

DAG Report: South Omo Zone Visit Report Findings and Recommendations

Mission, Methodology and Limitations

Seven agencies of the Donor Assistance Group (DAG) visited South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) from 3-10 April 2016. Earlier DAG missions to South Omo Zone took place in 2012, 2013 and 2014. The mission was guided by the DAG Terms of Reference (ToR) and questionnaire for Multi-Agency visits to accelerated development programmes and other areas of development-induced movement of people. The team held incoming and outgoing meetings with the Zonal Administrator in Jinka. Field missions were conducted in Salamago and Minit Sasha woredas with Mursi, Bodi and Suri communities as well as in Dassanech, Hamer and Nyangatom woredas with those communities and the Kara. Salamago woreda is the only one that was also visited by a DAG mission in 2014.

Eleven villages were visited and 17 community interviews were held with men and women. Extensive discussions were held with officials at the federal, zonal and woreda levels as well as with the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation. The DAG mission had full access to the communities in the region. We were gravely concerned, however, that the independence of at least two of our interpreters was compromised, negatively impacting on five community discussions. Nonetheless, we believe that the direct observations made by the mission, the material gathered, and the triangulation methods employed gave us a fair impression of the key realities on the ground.

Area Overview

Multiple large-scale development projects are underway in South Omo zone, although several agri-business projects appear to have been abandoned. The Government's vision for the area is to devote up to 175,000 hectares to sugar production in the Omo-Kuraz plantation, which belongs to the Ethiopia Sugar Corporation, with approximately 75,000 additional hectares slated for commercial farming. If these schemes are fully realized, an estimated 500,000 immigrant workers from other regions will move to the area.

The Government is following a "two-track" villagisation process. The Omo-Kuraz plantation associated villagisation started in 2012 and is now affecting Bodi, Mursi and Nyangatom areas. The second track supports "water-centred development" and is primarily in Dassanech, Nyangatom and Hamer woredas.

Local administrations have been asked to deliver significant change with few resources. It thus remains to be seen whether these schemes will be completed to their intended scale, whether they will be viable, and what their social and environmental impact will be if they are successful, partially successful or do not deliver.

Explanation of Findings and Comparison to 2014 Mission

Villagisation process and participation: The DAG mission did not hear of forced villagisation or evictions. Observations confirmed that villagised communities had agreed to move. The Government has spent time meeting with communities to discuss villagisation. However the evidence gathered, including discussions with Government officials, did not fully demonstrate that consultations followed good practice guidelines. In some instances, Government clearly approached consultations in a systematic and patient manner and considered the communities' views¹. We found, however, that

¹ Based on reports from both the government and the communities repeated, intensive and sustained process of discussions and experience sharing took place in Salamago woreda, particularly at the initial stage involving the leadership and management at all levels including the Prime Minister, Regional President, Zonal and woreda leaders. It also appears to

villagisation was generally achieved through a process of convincing people to move based on offers of access to services, without their clear understanding of the impact of multiple developmental projects. It was not clear therefore, beyond their acceptance of improved access to services and participation in the sugar cane out-grower scheme, what communities understood when they agreed to villagise.

The significance of Environmental Impact and Social Assessments (EISAs) to planning for

villagisation: The 2016 DAG mission confirmed the 2014 visit finding that the public and, in particular, communities were not adequately involved in the planning and decision making of developments that may affect them and their environment, despite legal obligations to do so². The EISA of the *Kuraz Sugar Development Project – Socioeconomic Development Study* and other EISAs for private commercial farms have not been publicly disseminated. Government officials themselves stated that they did not possess copies of the EISA although they recognized their importance. This raises concerns about the ability of officials to deliver on their legal responsibility to monitor the implementation of impact mitigation measures³. The officials we spoke to recognized the importance of the EISAs, one stating that, “the entire social, economic and environmental [mitigation] plans are covered in the assessments”.

Furthermore, contrary to legal requirement, the DAG mission found that EISAs are being completed after projects were initiated⁴. For example, the Kuraz Sugar Development Project EISA was completed in 2012, and the *Kuraz Environmental Impact Study* was completed in January 2013, several years *after* works began on the scheme. An EISA for a 10,000 hectare private farm was reported to be near completion at the time of the visit, several years after the development of the farm had begun. Given the failure of the project development process to follow the statutes of Proclamation No. 299/2002, and communities’ ignorance of environmental and social impact assessments, we believe that communities are not making *fully* informed consent when ceding their rights over land to such projects.

It was also not clear whether sufficient staffing was in place to operationalize the EISA, or how responsibility for implementation might be divided (between the Sugar Corporation, local Government and the Ministry of Environment, Forest Development and Climate Change). In one area of Salamago woreda, the DAG mission observed that the Sugar Corporation is belatedly considering addressing the negative environmental impact of the Omo Kuraz Plantation through the development of an environmental rehabilitation plan⁵.

In comparison with the 2014 mission: While attempts were made to engage the communities and consider some of their feedback, the DAG mission saw little improvement by Government to undertake meaningful participatory consultations with communities, improve communities’ stakes in discussion where land acquisition occurs, or to inform communities of the assessments and publish the EISAs. (recommendations 2, 5, 8)⁶.

have been relatively inclusive in terms of women’s participation, but mostly of traditional and opinion leaders. Feedback from the community was taken into account in terms of selection of location of villages, separation of sub-tribes in the arrangement of villages, and decisions to stay in old areas.

² Proclamation No. 299/2002 Environmental Impact Assessment, preamble para 4

³ Proclamation No. 299/2002 Environmental Impact Assessment, Part 2, section 2, 1 and 2.

⁴ Proclamation No. 299/2002 Environmental Impact Assessment, Part 3, section 8, 1.

⁵ The study titled ‘*Rehabilitation and Protection of Shigidan Catchment for Sustainable Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation*’ is a 5-year plan that outlines environmental rehabilitation activities to be undertaken in the Shigidan hills of Salamago. This document pertains particularly to the Plantation’s Factory 1 site.

⁶ 2. -Ensure resettlement is based on informed consent in line with international good practice, and respects cultural preferences. This engagement should be informed by the publication of the environmental impact assessment as required by Ethiopian law. 5 - In planning infrastructure and implementing services, identify community preferences and priorities through participatory consultations. More efforts should be made to involve women in these discussions; 8 - Regarding investment projects linked with land acquisition, engage local authorities, so as to ensure that all affected communities have a stake in projects.

Water: Flood retreat agriculture has long been the principle method of crop irrigation along the lower Omo River. The DAG mission was told by communities that in 2015 the Omo River's flood plain did not flood for the "first time in living memory". The Kara, Nyangatom and Dassanech⁷ tribes plant sorghum crop with the retreat of the flood and thus this year were not able to sow a crop. The absence of a sorghum harvest means that up to 70% of those communities are dependent on food aid in 2016, the highest proportion ever according to local Government officials.

The reason for the lack of a flood in 2015 was not clear. Some communities believed it was due to the newly established Gilgel Gibe III dam located further upstream, while some Government officials stated that it was due to the prevailing El Niño. The Gilgel Gibe III dam has reportedly been built with the capacity to release additional water to provide a 'pulse' to simulate a flood,⁸ yet we saw no evidence that a simulated flood was released in 2015 during the initial stages of filling the dam's reservoir.

The Government is developing some large-scale plot irrigation systems of between 500-1000 hectares to replace flood-retreat agriculture. However, with the exception of some canal systems in Salamago woreda, no functioning irrigation systems were in place in time for communities to plant their crops in 2015 and none of the shorter-term smaller irrigation systems visited were operational⁹ (broken small irrigation systems were visible).

In Salamago woreda, the Sugar Corporation has provided Bodi and Mursi communities with canals for their sugar out-grower scheme as well as private plots for cultivation. Yet communities reported that the systems were either delayed or were failing to provide year-round access to water as promised when they were villagised, preventing them from growing the three to four maize crops per year which they were told the system would deliver.

In comparison to the 2014 mission: While the access of some communities to irrigation water is noted, the transition of communities from a traditional to a technology-based water and livelihood approach is happening very quickly without all the parts in place on time. The 2014 mission had encouraged the Government to consider a slower pace for the transition; in 2016 it remains important that the speed of transition is slowed to favour better outcomes.

Pastoralist grazing land: The Zonal Administration stated that adequate grazing lands will be preserved for community use even following the attainment of all planned commercial farming and plantation projects. While in Salamago woreda, communities reported that they continue to have access to their grazing lands, communities in Hamer woreda stated that they have already lost grazing land to developmental projects. Given the scale of the planned expansion of commercial agriculture and that some communities grazing lands have already been affected by developmental projects, the DAG is concerned for the viability of existing pastoral livelihoods.

The risk of intercommunity conflict could also intensify as pressure increases on remaining rangelands, and as trade-offs become clearer between the requirements of commercial farms, the Omo-Kuraz Plantation and existing rangelands¹⁰.

⁷ In 2016, 48,000 of the 63,000 Dassanech depended on food aid, in comparison to normal years when approximately 24,000 received food aid.

⁸ CESI, MDI Consulting Engineers of Ethiopia, AGRICONSULTING ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT, GIBE III HYDROELECTRIC POWER PROJECT, Project Number: P-ET-FAB-005. Undertaken for the African Development Bank.

⁹ These small-scale systems were reported to be 95 percent funded by Government for their first year of operation, raising serious sustainability questions once their operating costs are transferred to agro-pastoralist communities. In Dassanech, and Nyangatom woredas, the only functional irrigation we saw was at a privately owned commercial farm.

¹⁰ We visited one community that had already experienced significant loss of land to a 10,000 ha privately owned cotton farm and they were angry, particularly as they had simultaneously lost their access to the river for flood retreat agriculture. Some Hamer communities continue to believe that grazing will be allowed in Mago National Park. In the meantime, the Government is moving forward with its plan to remove herds from the park. The Nyangatom believe that their herd of

The Zonal Administrator welcomed the DAG mission's suggestion that integrated mapping be shared with local communities and that a forum including all affected communities be initiated to facilitate inter-community land rights planning and reduce the risk of conflict. Maps at the Zonal level showing planned developments are inadequate for local level consultation and planning.

In comparison to the 2014 mission: We saw no evidence of action taken by Government to provide formal guarantees to protect communal grazing land and traditional livelihoods as per recommendation 7¹¹ of the 2014 DAG mission. Despite the continued access of some of the communities to traditional grazing lands, no formal guarantees other than continued verbal promises on the protection of communal grazing lands and livelihoods have been issued. There also appears to be a lack of coordination between Government structures on land planning and management.

Benefit sharing with Omo-Kuraz and land for food production: Despite encouraging beginnings, the overall employment system for local employment in South Omo lacks a broad strategy to ensure that affected communities will gain from the zone's changing economic landscape.

In Salamago woreda, the Omo-Kuraz plantation is now engaging Bodi and Mursi communities in sugar out-grower networks and establishing associations. Bodi and Mursi are also gaining employment as local security guards and, in a few instances, in higher skilled occupations such as development agents and machine operators. The government also highlighted to the DAG mission the initiation of vocational education programs for local youth. Agricultural, health and animal health extension staff were reported to be drawn from local populations and trained, although it was difficult to establish whether these were drawn from the specific communities they were serving.

In addition to the shifting cultivation they continue to practice, villagised Bodi and Mursi communities have been allocated 1 hectare of land (for each household) within sugar out-growing networks with the promise that irrigation will be available to them year round. The DAG mission was told that the land certification process for the 1 hectare plot allocated to villagised communities in Salamago woreda will be completed in 2-3 months' time. Of the 1 hectare plots allocated, communities are expected to dedicate 0.75 hectare to sugar as out-growers and 0.25 hectare to maize. However, communities told the DAG mission that they do not know whether they could grow food crops other than maize (for which they were provided seeds).

Sustainability issues: the Sugar Corporation has been given the huge task of developing the villagised communities' plots and irrigation in addition to developing their own plantation and factories. The Sugar Corporation admitted delays in providing villagised communities with adequate support for farming, including access to water, indicating that their machinery has been tied up clearing land.

Omo-Kuraz is currently providing hired farm labour to plant and cultivate the first two cycles of sugar-cane for the Bodi and Mursi communities. The out-growers are also being organized in associations to eventually form partnerships with Government, formalised by Memorandums of Understanding. However, the Sugar Corporation has yet to develop an "exit strategy" to turn farming over to the villagised families. This raises serious concerns of sustainability, as well as the dependency of the communities on the resources of the Omo Kuraz Plantation in the future. While communities appear to be attracted to sugar farming for the immediate cash benefit, their responsibilities and the longer-term expectations of the Sugar Corporation are unclear. Both Sugar Corporation and local Government recognise this risk. Indeed, one government official said that some communities might well abandon farming sugar, if for example, they were only provided oxen once the Sugar Corporation withdrew its machines and imported labour.

nearly 600,000 animals will be allowed to graze in Surma lands (a traditional source of conflict). The Surma whom the DAG mission met voiced concerns over any further encroachment to their grazing lands by the Nyangatom.

¹¹ 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.

In comparison to the 2014 mission: Communities villagised in Salamago woreda have an improved understanding of the land allocation process and the sugar out-grower scheme. They have some access to canal irrigation as well as emerging low level job opportunities and some vocational training.

Services for existing communities and migrant labour populations in South Omo Zone: The DAG mission found that the Government has made a concerted effort to establish social infrastructure in the area. Often this is the first time such services have been provided to these communities. In some cases, communities reported satisfaction with services, in particular with education in the case of Nyangatom and Dassanech, and livelihood opportunities in Salamago woreda. The Sugar Corporation stated that its clinics and water points are available to the local population, which communities in Salamago confirmed to the DAG mission.

Nonetheless, appreciation of some services was outweighed by general complaints that services are of poor quality and generally face critical problems¹² such as high staff turnover; lack of timely deployment; lower than required skill levels; and the depletion of key medicines. Government has set up services, but insufficient attention has been paid to the operation and quality of services or to enabling their effective utilization. Community-specific problems exist as well: for example in Salamago woreda many schools in villagised sites are not attended by children, although school feeding programmes were cited by communities as a positive incentive.

Mitigating the impact of large-scale influx of plantation workers: Up to 500,000 migrant workers (an increase of up to 700% of the population) are envisaged to move into the areas currently served by the service network described above. Local officials were unable to describe how they might expand services to the scale required to serve such an increase in population. They were also unable to articulate how they might mitigate the inherent social risks that accompany such an influx of predominantly single male migrants (e.g. Sexually Transmitted Diseases [STDs], alcoholism, Gender Based Violence etc.).

In comparison to the 2014 mission: With regards to the previous mission's recommendations 3, 5 and 10¹³ services are being established, particularly with regards to social infrastructure (recommendation 3). Critically, no substantive progress was witnessed on recommendation 10 to mitigate social problems likely to emerge from the arrival of migrant labour. Recommendation 5 for responsive services does not appear to have been acted upon. The lack of multilingual teaching was cited as a constraint in several communities. Also little progress appears to have been made in addressing the crisis in education for the Hamar. Some schools in Hamar woreda have seen enrolment decrease by 50% since the education-associated conflict of July 2015.

Grievance redress mechanisms (GRM): The South Omo Zonal Administration can channel public grievances only through woredas, zonal administration and councils, via anti-corruption and misconduct focal points. Communities lack confidence in the responsiveness of this grievance system. Women in particular either felt it was difficult to access, or were unaware of such mechanisms. Communities often waited two months to one year for any response to grievances filed. Examples of such delayed responses to grievances related to the servicing of water pumps, the staffing of health posts, and to problems with food assistance and education. Thus, the DAG mission concluded that the GRM in South Omo Zone does not currently meet the communities' needs.

¹² In Salamago Woreda the social infrastructure (including grinding mills) was seen to be in place in most of the villagised communities visited, but most of these facilities were not yet operational or were discontinued due to lack of staff. Women in particular were vocal about the discontinuation of grinding mills, indicating that now that they have experienced the convenience, it is difficult to go back to traditional systems. While the government talks about the establishment of women Income Generating Activity (IGA) groups to manage the grinding mills, women seemed unaware of this plan and such groups do not appear to be active.

¹³ 3 – Consider alternate ways to provide services for community members reluctant to resettle; 10 – Mitigate social problems likely to come with large-scale influx of migration workers.

Peace and security: Pastoral communities reported that security had generally improved following villagisation since they were more vulnerable to attack from other tribes when they were previously scattered in smaller groups. They also appreciated Government efforts to defuse potential inter-community violence. The DAG mission noted, however, the potential for violence and conflict due to changing land-use patterns, particularly due to development actions affecting grazing routes throughout the lower Omo valley and the neighbouring zones of Borena and Bench-Maji.

Land use plans have not been fully explained to the affected communities, which could increase localized conflict between tribes. The tribes highlighted current tension and occasional lethal clashes between them. Tensions were cited between the Hamar and Dassanech, Nyangatom and Surma, and the Surma and Dizi. Conflict between the Bodi and Konso is also a great concern because of the numbers of Konso moving into South Omo Zone. Finally, all southern tribes emphasized that their most pressing conflict issue was cross-border raiding from the Kenyan Turkana.

In comparison to recommendation 11¹⁴ the 2014 mission: Communities in the villagised sites expressed an improved sense of safety and security. Overall, however, the situation in the lower Omo valley remains potentially volatile precisely because communities remain largely unaware of and unprepared for the scale of the massive change to come.

Gender: Overall the DAG mission found that the Government is making a concerted effort to address gender gaps, focusing on the needs of women in South Omo Zone. In Salamago woreda, communities were appreciative of Government's messaging that women need to participate and benefit equally from development. Women have been given equal access to land plots and some are certified plot holders. Local women are involved in job skills training and opportunities; for example, there are a few women drivers in the Omo-Kuraz Plantation. Local women have also been trained as agriculture and health extension workers. While activities around the initial Government consultation involved some (mainly elderly) women, most women the DAG mission met had only a vague understanding of the decision-making process involved in villagisation.

The lack of essential services in communities has a huge impact on women in all four woredas. In addition, gender based violence is prevalent (increased gang-rapes within the Dassanech tribe were reported to the DAG mission). The rapid influx of single-men to South Omo Zone presents a risk of increased HIV/AIDs and STDs. Women were found to be mostly uninformed of these wider community changes to come in all woredas visited.

In comparison to the 2014 mission: In reference to recommendations 5 and 14¹⁵, the mission observed new efforts to include women to benefit from livelihoods and to secure their rights, in particular through land plot-titles. However, the poor public service operation and quality in all four woredas is negatively impacting on women, especially with regards to health, education and security.

Main recommendations

- In accordance with international good practice¹⁶ provide all villagised communities with clear, time-sequenced integrated plans and maps that show the land use of all developmental projects in the South Omo area, how communities will be affected, and use these as the basis for all community decision-making regarding villagisation.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 14 - Systematically consider the specific needs and interests of women when engaging communities on development plans.

¹⁶ The DAG has previously shared Good Practice Guidelines and Principles Regarding Resettlement with the Government of Ethiopia.

- All discussions with communities on their agreement to villagise, cede land, relocate, change their livelihoods, pastoral access etc., should be based on those plans and clear, time-sequenced maps. Current maps are inadequate.
- Ensure that all community discussions are documented and that the meeting reports are reviewed and agreed by community members, who can retain these records.
- Share and make available at the woreda and community levels all EISAs as required by Ethiopian law. Ensure that these are rendered easily comprehensible to the communities and that actions to mitigate negative impacts are fully implemented as per the law.
- Ensure that development activities do not negatively affect any community's food security or access to water.
- Slow down the pace of resettlement to ensure that all promised services are available before communities are villagised.
- Effective basic service delivery must be in place and the actual utilization of services provided should be monitored.

Water

- Given the scale of change to the Omo River through the dam and commercial irrigation programmes, government should analyse what, in addition to El Niño, caused the flood failure in 2015. Communities should receive clear guidance on the plan for future controlled floods from the Gibe III authorities as per the EISA for the Gilgel Gibe III dam.
- Access to water, including *sustainable* irrigation systems should be guaranteed for all affected communities and in particular those transitioning from flood recession to irrigated agriculture.
- Given the ongoing challenge of reducing food insecurity in Ethiopia and noting the GoE's efforts to meet food aid needs, development activities must avoid temporarily forcing communities into food aid dependency by cutting off water access.
- Develop and institute a water management plan for the entire lower Omo Valley watershed, including clear analysis of all planned and ongoing projects and actions relevant to populations who depend on the Omo River for their livelihoods. Communities should be fully engaged in the development and monitoring of the water management plan.

Land

- Use maps as noted under villagisation processes and consultation above to re-engage with the Dassanech, Salamago, Hamer and Nyangatom woredas for consultation on pastoral routes and access rights over time. Such maps and discussion outcomes should reflect the phasing of projects and actions to address rangeland degradation. This will assist pastoralists to adjust to changes within feasible time frames and will minimise the risk of conflict.
- Following inclusive discussions with all relevant stakeholders, issue formal guarantees protecting communal grazing lands and livelihoods.

Benefit sharing

- Develop a time-bound and transparent strategy for local skill development and employment for the residents of the lower Omo valley, in particular local women and youth.
- Training programs for local residents should cover a wide range of occupations for the provision of essential services (*e.g.* grinding mill operators, teachers, nurses, and mechanics).
- Ensure that technology for food production is of good quality, reflects the communities' preferences, and has a budgeted maintenance plan with technicians and parts readily available.
- Urgent effort is required to ensure that the food production and livelihoods systems promised to help the villagised Bodi and Mursi families achieve 3-4 crops per annum are quickly delivered and rendered sustainable, that communities have a documented understanding of their rights and obligations on the plots and of their rights to alternative livelihood options.
- Analyse the viability of the 0.25 hectare plots of land to produce 3-4 crops per annum, which is the minimum number of harvests required to ensure food security of villagised families.

Services for existing communities and migrant labour populations in South Omo Zone:

- Improve the utilization and quality of services through the provision of adequate and professional staff.
- Develop a publicly available plan to strengthen and scale-up services alongside expanding developmental projects. This phasing should ensure that the availability of quality services is always proportionate to the area's population (including migrant labourers).
- Emphasize service improvements for women, in particular in antenatal care and protection from violence.
- Take communities' preferences into account regarding services. For example, in education consider language, curricula and school schedules.
- Strengthen Grievance Redress Mechanisms as a whole in the lower Omo Valley and improve follow-up and communication with communities, including through increased partnerships with independent institutions.
- Expand the Government's existing Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAP) to South Omo Zone to improve citizen participation and oversight of critical services.

Peace and security:

- Strengthen efforts to promote a culture of peace in South Omo and the adjoining zones of Bench-Maji and Borena. This could be achieved through joint agreements on early warning and conflict resolution, cross-community conversations, understanding, and mutual respect.
- Strengthen planning for peace and security within the boundaries of the Omo-Kuraz Plantation where communities are being villagised (and brought into closer proximity) and where migrant worker populations will arrive.