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SIDAMA

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Formerly just one of the 100 or so subdivisions in Ethiopia known as Zones, Sidama became the newest region (Kilil) in the country having voted for autonomous region-hood outside of the Southern Nations and Nationalities Region (SNNPR) in a June 18, 2020 referendum with 98% Sidamans approving. The overwhelmingly “yes” vote by the Sidama – a Cushitic people who speak a language called Sidaamu Afoo who are of majority (93%)¹ Sidama ethnicity - turned the Zone into the 10th region (Kilil) in the country. Area measurement using Arc GIS Pro gave an estimated geographic extent (including Lake Hawasa) of approximately 7,700 square kilometers within 5°45′–6°45′N latitudes and 38°5′–39°41′E longitudes.



Figure 1. Map of Sidama Region

¹ Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidama_Region

Click [HERE](#) to return to the main page:

<http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org/TableOfContents.html>

Sidama Region has an estimated population of 4.3 million (September 2020 estimate) and is bordered in the West by the Bilate River (see map), which separates it from Wolayita zone, and in the north and east by the Oromia Region. It is also bordered by Oromiya in the south except for a brief stretch where it shares a boundary with Gedeo Zone. Awasa, the capital, is one of the biggest and rapidly modernizing cities in Ethiopia serving as an important tourist destination, especially for diaspora Ethiopians returning home for family visits. Other towns in Sidama include Yirgalem, Wondogenet, Chuko, Hula, Bona, Bursa, Bensa, and Aleta Wendo.

The following excerpts are from a paper by Robert J Quinlan et.al.² The traditional food is the draught resistant Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*) for Sidama people and others who live in Rift Valley lowlands as well as highlands in southwestern Ethiopia. Maize was introduced to the Sidama in the mid-twentieth century, is now common in midlands and lowlands. Although this crop matures more rapidly and provides more kcal/kg than Enset, it cannot withstand drought. Robert J Quinlan et.al's study compared the cultural ecology, productivity, failure, and resilience of Enset and maize in 410 farms across four Sidama ecological zones. Its focus on the risks and benefits of Enset and maize found the association to be complex and closely linked to variable local environments. Further, it found that Enset and maize farms differ in resilience after drought. Whereas maize farms rebounded from crop loss within four years, only half of Enset farms were found to do so within a span of six years after crop failure. This is thought to a complicating factor for farming decisions in an environment that has near infinite localized variations. The study also notes that maize has become a preferred crop and food for younger people.

Sidama Region has approximately a thousand kilometers of all-weather roads and is a leading producer of coffee. The new region is rich in water resources with significant values attached to livestock which are a status symbol. The more cattle one owns the higher their prestige and esteem in society.

Scholarly papers conducted in the region include those that focused on the practice of using traditional medicine to treat malaria – A total of 42 antimalarial plants belonging to 27 families.³ A study on availability and level of supply of food in Sidama Region showed food insecurity as a major concern for smallholder farming households with substantial majority of the households facing mild to severe food insecurity and hunger.⁴ In a study of diarrheal disease occurrence among

² Robert J. Quinlan, Marsha B. Quinlan, Samuel Dira, Mark Caudell, Amalo Sooge, and Awoke Amzaye Assoma, Vulnerability And Resilience Of Sidama Enset, And Maize Farms In Southwestern Ethiopia, *Journal of Ethnobiology* 35(2): 314–336 2015

³ Solomon Asnake, Tilahun Teklehaymanot, Ariaya Hymete, Berhanu Erko, Mirutse Giday, "Survey of Medicinal Plants Used to Treat Malaria by Sidama People of Boricha District, Sidama Zone, South Region of Ethiopia", *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, vol. 2016, Article ID 9690164, 9 pages, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/9690164>

⁴ Regassa, N., & Stoecker, B. (2012). Household food insecurity and hunger among households in Sidama district, southern Ethiopia. *Public Health Nutrition*, 15(7), 1276-1283. doi:10.1017/S1368980011003119

Click [HERE](#) to return to the main page:

<http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org/TableOfContents.html>

children under 5 years of age revealed educational levels of age of the indexed child nutritional status, hand washing after using the latrine and housing floor material to be significantly associated with the occurrence of childhood diarrheal diseases.⁵ A study of the prevalence and associated factors for the prevalence of pneumonia among children aged 2-59 months in Wondo Genet district found the overall rate to be 33.5% with the lack of a separate kitchen and absence of a window in the kitchen as well as breastfeeding less than a year and being at the age range of 2-12 months identified as the main determinates.⁶ Findings from a study assessing pregnant women's knowledge about obstetric danger signs in Aleta Wondo district showed that at least 30% knew the danger signs associated with pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.⁷

A 2017 study featuring home garden system dynamics in Southern Ethiopia focused on Sidama Region (it was a Zone then) and Gedeo Zone.⁸ It found the two to be good representatives of all garden systems SNNP with a prevalence of Enset-coffee home gardens. These home gardens are known for the production of Enset, coffee and multi-purpose trees, in addition to root and tuber crops, vegetables, annual cereal crops and the raising of livestock keeping. The rainfall distribution was found to be bimodal with a long (June - September) Kiremt (in Amharic) season and short (March - May) Meher rainy season. Both Sidama and Gedeo span two agro-ecological zones - the moist mid-altitude (wainadega in Amharic) and the moist highland (dega in Amharic). Wainadega ranges in elevation from 1500 to 2300 meters above sea level and receives between 1200 mm and 1600 mm of rainfall annually with average annual temperature ranging from 16 to 22 °Celsius. The dega highland zone consisted of elevations ranging from 2300 to 3200 meters above sea level with mean annual rainfall of between 1600 mm and 2000 mm. Average annual temperature ranges from 15 to 19 °Celsius. The soils in wainadega and dega agro-ecologies were characterized as being predominantly clay-loam to silt-loam and sandy-loam to sandy-clay textural classes respectively. Overall, the study found five home garden types based on cropping patterns. Smallholder farmers specializing in khat (a stimulant leaf crop) production typically allocated about half of their farm land to khat depending on the market to earn good income. Contrastingly, farmers specializing in food production allocated approximately 75% of their farm to food crops, thus generating significantly less cash income. The study also noted significant shifts cropping patterns over the past two decades marked by: (1) a shift away from food crop to cash crop production in densely populated areas that are close to markets and; (2) a continuation of food/cash-crops production in less densely populated areas with less access to markets. The authors believe that these dynamic changes were being driven by increasing population density and market access, price dynamics, declines in soil fertility, and new policies of market liberalization. Their insights on how Enset and coffee-based home gardens in southern Ethiopia

⁵ Melese, B., Paulos, W., Astawesegn, F.H. et al. Prevalence of diarrheal diseases and associated factors among under-five children in Dale District, Sidama zone, Southern Ethiopia: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health* 19, 1235 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7579-2>

⁶ Teshome Abuka, Prevalence of pneumonia and factors associated among children 2-59 months old in Wondo Genet district, Sidama zone, SNNPR, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Pediatrics*, ISSN: 0971-9032

⁷ Mesay Hailu, Abebe Gebremariam, Fessahaye Alemseged, Knowledge About Obstetric Danger Signs Among Pregnant Women In Aleta Wondo District, Sidama Zone, Southern Ethiopia, *Ethiop J Health Sci*. Vol. 20, No. 1 March 2010

⁸ Mellisse, B.T., van de Ven, G.W.J., Giller, K.E. et al. Home garden system dynamics in Southern Ethiopia. *Agroforest Syst* 92, 1579–1595 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10457-017-0106-5>, 2017

Click [HERE](#) to return to the main page:

<http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org/TableOfContents.html>

have responded to increasing population pressure as well as commercialization of farm products, provide important lessons that can inform the formulation and execution of alternative approaches for attaining sustainable development Sidama - in the newest Region/Kilil in the country.

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