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# Comparative Study of Villagization under Two Regimes in Ethiopia: Case Study of Guji-Oromo and Mao-Kommo Areas<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This is a comparative study of villagization programs in Ethiopia under two different regimes. Comparisons were made in relation to the objectives of the programs, implementation modalities (forced/voluntary), and the likely short and long-term effects of the programs on the social, economic, political, and environmental lives of the study populations. Different methods that include interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations were employed to collect the data upon which the writing of this paper was based. While there are similarities between the two regimes with regard to the objectives of the program, there are differences in their implementation modalities and the provision of infrastructure and basic social services. Both regimes recorded poor achievements in areas of economic and environmental development objectives, and thus serious consideration should be made in the planning of these important areas for meaningful transformation.

**Keywords:** Beni-shangul Gumuz, Ethiopia, Jam Jam *Awraja*, Villagization.

## 1. Background (Review)

Villagization is one variant of resettlement schemes often organized by governments. Like most resettlement programs, it is characterized by an element of planning and control. Yet unlike most resettlement programs, it may not involve the moving of people over a significant distance. In most cases, it takes the form of a spatial regrouping of populations in areas where they are already living (Taddesse, 2002: 116; A. Pankhurst, 1989:2; Alemayehu, 1989:1).

The policy of villagization and thus the establishment of cooperative villages in rural areas was not new both at global level and in Ethiopia. Various governments have embarked on villagization programs at different times for socio-economic and political reasons. Despite its close association with

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socialist states and agricultural collectivization, villagization has also been attempted by some non-socialist governments. In Italy, for example, cooperative village settlements started before 1900 (Omari, 1984). The *Kibbutz* and *Moshav* of Israel are other well-known examples of co-operative villages established by non-socialist governments (Taddesse, 2002:116).

In Africa, some colonial governments attempted to organize rural communities into villages to control the people and/or their produces. One of the earliest efforts at villagization occurred in north-east Rhodesia at the end of the nineteenth century when the British South African Company ruthlessly moved people from isolated homesteads into villages in order to promote the economic interests of the company (Key, 1967; Cohen and Isaksson, 1987). The British government also created strategic villages in the highlands surrounding Nairobi during the 1950s to deny recruits and supplies to the Mau Mau (Sorrenson, 1976). Similar schemes, which collectivized the rural population into hamlets in order to prevent their active participation in their own liberation struggles were attempted by the French in Algeria, the Italians in Libya, the Americans in Vietnam and the racist regime in South Africa (Gadaa Melbaa, 1988: 108).

The best-known cases of villagization are those attempted by socialist countries like China, North Vietnam, Mozambique, Algeria and Tanzania (Taddesse, 2002; 117). In countries that followed the socialist route to development villagization was often considered as means of enhancing rural development in general and agricultural development in particular, being designed as a first step toward the collectivization of agriculture. But this ultimate objective has never been fully achieved. Even in the former Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China and North Vietnam where great efforts were made to achieve collectivization, the practice was being reversed. In Tanzania, though collectivization was the aim, *Ujamaa* villages never moved beyond preliminary attempts at collectivization (Fortmann, 1980; Ergas, 1980). Despite massive efforts in the 1970s, even villagization appears to have failed. Using Goran Hyden's term (1980), Tanzania failed to "capture" its own peasants.

In Ethiopia beginning in late 1985, as part of its plan for "rapid rural transformation" and greater control over peasant farmers, Mengistu's military government (1974-1991) aimed to implement a villagization program throughout the country, except in the then war-torn regions of Eritrea and Tigray. The program was implemented in three phases: First security villages

(in Bale and Hararghe; then development villages in cereal and perennial crops growing areas; then lowlands were planned, but not implemented. Peasant farmers were instructed to dismantle their age-old scattered dwelling and move into grid-patterned villages despite their unwillingness to do so. By the end of 1989, nearly 40 percent of the country's rural population, numbering about 14 million peasant farmers, had forcibly been villagized as part of the regime's 10 years development plan (Tadesse, 2002:117). In March 1990, however, suddenly and unexpectedly, the government called a halt to most of its socialist programs. Although the reform policy failed to mention villagization by name, the peasant farmers understood it to include the option to de-villagize. Thus, as of March 1990, many peasant farmers in different regions of the country were just as busy as they were during the villagization period in dismantling their huts from the villages and reconstructing homes on their previous sites (Tesfaye, 1994: 1-2; Tadesse 2002).

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991 with a clear negative attitude towards the resettlement program, including villagization. The regime believes that the programs were flawed in their designs and hastily implemented involving human rights abuses and untold suffering to peasant farmers with grave social, economic, political, cultural and environmental costs (A. Pankhurst, 2009). The government deemed the programs as inhumane and inefficient. However, later on, the EPRDF government changed its attitude and started to implement both resettlement and villagization programs as part of its plan to transform rural population. The villagization program, the subject of this study, reintroduced to be implemented mainly among the pastoral and peripheral population of the country.

The new and revised phase of villagization program was commenced in 2010 in the four "emerging" regional state of Ethiopia: namely Afar, Beni-shangul Gumuz, Gambella and Somali to settle 1.5 million individuals by 2013 (Fana: 2014; Beni-shangul Gumuz Regional Government BGRG, 2010; Guyu, 2012). It has also been implemented in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples National Regional State's periphery. The aim was to establish new villages on a voluntary basis to enhance and transform the livelihood of the regions by improving food security, diversifying income sources and delivering better social services (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia FDRE, 2013).

The objective of this study is to compare the villagization programs under the FDRE government, in Mao-Kommo special *woreda* of Beni-shangul Gumuz Regional State with the villagization program in Jam Jam *Awraja* of Guji-Oromo of Oromia Regional State under the Derg Regime. In this regard, comparison was made in relation to the objectives of the programs, implementation modalities (whether it was forced or voluntary), and the likely socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental effects of the programs on the peoples of the two study areas. No such comparative study has been made in Ethiopia regarding the villagization programs and thus this is an attempt to address the gap. The study carefully considered the perceptions and experiences of the communities in both cases. It is hoped that the study would produce empirical evidences to address villagization, which is subjected to controversy with regards to the rationale behind the program.

## 2. Villagization among the Guji-Oromo and Mao-Kommo Groups

The implementation of villagization among the Guji-Oromo of the then Jam Jam *Awraja* started in January 1986. The implementing authorities were successful in organizing Villagization Coordinating Committees (VCCs) at the *awraja*, *woreda* and peasant association levels. As of June 1988, it was reported about 45 percent of the *awraja*'s population was organized into 240 villages consisting of 20,000 household heads, i.e., about 105,000 people (Jam Jam *Awraja* Villagization Coordinating Council, 1988:153). This was reported as a big success in the implementation of villagization in the *awraja*.

In Beni-shangul Gumuz National Regional State the three-year long villagization program was launched in 2011. The program targeted some 45 thousand households living in 18 of the regions 20 districts (*woredas*), the remaining two being towns. It was reported that the overall achievement has been considerable, and the program has achieved over 90 percent of its targets, with over 39,500 households settled in 221 villages<sup>3</sup>. As part of the Beni-shangul Gumuz National Regional State, villagization in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* was launched in 2011 and out of the total 32 peasant associations (*Kebeles*) nine were villagized between 2011 and 2012. This study concentrates on two of these villages called EshiGogo and Ya'a Beldigs.

The fieldwork upon which the Guji-Oromo villagization study based was conducted between 1990 and 1991 for a PhD dissertation, covering one

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<sup>3</sup> This was reported by the regional president, Ahmed Nasir, 2020 on his face book page.

intensive case study and thirty-two survey villages selected from a total of 144 peasant associations villagized in three study *woredas* (i.e. Bore, Bule-Uraga and Adola *Woreda*) of the then Jam Jam *Awraja*. A total of 224 peasant associations had been villagized in the three *woredas*, many associations supporting of more than one new village. The fieldwork in Beni-shangul Gumuz, among the Mao-Kommo groups, was conducted for a month time between March 15 and April 16, 2017.

Most rural people in Ethiopia are pre-literate. In this case, the most relevant research approach would be a qualitative method. A qualitative research is primary explorative and interpretive. This approach is particularly important when the purpose of the research is to understand people's attitudes, people's subjective perceptions and their deep-rooted feelings. Under the qualitative approach both secondary and primary data collection methods have been employed. A review of the available literature was made on issues concerning villagization, both at national and global levels. Secondary data were obtained from sources like government publications, reports, books, journals and other relevant publications. Primary data were derived from field works conducted in the two study areas.

A combination of different research methods has been employed in both study areas. These include: interviews (in-depth and key informants) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interviews and Group discussions were held with villagized community leaders, village heads, female and male household heads, *Kebele* leaders, officials, experts and authorities involved in villagization and regional sector officers. Data related to the processes of villagization and its impacts were collected from over 150 participants using focus group discussions and interviews. Field observations were also conducted at the villagized sites to assess the nature, extent and quality of the basic infrastructure and services.

### **3. Objectives of the Villagization Programs**

The objectives of villagization were similar under the two regimes, although some modifications have been made to the later program, depending on the developmental state ideology of the regime. The Derg regime stated that villagization is a multipurpose scheme whose central objective was to introduce a systematic land-use and/or recovery program through collective and coordinated efforts (National Villagization Coordinating Committee

1987). Its aims were to move peasant farmers into villages where it would be easier to provide them with basic social and infrastructural services such as schools, clinics, water supplies, rural roads, electricity and flourmills. It was also said that the villagization program would enhance extension services to peasant farmers and this will enable them to raise agricultural production and productivity. Villagization was also given an important role in strengthening peasant security and self-defense, reducing rural-urban disparities and raising the consciousness of peasant farmers. In the latter case, it is also amid at transforming the living condition of pastoral and semi-pastoral communities of the newly initiated villages by improving food security and by bringing socioeconomic and cultural transformation of the people. In general, both regimes considered villagization as an important scheme to master state territory, to control population, to ensure sustainable food security and to deliver social services. Were the two regimes successful in achieving these promised objectives? This is a kind question to be addressed by this study.

#### **4. Implementation of Villagization among the Guji-Oromo of Jam Jam *Awraja* and Groups in Mao-Komo Special *Woreda* of the Beni-shangul Gumuz**

In our peasant association, nobody wanted to be organized under the Villagization program. We have information about the unpopular nature of the program from those who have already been villagized before us. When the implementers came to our *kebele*, some people fled to lowland areas, which were not supposed to be villagized. Others who raised their voices against or oppose the program were jailed, some others were beaten and thus we were forced to accept the program (Key Informant from Furfusa Maro village, Jam Jam *Awraja*, 1991).

Villagization in Jam Jam *Awraja* suffered from a top-down approach, reflecting the absence of any meaningful consultation with peasant farmers prior to the implementation. Government and party officials were the sole architects of the whole process of implementation. They applied a paternalistic approach in which they assumed the whole responsibility of deciding when, where and how to implement the program. There was lack of detailed and comprehensive planning and lack of legal frameworks which in any case do not fully take into account the rights of settlers (Tadesse 1995). Peasant farmers were not given a chance to participate in site selection or in designing

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village layout, houses or garden plots. They were called in only to provide labor and building materials.

Guji farmers were against villagization because of the nature of the program in general and the way it was planned and implemented in particular. They started opposing it from the very day they were told about it. When they were later forced to implement it, they resorted to various kinds of violent and non-violent methods of resistance. Some individuals and families fled from their peasant associations in order to evade the program. Others made the implementation difficult by refusing (or delaying) the clearing of bushes from the sites where the villages were supposed to be built, by cultivating and sowing crops on the sites selected for villages and by displacing the marks made by designers on the sites. In some peasant associations, farmers contributed money and bribed officials not to select their place for villagization. There were also a few individuals who went to the extent of threatening designers and implementation authorities with armed forces (See Tadesse, 1995:153-7 for a detailed study of Guji-Oromo peasant's resistance against villagization).

Because of such resistance, authorities in Jam Jam *Awraja* themselves resorted to force to villagize peasant farmers and to make them stay in the villages. Thus, peasant farmers, in general and their institutions in Jam Jam *Awraja* were not involved in planning or designing villagization, though they were directly affected by the program. The program hardly encouraged grass-roots participation (Tadesse, 2002). In general, villagization among the Guji-Oromo was not properly planned and executed. No detail socio-economic or environmental assessments were made before implementation. The peasant associations villagized were not selected according to the criteria laid down by the national guidelines, no proper awareness creation lessons were given to peasant farmers to make them understand the objectives and importance of the program, and force was used (Tadesse, 1995).

The official implementation of villagization in Mao-Kommo Special *woreda* started in 2011, although some *Kebeles* might have started the implementation earlier. The process of implementation was supposed to follow the major principles of voluntary villagization schemes which include voluntarism, participatory, consultation of the community, preparation and so on. Contrary to the implementation processes in Guji-Oromo, which was forced, in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* the implementation of villagization was in most cases voluntary. Almost all participants of the FGDs and interview schedules agree

that they joined the program by their own will, without any forceful relocating measure. However, they asserted that villagization was not initiated by the grass-roots residents themselves, it was planned and implemented by the government. One focus group participant in EshiGogo asserted that:

Government officials came to our *kebele* and told us about the potential benefits of being villagized. We were told about the basic social and infrastructural services to be provided by the government if we are villagized. There were so many promises including how we could be food self-sufficient and develop sustainably if villagized. We knew that even if we refuse, the government would go ahead with its plan and thus we join villagization schemes as *Ye-weudeta- Gideta*, induced free participation.

Another key Informant from the same *kebele* indicated that,

After awareness creation about the program, various consultations at different times were conducted with target communities by using influential local elders who were members of the *kebele* villagization committee. However, given the negative propaganda against the program, the consultation took much time to persuade and convince the target communities.

Furthermore, Guyu's (2012: 261) findings also indicated the voluntary nature of villagization in Beni-shangule Gumuz region,

... every household was brought to the new village based on its will, informed consent, voluntarism and no one was forced to leave his previous home area without his/her will..., even those who want to return back to their previous home could do so without any interference, but they cannot claim for separate institution or institutional facilities like health, education, road ...etc.

This does not however mean that there were no individuals/families who defied the program. According to my informant, there were a few who refused to join the program. Yet the implementation modality in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* was much better than that of the Guji in-terms of voluntarism, participation, and consultation. In Mao-Kommo case, peasant farmers were given a chance to participate in site selection (although this was sometimes dictated by *Kebele* leaders and wealthy individuals), in designing village layouts, houses or garden plots. It is clear in this case that the type of direct



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coercion that was parts of the Derg's villagization were avoided under the EPRDF's regime.

## 5. Impacts of Villagization

### Economic Impacts

Guji-Oromo practice a mixed economy of animal husbandry and crop cultivation on fertile land which stretches over a wide variety of altitudes. While cultivation is more important to Guji than they admit, animal husbandry was and still is their favorite economic activity. The implementation of the villagization program had clear negative effects on their economy. The use of farm labor for house constructing during peak agricultural seasons, increased distance between the farm and the homesteads for most farmers after villagization, space limitations for garden plots and other sideline activities in villages, and the inconvenience created for animal husbandry were some of the major ways by which villagization has adversely affected the Guji economy (Taddesse, 2002:123).

According to the villagization guidelines, villagization was to be implemented in a manner that would not hamper or disrupt the agricultural and marketing activities and the peasant farmers (Ministry and Agriculture, 1986:19). But the implementing authorities in Jam Jam *Awraja* did not take the directive seriously, and the program was implemented at various points in the planting, weeding, harvesting and threshing months (See Taddesse, 2002 for detail). This has negatively affected not only farmers in peasant associations where villagization was implemented, but also all farmers throughout the *awraja*. Men and women, old and young, were all mobilized to participate in the villagization campaign. Farmers were not allowed to work their fields until they had finished their quotas for house construction. Consequently, there was a significant drop in crop production in Jam Jam *Awraja* during the years of implementation (Taddesse, 2002: 123).

While this was a short-term effect in the *awraja*, the more lasting residue was the increased distance between farms and villages. This had tremendously negative effects not only on crop production but also on labor productivity. The distance between farms and homesteads in villages increased for the majority of peasant farmers (65 percent) (Taddesse, 2002:124.) The longest distance recorded during fieldwork was eight kilometers. For a few households, villagization had, of course, shortened the distance between the

farms and the villages. But the average distance was still about three kilometers for the villages studied in Jam Jam *Awraja*. As a consequence, time that could have been used for production was spent on the road. The long distances from farm to village also increased the incidence of crop damage by vermin, pests and thieves. Increased farm-to-village distances also made it difficult for farmers to discover and treat crop and plant diseases on time and to use inputs like manure properly. It thus became counter-productive to a rational land use system.

The limitation of space in villages for home garden and sideline activities was another reason for the drop in productivity. It is evident that many Ethiopian peasant farmers (particularly women and the poor) grow a considerable amount of produce in their garden plots for consumption as well as for cash. Villagization program attached little importance to home gardens by allocating very little land (1000 square meters each) for such purposes. Old garden plots far away from the new villages were therefore often abandoned due to the distance and the difficulties involved from protecting them from pests. During the field work, most farmers had not even stated growing crops and vegetables in the new villages. Some said that the space allotted to them was insufficient to grow anything. Others complained that their villages were built on a pasture or forest land which would take years to become productive. Yet others complained that a lack of fences and fears of theft have prevented them from growing garden crops in the new villages. Farmers also found it difficult to engage themselves in other sideline activities like bee-keeping or raising poultry, due to the inconveniences created by villagization. In general, home garden production and sideline activities suffered badly from villagization. It is evident that efficiency of production by each farmer and an increase in acreage under cultivation were necessary ingredients for further expansion and improvement of agricultural production. But both conditions were constrained in Jam Jam by villagization, and consequently there was a drop in crop productivity.

No other government policy has ever threatened the Guji's favorite economic activity (animal husbandry) as much as the villagization program. First, many farmers sold their livestock due to the inconvenience created by the program and the fear that livestock might be nationalized. Second, animals' mortality increased after villagization due to communicable diseases, shortage of fodder in the villages. Third, the limitation of space and compactness of stables in the new villages did not permit farmers to keep many animals. Finally, traditional

transhumance and *dabare*<sup>4</sup> practices were disrupted because of the program. From all these we can argue that villagization in Guji did not achieve its goals of economic development.

The economic impacts of villagization in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* are very similar to that of Jam Jam *Awraja*. Like the Guji-Oromo of Jam Jam *Awraja*, groups in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* (i.e., Berta, Mao, Kommo, Oromo and Felata) practice a mixed economy of crop cultivation and livestock husbandry, although the number of livestock is very small in this *Woreda* in comparison to Jam Jam *Awraja* due to the prevalence of various diseases like tse-tse fly. The environment is more conducive for raising smaller animals like goats and poultry than cattle. Maize, sorghum, *dagusa*, beans and niger-seed are some major crops produced in the area. Some people also keep traditional bee hives for honey production. Similar to the Guji-Oromo case, increased distance between the farm and the homesteads<sup>5</sup>, space limitation for garden plots, and the prevalence of a wide variety of wild animals that feed on crops were reported as main causes for drop in crop production during the fieldwork. Some informants from Ya'aBelgidis, who joined the village from other peasant association, complained that they are not even given garden plots, as the area in the village was already occupied by the host community members.

### **Social and Political Impacts of Villagization**

The social impacts of villagization can be assessed in relation to the provision of social and infrastructural services, individual and social relations, family structure, lives of women and children, marriage and traditional patterns of cooperative work organizations like *debo*<sup>6</sup>.

One of the major objectives of the villagization program was to ensure that basic development infrastructural facilities and services were provided for

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<sup>4</sup>Dabare is the lending of cattle to poor kin and affine. As Hinnant (1985:804) correctly observed, *dabare* is not entirely altruistic, but rather part of a large-scale adaptive strategy. A man with sufficient milk cows parcels out his herd in a way that takes advantage of the varied topography in Guji land. To keep the entire herd in one area is seen as an invitation to predation, drought and disease.

<sup>5</sup> It was reported that the mean distance between homesteads and farms for the two study villages was about three kilometers.

<sup>6</sup> Debo is one of the most known indigenous forms of voluntary association through which rural communities cooperate with each other to meet certain social and economic ends. The people living in a particular geographic boundary help one another in plowing, weeding, sowing, harvesting and home construction.

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enhancement of the livelihood of the rural population and their socio-economic uplift (Ministry of Agriculture, 1986). Local officials promised peasant farmers that the government would provide them with basic social services when they moved to new villages.

Table 1: Planned villages in Guji Oromo and services provided (Tadesse, 2002: 126)

<i>Woreda</i>	Villages	School	Clinic	Piped water	Assembly hall**	MOA office**
	FurfursaMaro	-	-	-	-	-
Bore						
1	GossaWotiye	-	-	x*	x*	X
2	AlayuDhibba	-	-	x*	-	X
3	Sutta Dhibba	-	-	-	-	-
4	Anno Qeransa	-	-	-	-	-
5	Qale Kuku	-	-	-	-	-
6	QaleSalato	-	-	-	x	X
7	BorotoChichu	-	-	-	-	-
8	Sololo Qobo	-	-	-	-	-
9	YirbaBuliyo	-	-	-	x	X
10	AjersaKalacha	-	-	-	-	-
11	Kara Qulubi	-	-	-	-	X
12	HiyoKomole	-	-	-	-	-
BULE URAGA						
1	Layo Taraga	-	-	-	-	-
2	Sonqole Kalato	-	-	-	-	-
3	Sonqole Hora	-	-	-	-	-
4	Dida Hora Burqa	-	-	-	-	-
5	TebeSolamo	-	-	-	X	X
6	TebeHaroWato	x	-	x	X	-
7	Gadiyo Guratu	-	-	x	X	-
8	Bursa Dhokata	-	-	-	X	-
9	Afale Kola	-	x	X	-	x
10	Ballo Hanqu	-	-	-	-	-
11	Elialicha Dansuma	-	-	x	-	-

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12	Guticha	-	-	-	-	-
13	LaboDama	-	-	-	-	-
14	Kochore	-	-	-	-	-
15	AndegnaOkolu	x	-	-	-	-
ADOLA- WADAR A						
1	Dole	-	-	x	-	-
2	Darartu	-	-	-	-	-
3	Gobicha	-	-	x	-	-
4	KobaSorssa	-	-	x	-	-
5	Anfarara	-	-	-	-	-

Note: \*\* are services built at the expense of farmers are services provided by the Lutheran Mission; - no services provided.

As indicated in Table 1 above, not sufficient services have been provided to farmers as promised by the government, due to lack of necessary resources (Taddesse. 2002: 125). Since its beginning in January 1986 until the end of 1991, only two elementary schools, one clinic and seven piped water facilities were provided to the 33 study villages in Jam Jam by the government. Even these few social services were deteriorated and some fell to give services due to a lack of maintenance. It is thus obvious that the governments' promise to provide farmers with social services was unfulfilled.

In the two study villages of the Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* the number of social and infrastructural services provided by the government is shown in the following table:

Table 2: No. of social and infrastructural services provided to the two villages in Mao-Komo Special *Woreda* between 2011 and 2014.

Number	Name of Vills.	School	Clinic	Piped water	Road
1.	Eshi Gojo (GadaShola)	1 (1-8)	1	1	Yes, by villagers
2.	Ya'aBeldigs	1 (1-4)	1*	1	Yes, by villagers

As can be seen from table 2 above, there have been positive changes in the provision of services in the new villages of Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* when compared to the Guji case. In both study villages schools, clinics, piped water and roads were available, although the villagers complained about the low quality of the services. They, for example, complained about the lack of skilled man power and lack of medicine in clinics, lack of maintenance for water pipe when damaged and use of poor material for building schools. They also complained that some of the promised services such as electricity are not yet provided and they are still waiting for them to come. It seems that the building of some of the services before people move to villages gave advantage to Mao-Kommo Special *woreda* as opposed to Guji area where people were forced to dismantle their dwellings and move to villages before services were provided.

In both Guji and Mao Kommo villagized settlements, there were frequent conflicts among village dwellers arising from crop damage (in villages) by domestic animals, from the easy availability of alcohol drinks or *khat*, and from a situation that forced co-wives to live next to each other in villages. The Guji are a polygynous society. A man can marry as many women as he can support. Before villagization, tensions between co-wives were generally minimized by separating and settling them in different places, usually in different ecological zone which is also important to take advantage of the difference in ecological zones for cattle grazing and crop diversification.

In Mao Kommo Special *Woreda*, most of the people are Muslim and can marry to more than one wife. Co-wives are usually settled next to each other as family members, who ignited conflicts between or among themselves. The availability of alcohol drinks and *khat* in villages was another source of conflicts in villages of both study areas. On the one hand alcohol drinks or *khat* became a source of income for women and for those who were engaged in producing and selling these products; on the other hand, for others (consumers) it became a drain on their pockets and a major source of conflicts. Besides this, alcohol drinking and *khat* chewing dens became meeting and recreational places for many people in the villages. Instead of working their fields or tending animals, farmers started to spend most of their time in drinking or chewing dens, gossiping and backbiting. This obviously had adverse effects on time and energy which farmers would otherwise have used in production activities. In the Mao Kommo study villages, the coexistence of different ethnic groups also became a source of low-level tensions in villages,

which according to informants, could be solved through traditional conflict management mechanisms.

In the area of customs, villagization had clear effects on farmers' privacy and indigenous work organization such as *debo*. It brought hundreds of people together in the same village, where people could not keep their affairs and property private. What used to be private and family affairs became public in the villages.

On the positive side, villagization improved the opportunities to organize work parties and voluntary associations like *debo*, *Iddir*<sup>7</sup>, *equb*<sup>8</sup>..., by making people more easily accessible to one another. Villagization thus increased integration levels between people. For those who formerly live in relatively isolated settlements, the positive aspects of the program were significant. The social and economic benefits of a denser population were particularly important for women, enabling them to carry on small businesses like selling drinks and chat in villages and go to literacy schools.

A woman informant in Ya'aBeldigs village talked about the benefit of the denser population as follows,

I, with my husband, opened a small shop in the village and started to sell various items such as salt, soaps, sugar, oil..., etc to the village community, taking advantage of the denser population. It was hard to get these items in our previous settlements areas and one has to go to the nearby towns to buy them. Ours is just an example of the kind business people are engaged in in the villages. There are many others who have benefited from such businesses in villages.

Villagization also made communication easier and faster within villages. People are easily accessible to assist each other in relation to accidents, death, illness and other problems. With regard to such assistance, Helen Pankhurst's (1992:66) observations on the peasant association in Shewa region could equally be applicable to the Guji and to Mao Kommo new villages.

For the community as a whole, villagization increased the speed with which distress could be dealt with... Any call for help was more likely

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<sup>7</sup>Iddir is a voluntary association based on neighborhood for the purpose of mutual aid in matters of burial and community concerns.

<sup>8</sup>Equb is a voluntary association established for the purpose of saving money. Each member agrees to periodically pay a fixed amount of money into a common pool and receives, in his/her turn, one lump sum.

to be heard and the people were easily available when someone was ill, or a woman was having difficulties during childbirth and had to be carried to the clinic. This was an immense benefit for female-headed households whose members were otherwise vulnerable.

In addition to this, communication between villagers and the government authorities has become easier after the implementation of villagization, to discuss issues of common interests.

With regards to the political impacts of villagization in the Guji-Oromo area, Tadesse (2002: 130) concluded that,

It is thus clear that behind the rhetoric of helping peasant farmers, the Villagization program was introduced in Ethiopia mainly to fight against national liberation fronts and to provide greater control over peasants and peasant produce in order to feed the army and the urban population, while at the same time helping Mengistu to prolong his hold on political power.

Mulatu (2002:174) also summarized the overall villagization experience of the Derg regime as follows:

The verdict on villagization was not favorable. Thousands of people fled to avoid villagization; others died or lived in deplorable conditions after being forcibly resettled. There were indications that in the short term, villagization may have further impoverished an already poor peasantry. The services that were supposed to be delivered in new villages, such as water, electricity, health care clinics, schools, transportation and agricultural extension services, were not being provided because the government lacked the necessary resources. Denied immediate access to their fields, the peasants were also prevented from guarding their crops from birds and other wild animals.

Thus, it could be argued that villagization program under the Derg regime was more of political than ecological and socio-economic arguments.

According to some reports (see for example, Human Rights Watch Report (2012); Fana (2014), villagization in “emerging” regions was used as a political instrument, “...the intention of which is to give way to further commercial agriculture interests in the regions. These critiques also argue that villagization constituted a mechanism of land grabbing by the state and private sector at the expense of pastoralist and peripheral people. My finding indicates



that no land has been given to large commercial agricultural investors in the area during my fieldwork. However, as the regime follows Developmental State ideology/policy, it is expected that land alienation in the name of investment would follow sooner or later.

### **Impact of Villagization on Environment and Health**

In both villagization programs under the two regimes, construction materials from the old houses rarely used to build houses and facilities in the new villages. This was most probably due to the relative availability of forests in both areas. It resulted in excessive trees/bamboo-felling, which caused deforestation in both sites. It is also, important to bear in mind that trees are the main source of fuel in both areas. In Guji area, since the disintegration of the villagization program in 1991, de-villagization has also consumed as much forest as villagization had done.

It was also reported that the concentration of people and livestock in the villages had adversely affected human health and the environment, due to lack of sanitation, overgrazing and soil erosion in the Guji area (Tadesse, 2002: 129). Lack of garbage disposal, uncovered stables and pit latrines, and mud and dust (during rainy and dry seasons) have contributed to pollution which in turn became a breeding ground for various disease-bearing organisms. As a result, hundreds of village-dwellers in Guji suffered from communicable diseases and cold related illnesses. Some deaths were also reported. Livestock diseases were rampant, killing thousands of beasts (Tadesse, 2002: 129-30).

The situation was much better in Mao-Kommo villages as clinics and pit latrines with covers were built ahead of moving dwellers into villages. The small number of animals in the Mao-Kommo villages also helped settlers to survive the disaster. However, concentrating people in a central area would intensify pressure on available water and grazing and lead to a decline in soil fertility. Thus, villagization seems to be counterproductive to a rational land use system and was damaging ecologically.

### **6. Summary and Conclusion**

The rationale for introducing villagization program in Ethiopia was that the existing arrangement of dispersed settlements made it difficult to provide social and infrastructural services and to use resources, especially land and water, efficiently. It is argued that the relocation of peasants in larger villages

would give rural people better access to amenities such as agricultural extension services, schools, clinics, water, electricity..., and would strengthen local security and the capacity for self-defense. Improved economic and social services were believed to promote more efficient use of land and other natural resources and this would lead to increase agricultural production and a higher standard of living. With a mixture of economic, social, political and environmental objectives, the program was considered a viable strategy for enhancing rural development in Ethiopia. To evaluate the extent to which these objectives were successfully achieved, one must turn to evidences from actual cases.

Villagization in Jam Jam *Awraja*, among the Gujii-Oromo, suffered from top-down implementation approach and it was totally against the human rights of the population. In Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* villagization was voluntary, except that a few individuals complained that they were forced. Peasant farmers participated in the planning and implementation of the program.

With regards to the economy, instead of increasing production or productivity, villagization turned out to be a major cause of economic decline in Jam Jam *Awraja* as well as in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda*. The use of farm labor for house construction during agricultural peak seasons (specially in Jam Jam), the increased distance between farms and homesteads, and the limitation of space for garden crops and other sideline activities greatly reduced production and productivity. Even worse, in Jam Jam, was the impact of villagization on animal husbandry. Due to the inconveniences created by the program, the number of livestock was greatly declined. Villagization has also been a cause of deforestation and environmental degradation in both study areas. Thus, there were indications that in the short term, villagization has further impoverished an already poor peasantry.

The social impacts of villagization in Jam Jam were not so impressive. The government's promise to provide farmers with basic infrastructural and social services was largely unfulfilled because the government lacked the necessary resources. In addition, by bringing hundreds of peasant farmers together into compact villages, the program created tensions and disputes between individuals and families, eroding peasant farmer's privacy and contributing to increased alcohol/chat consumptions and other social crimes like theft. In Jam Jam, the program proved to be a major infringement of the basic human rights of the Guji by moving them into villages against their will.

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The provision of basic social and infrastructural services to peasant farmers in Mao-Kommo special *woreda* was much better when compared to that of Guji-Oromo. However, farmers complained about the poor quality of services and demanded that services should be provided in full package before moving farmers to new villages. On a positive side, villagization, in both cases, made communication easier and faster within villages. People are easily accessible to assist each other in relation to accidents, death, illness and other problems. Besides this, some villages became center for small-scale businesses from which some individuals have benefited. Moreover, one important development recently observed is that some old villages in Guji-Oromo area (especially those on main roads sides) have been developed into small scale rural towns that are serving the socio-economic interests of the population. These towns are well served with social and infrastructural services than the previous villages.

Villagization in Jam Jam scored more success in the political than the economic or social arenas. The grouping of peasants into compact villages gave the government easy access to them so that they could agitate farmers against opposition groups through regular meetings. It also made it possible for the government to control peasant production through grain quota deliveries administered by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation to feed the army and urban population, to collect taxes and “voluntary contributions,” and to recruit militias for war.

The general conclusion of this study is that, villagization was a failed project in Jam Jam *Awraja* under the military regime, whether measured in terms of the expansion of agricultural output, improved social and infrastructural services or environmental development. There were some improvements in the implementation process and in the provision of infrastructure and social services in Mao-Kommo Special *Woreda* under the FDRE regime. However, in both cases, villagization recorded poor results in the economic and environmental transformation objectives, and thus needs serious consideration in the future planning.

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