



Development Assistance Group ETHIOPIA

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Subject: DAG Recommendations following South Omo and Bench-Maji mission

Your Excellencies,

In August 2014 members of the Development Assistance Group (DAG) conducted missions to the South Omo and Bench-Maji Zones of SNNPR. The objective of the mission was to deepen our understanding of development activities in these areas, including resettlement. Like the previous DAG visits to South Omo, on which we have previously corresponded, these missions were 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 missions and to offer some recommendations which we believe will assist the Government to improve the settlement process 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 good collaboration that allowed the teams to independently monitor the impact of the agro-industrial developments and the resettlement related activities in the Zones. Both missions were satisfactorily completed with good access to the areas and people. While the DAG would prefer conversations without the presence of Government employees, we were subsequently made aware that they were present in most conversations in Bench-Maji.

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.

The DAG missions found no evidence of the Government of Ethiopia forcibly resettling people. However, the DAG would like to highlight some observations that were raised during the missions:

South Omo (Salamago woreda)

While the federal authorities have repeatedly confirmed the applicability of constitutional protection for the pastoral way of life, the zonal administration made it clear during the visit that permanent settlement is now considered the only way to provide services to pastoralist communities and that it would continue to encourage these communities to settle in villages.

The DAG appreciates the Government's view that communities must see the benefits of resettlement in order to persuade them to move. The fact that the Government has started to invite representatives of affected communities to observe irrigated agriculture, as practiced in other resettled communities, is a positive step. While the Bodi and Mursi people have expressed their keenness to maintain their agro-pastoralist way of life, they are also interested in some of the basic services on offer. However, Government efforts to persuade communities to resettle takes place against a background of mistrust towards the Government, as confirmed by interviews during the visit. Overcoming this will be important in the future.

There are opportunities to build a more positive working relationship between Government and communities on resettlement. Building on past efforts in this and neighboring Zones, initiatives could be further pushed forward to strengthen communication channels across ethnic communities (via customary structures) and with formal Government counterparts. These efforts would enable broader and more inclusive conversations and strategies about development/livelihoods/culture and how to manage change in a respectful and conflict sensitive manner.

Mission members were told that only a limited sub-set of local planning decisions are discussed with communities. This raises a question about whether such discussions achieve informed consent (as stipulated in international good practice and Ethiopia's own basic ingredients for resettlement).

In many cases, despite numerous meetings, communities seem to remain largely unaware of the full extent of plans for the transformation of their valley and the impact this will have on communal land. In our view, once completed, the development of sugar plantations in South Omo and the potential introduction of hundreds of thousands of new workers to the Zone will have a significant impact on existing livelihoods (such as flood retreat agriculture, bee keeping and agro-pastoralism), and on the way of life of the community. This, as well as the rapid pace for planned development may significantly increase the risk of conflict, as the Bodi and Mursi are increasingly exposed to external influences, and could lead, if not handled properly, to destabilization.

Central to Bodi and Mursi concerns is the protection of their cattle herds. While local authorities have indicated that *"grazing land will not be touched,"* they also indicated that they will not provide certificates for communal ownership of land.

The mission found that significant efforts have been made to improve the standard of living in resettled villages. In two of the three resettlement villages visited by the mission, there was a broad consensus that living standards were similar to, and perhaps moderately better than, life before moving, despite complaints about water pumps, health clinics and sanitation. However, the third site visited was not a success. The site was completely unsuitable for settlement; no services had been provided, and people were suffering from numerous health problems. At this site, the team was informed that consultations had not occurred.

Our interviews revealed that access to water, health and veterinary services was generally welcomed by the local communities. The issue of access to schooling generated mixed reactions: communities without schools were quite negative about education, while those which now have a school were positive. In our view, there are potential positive gender aspects to the resettlement policy: women

may benefit more directly than men from greater access to healthcare, water and irrigated agriculture.

Bench-Maji

Some of the development programs under implementation in Surma Woreda are explicitly aimed at incentivizing the settlement of semi-nomad pastoralists through the provision of basic services, the provision of food (in a context of food insecurity) and improved housing around villages that in many cases are already established. The mission received positive feedback from the local population in terms of improved access to education, roads and health services in recent years.

While communities were able to identify progress in the region, they also raised a number of problems, including: access to water, the high costs of health care, unclear and inefficient process for house and land allocation, the lack of alternative sources of income for women, poor security and the growing presence of guns and alcohol.

With regard to the palm oil plantation, the mission found that portions of the land allocated to the investor had previously been used as seasonal grazing land for Suri cattle. The conflict with the plantation, which led to episodes of violence against the plantation workers, seems to have been triggered initially in part due to Suri grievances over access to the land.

This investment project was approved and managed at the federal level with limited involvement of the local authorities. This approach entails a clear risk in terms of understanding the consequences and full impact of investment projects on the affected areas and on local communities.

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 in the future:

1. Consider the capacity of largely traditional communities to adapt to rapid change; and whether a **slower pace** with more options may generate better, more sustainable results with less risk of conflict. The Government could explore **middle ways and adapted proposals** that would allow a softer transition, avoiding conflict.
2. Ensure re-settlement is based on informed consent in line with international good practice, and respects cultural preferences. **Transparency and meaningful consultations** is essential. It is important that local government and the management of plantation firms engage more deeply with communities, ensuring that they have a complete picture of proposed development plans. This engagement should be informed by the **publication of the environmental impact assessment** (e.g. sugar plantations) as required by Ethiopian law, i.e. the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation (Proclamation no. 299/2002). This will help ensure that local populations can make informed choices on issues such as resettlement and the future development of the communities.
3. Consider **alternative ways of providing services** (such as health and education) to accommodate those community members who may be more reluctant to settle. We encourage the Government to offer the population meaningful alternatives to settlement or relocation without denying them access to health, education and other services.
4. **Engage third parties** (e.g. NGOs) in line with good practice demonstrated in the Ethiopian Social Accountability Program. There are also lessons to be drawn from **Maki-Orachaga**, where a mission has provided long-term support over many decades. In this case, both

development and integration (i.e. voluntary villagisation) is occurring and accepted by the community thanks largely to the mission's participatory approach.

5. In planning infrastructure and implementing services, identify community preferences and priorities through **participatory consultations** and, where possible, taken into account (for example, in adapting the school curriculum or adjusting holidays to harvest cycles). More efforts should be made to **involve women** in these discussions.
6. Ensure all services (health, water, education, housing, agricultural plots) are available and affordable, and the process for allocating housing and agricultural plots is more transparent. **Promised services should be in place before people are moved**, along with arrangements (handover to local government or functioning community management structures), to ensure that these services are **maintained** to an acceptable standard.
7. Consider providing a **formal guarantee on the protection of communal grazing land and the continuation of traditional livelihoods in livestock** in order to respond to the concerns of Mursi and Bodi.
8. Regarding investment projects linked with land acquisition, **engage local authorities**, so as to ensure that all affected communities have a stake in projects. Where relevant, compensation should be provided in cases of lost grazing lands. A **phased approach** to land use change could help to minimize instances of pastoralists being denied access to land not yet used for other purposes.
9. Consider the establishment of an **ombudsman-led grievance redress mechanism**, as highlighted previously following other field visits.
10. Anticipate and seek to **mitigate the risk of social problems** (alcohol, prostitution, HIV/AIDS) likely to come with a large-scale influx of plantation workers. Drawing on international best practice, the Government could consider using participatory tools to engage communities for awareness and prevention.
11. Establish sound **conflict management mechanisms** and seek ways to mitigate conflicts and risks while respecting 'do no harm' principles. In particular, the Government might consider addressing the large number of firearms in the communities.
12. Develop **benefit-sharing arrangements** to ensure that Bodi and Mursi communities share in the gains from the sugar plantation.
13. Explore options for enabling local populations, and especially women, to develop their livelihoods along their traditions, knowledge and experiences and to **diversify their income generating activities**.
14. Systematically consider the **specific needs and interests of women** when engaging communities on development plans.

Transparency, participation, exploring options and managing change are essential to help address the identified challenges. Building on progress already made will increase the chances for a peaceful process of development and improved human development outcomes.

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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