

## Christmas holiday spirits dim, despite stabilizing food prices

By Elias Gebreselassie

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The Ethiopian Christmas day, which falls on January 7, is a time of big lights, feasting and charitable deeds to the needy, but the ever rising cost of holiday items,

especially food items, usually is the cause for dampening the holiday spirit. This time around, even though prices seem to have stabilized, and actually even slightly decreased for some food items, the holiday spirit seems to be in the doldrums.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition, Ethiopia celebrates Christmas two weeks after most Christians around the world celebrate, which is on December 25th.

Although the price decreases was not across the board, some essential food items, such as a meat, showed significant reduction, despite being increasingly demanded by the working class, who is finding buying a whole sheep ever more out of reach. One other food item that fell by as much as twice the price it recently commanded is the price of onions, which is used in vast quantities, during such occasions. It is basically used in every traditional delicacy such as the hot and spicy “Doro Wat”, and another treat usually eaten in the morning on Christmas day, like the “Dulet”.

Poultry of the local variety, which seems to have replaced sheep in perhaps the majority of Addis homes as the primary source of food item during the holiday, was, at the very least, stagnant pricewise, and at the best, showed a slight decrease, while the cost of the less common and less popular poultry of the foreign variety was even lower, fetching between 120 to 130 birr, as per data obtained from Elfora, which is the primary source for these chicken. The price of cattle, mostly ox, which are slaughtered for such occasions, has been out of reach of the vast majority of Addis Ababa’s residents. It also showed little change in price, standing at an average of 12,000 birr for the normal variety, while the pricier type did exhibit some difference, although it was of little consequence to the residents of Addis, who tend to feast at home or at their relatives domicile during such holidays rather than venture out and partake of the expensive cattle meat sold at eateries in the city. While prices for edible oil and butter showed minor changes, the biggest foodstuff in terms of consumption, Teff, showed little change, which would be of some relief to many.

Roman Moges, a married mother of two who lives around the Wossen Grocery neighborhood of North Addis Ababa, says that even though compared to many Addis Ababa residents the size of her family is small she’s cutting back on her costs as well as waiting until the last minute, a day before Christmas to purchase all her holiday foodstuff, since it’s normally expected that prices will stabilize or even fall by then.

Many vendors and animal traders, who come from the rural areas or suburban areas of Addis

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Ababa or have families there, rush to return home for the holiday with their gains, thereby selling their stuff at lesser prices on the eve.

In contrast, Gennet Negussie, who sells fresh butter, said she had a good week and is expecting sales to increase during the weekend as people expend their hard-earned salaries and incomes on feasting.

Another trader who sells sheep said he also expects a robust trade and believes he will make money from the sale of his animals, even though many people have been hard hit by the rise in cost.

Christmas is one of the three Christian holidays, which is most commonly associated with a time of feasting and reflection, where families, neighbors, friends and relatives visit each other to socialize; to eat and chat with each other about past experiences, present situations and future plans.

The other holidays are the Ethiopian New Year, which usually falls on September 11, but varies by a day each leap year, and the Easter holiday celebrations which take place in April, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion.