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Villagization in the Metekel Area: the Case of Mandura District, 1986-87

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ABSTRACT

Villagization in the areas of Ethiopia began in the 1970's and then the project took place in Mandura district of the Metekel area, North West Ethiopia in the 1980's during Derg government. The program was practical in the district from 1986-87. The process of villagization and regrouping of communities from scattered homesteads into villages established at Dutch Alem Tsehay, Gumdia, Daffe, Dabie, Anze Baguna, Kuter Hulet, Dukill, Babeistha and Mekesegene kebeles. Gumuz, Agew and Amhara were villagized communities in the district. But, the program was failed because of the lack of feasibility studies, deteriorating of security conditions and lack of supplying infrastructures for the newly villagized communities in the district.

Keywords: Villagization, Mandura, Metekel, Natives, Resettlers

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Background to villagization in Ethiopia

Villagization is the clustering of an agro-pastoral and habit of shifting cultivator populations into more permanent, sedentary settlement (De, 1991). It is an effort to increase the power of state by leading people in more easily controlled groups. This program is the relocation of peasants from the traditionally scattered homes in nearby areas to new villages established in network like patterns (Jane, 1989:2). Villagization setups shifted over million peoples from their former distributed homesteads into new nucleated settlement (Michael, 1985:123). The program had been implemented in the East Africa notably in Ethiopia since in 1970's to regrouping of people from scattered homesteads into villages (Mathijs, 2001:623).

Villagization in Ethiopia has a lengthy history with dramatic impact on rural populations and was a key component of the Derg's socialist agricultural collectivization policies (De, 1991). Under this program, Derg had attempted to group the scattered farming communities throughout the country into small village clusters to promote rational and productivity; conserve natural resources and provide access to public services like clean water, clinics, schools, electricity, market and cooperatives. It was means for enhance public defense and guarantee peace and security as well as into centers for military recruitment throughout the country (Messay and Bekure, 2011:277). But, the program was unpopular and highly resisted from the most rural areas in the Ethiopia. The thousands of Ethiopia people fled to avoid this program; others lived unpleased conditions after being forcibly villagized. Because the services such as water, clinics, housing, seeds, food, proper sanitation and in adequate health care was not provided by the government (*Ibid*).

In similar way of the other Ethiopian regions, without consideration of all fundamental issues, Derg government implemented the program in the Benishangul-Gumuz region along Metekel area specifically from Mandura district. The program took place on the Dutch Alem Teshay,

Gumede, Dukill, Kuter Hulet, Anze Boguna, Mekeseget, Genet Mariam (the center of district), Jegedia, Daffe, Babeistha and Dabie kebeles (Dario:83). The villagized communities were composed of the natives (Gumuz) and the settlers (Agaw and Amhara) from 1986-87 in the district. The government did not take into considerations even the disintegration of the original social networks and the possible relationships between the settlers and the natives (*Ibid*). This forceful villagization program and process along Mandura district in the Metekel area during the Derg regime resulted intolerance and lack of security among villagized communities. The subprogram strategy of villagization brought the decline of program in the district.

Methodology

This study was conducted based on the qualitative approach. Data are employed from both primary and sources. The key informants and document analysis are included. Unstructured interviews were carried out with intention of collecting the required data. Elders of Gumuz, Awi, and Amhara are interviewed in depth. Additionally, letters, news-papers, articles and research papers that give brief information about the villagization of the Mandura woreda in the Metekel zone are referred. Published and unpublished sources are cross-checked with responses of key informants. The collected data from key informant interview and written sources were critically analyzed, narrative and summarized in document investigation methodology.

Results and Discussion

In most parts of Ethiopia, Villagization is implemented without consideration of fundamental issues during the reign of Derg regime. Villagization is the relocation of peasants from their traditionally scattered homes in nearby areas to new villages established in grid like patterns to provide access to public services like clean water, clinics, schools, electricity, market and cooperative. This was also took place in the

Mandura woreda of the Metekel province, Benishangul Gumuz regional state, Northwest Ethiopia. Villagization program in Mandura district conducted among the Gumuz and settlers (Agew and Amhara). This research emphasized on the villagization of Mandura district from 1986-87 in the Metekel area.

The program of villagization in the District

The villagization program was designed to improve the access of rural residents to social services and to strengthen the ability of rural communities to define themselves to the villagized communities. Another motive was the conversion of villagized communities into producers or cooperatives as well as into centers for military recruitment (Asrat, 2009:4). This strategy implemented along the district of Mandura in the Metekel area, Benishangul Gumuz regional state. The district has natives and non-natives which dominantly plow cultivators, characterized by high cash income compared to the other woredas from the region (Dario: 84). But, the district is characterized by very poor infrastructure. Most roads are dry weather roads and hence access is difficult during rainy seasons. Moreover, the road network connecting the region with zones and woredas is very poor. Kebeles are in most cases not connected with woredas. This was forced the Derg regime forcibly assembled and transported resettlers and the natives that settled of Dutch Alem Tsehay, Dukill, Kuter Hulet, Genet Marium, Anze Boguna, Mekesengenet, Gumedra, Daffe, Babeistha, Jegedia and Dabhi kebeles in the Mandura district (Ethiopia, 2007:6).

The program was established between the natives, Gumuz and the resettlers (Gojjam Agaw and Amhara). This can be considered as the most tragic experience which affected both the natives and resettlers, brought about by villagization scheme contrary to their previous better secured way of life (Dario,86). It had a terrible impact on the socio-economic process of the villagized communities (Johnson, 2012:6). The settled communities had totally setting which has inhospitable, marked by the

strong presence of malaria and other lowland disease agro-ecology of their new village was very different from that of their original homes (Asrat:18).

In new setting, the different conception of the land, expressed by the two groups, became one of the fundamental reasons at the ground of the war between the natives and the resettlers. A member of the Gumuz ethnic group states:-

“With the resettlers the war was for the land. Nobody has its own land.

The land is big and everybody works together without saying this is mine

and this is yours. At the harvest time we share the fruits of our work. This

is the rule in Gumuz people. They want all the land. Every Gumuz was free

to farm where he wanted, but , after their arrival, we have forgotten the

meaning of peace”(Dario,86).

The huge project, villagization in the district lacked proper feasibility study. In fact, the selection of settlement sites in Mandura kebeles was made by local authorities or the program should not take place on a participatory basis and take environmental, social and cultural realities of the people that lived from the district (Dessalegn, 2003:33). Absence of proper study fostered intolerance among the newly villagized communities of Gumuz, Agaw and Amhara in the District (Dario, 86).

The process of villagization in the Madura District (1986-87)

With absence of adequate available infrastructures and in order to achieve the political objectives, the Derg government followed villagization as important issue that deserve due attention in attaining food security and living standard of the peoples in the district by selecting local chiefs from each kebele's and gave training for them that facilitate the process of program (Benishangul Gumuz Region, 2004:32). The villagization should take place on the basis of participation of the villagized

communities from the district step by step (*Ibid*). Informants such as Zewdu chekole, Abebe Semeneh, Yeshwuse Mamo and Belay Wagheyu stated that the movement of the population and their cattle's begun after the harvest and continued until the decline of the program. The process was first started in February 1986 at Dutch Alem Tsehay. After one year, in the 1987 the process continued on

Gumedia, Jegedia, Deffele, Dabhie, Dukill, Kuter Hulet, Anze Boguna, Babeistha and Mekesenegnet respectively (Yesuf Nega and Sullie Gessase). The preparation, recruitment and implementation process of the villagization in the Mandura district was poorly observed criteria, rushed out feasibility studies and inefficient village administration (Asrat: 10).

No	Name of informants	Age	Place of interview	Date of interview	Remarks
1	Abebe Semeneh(Ato)	63	Mandura Genet Marium	25/9/2012	He is the speaker of Awagna language and stayed for long time with Gumuz communities in the Gumedia kebele.
2	Asmamaw Getahun(Ato)	41	Dabhie	23/9/2012	He is a farmer that depended on the mixed farming system and now lived in the Dabhie kebele.
3	Belay Wageyhu (Ato)	43	Mandura Genet Marium	25/9/2012	He is a farmer of Jegedia kebele that speaks the Awagna language.
4	Mekonnen Guki (Ato)	57	Dukill	23/9/2012	He is a Gumuzegna speaker and now settled in the Dukill kebele.
5	Sullie Gassesse (Ato)	78	Gumedia	24/9/2012	He was born from the Gumuz communities and now lived at Gumedia kebele with involvement of farming.
6	Wube Negessa (Ato)	71	Dukill	23/9/2012	He is a native of Dukill kebele that speaks Gumuzegna language and dependent on farming system by using farm tool, hoe.
7	Yeshiwuse Mamo (Ato)	53	Mandura Genet Marium	25/9/2012	He is the speaker of Awagna and stayed for thirteen years at Jegedia and now lived at Mandura Genet Marium.
8	Yesuf Nega(Ato)	47	Mandura Genet Marium	25/9/2012	He lived in Mandura Genet Marium kebele and now engaged in both farming and trading system that speaks Amharic language.
9	Zewidu Chekol (Ato)	54	Mandura Genet Marium	25/9/2012	He stayed at Mandura Genet Marium Kebele for thirty years that speaks Awanga and now he is chairman in the kebele.

The process contributed to the hardship of the Gumuz population caused unexpected changes in their survival strategies and customary practices (Gebre, 2003:50). Also resettlers of

Agaw and Amhara from the district during villagization process were highly persecuted because of the clashes with Gumuz, lack of clan water, clinics and contestation (*Ibid*, 2002:35).

As a result of this, the 1986-87 villagization process along Metekel area in the Mandura district drew heavy criticisms particularly from a number of writers and western governments as being forcible in nature and designed for political rather than socio-economic development objectives (Helmut and Adugna, 1989:133). An earlier body of social science research, relying largely on village case studies, generally criticized this villagization process as a failed example of large scale state planning with contrary economic and ecological consequences (Philip, 2011:2). This huge project faced the deteriorating of security conditions and lack of supplying infrastructures for the newly villagized communities in the district by the Derg government finally effected the program failed (Messsay and Bekure, 2011:277).

Villagized communities in the district

The natives, Gumuz and *Mofar Zemeches*, Gojjam Agaw and Amhara were the communities forcefully assembled and transported in the Mandura district from 1986-87 during Derg regime. The district consist Dutch Alem Teshay, Dukill, Anze Baguna, Makesnet, Babeistha, Dubanga, Tunie, Gedam Deffele, Gumedia, Kuter Hulet, Jegedia, Deffele and Dabhie kebeles. Those kebeles are sparsely populated. This created the problem for political management, agricultural collectivization, taxation, market control and other services (Asmamaw Getahun, Mekonnen Guki and Wubi Negese).

In order to overcome the hindrance, the Deg government was aimed to reorganize the settlement pattern of population through villagization which was regrouping of people from scattered homesteads into villages. Among those kebeles, the Derg government was begun villagization process from the scattered populations of Gumuz, Agaw and Amhara communities of the Dutch Alem Teshay in the 1987. Then, in the 1987 the communities of Agaw and Gumuz were villagized into Gumdia, Daffe, Dabhie, Anze Baguna, Kuter Hulet,

Babeistha, Dukill and Mekeseget. In the same year, Agew, Gumuz and Amhara communities were also villagized into Jegeda from their original areas (*Ibid*).

Conclusion

Ethiopia has a long history characterized by displacing the rural populations through resettlement and villagization from 1970' up to 1980's. Displacement of the rural peasants in the past through villagization has objective of grouping scattered farming communities into small villages to promote rational and productivity, conserve natural resources and provide access to public services like clean water, market, cooperative, guarantee peace and security as well as centers for military recruitment. The Derg government was made villagization program in the Mandura district of the Metekel area in mid-1980's likely other provinces of the country to attain objective. The program and the process of the district was functional at Dutch Alem Teshay, Gumedia, Daffe, Dabhie, Dukil, Anze Bugana, Mekeseget, Jegedia, Babeistha and Kuter Hulet among the natives and the resettlers between 1986-87. This program challenged by the problem of security conditions and lack of supply infrastructures to the newly villagized communities in the district lastly caused the project to failure.

Conflict interests

The author has no declared any interest of conflicts.

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