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RESETTLEMENT OF PEASANTS IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Government sponsored resettlement programs implemented in Ethiopia since the 1980s were studied. The results of the study show that the objectives of the resettlement programs of the military regime and the present government are similar. More precisely, both programs aimed at alleviating the problem of recurrent food insecurity, easing overwhelming human and livestock pressure on land and other natural resources, and promoting environmental rehabilitation in famine/drought-prone areas of the country. A critical analysis of the emergency resettlement program of the military government reveals that it was beset with numerous planning and implementation problems. The study indicates also that the emergency resettlement program was more of a top-down exercise in futility because it did not pay due attention to the very people who are the causes and victims of environmental degradation and the consequences of the program on both the environment and the host population. With regard to the current resettlement program, the findings of the study show that the present government's plan of relocating 2.2 million people over a

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three-year period appears to be an ambitious target when seen from the low implementation capacity of the Regions and the huge financial resources required to undertake the program. Moreover, reports from various sources point to the fact that the current resettlement program lacks preparation and efforts that have been made so far to implement the plan are inadequate.

> *"If we have the will and the commitment, we do have the capacity to resolve our chronic problem of food shortage. It is high time that we stop blaming nature for our obvious failures to adjust to her vicissitudes and to harness her might [...] The processes of nature do not operate with a motive of any kind. Nature simply is. It is society that ought to adjust and act purposefully and responsibly. We cannot say nature ought to be this or that. Nature responds neither to threats and slogans nor to prayers and supplications. It responds only to rational and effective social action*."
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> Mesfin Wolde Mariam (2003), Professor of Geography and outspoken critic of successive political regimes in Ethiopia

I. Introduction

Resettling drought, earthquake, flood and other natural calamity victims to relatively safer sites has been one of the areas where governments of developing countries have been very active since the middle of the last century. Paradoxically, there is always hard-core opposition to these programs, which emanates mainly from conflicts of interest between victims and governments. Usually governments prefer to move victims permanently to safer sites while the victims prefer to stay in their villages and receive relief assistance. In traditional societies, the attachment to ancestors' land, the community, the native village and other physical assets is very strong. Consequently, victims of natural disasters always hope for the better days to come and almost never volunteer to quit their lands forever. Experience shows that resettlement programs

are better on paper than in practice because their implementation raises many thorny practical problems.

In Ethiopia, resettlement has been carried out both on a 'self-initiated' or spontaneous and an organised basis. The former occurred with the individual initiatives without any central co-ordination, whereas the latter tended to be massively implemented through centrally co-ordinated government policy (Wolde-Selassie 2002). The Ethiopian experience shows that spontaneous settlements/resettlements have been taking place in the last few centuries and state-sponsored resettlement programs have been implemented by successive governments since the 1960s (RRC 1988). Available empirical literature on resettlement programs in Ethiopia shows that spontaneous settlers often negotiate for land and other resources with the host population. However, state-sponsored settlers are settled in areas selected by resettlement administering authorities without consulting the host population, assessing the capacity of receiving areas to accommodate settlers and factoring in the implications of the resettlement program to the host population and the environment. This situation is believed to have resulted in animosities and violent clashes among host communities and resettled families (Getachew 1989; Pankhurst 1990; Comenetz and Caviedes 2002; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Gebre 2003).

The first organised and centrally co-ordinated initiative to carry out resettlement programs in Ethiopia dates back to the early 1960s when American sociologists and ethnologists recommended the relocation of peasants from northern areas, suffering from high population pressure, soil erosion and deforestation to the South and South-western regions where there are under-utilised and fertile lands. However, this strategy was accepted with mixed feelings. Some critics argued that it was still possible to reclaim the damaged lands through terracing, reforestation, and other conservation measures (Cohen and Isaksson 1988). Similarly, others have attacked the strategy vehemently on the ground that its prime objective was not humanitarian but to propagate the national ideology and create ethnic diversity (Bureau 1988; Gebre

2003). Available evidence shows that in the 1960s and early 1970s, a number of government and voluntary agencies in Ethiopia were involved in resettlement schemes (Clarke 1986). On the government side, the resettlement programs gained currency in the Third Five Year Development Plan (1968-1973). Accordingly, the official document of this plan (IGE 1968) states:

> A gradual but accelerating shift in the agricultural population will begin to be seen during the third plan, from the present overcrowded northern and central highlands to the lowland areas, and in a still longer run, to the Southwestern highlands (and those parts of the southern highlands where population pressure is not a problem). Because of the large costs, careful and intensive surveys, research and initial preparatory and pilot activity will have to precede government resettlement schemes. In the meantime, careful evaluation will be made of the experiences of relatively small-scale settlement projects now being undertaken in the middle Awash and in Wolamo.

Exact figures about the number of people resettled by the imperial regime are difficult to find. However, Clarke (1986) reported that up to the Revolution of 1974, 20,000 families were resettled mainly from the drought afflicted and over populated north to the south.

The military government that overthrew the imperial government in 1974 considered resettlement as a very powerful policy instrument to alleviate the problem of chronic food insecurity in drought-prone areas of northern Ethiopia to the extent that resettlement was enshrined in the Constitution. More specifically, Sub-article 2 of article 10 of the 1987 Constitution (PDRE 1987) states:

> In order to create favourable conditions for development, the State shall ensure that human settlement patterns correspond to the distribution of national resources.

The military government implemented large-scale resettlement schemes, whose impacts have been hotly debated, until the present federal government took over power in May 1991. The present government has made resettlement a major component of its food security strategy. In fact, the Food Security Strategic document (FDRE 2002) states that:

> As a strategy of responding to the problems of highland degradation, population and small farm size in moisture deficit areas, programs will be effected to resettle farmers in suitable, under-utilised areas [....] The resettlement program will have a positive effect on food security in that under-utilised land will be brought to economic use resulting in the improvement of the welfare of the resettled people, and contributing to economic growth.

The current resettlement program has been underway since the beginningof 2003 and has been implemented in four regions of the country, namely The Amhara National Regional State (ANRS), the Oromia National Regional State (ONRS), the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) and the Tigray National Regional State (TNRS).[1] Although almost all regions of the country have undergone periods of drought over the last ten years, these four regions were the most affected by recurrent droughts during the same period. These four regions constitute the densely settled, mixed-farming regions of the temperate and central highlands of the country and account for almost all the nation's agricultural production.[2] According to NCFSE (2003), in Ethiopia on the

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[1] With the change in government in 1991, on the basis of ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity, the country was divided into 9 semi-autonomous regional states, one federal capital (Addis Ababa) and one special administrative division (Dire Dawa).

[2] According to MEDaC (2000), these four regions account for about 86% of the country's population. More specifically, in 1999, the population of the ANRS, ONRS, SNNPRS and TNRS made up 25.9%, 35.2%, 19.6%,

average 6,166,452 people received relief food assistance yearly over the period 1994-2003. The regional distribution of the relief food assisted population over the same period reveals that 33%, 22.6%, 11.5%, and 17.9% were found in the ANRS, ONRS, SNNPRS and TNRS, respectively.

The objective of this paper is to examine resettlement programs implemented in Ethiopia under the military regime and the present government. The paper is based on a thorough review of existing empirical literature on resettlement programs in Ethiopia. The rest of this paper is organised in three sections. Section II provides background information on Ethiopian agriculture. Section III reviews the resettlement programs that the military regime and the present government implemented in response to recurrent droughts and famines in some parts of the country. The final section summarises the main findings of this paper and draws appropriate conclusions.

II. Background Information on Ethiopian Agriculture

As resettlement schemes in Ethiopia are closely linkedto the deterioration of livelihoods of the rural population and the low agricultural productivity in the traditionally settled highlands, a bit of highlight about the agricultural sector is in order so as to provide a proper perspective for the subsequent discussions.

Ethiopia, with a population of 70.7 million in 2003 is the third most populous country in Africa just behind Nigeria and Egypt (WIC 2003). About 55 percent of the population is believed to live below the poverty line of one dollar a day; in some regions of the country, this incidence of poverty is as high as 70 percent and close to 85 percent in the worst cases (OECD and ADB 2002). The Ethiopian economy is based on agriculture, which accounts for about 50% of GDP, 90% of exports, and 85%

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and 5.8% of the country's total population, respectively. The same source shows that the ANRS, ONRS, SNNPRS and TNRS account for 12.7%, 28.2%, 9%, and 4% of the total land area of the country.

of total employment (EPA 2003). Ethiopian agriculture is virtually small-scale, subsistence-oriented and crucially dependent on rainfall. About 90 percent of the country's agricultural output is generated by subsistence farmers who use traditional tools and farming practices (Omiti et al. 2000; EPA, 2003). Low productivity characterises Ethiopian agriculture. The average grain yield for various crops is less than 1 metric ton per hectare (Belay 2002). The livestock sub-sector plays an important role in the Ethiopian economy. The majority of smallholder farms depend on animals for draught power, cultivation and transport of goods. The sub-sector makes also significant contribution to the food supply in terms of meat and dairy products as well as to export in terms of hides and skins which make up the second major export category. However, the productivity the sub-sector is decreasing as a result of poor management systems, shortage of feed and inadequate health care services (Agricultural Research Task Force 1996).

Food insecurity is an enormous challenge to Ethiopia. In this connection, it is important to note that over the last three decades Ethiopian agriculture has been unable to produce sufficient quantities to feed the country's rapidly growing population (Belay 2004). As a result, the country has been increasingly dependent on commercial food imports and food aids. In recent years food aid has been accounting for a significant proportion of the total food supply in the country. For instance, Ethiopia received 726 640 metric tons of food aid yearly over the period 19852000 (FDRE 2002). This represents about 10 per cent of the national food grain production.

Recent studies on Ethiopian agriculture found that low technical inputs, outmoded farming practices, inappropriate polices, tenure insecurity, as well as the degradation of the environment and its productive potential are the underlying reasons for poverty, food insecurity and increased vulnerability to drought in the Ethiopian highlands (Shiferaw and Holden, 1998; Omiti et al. 2000; Girma 2001; MOIPAD 2001; MOFED 2002; Belay 2004). Agriculture in the Ethiopian highlands is dominated

by small scale mixed crop-livestock subsistence farms with an average land holding of only about one hectare per family (CSA 2002).[3] In these areas, the population growth rate is creating increasing pressure on land and other natural resources. In fact, more than 80 per cent of Ethiopia's population lives in the highlands where the population pressure on arable land has always been immense. The absence of technological development and the increasing inability of the non-farm sector to provide employment to the excess rural population have created a near total dependence of employment in the agricultural sector. This has resulted in smaller and fragmented individual land holdings which, in turn, led to the cultivation of marginal lands, such as steep slopes, hills, forest lands and permanent pasture lands and exacerbated the effects of recurrent droughts and famines (Belay 2004).

Environmental degradation is a major challenge in the Ethiopian highlands. The degradation mainly manifests itself in terms of lands where the soil has either been eroded away and/or whose nutrients have been taken out to exhaustion with very little recycling of organic materials such as manure and crop residues, deforestation and depletion of ground and surface water. All these are critical problems, which contribute to low agricultural productivity, poverty and food insecurity in the Ethiopian highlands (Benin and Pender 2002).

Soil degradation is one of the most serious environmental problems in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian highlands have been experiencing declining soil fertility and severe soil erosion due to intensive farming on steep andfragile lands and other factors attributed to population pressure. Soil erosion is a phenomenon, which mainly occurs in the highlands of Ethiopia (areas > 1500 meters above sea level) which constitute about 46 percent of the

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[3] It should be noted that the average land holding shows significant regional variations, with very small holdings in the northern and central parts of the country and relatively larger holdings in the south-most and east-most parts of the country (predominantly pastoral areas).

total area of the country, support more than 80 percent of the population, and account for over 95 percent of the regularly cultivated land and about 75 percent of the livestock population (Shiferaw and Holden 1998).[4] Erosion is most severe on cultivated lands averaging 42 MT per hectare per year on currently cultivated lands and 70 MT per hectare per year on formerly cultivated degraded lands (Hurni 1988). The latest land degradation estimates indicate that out of the 52 million hectares of land making up the highlands of Ethiopia, 14 million hectares are severely degraded, 13 million hectares are moderately degraded and 2 million hectares have practically lost the minimum soil cover needed to produce crops (DCI 1997). Soil erosion has caused several direct and indirect negative impacts. It has led to the degradation of agricultural land and consequent reduction in agricultural production thus exposing the population to food insecurity. According to EPA (2003), the amount of soil that Ethiopia loses annually due to water and wind erosion reaches 1.5 to 1.9 billion MT. Out of this, 45 percent occurs on crop farmlands and 21 percent occurs on overgrazed rangelands. This could have added about 1 to 1.5 million MT of grain to the country's harvest.

The forests and woodlands of Ethiopia are being reduced at an alarming rate. The cutting of trees and clearing of forests has been taking place over the centuries for purposes of getting more land for agriculture, for fuel wood, charcoal and for construction. Overgrazing is another cause of forest destruction and the prevention of natural regeneration. The forest cover that constituted 40 percent of the land in the 1930s has gone down to less than 4 percent at present. In 1990, the rate of deforestation was estimated at 200,000 hectares per year (WCMC 1991). There are a few remaining patches of forest found mostly in inaccessible areas. Other causes of degradation, particularly in

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[4] The favourable climate, moderate disease and pest problems make the highlands attractive to people and livestock.

areas of irrigated agriculture, are salinity and water logging. The problem of salinity has put out of production some 4,700 hectares of land in the Awash river basin (DCI 1997).

Some authors pointed out that in addition to environmental degradation, some traditional cultural practices are the breeding ground of famine because they contribute to soil erosion and degradation particularly under rising population pressure (Pickett, 1991; Legesse *et al*., 2002). These include: cultivation of cereal crops such as teff (*Eragrostis Abyssinica*) and wheat, which require the preparation of fine seedbeds; down slope ploughing to facilitate drainage; continuous cultivation of fields without any replenishment of soil nutrients; repeated tillage using the traditional ox-plough, which penetrates deep in to the soil; persistent overgrazing of land used for crops; and, cultivation of steep slopes and marginal areas. The traditional practices can consequently seriously weaken the ability of the system to cope with drought, so that widespread famine may occur if climate and other conditions are unfavourable.

Recurrent droughts and famines are Ethiopia's salient features and its permanent problem. A brief historical survey reveals that during the last two centuries, for a period of 40 to 50 years, the country had to live with regional or national famines (Gallais 1985). According to EM-DAT (2002), drought had affected on average about three million people each year between 1977 and 2001. Official Ethiopian government sources put the number of drought-affected people in 2002-2003 at fifteen million (EPA 2003). Records show that recurrent droughts have made the country a perpetual recipient of international assistance. However, it should be noted that food aid is a temporary solution to the chronic food shortage in the country. In this regard, the successive governments in Ethiopia have been implementing resettlement programs in view of reducing population pressure, environmental degradation, land fragmentation, poverty and chronic food insecurity in the highlands.

III. Resettlement Programs

In Ethiopia, government sponsored large-scale resettlement programs have been implemented since the early 1970s. These programs have been designed to move people from drought-stricken areas to supposedly more fertile and sparsely populated places of the country. Resettlement schemes were institutionalized with the establishment of the then Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) (now Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission), in 1974, following the 1973/74 famine. The RRC was mandated to deal with emergency situation and co-ordinate reliefand rehabilitation projects. It was also entrusted to establish resettlement schemes on the ground that they could help to attenuate the degenerating ecological crisis in the north. Through time these schemes were given immense political weight and were placed high on the government's agenda. In practice, resettlement sites were intended to be the main instruments for expanding the area under cultivation. Each resettlement site received government assistance for the first three years of its existence after which it was intended that it should form itself into a producer co-operative (RRC 1988). In the 1974-1984 period, 45,849 families mainly from Wollo and Tigray regions were resettled in various regions of Ethiopia under the auspices of RRC (Alemneh 1990). The Ten Year Development Plan (1984/85-1993/94) set a target to resettle a total of 194,000 households or 854,000 people by the end of the plan period (ONCCP 1984). According to the official document of the Ten Year Development Plan, the objectives of the resettlement program included: alleviating population pressure on land by transferring people from densely populated, drought-prone and degraded northern and central highland areas; resettling people displaced by natural and man made disasters; enhancing the agricultural development of sparsely populated but fertile areas; and settling nomadic pastoralists and the unemployed from urban

areas (ONCCP 1984).[5]

However, the pace of resettlement culminated following the 1984/85 famine. Soon after the enormous scale of the famine had become clear, the military rulers concluded that relief assistance alone, to the famine victims, no matter how big it could be, would not bring substantial and lasting improvement within the drought-stricken northern areas as long as the population and environmental conditions that had given rise to the famine remained. This view was further reinforced by the spontaneous movement of people out of the famine regions into the central and south-western parts of the country in search of relief assistance and new lands to settle on, respectively. Consequently, in response to the famine, the government adopted in October 1984 a massive emergency program. In November 1984, the government declared resolutely its intention to move and resettle 300,000 families consisting of about 1.5 million people from the food deficient areas of the North to regions like Keffa, Wollega and Illibabor within a year (Alemneh 1990). This huge state-sponsored resettlement venture was generally known as the 'Emergency Resettlement' program and was justified on economic, humanitarian and socio-ecological grounds. According to Clarke (1986), the intention of the Ethiopian Government through its emergency resettlement program was to maximize the benefits from a migration out of the northern famine areas while avoiding the worst dangers and problems involved in spontaneous movement of people, through its own organized resettlement program.

As already noted, all resettlement schemes were organised and implemented under the responsibility of the RRC. However, due to the massive nature of the emergency resettlement program, RRC could not implement it alone. As a result, it was organised

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[5] It should be noted that settlement farms that cultivated, 0.4%, of the total cultivated area at the beginning of the plan period (1984/85) were expected to see their share passing to 1.8% of the cultivated land at the end of the plan period (1993/94).

and implemented on a campaign basis under the overall direction of the Political Bureau of the then newly formed Workers Party of Ethiopia. Although the emergency resettlement program was conceived as a response to the famine crisis, policy makers generally viewed it as a once and for all measure to deal with the root causes of famine in the country (Teketel 1998). Its proponents argued that due to a long history of improper land use, the soil in the northern part of the country is overused, infertile and incapable of supporting the productive activities of the inhabitants. In view of these problems, it is was argued that relocating the people to fertile areas where there was plenty of rainfall, less demographic pressure on land, and no scarcity of cultivable land was a rational move (Clarke 1986; Getachew 1989; Alemneh 1990; Pankhurst 1990). The idea of resettlement is in principle sound in that in the long run, if properly planned and implemented, it would help tackle widespread environmental degradation and the country's structural dependence on foreign food aid. In fact, moving people away from overpopulated and famine affected areas would not only benefit those resettled, but it would also help the people who remained in the famine areas. The landscape in these areas would suffer less damage and would be better able after the drought to support the population that remained. Rehabilitation of the environment here would also be much easier if resettlement reduced the population pressure on the land, making the region less vulnerable to famine in the future.

The emergency resettlement program was implemented in the form of 'conventional' and 'integrated' settlement schemes. The conventional settlement schemes involve large-scale mechanised farms created on newly cleared and sparsely populated south-western lowlands. These schemes were organised from the very beginning on the basis of producers' co-operatives. According to Alemneh (1990), under these schemes peasants were transformed overnight into daily workers in a modern farm with little understanding of the modern farming involved. The only individual land the peasants owned under these schemes was a

small plot of 0.1 hectares around their homesteads. Available evidence shows that peasants under the conventional settlement schemes deeply resented the collectivisation forced upon them (Alemneh 1990; Pankhurst 1990; Teketel, 1998; Wolde-Selassie, 2002). In the integrated settlement schemes, peasants were placed within already existing, but sparsely populated peasant associations and were allocated land to farm individually. These settlement schemes were mainly located in the sparsely populated south-western highlands. Many of the resettlement schemes established during the emergency resettlement process were conventional types.

Because of the mounting criticisms and international pressure to halt the emergency resettlement program, the government announced the suspension of the program in March 1986. However, between November 1984 and March 1986, 594,190 family members were resettled in Illibabor, Wollega, Keffa, Gojjam and Gondar regions (Alemneh 1990). Pankhurst (1990) noted that the settler population was not composed merely of famine-victims. He further pointed out that although the official selection criteria included willingness, ability to partake in agricultural work, physical fitness and age limits for household heads, these criteria were not always adhered to, presented dilemmas, and were sometimes mutually contradictory. At present, there is evidence that although the emergency resettlement program was portrayed as a response to the famine, government officials and local authorities used it to further their hidden agenda (Pankhurst 1990; Comenetz and Caviedes, 2002; Wolde-Selassie 2002). In this connection, Pankhurst (1990) argued that the abuses of power by resettlement administering authorities in the course of the emergency resettlement process were observed at three levels: regional, local and peasant association.[6] At the regional level resettlement was sometimes

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[6] A Peasant Association is a territorial organisation with broad administrative and legal powers encompassing 800 hectares or more. The average PA membership is 250-270 families (households).

used to further local policies other than settling of famine-victims. These included moving people off slopes designated for reforestation, 'disposing' of urban unemployed who were suspected of being trouble makers, and sedentarizing pastoralists. At the local level, during the later phase of the program when the rains had arrived and willingness to move had decreased, regional targets were turned into quotas.[7] At the peasant association level, resettlement was used against people who were unable to pay taxes, and to 'solve' disputes arising from land re-allocations.

The emergency resettlement was strongly criticised by international donors and non-governmental organisations, engaged in the famine relief effort on the ground that it did not take important economic, social, cultural and environmental factors into account. Chief among the criticisms were:

- The program lacked preparedness, was implemented hastily and resulted in widespread suffering and mortality that occurred en route to resettlement sites and upon arrival (Kumar 1987; Cohen and Isaksson 1988; Getachew 1989; Kloos 1989; Teketel 1998; Wolde-Selassie 2002). In this connection, Dessalegn (2003) reported that in the course of the emergency resettlement process about 33 000 settlers lost their lives due to disease, hunger and exhaustion.
- The program resulted in land dispossession, decline of access to common property resources and deterioration of livelihoods for host populations (Dessalegn, 1988; Getachew 1989; Teketel 1998; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Dessalegn 2003; Gebre 2003). For instance, NCFSE (2003) noted that in some of the resettlement areas, particularly in Southwest Ethiopia, indigenous communities were instructed to abandon

[7] In fact, to implement the plan of the resettlement program, quotas were given to the drought-hit districts regarding the number of families that would ideally be drawn. In turn, each affected district instructed peasant association leaders in the recruiting of a specific number of families.

all their claims to use of natural forest resources as these changed hands to settlers. The host communities had resented this and the settlers were seen in a negative light.

- Some authors underlined that the resettlement program was driven more by the government's political imperatives than by perceived economic, social, humanitarian, and environmental objectives. In this respect, Kumar (1987) cited an article published on The Times on 11 October 1985, which stated that the main motive was to empty northern rebel niches of potential recruits by forcibly removing the population in the guise of resettlement. Some authors expressed views that were in complete agreement with the aforementioned line of reasoning (Cohen and Isaksson 1988; Milas and Abdel Latif 2000). Similarly, the Southern opposition groups attacked resettlement as a move to deprive the local ethnic groups of their land and used it to heighten ethnic tensions and build support for ethnically based opposition fronts (Milas and Abdel Latif 2000).
- Medical services were said to have been inadequate and death from diseases not found in settlers' home areas such as malaria, yellow fever, sleeping sickness was common (Getachew 1989; Kloos 1989; Alemneh 1990; Teketel 1998; Mengistu 1999; Wolde-Selassie 2002).
- Tensions between settlers and local people were reported to have been mounting as the settlers began to compete for some resources such as wood land, water, grazing lands (Getachew 1989; Pankhurst 1990; MOPAD, 2001; Comenetz and Caviedes 2002; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Dessalegn 2003; Gebre 2003). The problem was reported to have culminated into loss of lives and property damage as hostilities among settlers and host communities escalated. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the official document on the new resettlement program (NCFSE 2003) singled out the manner in which the emergency resettlement program was implemented as the root cause of ethnic conflicts that flare up from time to time in South and Southwest Ethiopia.

- The resettlement program engendered massive destruction of the country's forest resources and introduced intensive highland agricultural techniques in areas which have delicate soils calling for low population densities and the practice of shifting agriculture (Cohen and Isaksson 1988; Getachew 1989; Mengistu 1999; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Dessalegn 2003; Gebre 2003).
- The most important criticism on which there exists consensus is the fact that not all settlers were volunteers to quit their villages rather many were deported by force (Cohen and Isaksson, 1988; Comenetz and Caviedes 2002). There were also reports indicating that some family members were separated and resettled in different sites (Teketel 1998; Wolde-Selassie 2002). However, some authors pointed out that most peasants had left voluntarily, seeking, under the circumstances, the only available alternative for survival (Alemneh 1990; Pankhurst 1990). Pankhurst (1990) noted that large numbers of young people decided to leave their own areas out of a combination of 'push factors' in their home land and 'pull factors' in the resettlement areas. Among the former were land shortages, disputes with family and lack of opportunities to become self-sufficient producers; among the latter were aspirations to become independent and to see the world. Moreover, intense government propaganda played a crucial role (Teketel 1998). Government officials warned that a severe famine was imminent and that it would be difficult to provide relief assistance to all. Potential settlers were also told that a bright future awaited them in the resettlement areas.
- The resettlementsites were selected by high-level government officials on helicopter tours without adequate studies being undertaken concerning the development potential, soil, climatic, disease, surface and/or ground water, etc. conditions (Dessalegn 1988; Getachew 1989; Pankhurst 1990; Teketel 1998; Mengistu 1999; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Gebre 2003). It is worth noting that this issue was later found to be of

paramount importance to the extent that some of the resettlement sites were abandoned after large tracts of land were cleared and settlers were moved.

- The program faced chronic logistics shortage for the continuous support required till the settlers become self-sufficient (RRC 1988; Pankhurst 1990; Teketel 1998; Kassahun 2003).

As to the overall performance of the program, it leaves a lot to be desired. For instance, it has been recognised that the resettlement process was hastily conceived, poorly planned and executed, and it has resulted in considerable hardship to the settlers (Getachew 1989; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Gebre 2003). For instance, the mortality rate in the resettlement sites was higher than the national average (Getachew 1989; Kloos 1989). Moreover, the settlers were not free to decide whether to stay at the new sites or return to their original villages.[8] Rather, in an attempt to deter defections, settlers were subjected to restriction of travel and movement outside the settlement sites (Pankhurst 1990; Teketel 1998). Available evidence shows that most of the settlers returned to their place of origin after the 1991 government change (Teketel 1998; Mengistu 1999; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Dessalegn 2003; Gebre 2003). In sum, at present, there is consensus in the literature that the resettlement program did not live up to its expectations. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the government's effort to tackle the problems of land scarcity, famine, and ecological degradation in the highlands has resulted in the spread of these problems to regions which were previously unaffected (Dessalegn 1988; Alemneh 1990; Getachew 1989; Teketel 1998; Wolde-Selassie 2002; Gebre 2003).

With the exception of few isolated attempts to relocate people, planned resettlement was indefinitely suspended in the

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[8] Resettled households forfeited their user rights on land in their areas of origin and the land in question was reallocated by PA officials to landless members of the community.

years following the ousting of the military government. This was, among others, owing to a variety of reasons like the preoccupation of the present government with other priorities, the regionalisation policy that diminished possibilities for inter-regional relocation, and the effects of the traumatic experience of previous resettlement schemes (Kassahun 2003). Recently, however, the present government placed resettling people from drought-prone areas to areas where sufficient land and rainfall are available, high on its list of priorities. The government considers voluntary resettlement as a key strategy that would help realise the objectives of food security in the medium and long-term (MOFED 2002).

The official statements of the present government indicate that the voluntary resettlement programs that the government intends to implement are to be based on a well-conceived plan and with a well co-ordinated support. Given polices of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, the climate is unfavourable for inter-regional resettlement. Understandably, official government sources recommend that resettlement programs should in the first instance be conducted within regions rather than across regions (MOIPAD 2001). This view presupposes the availability of enough unused land suitable for settlers and their agricultural production techniques in each region. However, the reality is that most of the drought-prone areas are located in regions that have little or no uncultivated land suitable for resettlement. It is, therefore, obvious that most of the new resettlement sites will have to be located in either remote and/or inaccessible parts of the highlands or low lands that are sparsely populated and have vast areas of uncultivated land.[9] According to MOIPAD (2001), these areas do

[9] Dessalegn (2003) noted that the vast area of the country that is categorised as 'uncultivated' land has the following characteristics: it lies in arid or semi-arid ecology; it is used primarily as grazing land by the neighbouring peasantry or pastoralist communities because it is not suitable for peasant agriculture; it would require huge investment in water development, infrastructure, health and other social services to bring it under cultivation.

not possess development infrastructure and suffer from various health problems. Given this reality, the government (Federal government and/or regional) should put in place basic development infrastructure including schools, health facilities, roads and water systems in the selected resettlement sites before people are assisted to move.

The current resettlement scheme envisages relocating 440,000 households, involving approximately 2.2 million people, within three years (between 2003 and 2005) from drought-prone and chronically food insecure areas to potentially more productive, fertile and less populated parts of the country (NCFSE 2003). The number of households to be resettled in the first, second and third year was estimated at one hundred thousand, one hundred and fifty thousand, and one hundred and ninety thousand, respectively. The implementation of the resettlement program rests with the Regional governments, with the overall co-ordination given to the Department for Food Security at the Federal Ministry of Rural Development. With respect to funding of the program, 75 percent of the cost will be allocated from the federal budget for food security. This is matched by 20 percent contribution from the Regional funds and 5 percent from the respective host district budget (Feleke 2003).

From past experience, one can safely say that the current resettlement program would be an enormous challenge to the nation. This is mainly because it aims to relocate too many people in relatively shot time, puts tremendous requirement on resourcesand expertise, and requires finding the right source to cough up the money needed to undertake the program. Table 1 shows that the program requires an estimated total cost of 1.87 billion Birr (212.2 million US dollars), which the country cannot mobilize in the short run.[10] As a result, massive external support will be needed to undertake the program.

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[10] Birr is the Ethiopian national currency. Currently, the exchange rate is determined by inter-bank exchange of currencies and it is around 1 US Dollar = 8.8 Birr.

As noted earlier, in the current resettlement scheme peasants are resettled within their own regions where they will live together with people with the same ethnic, language and cultural backgrounds. According to the official statements of the government, unlike the resettlement program of the military regime, under the current program, settlers, if unhappy about their new place of settlement, could return to their original homeland. It is also important to note that the land use rights of settled families in areas of origin would remain unchanged for three years to give the settlers the opportunity to return or to leave part

TABLE 1. Settler Population and Cost Estimate (in Thousands of Birr)

Settler population & cost category	Regions				Total for the four regions
	Tigray (TNRS)	Amhara (ANRS)	Southern Region (SNNPRS)	Oromiya (ONRS)	
Settler population					
Total number of households	40,000	200,000	100,000	100,000	440,000
Total number of people	200,000	1,000,000	500,000	500,000	2,200,000
Cost Category ('000 Birr)					
Household benefit packages[1)]	66,800	331,000	165,500	165,500	728,800
Infrastructure development[2)]	14,280	70,080	31,500	31,500	147,360
Transportation	18,000	100,000	50,000	55,000	223,000
Credit assistance[3)]	40,000	200,000	100,000	100,000	440,000
Warehouse & grinding mill					167,000
Capacity building, etc.[4)]					121,649
Administration					5,000
Contingency					34,720
Grand Total					1,867,529

1) Cost of food items, household utensils, farm implements, hand tools and seeds.
2) Cost required for the provision of services such as health care, water supply, veterinary, education.
3) Credit to be extended to settlers, for the purchase of oxen, with a maturity period of five years.
4) Capacity building, information exchange, procurement of drugs & equipment for health posts, purchase of vehicles.

Source: NCFSE, 2003.

of their family behind while preparing the resettlement farm for a permanent living (NCFSE 2003). People moving under the resettlement program would receive two hectares of land, a soft loan of 1000 Birr per household for the purchase of farm oxen, and food rations or the cash equivalent until the first harvest after which they would be expected to be self-sufficient and independent of government assistance (Feleke 2003). It should be noted that given the previous experience, the one-year period is not enough for the settlers to become self-sufficient.

As can be seen from Table 2, the fact that the emergency resettlement program was hastily conceived and implemented and that it failed to take into consideration the basic requirements of resettlement schemes explain why it was a notable failure. As to the current resettlement program, it is too early to evaluate its outcomes, partly because it was launched recently, and partly because there is virtually no information, at least in the public domain, about the execution and progress of the program. However, the international community, Non-governmental organisations and the local press raised some points of concern about the current resettlement program. For instance, EDC (2003) observed that in some of the resettlement sites there is no suitable land for agriculture. Similarly, Dessalegn (2003) noted that many of the resettlement sites are the same ones that the military government used for its ill-fated resettlement program in the 1980s; they include environments with insufficient rain and health hazards to highland farmers and their livestock.

An important factor for successful resettlement programs is the availability of social services such as health, education, road, water, etc. at the resettlement sites before relocating people. In this connection, the official document on resettlement underlines that no movement of people should start before confirmation of fulfilment of the pre-conditions at both ends (sending and receiving districts) (NCFSE 2003).[11] Available evidence shows

[11] The document in question states that the following conditions, among others, should be checked before moving people: determination of

TABLE 2. Summary of the Salient Features of the Emergency and the Current Resettlement Programs.

Features	Emergency resettlement program	Current resettlement program
Planning	inadequately planned and poorly conceived	relatively fairly planned in advance
Coordination	coordinated by a central government organ (centralized)	executed by regional governments (decentralized)
Selection of resettlement sites	made by high level government officials without properly assessing conditions in the resettlement sites	made by multidisciplinary teams of professionals
Location of resettlement sites vis-a-vis the settlers' area of origin	inter-regional (across regions), resulting in tensions among different ethnic groups and causing widespread resentment	intra-regional (within the regional states), with little or no ethnic tensions expected to happen
Recruitment of settlers	the majority of the settlers were recruited without their consent	voluntarily
Transportation of settlers to the resettlement sites	executed hastily, in a campaign form, resulting in the death of people and separation of family members	properly handled, with little loss of human life
Nature of resettlement	most of the settlers were forced to join producers cooperatives (forced collectivization)	settlers established themselves as independent farmers with a land holding of at least 2 hectares per family
Assistance to settlers in the resettlement sites	food rations until they become self sufficient	food rations until the first harvest and working capital
Land use rights of settled families in areas of origin	forfeited automatically to peasant associations	maintained for three years
Civil rights of settlers	settlers were not allowed to leave resettlement sites	settlers are free to go back to their areas of origin if they so wish

minimal service standards as triggers for receiving districts; consultation with regions and districts; public education in beneficiary districts; selection of representatives to check out sites; public posting of potential land in hosting districts; public consultation in hosting districts; visits by representatives of migrants and district administration to check out progress on infrastructure, preparation of site, etc.; in host districts, completion of basic infrastructure, selection of skilled farmers and advisors to new migrants.

that in most of the resettlement sites regional government officials relocated people before putting adequate essential social services at resettlement sites (Abraham 2003; Dessalegn 2003; EDC 2003; UN 2004; USAID 2004). It is also shocking to learn that in some resettlement sites the food aid (ration) distributed to the settlers was insufficient and/or delayed (Dessalegn 2003; CRDA 2004; USAID 2004). Reports indicate also that many of the resettlement sites in Amhara, Oromiya, and Southern Nations Nationalities, Peoples regional states are inaccessible by road during the main rainy season (EDC 2003; USAID 2004).

Dessalegn (2003) summarised the anomalies of the current resettlement program as follows:

> There are disturbing reports emerging from NGOs, donor agencies and international organisations that the resettlement program has been launched in haste and without adequate preparation, that it is not exactly voluntary, that peasants have been given false promises to entice them to register for resettlement, and that settlers are experiencing serious hardships due to lack of basic services such as health and clean water. Some of the resettlement sites do not receive adequate rainfall, and others contain residents who have been on food aid for quite some time.

On the basis of lessons learnt from the past resettlement schemes in Ethiopia, the present government's plan to resettle 2.2 million people over a three-year period appears to be an ambitious target. This is precisely because given the existing low level of institutional capacity at regional and district levels and the need to put in place infrastructure and essential social services in the resettlement sites, the three-year period is too short to implement the plan successfully. It is, therefore, imperative to undertake a mid-term review of the program to track progress and readjust the target in light of the outcomes of the review.

There should be no doubt at all that, against the

background of recurrent droughts, mounting population pressure and ecological degradation in the traditionally settled highlands, planned voluntary resettlement could be a strategy worth considering. However, it requires careful planning, comprehensive feasibility study, adequate funding, and above all the settlers should be resettled of their own free will. Moreover, any new resettlement initiative needs to learn from the mistakes of the emergency resettlement program of the military regime and build on the strategies of spontaneous migrants, who often prioritise establishing good relations with local people.

In general, if the current resettlement program is to become successful, it should be executed in a very careful and gradual manner by taking into account, among others, the following issues:

- suitability of the new site for human and animal habitation (there should not be marked climatic difference between the abandoned site and the new one) and the selection of the resettlement sites should be done by competent and experienced people on purely professional ground, without any political interference;
- availability of adequate and reliable rainfall, fertile soil for production purposes, adequate unoccupied land, sufficient water for human and animal consumption and accessibility of the site;
- the willingness of the indigenous population to cohabit with the incoming settlers and the linguistic, religious, socio-cultural and other differences as well as similarities between the local people and the settlers;
- provision (either freely or in credit forms) of food, shelter, medical care, household utensils, farm inputs such as fertilisers, seeds, farm tools etc. at least till the settlers become self-sufficient;
- the program should be flexible enough and lend itself for modifications to account for problems faced and new realities;

- it should be truly voluntary;
- it should be environmentally friendly and must recognize the rights of the indigenous population (should not be a threat to the host population);
- settlers should be empowered and their representatives should be allowed to visit the would be their resettlement site and check whether or not the site is accessible, the necessary infrastructure is in place, and basic services such as safe water, health care, schools, grain mills etc. are readily available.

IV. Conclusion

Voluntary resettlement of people from drought-prone and severely degraded areas to areas of sufficient rainfall and land could be one of the potential solutions to the problems of recurrent droughts/famine and land scarcity. However, it is imperative that it is planned carefully and executed in a very prudent and gradual manner by taking into account a wide range of socio-economic, cultural, institutional, environmental, and political issues. It is also important to note that resettlement should be a process, starting as a pilot and replicated at a wider scale if proved successful. Resettlement should not be viewed as a panacea to the structural problems of drought, famine, population pressure and land degradation in Ethiopia. Much emphasis should rather be given to measures that deal with the root causes of all these problems, which necessitated the resettlement of the rural population. Considering the current state of affairs in the agricultural sector, it is imperative that the country's development strategies be geared towards the attainment of food self-sufficiency with due emphasis being paid to the conservation, rehabilitation and sustainable use of natural resources. The strategies should also consider the nation's rapidly growing population.

Given the severity of land degradation in the country, it is imperative that, in many parts of the country, appropriate soil and

water conservation measures be popularised. These measures should take in to account the various socio-economic, agro-climatic, institutional and cultural environments of the target population so as to promote sustainable land use and attain food self-sufficiency at a national level. This could be materialised through government support and the participation of the public in physical and biological conservation efforts. Moreover, under the existing conditions, special efforts must be made to slow down the growth rate of the population, by providing effective family planning services and education, if economic development is to catch up with the surging economic demands of the population.

It is quite evident that resettlement alone would not provide sustainable and lasting solution to the chronic problems of environmental degradation, spiralling population growth, recurring cycle of droughts/famines, and low agricultural productivity in the highlands. It is equally important to consider other development options that will help absorb a significant proportion of the population out of agriculture. This would call for, among others, creating an enabling environment for private and public organisations to invest in non-agricultural sectors in rural areas, providing favourable conditions for strong rural-urban linkages that encourage mobility of the farming population, developing rural infrastructure, as well as organising efficient input, output, and financial marketing systems.

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