

# Sustainable Land Management



## Excerpts from a field diary

**Deki Lefay, April 25th 1997**

Today the heat will probably be unbearable again - it is almost the end of April and the dry season is practically over. So we get up early. It is still dark. With bottles of water, notebooks, pens and cameras in our backpacks, we leave our quarters in the schoolhouse at dawn and make our way towards Adi Shenet, a small village at the end of the valley south of Deki Lefay. There we hope to meet with farmers to discuss the crucial problem of water.

The route is dusty and it also becomes hot as soon as the first rays of the sun appear. Several children accompany us for the first few kilometers. It is very quiet in this vast expanse of open land. Aside from birds, locusts, and a few cows, we hear nothing but the crunching sound of the sand and the gravel under our feet. We allow ourselves a brief pause and admire the beauty of this grandiose landscape, while a vulture flies in circles overhead.

The route wends its way through the plain, and we gradually approach Adi Shenet, which is perched like an eagle's nest high up on a precipice. Suddenly, and completely unexpectedly, an old man appears before us. "Buon giorno signori. Come va? Fa caldo stamattine, no?!" Perfect Italian? Here?

Straightaway, the man begins to explain: he had seen us approaching from far away, so he descended the mountain in order to greet us. He had been a mercenary in the Italian army in colonial times - hence the unexpected greeting. He urges us to come with him; he can show us a simple shortcut to the village.

Once we arrive, there is a great cackling and a flurry of feathers from the hens, which can mean only one thing. In the end, our chicken dinner was excellent, and the home-brewed beer underscored the congenial atmosphere. And in a long and animated discussion, we found the information we were seeking, and plenty more as well.

We heard of the deaths of small children who fell from the precipice while playing. We were told how young men can no longer find wives since there is scarcely a woman whose father is prepared to send his daughter off to a village with such difficult living conditions. We discussed the scarcity of water, which affects women in particular. We heard about numbers of livestock and details about crop cultivation. We heard complaints about difficult access to various types of infrastructure.

In brief, we were able to ascertain that what for us is a picturesque village in a secluded location has become a place of burden and hardship for the local population.

As we prepare to leave, hearing words of farewell once again expressed in Italian, we admire the spectacular view for one last time. Only the journey back was far too long and too hot.