%)	6 (18%)	7 (21%)
Total no. of animals	80	8	6	n.a.
Average no. per h.hold	2.4	0.25	0.2	n.a.

A particular constraint on livestock husbandry is animal diseases. Last year, more than one-third of the interviewees said that they lost some animals due to diseases. All together we registered the death of 49 goats, 3 donkeys and 3 camels among the sample households. Regarding the goats, some said that they died due to lack of fodder, from diarrhoea, or because they ate poisonous grasses. Others said that the goats were weak even when they got them from CERA (presently CRRA). One man said his goats died because they ate some biscuits that the soldiers from the National Service left behind.

We also registered the death of 3 donkeys and 3 camels. One donkey died because it went on a land mine. One camel died because it was taken by the flood after a heavy rainfall. We must add that the loss of a camel is a really hard blow to a family's economy since they are often used for transport which brings income. The price of a new camel is between 2000-2500 birr. In the present situation it is therefore difficult to replace it.

Even with the limited livestock component, a few people have some income from it. Nine sample families (27%) sold livestock last year, mainly goats, to get some food for the family. One family got some income from selling eggs, and three families earned some income using their animals to transport water and other goods.

It is a possibility that the respondents here have undercommunicated the income they have received from transport activities. We have reasons to believe that at least the families with a camel use it for transport purposes to bring income. This is possibly the same for the families with a donkey.

During the survey we also tried to find out what types of coping mechanisms the people had employed last year to solve the problem of food deficiency within the households. It was not difficult to detect the coping pattern since almost every family, 31 out of 33, mentioned food relief as the major coping mechanism. The two others mentioned assistance from neighbours/relatives as their major source of food.

When asked what proportion food relief constituted of the total amount of food consumed last year, the majority answered that relief constituted from about 50% up to 75%. Some said that almost all their food last year came from relief.

Other major coping mechanisms reported were borrowing grains from shop keepers or neighbours/relatives; hiring out labour; and selling of livestock. Other coping mechanisms of minor importance: two persons sold local items like water, firewood or grass; one got some remittances from relatives; and one was paid as a Quran teacher.

Table 6: Distribution of households according to the main food coping mechanisms in 1995 (percentage in brackets)

Relief	Borrowing	Wage labour	Sales of animals	Others
31 (94%)	18 (55%)	14 (42%)	13 (39%)	4 (12%)

When we add these percentages we will reach much more than 100 % as several coping mechanisms are possible for each family.

We also asked what were the main sources of cash income last year. Though it is obvious that there is a very limited amount of cash within the Mahmimet community, the little they gained came from the following sources:

Table 7: Distribution of households according to the main sources of cash income in 1995 (percentage in brackets)

Wage labour	Remittances	Transport	Trade	Sales of animals	Sales of crops	Sales of animal products	Handicraft
19 (58%)	2 (6%)	4 (12%)	3 (9%)	6 (18%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)

What we must keep in mind when reading tables 6 and 7 is that both the main source of food, namely relief, and the main source of cash, namely wage work, is no longer possible. The food relief stopped some months ago, and the wage work was used to construct houses and other infrastructure for the project. This construction period is now finalized.

Also borrowing from shop keepers and neighbours have become very difficult, if not impossible. The shop keepers will not borrow out more grains before people have settled their debt, and to borrow from neighbours is not easy when everybody is equally bad off.

The possibility to sell livestock, especially goats, to cover up the food needs is also diminishing in importance as the livestock component has significantly decreased during the last couple of years.

6 THE SURVEY ON HEALTH, WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Information about the interviewed women

Interviews were done with 10 women out of which 5 were heads of households and 5 were wives to male heads of households. Out of the 10 interviewed women, 5 were from the project and 5 came from outside the project (i.e. they have not been allocated a cement house). All the interviewed women were returnees from the Sudan and all had children.

Health aspects

All together the sample of 10 women had 27 children, out of these 4 children had been sick with diarrhoea, 3 children had been vomiting, 1 child had had respiratory tract infection and 1 child had been sick with malaria during the last 12 months. None of the interviewed women had a chronically sick person in their house.

The medical services in the health centre were termed as inadequate by the interviewed women because no laboratory service was available and no physical examination was done by the health personnel on the patients.

Breast feeding is generally performed for more than 7 months because traditionally a woman is supposed to breast feed her child till she gives birth to the next child. No birth control measures were taken by the interviewed women except for one. The majority of them (6) did not want to take any contraceptive measures because they wanted more children; 2 women had no husbands so they did not need to take it, and 1 woman would not take it for religious reasons. According to themselves, they want to have as many children as God gives them. They feel that only God should decide how many children they should have.

Antenatal service was followed by 8 women while the remaining 2 women did not attend any such service because it was not available to them at the required period. Six of the women did not take Tetanus Toxoid (TT) vaccination during pregnancy while the remaining 4 of them took it. Nine of the ten women (90%) delivered their babies at home with the help of a local midwife. 50% of them preferred to deliver at home because they had transportation problems, and because they believed that the local midwife was competent, and that at home they would get help from relatives, who are not allowed to enter into the health centre during delivery. The remaining 50% of the interviewed women preferred to deliver at the health centre in order to avoid complications or to get better assistance and hygiene.

A total of 18 children from 8 households has been vaccinated compared to 9 children from two households who had not been vaccinated.

Infant and child mortality

The most common causes for infant and child mortality were diarrhoea, vomiting, common cold and fever. From the interviewed women it was found that 4 children from 3 households had died below the age of 1 year due to diarrhoea, vomiting and fever. Additionally, 6 children from 4 households had died at the age between 1-5 years due to diarrhoea, vomiting, common cold, fever and starvation.

Traditional healing practices

Among the interviewees, 8 usually tried traditional medicine before going to the health centre while 2 claimed to go directly to the health centre if a member of their household got sick.

Traditional healing practices are being practised mainly by women. Among the interviewed, blood letting is practised by 4 women; infabulation by 9; cauterisation by 4; herbal medicine by 4, and uvulectomy by 9 women.

Circumcision had been practised in the households of 6 of the interviewed women, usually when the girls were at the age of 1-7 years. The remaining 4 interviewed women did not have daughters; but they claimed that they would have circumcised their daughter if they had one. Girls are circumcised mainly because of cultural reasons and for beauty.

Only two of the interviewed women use antimalarial drugs for malaria protection while 4 women take sour herbs orally and 4 women do not take any protective measures for malaria.

Health awareness

The interviewed women believe that diseases are transmitted from one person to another by sleeping and eating together; using the same clothes; drinking dirty water; and eating with dirty hands. They also believe that drinking raw milk is not good for children because it causes vomiting and diarrhoea.

Gender issues

The interviewed women got married at the age between 15-20 years. They feel that the husband is the head of the household because traditionally a man is believed to be superior to a woman.

According to the interviews, 9 of the women do not participate in development programmes either because of lack of opportunity or because child care does not allow them to participate. The remaining woman participated in order to earn some money. Women can not participate in policy and decision-making on development programmes because of lack of opportunity and because some of them believe that they would not be able to do it.

Eight of the 10 women are members of the National Union of Eritrea's Women (NUEW) while 2 are not. The members contribute 1 birr per month. They say that they do not benefit anything from the Union because its headquarters is in Nacfa and officials seldom come to Mahmimet. The elected local representative in Mahmimet is responsible for collecting money from the members and hand it over to the headquarters in Nacfa. For this she gets paid 20 birr per month.

The most tiresome domestic work mentioned by all the interviewed women are grinding, fetching water and collecting firewood. Two of the interviewed women mentioned washing as a tiresome domestic work.

Children issues

The interviewed women had a positive attitude towards education. The majority of them (70%) sent their children to school while the remaining 30% did not because of transportation problems (mentioned by 1 interviewed woman) or because their children were too young to go to school (mentioned by 2 women).

The interviewed women believed that children should work at home to help their families. 50% of them had their children helping them at home. The rest of them did not get any help from their children because they were too young. Girls help in activities like fetching water, collecting firewood, house cleaning, washing and child care while boys help in activities like herding, fetching water and collecting firewood.

Regarding the main problems for the children, 9 of the interviewed women mentioned food, 6 women mentioned clothing, and 5 women mentioned soap (lack of hygiene).

ANNEX 1: Group discussion with elder men

Life in Mahmimet before exile

Before the people of Mahmimet went to Sudan there were six villages which were “blood-related”, namely Medagih, Meba'a, Asrai, Meba'abi, Alghen and Dighe Rihib. Most of the present returnees used to live in these villages as permanent settlers. Nuclear families lived in separate houses, but it was common for brothers and other close relatives to live in the same neighbourhood.

The houses were mostly constructed by the use of wood and grass, but also with mats. Wooden huts were constructed for the livestock but they were not very common because of the high requirement for wood.

Usually, rainfall was sufficient, and it was stipulated to be more than twice the amount that have fallen during the recent years. Vegetation was also more abundant; the trees and bushes were more dense and higher, and the land was covered with grass .

Division of labour between the husband and the wife.

The wife's main obligations were to fetch water, do the cooking, washing, and other types of housework. In addition she would do some handicraft including the work of collecting and preparing the material to be used.

The husband's main obligations were to collect fuel wood for cooking and grass for house construction, and to provide the family with food and clothing from his work on the farm and with the livestock. If necessary, he would go for wage work to Nacfa or any other place to earn the necessary means. It was also an obligation for him to assist needy relatives.

- At the age of 12-15 years, boys and girls started to do some routine activities: girls work in the house; and boys work in the neighbourhood, e.g. herding of livestock.
- Boys above 15 years of age started to help their fathers in the farms.

The common age of marriage for girls was 15-16 years, for boys 17-18 years.

Before getting married a man had to build his own house, usually close to his parents or parents-in-laws' house. Location of the house was based on the couple's preference.

Based on his economic status a man could marry up to four wives. If, for example, a wife who had given birth to two children stopped further reproduction, the husband could marry another wife. In this case, he had to give indemnity or compensation (e.g. gold) to his first wife. There were no restrictions regarding clan membership and marriage, i.e. any person from any clan could marry any person of the opposing sex from any other clan. But marriage was arranged by parents.

An average family had from 5-8 children.

Traditionally, there used to be a lot of mutual aid co-operation between brothers, neighbours and relatives in activities like farming, animal husbandry and trading.

Village organisation

Among the Tigré there were 24 clans. Within the six villages usually two-four clans were represented in each. The people from the same clan usually minded their own affairs, and problems within the clan was solved by clan elders. The elders used to make decisions on matters regarding their respective clans within the village. Decisions on matters that concerned the whole village were made by a leader elected by the different clan leaders in the village. This village leader was responsible for settling conflicts between clans, and also to make important decisions concerning the whole village.

Officially, land was owned by the government and if a person was in need of land his clan leaders would ask local government representatives for land. In practice, most of the land was divided between the clans so that an individual received land from his clan.

Agriculture

There used to be two types of cultivation, *saluka* and ox-ploughing. The red soils, which were usually hard, were most often ploughed with a pair of oxen. In the loose soils farmers most often used a stick ("saluka") to make holes in the ground after which seeds were put into the holes.

The most important crops grown were wheat and pearl millet in the loose soils (sandy soils) and cotton in the hardy red soils.

Agriculture was both rainfed and irrigated. During the Italian colonisation, a rich Italian farmer established a cotton plantation based on irrigation. Closer to the coastal areas around Kirai and Marsa Teklai farmers employed the practice of "delta" irrigation, i.e. they planted in the soil at the place where the seasonal rivers stopped flowing and where the soil moisture was high. Many of the areas which today are arid and completely barren were earlier cultivated under a rainfed agriculture regime.

Livestock

Livestock was owned on an individual basis but herding was most commonly undertaken as a co-operation between groups of households, e.g. brothers, neighbours or friends. Few farmers herded their livestock individually. If rainfall was good for two consecutive seasons, it would make a herd of 10 goats multiply up to 50. But if rainfall did not appear for one rainy season, a person might become a beggar (i.e. he would lose all his livestock)..

The main livestock types were camels, goats, sheep, and donkeys.

People used to practice seasonal migration of livestock to particular grazing areas. It was the herders that were responsible for this migration. Usually they stayed there for some months at the time. It was only the goats that were migrated; camels and sheep stayed behind. The ownership both to grazing land and water points was communal. Livestock could graze anywhere where grass and water were available, even in the land of the Rashaidas.

Composition of wealth status among individuals in the past:

- A rich person used to own: 2-5 camels, 20-25 goats, 10-15 sheep, 2 oxen, 2-3 cows and a

shop.

- A middle person used to own : 1 female camel, 10-15 goats, 3-5 sheep and 1 donkey.
- A poor person used to own: 1 donkey and 2-3 goats.

Classification of rich, middle and poor in the past was done according to the following criteria:

- A rich person had sufficient income to sustain his family, hire labour, give 2.5% of his income to needy people, and he could do business (have a shop).
- A middle person was self reliant, i.e. he could subsist on his own means and did not need assistance from other people.
- A poor person depended on the rich ones, he had to migrate for work, and he usually borrowed from others.

Poor people used to go to Asmara, Massawa or to the Sudan on labour migration, or possibly also to farms in the surrounding areas.

In the past, 40-50% of the population used to be rich. At present, only 4-5% of the population is rich.

Composition of wealth status among individuals today:

- A rich person: 2 female camels, 1 male camel, a small shop, 1 donkey and 3-5 goats.
- A poor person: many of them do not own anything, but some own up to 5 goats and 1 donkey.

There is no middle person at present. Anybody is either poor or rich.

Other historical information

The bride price in the past varied from clan to clan. Some clans had to give around 10-15 goats or 32 grams of gold or 1 camel.

People used to practice handicraft work 20-25 years ago. Blacksmiths, shoe-makers, tailors and goldsmiths were present in most communities. While regular handicrafters were economically medium people; tailors and goldsmith were often rich.

As far as the elders could remember there were no outbreak of livestock diseases in the past. But the droughts in 1970 and 1983 greatly reduced livestock numbers.

Future projects suggested by the elderly men.

- River diversion for agricultural production at the Felket river in order for people to be able to feed themselves.
- Tractor hire service.
- Provision of food.

Marketing today

The market place is located in Mahmimet, and consumer goods are generally available. There are two market days per week- Mondays and Fridays. The nearest market place is Nacfa.

ANNEX 2: Group discussion with middle/old aged women

Life before exile

Before leaving for Sudan, people used to earn their living mainly from livestock and agriculture. Livestock number was high because rainfall was higher and vegetation was abundant. War and drought reduced the livestock number greatly.

Project components

The most important project components mentioned by the women were education followed by health and the grinding mill. Education was ranked first because they think that if their children get educated they will be able to solve their problems easily as it is the educated people who can solve problems. Health is important in order to be able to work. The grinding mill saves time and labour power.

They think that agriculture through irrigation by diversion would be the most important intervention to start a development process in the area.

They claimed that the present health service is not satisfactory since there is no laboratory service and hence people have to travel to Nacfa for laboratory examination. Additionally, they complained about the absence of physical examination. They claimed that MCH (Mother-Child Health Care) service is good because there is a monthly check-up of pregnant women ,and that vaccination service is available.

The education service was claimed to be good except for the long distance to the school. The women have a positive attitude towards education and they send their children (both girls and boys) to school.

The grinding mill service was said to be good by the women except for the high grinding fee.

Water provision and shelter have not been utilised yet because people have not moved in. The women could therefore not say anything about their usefulness.

There are no sources of income at present (no job opportunity). There is no market for their handicrafts work; no income can be generated from handicraft work as there is a transport problem to sell their products. To buy consumer items such as soap and coffee they have to borrow from the shopkeepers and pay their debt from the food aid. But at present, there is no more food aid and the shop-keepers refuse to give them more goods on credit. A few women sell chicken, eggs or goats to earn some money. They suggested that job opportunity should be created for the women in Mahmimet.

The bride price before exile used to be 1 cow or 10 goats or 32 grams of gold. At present the man buys some jewellery to the bride.

Decision making in a household is always done by the man. If it is a female headed household the male relatives make important decisions for the household.

In the past, women could not participate in development programmes but at present this is possible (if the opportunity comes), for instance road construction in order to earn money.

The majority of the women are members of the National Union of Eritrea's Women (NUEW) but do not get any benefit from the union because the headquarters is in Nacfa and representatives seldom come to Mahmimet. The representative in Mahmimet earns 20 birr per month and her duty is to collect money from the members of the union.

Problems

Food shortage was mentioned to be the most crucial problem at present. Transportation facilities for school children and for marketing purposes were also mentioned as a problem.

ANNEX 3: Group discussion with young/middle-aged women.

Before the war people used to live rather comfortably. They used to subsist on products from livestock husbandry and arable farming. The reason for going for exile in the Sudan was the frequent bombing and the harassment of the local people by the soldiers. Initially they escaped to Nacfa but conditions were the same everywhere. Therefore, they were forced to escape to the Sudan in order to save their lives. It sometimes happened that the bombing killed as many as 8 people in a family or even the entire family.

During the escape, people used to spend the days under the trees and travel by night. Many people died on the way because of hunger and thirst. They carried their children on their backs. When they initially arrived the Sudan, nobody was there to receive them. Many people started to work on farms as hired workers and get a percentage of the produce. However, as the influx of people increased (especially in 1982), the UNHCR started to receive them and put them into refugee camps. They provided the refugees with tents, clothing and blankets, soap and food (sugar, oil and grain). Services like education, and health were also provided but there was shortage of drugs. The water supply came from the rivers. People from different villages were living in one camp, i. e. they were intermixing. In the camps relatives were usually living in one place, but they worked in different areas.

In the beginning, provision of food was fairly good (i.e. weekly), but as time went by, the people responsible for the provision became corrupt and started embezzling the provision. Also, the period for food provision was changed from once per week to once per three months (received 50 kgs. of cereals). The provision of sugar and other commodities was discontinued as it was embezzled by the camp officers.

People who were working outside the camps continued to do so until they came back to Eritrea after liberation. Many were working in agriculture, others were working as guards or porters at the ports, or they did any other job.

Initially, life in Sudan was OK, but after the liberation of Eritrea the situation deteriorated because of political reasons. Some of the refugees were being imprisoned and tortured. They therefore chose to come back to Eritrea immediately after liberation because they preferred to live in their own country in peace and dignity.

No promises were made to them before they came back to Eritrea. When they came back CERA asked them how much they had spent on the travel fare, but no compensation has been received so far.

Spontaneous returnees get utensils and food for three months (cereals, oil and lentils) plus some money.

They could not say much about the future as food was not available and they did not see any solution to their problems. Many children have clothing problems and cannot go to school. Food was mentioned as a core problem and immediate intervention was required.

ANNEX 4: Group discussion with young men

People left for Sudan in 1979-1980 because of the frequent bombardments. Before leaving for the Sudan they tried to hide in the surroundings, but since the situation was the same everywhere, they were forced to escape to Sudan. Some people left with their livestock before the Ethiopian soldiers arrived Mahmimet, whereas others left after the soldiers had arrived. Families were dispersed and were reunited in Sudan. Some people fled in big groups (the whole village) while others fled in small groups.

People who took their livestock with them to the Sudan were forced to sell them to earn some money. Many of the animals died because of the drought in 1984, some were eaten and the rest given to other people because they could not take care of them themselves. Many of the rich shop keepers lost their belongings before they left because soldiers looted their shops. People started to regain their livestock gradually but lost them again due to the drought in 1990.

When they reached the Sudan, some were taken to a camp and registered by Sudanese government officers. Others spread around individually to seek work. Only those who were staying in the refugee camps got assistance from the UNHCR. Some people used to work outside the camps as daily labourers, masons, assistants in tea shops or guards while still living in the camps because they needed to supplement the inadequate food supply.

Before the war, only some few people migrated to the Sudan for work. Most people performed their own agriculture and livestock activities and did not need to migrate for work. However, there was trade co-operation/exchange between the two countries. Inter-marriage between people from the two countries was not common.

Life in the camps can not be defined as a good because there was shortage of food and other items. Life outside the camps was even worse since local people used to insult them and the government was hunting them because they did not have a working permit. The relationship among the refugees was good. People used to talk about coming back 24 hours a day but could not do it on an individual basis, it had to be done in organised forms. They used to follow the progress of the war and contributed money. Some even joined the army.

When Eritrea was liberated people wanted to come back because peace had been restored and they wanted to live in their country in peace and dignity. Initially there were no restrictions for coming back; it was just a matter of means, but at present, it is very difficult. For example, a person has to pay 300-500 birr just to hire a camel to transport his/her belongings.

No promises were being made to the returnees before they came to Eritrea, but when they reached here they were given money for three months.

At present, life in camps is extremely bad. The refugees are put in jail and tortured and if they want to go back to Eritrea the officials ask them to pay 500 birr as a bribe. The main reason preventing people from coming back is that they cannot afford to pay such amount of money, otherwise nobody would have stayed there any longer.

The present situation in Eritrea is good because it is peaceful, but the economic condition in Mahmimet is very bad. There has not been adequate rainfall for three years and people are starving.

Suggestions

The people do not want to live from food aid forever. They are afraid that it would make them dependent and hinder their initiative to work. People want to be self-reliant. Therefore, they proposed that something should be done in the field of agriculture. Melet and Kerai were mentioned as potentially good agricultural lands and the river flowing to the sea could be utilised by diversion.

Regarding the health aspect laboratory services should be made available.

ANNEX 5: Interview with wereda administrator

The name of the administrator is *Ato* (Mr.)Gebremeskel Gilazghi. According to him, the most important project component is the health service as this did not exist before. Malnutrition, anaemia, malaria, and mother-child diseases represent big problems for the local people. Before the establishment of the health centre, people had to go to Asmara or Massawa for treatment. The main problem now is that the laboratory does not function due to lack of a technician.

Education facilities are also very important. Earlier, everybody in this community was illiterate. The school started in 1992, and now there are 4. grade students.

Promoting agriculture will be the basic component for economic development of the wereda. Spate irrigation along Felket river will be the best option to start the agricultural development process. Earlier, 70% were living from this type of agriculture.

The best rains usually come in July, and grasses then immediately start to sprout. Some people migrate their livestock to Nacfa.

Generally, the lives of the local people depend on the livestock, especially the goats.

Of all the returnees, 80% came from Sudan. The rest came from other areas in Eritrea. The main difference between these two type of returnees is that those remaining in Eritrea have kept their livestock. All these households have a camel, and many also have some cattle.

Land is not a problem in Mahmimet. Land will be given to anybody who wants it. Presently, some farmers cultivate some small amounts of cotton and millet, but then in other areas. The majority do not cultivate due to lack of rains.

All households living in Mahmimet depend on relief. Some get some means from wage labour, e.g. road construction, clearing bushes, and digging wells.

Annex 6: Interview with the Mahmimet adidat (village) baito

When asked about which project components they appreciated most, there were some differences in opinion about prioritizing the components, but it was no doubt that health, education and water were mostly appreciated. Shelter got a very low priority, and the grinding mill was not mentioned at first. (Probably because they are men, and thus not very much involved in that type of activity). When we took it up they said that the mill was very important.

The most important development issue for the community today is water harvesting techniques to utilize the seasonal floods, i.e. spate irrigation. Also, the existing services should be expanded as they expect many more returnees to arrive. Employment was also mentioned as a priority area.

According to their opinions, the area has today reached its carrying capacity regarding livestock due to the arid climate. Agriculture is therefore the best option. In addition, people are not so inclined towards pastoralism anymore. They want to live a settled life to utilize schools, clinic, markets, and so on.

The climatic changes in this area have been dramatic. When they were young, the area was full of trees, bushes, grasses and livestock. The drought, which started around 1970, have changed the situation completely.

In 1970 an ordinary family could have 300 goats, 20 sheep, and 2 camels. Some also had cattle. Today, an ordinary family may have one camel and 10-15 goats. If they in addition owns a female camel, they are considered to be rich.

While a he-camel is used for transport, a she-camel is used for breeding and milk.

Today, the brideprice commonly paid is either 10 goats or 32 grams of gold. This might seem a lot seen from the present situation, but a brideprice is a co-operative effort between many contributing relatives.

For the future they foresee fishing, fish processing and fish trade as good options for development. But salt production can also become important.

Even before exile, some people from Mahmimet went to Tokor in Sudan for wage work.

Some men presently living in the village are trained as carpenters, black smiths, masons, and so on.

Annex 7: Information from the Health Centre

The outpatient department (OPD) of the health centre in Mahmimet treats up to 50 patients per day. The outpatient pays 5 birr for the visit and if admitted the payment is 1 birr daily for the time he/she stays at the health centre. Drugs are provided for free. A patient is allowed to stay in the health centre for a maximum period of 7 days and if he is not treated in that period, the patient is sent to Nacfa for further treatment. The health centre has 30 beds; 10 for "isolation patients" infected with diseases such as hepatitis, measles, scabies and the remaining 20 beds for the other patients. At present, no ambulance is available for the health centre; only a car (small truck) which is not comfortable to transport patients.

The health centre gives services to the inhabitants of Mahmimet and its surrounding 7 villages. These are: Meba'a, Felket, Rihib, Aflag, Dighe, Karura Dighe and Aghra'.

Mother Child Health service (MCH)

Antenatal service is provided to mothers regularly. In the period between 1995 and March 1996, 488 mothers were provided with antenatal examination, and 150 of them have delivered in the health centre so far. Most of the mothers are anaemic, hence, weaning food is provided to anaemic mothers and malnourished children and debilitated patients. Risk mothers are given a medical follow-up up to the second trimester and then referred to Nacfa for delivery in order to avoid complications. Transportation is provided for the patients, but there is a problem of reaching many of the areas because of land mines.

Vaccination started from November 1995. A vaccination campaign assisted by the baito and the school was launched in November 1995, and around 80% of the children were vaccinated. Children under the age of 5 are vaccinated against Polio, BCG, DPT and Measles. Mothers and girls above the age of 19 take TT (Tetanus antitoxoid) vaccination. Outreach vaccination (going to places to give vaccination) was difficult because many of the areas are suspected to contain land mines.

There are no recognised Traditional Birth Assistants (TBAs), and no local midwives have been trained so far. There is no co-operation between TBAs and trained midwives. There was a plan to train local midwives on midwifery and breast-feeding but they asked to be paid for the training period. Hence, the plan could not be implemented due to shortage of money.

Staffing

A health centre is supposed to be staffed with 4 certified nurses, up to 8 certified health assistants, cleaners and people to wash bed sheets. At present the Mahmimet health centre is staffed with 4 certified nurses, 2 certified health assistants, 2 barefoot doctors and 4 cleaners. They have a staff shortage in that a health centre is supposed to have 4 nurses, up to 8 health assistants, cleaners and people to wash the bed sheets. At present the available bed sheets are not being utilised by the patients because there is nobody responsible of washing them. The patients are provided with blankets and the patients' relatives are asked to wash them after use.

The laboratory is not functional at present because of the absence of a laboratory technician. Patients have to go to Nacfa for simple laboratory tests.

Traditional treatment

The local people usually first try traditional treatment. If that does not cure them they come to the health centre for treatment. Infections arise because of traditional practices such as cauterisation and circumcision.

Health education

At present, no health education is given to the local people because of shortage of staff that can properly speak the local language and because there is no money in the budget to pay for an interpreter.

Most prevalent diseases in the area

Malaria

Tonsillitis

Gonorrhoea

TB

Upper respiratory tract infection

Urinary tract infection

Infertility

Menstrual disorder

Arthritis

Chest pain

Asthma

Flu in children

Future plans

-Fencing of the health centre to control the entrance of visitors at inappropriate times of the day and to keep the hygiene of the place.

-Outreach vaccination

-Health education

Problems

1. Shortage of drugs

2. Shortage of furniture like chairs for pregnant mothers waiting in the waiting room for their monthly check ups.

3. Ambulance.

4. Staff shortage

5. Budget.

Annex 8: Information about the Mahmimet Elementary School

The Mahmimet elementary school was established in 1992. Until the construction of the school, students were trained in thatched grass houses. Some school children are still trained in 3 rooms made of grass. Now, 7 additional class rooms have been built.

Enrolment of children in 1995/96

The number of children presently enrolled in the school is 373 out of which 122 are girls.

Table A8.1: School enrolment at Mahmimet Elementary School, April 1996

1. Grade		2. Grade		3. Grade		4. Grade	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
74	59	57	25	70	25	50	13
55%	45%	70%	30%	64%	36%	79%	21%

According to this data, the girls constitute 32.7% of the students. The rate differs from grade to grade. The rate does considerably decline in the 4th grade. The main reason is that the girls are leaving school as they are getting married.

The increasing rate of drop-outs is a grave concern. In 1995/96 academic year 415 students were registered, but 34 of them dropped out. The causes were mainly the following:

- Some left because they could not walk the long distance back and forth.
- Some left due to shortage of food.
- Some left because their parents were not interested to send them to school.

The above mentioned causes have also negatively affected the daily attendance of school children, i.e. the rate of absenteeism is high.

Students achievements

Table A8.2: Students failing rate at Mahmimet Elementary School, April 1996

1. Grade		2. Grade		3. Grade		4. Grade	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
20%	15%	12%	38%	30%	12%	16%	48%

The average failing rate for boys and girls is 37.2%. In general, the rate is higher for girls.

Reasons for failing

School children spend a greater part of their time on fetching water and firewood, herding animals, and domestic activities. As a consequence the chance for studying at home is very low.

Frequently, children come to school without having eaten breakfast. This has a negative impact on their concentration at school.

Particular educational problems

- The supplementary food that the school provides the children is inadequate
- There is a serious lack of exercise books, pens and pencils
- Students have a very poor clothing
- The school lack sport equipment like balls and sport clothes
- Students are concerned about their future studies. Neither a full elementary school (grade 1-6) nor a junior school is planned.

Teachers

In the Mahmimet elementary school there are 13 teachers (including one director), 9 of the teachers are qualified. They have attended the T.T.I. training courses in Asmara. All the teachers are males. Teachers have adequate living quarters (12 rooms).

Parents committee

The school has a parents committee. Composition of the committee is as follows: 7 parents elected by the villagers, one teacher, and the director. The committee discusses about the problems of the school and proposes solutions. The committee is not yet active. Absenteeism among the parents is high.

Adult education

Adult education is arranged at the school. The adults have their classes in the afternoons.

Table A8.3: Adult education at Mahmimet Elementary School, April 1996

	1. Grade	2. Grade	3. Grade	Total
Males	10	12	0	22
Females	23	0	12	35