



Development Assistance Group ETHIOPIA

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Subject: DAG Recommendations following Gambella mission

Your Excellencies,

In December 2014 members of the Development Assistance Group (DAG) conducted a fourth formal mission to the Gambella regional state. The objective of the mission was to update and deepen our understanding of progress made and challenges faced during the continued implementation of the Commune Development Program (CDP). Like the previous DAG visits to Gambella, on which we have previously corresponded, this mission was carried out under the framework of the DAG methodology for multi-agency visits to the Commune Development Program (CDP) and other areas of relocation.

On behalf of the DAG, we would like to provide feedback to you on the main findings from the mission and to offer some recommendations which we believe will assist the Government to improve the settlement process and services to those populations in the future. This letter is written in the spirit of a strong partnership for development and we hope it will serve as a basis for further dialogue between the Government and the DAG.

The DAG would like to thank the Government for the continued good collaboration that allowed the team to independently monitor the status of the CDP in Gambella. The team was able to move freely about within the regional state, with good access to the areas and people.

This mission, similar to the three previous DAG visits to Gambella, found no evidence that the Government expelled populations among any of the villages visited. In fact, the team visited a community that refused to participate in the CDP and continues to receive basic services from government service providers. The DAG commends the Government for respecting the wishes of

this community to remain in its present location and maintaining needed services. The DAG would like to highlight some observations that were raised during the missions:

Observations:

As previously stated, all villagers interviewed (with the exception of the one village that did refuse) expressed they had voluntarily chosen to participate in the CDP. It was observed that each household received a plot of land to construct and maintain their residence, as well as up to 4 hectares for farming. The team also heard from those persons interviewed that people are able to access and move between their new and lands of origin for farming or grazing their animals.

The DAG appreciates the Government's efforts to provide services promised to communities as part of the inception of the CDP program; particularly given the remote location of many villages. Mission members noted genuine public appreciation for some of the services and corresponding infrastructure that the government had delivered as part of their relocation. Access to education and potable water were cited the most for being significantly improved when compared to their villages of origin. On the other hand, promised services including health care, grinding mills, technical support for land clearing/preparation and land use certificates were either not delivered or were of poor quality. This contributed to an observable sense of frustration within communities.

The DAG also understands that one of the stated goals of the CDP in Gambella is to reduce the risk of flooding affecting communities. Unfortunately, the team witnessed that several villages (particularly near the Baro River) expanded under the CDP remain at risk of having their homes and lands flooded. This raises health implications for these communities and has had a negative impact on confidence in the program.

The DAG likewise understands another goal of the CDP was to increase the productivity of each household and that this was the purpose behind providing up to 4 hectares of land for each family. The team noted that in many areas the land remains unusable for agricultural production, either because Government has not fulfilled its promise to clear the land, or because the land lies within the Baro river floodplain. The team heard that the authorities had originally promised to assist villagers with the initial ploughing of new and previously uncultivated land. This was to be followed by training of farmers on how to plough their lands by oxen rather than simple hand tools. We did not see evidence, however, that the introduction of oxen (or mechanized means) for ploughing had yet been implemented. Finally the team saw no evidence that the Regional Government's Land Administration Office (at Regional and Zonal levels) had made progress on the distribution of actual land use certificates. The DAG believes that these factors if unaddressed will contribute to continued issues related to food insecurity, as well as the lack of genuine community feeling of true land ownership.

The mission were initially informed by the Government and subsequently by the communities that overall living standards were similar to, and in some instances moderately better than where

people had moved from. Communities visited stated that they felt much more secure from cattle raids in their new villages. The proximity and access to potable water, health care, schools, roads, and markets was also in most instances improved. However, a significant variability was observed in the quality of both the infrastructure and subsequent services available.

The resettled villagers we spoke to also had limited knowledge of existing formal mechanisms for appeals or grievance reporting, nor of the existence and role of the Gambella Institute of the Ombudsman. The DAG is aware that Gambella has a branch office of the Ombudsman, but it appeared for a number of reasons, to not be active outside of Gambella city. The mission observed that complaints appear generally to be directed to woreda or zonal officials (mostly orally) with apparently little or no follow-up from the woreda level administrations. The communities visited also do not appear to have organized themselves for the maintenance and upkeep of infrastructure. Therefore, when the team observed poorly constructed buildings, broken grinding mills or non-functioning solar systems in CDP village health centers; it was evident that they had been in disrepair for long periods of time. Communication between communities and local government may have compounded this problem.

Recommendations:

On the basis of these observations, the DAG would like to propose the following recommendations to Government in order to improve the settlement process and needed services in the future:

1. The government should continue to permit resettled communities to continue to have unimpeded access to their lands of origin and assets along the river banks for dry season farming, in order to supplement communities' livelihood and food security needs.
2. The government should strengthen the agricultural extension system, with adequate staffing, and provide adequate training to farmers on improved farming technology and techniques. It should also provide appropriate agricultural tools (including promised oxen) to support the land clearance and preparation tasks farmers are faced with and follow up with training.
3. The government should provide promised improved basic services (including facilities, staffing and supplies), focusing particularly on addressing deficiencies in health services and flour grinding mills. It should also focus on providing communities with promised land use certificates to enable citizens to take official possession of their land parcels and feel secure that it will not be taken back.
4. Community participation and ownership of services should be improved through training and capacity building, including technical training of community representatives to handle minor maintenance and operation of services such as grinding mills and solar power systems.

- Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM) should be further strengthened through community empowerment (e.g intensify social accountability training), and strengthening of GRM structures (within woreda, zonal and regional level administrative structures). Government should also endeavor to support and promote the public outreach and functioning of the Gambella branch of the Ethiopian Institute of the Ombudsman; as in other regional states.

The DAG would like to take this opportunity to reemphasize the importance of respecting international good practices on resettlement and we encourage the Government to follow these practices when implementing resettlement programs in Ethiopia.

We hope these recommendations will help to advance positive and constructive dialogue between the DAG and the Government around these issues. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss further with you and look forward to your response to the recommendations.

Please accept, Your Excellencies, the assurance of our highest considerations.


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