

DEVELOPMENTAL PARADOX IN ETHIOPIA: LARGE SCALE AGRICULTURE AND ITS IMPACT

Gubaye Assaye Alamineh¹, Kumilachew Siferaw Anteneh²

ABSTRACT

Large scale agriculture is being presented by the Ethiopian government with recommendation of international bodies. The government adopted and implemented large scale agriculture to bring long lasting development via the democratic developmental state ideology. Taking the Ethiopian government development goal which is based on large scale agriculture on one hand and assessing its impacts on indigenous communities via the concept of sustainable development on the other hand, this study tried to assess the actual outcomes of the state project based on secondary sources. The study shows that the objective of implementing large scale agriculture in the lowland parts of the country emanated from the desire of exploitation of the untapped resources and extending state's encroachment to the area. The impacts of such project have been characterized by the destruction of natural resources, the disintegration of socio-economic organization, and the erosion of the culture and cosmology of indigenous people.

Keywords: Commercialization, agriculture, indigenous community, land acquisition, impacts

¹ Lecturer, Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University

² Lecturer, Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University

INTRODUCTION

The convergence of modern world economic crisis with continuing food and energy crisis has generated an agitation of large –scale land acquisition and a serious of social and political explosions across the global south (Makki, 2014:79). To overcome the global economic crisis, through past decade, there has been a spectacular increase in large-scale land acquisitions for the intentions of having right to use to the means of producing natural resource commodities. To overcome this threat “within just one year, from March 2008 to April 2009, about 40 million hectares of land changed hands; the latest figures from the World Bank suggest that this was twenty times higher than the average annual level of land transfers for the preceding forty years” (Wolford, W. et al., and 2013)

The capturing -phrase, “global land grab”, passes on to the hurry for commercial land in Africa and elsewhere by private and sovereign investors for the production and export of food crops as well as bio-fuels, in which the land deals involved stand to benefit the investors at the expense of host countries and their populations. The occurrence has paying attention of the international activist organizations and the world media for the reason that much of the land transferred is in poor and food insecure countries that have long been reliant on Western financed food aid and other support programs (Rahmato,2011).

The argument on the global land run has been subjugated by those who have focused on what they believe to be the exploitive nature of land investments and the loss of essential resources by rural populations. This approach has been supported by international activist organizations which have argued that the acquisition of land by foreign entities in poor and vulnerable countries creates a menace to their economies and livelihoods and puts at risk their chances of achieving food security and improved nutrition. The more controversial description of this line of thinking speaks of a new form of agricultural neo-colonialism, and accuses the international financial institutions of promoting aggressive land grabs in poor countries through support to investors and host governments (Makki, 2014).

The other school of thought examines the structural changes that large-scale land transfers will bring about in host countries, particularly in the agricultural sector and the direction these changes will take in terms of class divisions and social polarization. Borras and Franco (2010) are critical of the liberal approach and contend that the debate should examine what they call the political dynamics of land property relations and changes in these relations, and give particular attention to class analysis. The impact of the global land grab, they argue, is to bring about changes in land property relations supports the (re)accumulation of ‘wealth and power’ in the hands of the dominant classes, especially bourgeoisies, capitalists, state bureaucrats and village chiefs.

The third line of argument which is supported by “liberal and pragmatic opinion” affirms mammoth threat in the global rush for land but understands that there are substantial chances that could benefit host governments and their populations. The hopes of the future here consider that given “responsible decision-making and equally responsible investment, the costs and damages assumed to be inherent in land grabbing could be minimized”, pave the way to a situation where both “host countries and investors could benefit in equal measure”. Supporters of large-scale investment focus on the necessary for improved land administration, improved quality and transparency of land

transactions and greater institutional capacity of host countries for sound contracts, oversight and follow-up. Thus, they give emphasis on the significance of instituting resonance guidelines and standards for land allocations and land use, and an effective code of conduct to govern relations between investors on the one hand, and communities and host governments on the other (Makki, 2014).

We want to align the third line of thinking with the concept of development and want to assess the impacts of large-scale agriculture in Ethiopia. The term ‘development’ has come to being since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972), as a more abstract and inclusive concept than that of growth. Over the past decades, and particularly since the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), and the UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992), as connections have been made between the environment, culture and socio-economic issues of poverty and degradation. The concept of sustainable development was recognized the need to balance economic and social progress with the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources. Later in Johannesburg Summit of 2002, the concept of sustainable development has widened to include the essential of social justice and the alleviation of poverty (Robinson & Picard, 2006). Having such definition and conceptualization of development in mind, let me present the impacts of large-scale Agriculture on the lives of the indigenous people to check whether the development slogan of Ethiopian government practical exist or not.

THE DYNAMICS OF LARGE-SCALE AGRICULTURE IN ETHIOPIA

The Ethiopian government and international organizations such as the World Bank (WB), have recommended the commercialization of land and the transfer to large scale agriculture as being an indispensable measure for agricultural modernization and to the enhancement of production effectiveness which will direct to amplified food production and economic growth (World Bank, 2010). As WB suggested, population growth in the developing countries will go ahead to augmented “demand for food products, expanding urbanization, and rising incomes which needs to be met by bringing more land into farming and by improving productivity”. As other scholars worldwide, the WB’s finale is that Africa will benefit greatly as it has “plentiful potential farmland and by closing the productivity gap on the ones under cultivation”. Accepting the WB’s claim, the Ethiopian government also proves that there is abundance of “unused” land for investors to function capably without posing a danger to the livelihood of smallholders. As different studies attested, however, the rights of smallholders to land have not been clearly respected during the time of implementation (Mesfin, 2013).

To attain the stated objective, Ethiopian government has been getting an increased amount of consideration in the ongoing dialogue of the ‘global land rush’ or ‘global land grab’. Domestic as well as foreign investors carry on to search for leases for new, large-scale agricultural projects on Ethiopia’s perceived abundant and available fertile lands. The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), officially possess all the land in the country with unlawful ways and introducing large scale land acquisition aiming at achieving food security through getting foreign exchange earnings to import food with a growing agricultural export economy and also facilitate technology and knowledge transfer to current smallholders in order to boost domestic yields and modernize the

sector. In actual context, land leasing is a politically stimulating topic given that land is a highly precious asset in Ethiopia (Nalepa, 2013).

The present-day processes of commercialization have to be situated within context of differentiation notion of historical development. The dynamics of commercialization have acquired a divergent but interconnected socio-spatial pattern that maps into older imperial core-periphery hierarchies. In the central highland where traditions of peasant solidarity were strong and where both rulers and ruled shared ethno-religious links, the peasantry was able to institute strong rights to land considered on a kinship basis. While, in the territories integrated into the empire in the late 20th c, greedy expansion destabilized the customary rights of large segment of the autonomous peasantry and reduced them to the status of dependent tenants (Makki, 2012; Fana, 2016). The lowlands contaminated with tropical human and livestock diseases and characterized by unpredictable rains are difficult for settled smallholder agriculture to adapt and so that it has been areas of shifting cultivation and agropastoralism. Thus, significant and continual state extraction was feasible merely on the highlands. The imperial government had exercised commercial extraction from the lowlands in the form of Slavery and Ivory and sometimes in the form of plundering of resources (Fana, 2016).

The 1974 Revolution that deposed the imperial regime, implemented a historical land reform in the country which re-configured the previous socio-spatial hierarchies and created a relatively uniform smallholder agrarian order across the country. But by vesting all land in the state had in actuality alienated it from their customary control and the local social integuments in which it was embedded. State elites were after this given “plenipotentiary” powers to determine the distribution and form of land use (Makki, 2012).

In terms of the land-governance systems, there are great differences between of the imperial and the Dergue regimes. The royally government approved all land in the lowlands as assets of the emperor and the royal family. The local community did not have any land possession right and could be alienated without any compensation (Fana, 2016). According to the “Land to the Tiller” slogans of the Ethiopian Student Movement, the Dergue proclaimed rural and urban land in 1975 as state owned and reallocated land with regular interval. But in the lowlands the change did not bring radical reform. It was manifested simply as private commercial farms simply altered possessions into state farms at the time, and new commercial farms, including in the western lowlands, were established in the 1980s (Abebe 1990; Fana,2016).

The present policy thoughts and practice shares major threads with this historical inclination towards the lowlands (Fana, 2016). The up-and-coming social form of market dependence has not been homogeneous across Ethiopia. It is characterized by distinguished pattern of smallholder commercialization which is characterized by labour and capital intensive in the highlands while mechanized agriculture attribute by low labour intensive over huge areas of land in the lowlands. The first is characterized by high population densities, small farm sizes, and intensive forms of cultivation and attribute by tenure relations. Thus, the program of smallholder commercialization has been implemented to get higher production by supporting it with large capital investments to enclaves that entail little if any displacement of smallholders (Lavers 2012; MOFED 2006).

The program of smallholder commercialization occupies a vital place in the government's overall development agenda until the early 2000s. The 2011–15 Growth and Transformation Plan (the third GTP) envisages a tripling of the number of farmers receiving extension services and a doubling of the production of staple crops from 18.08 to 39.5 million metric tons. It anticipates a minimum annual growth rate of 8.1 percent for this agricultural sector and ambitiously proclaims its aim to ensure the country will be food self-sufficient by 2015 and a middle-income country by 2025 (Makki, 2014).

However, despite the fact that smallholder commercialization is in principle reliable with the distributive land reform of 1975, the federal republic has been weakening some of its key provisions in the name of delegating the administration of land to the constituent regional governments. This has permitted for the irregular spread of informal land markets and the increasing occurrence of landlessness, which is amalgamating social inequalities related to the ever-diminishing size of farm plots in the face of demographic pressures. "Titling and certification of individual use rights" has been extensively put into practice and peasants at this particular time lease up to 50 percent of their plot for limited periods of time (Ibid).

In recent times, the emphasis of EPRDF government has been on spinning the lowlands into locations for "large-scale, export-oriented agriculture" that can also put forth competition on smallholders elsewhere. This orientation is initiated by a belief in economies of scale for which large inputs of machinery, capital, and chemicals are a necessary prerequisite. Accordingly, as an alternative of the coalition between smallholders and the state visualized in the highlands, the planned coalition in the lowlands involves an agreement between the state and large-scale investors. The up-and-coming social relationship is for that reason one of vertical class polarization rather than horizontal smallholder differentiation. To achieve the intended objective, the government has given special attention to national and foreign investors, and has carried out infrastructural projects to facilitate large-scale commercial agriculture. This has included considerable investments in transportation and communications links, and network of roads presently ties all the regions to the capital. In addition, investment codes have also been liberalized to decrease the minimum capital requirement for foreign investors and provisions for the unrestricted repatriation of profit and asset sales have been instituted (Makki, 2014).

To deal with the flow of foreign investments, in January 2009 the government instituted the Agricultural Investment Support Directorate, which acts as the main organization for bargaining lease accords on land above 5,000 hectares. The Federal Land Bank was also established to provide as a storehouse of land designated for leasing. By the year 2011, about 3.5 million hectares corresponding to 50 percent of the total land at present under smallholder cultivation; had been transferred to the Land Bank (MOARD 2009). More or less all the land so far given to investors has come from the "four administrative regions of the western and eastern lowlands: Benishangul-Gumuz; Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples; Gambella; and Afar" (Makki, 2014).

WHY EPRDF ADAPT COMMERCIALIZATION OF AGRICULTURE?

In the early 2000s two important incidences occurred in EPRDF government system; the first was the split within TPLF which created a political shock in 2001 and ended up by the elimination of the TPLF's "left-wing", and the

second is the 2005 well known and contentious elections in the history of the country. These incidences were the indicators for the need for policy reform in the EPRDF governance system. These happenings clearly indicated that EPRDF did not survive by basing itself only the smallholder agriculture (Chinigò, and Fantini, 2015). Thus, the 2010 (2010-12014) GTP policy document outlines the new strategy for agricultural commercialization in Ethiopia. Under the GTP the “agricultural strategy will direct on placing major effort to support the intensification of marketable farm products; both for domestic and export markets, and by small and large farmers”. Large-scale commercial agriculture and commercialization of smallholder farming are equally supported, as the latter “will continue to be the major source of agricultural growth”. Agricultural commercialization has been taken as the main political priority for fast rural transformation, and towards making Ethiopia a middle-income country by 2025. As such, achieving food security through the direct support of the smallholder sector becomes a secondary (EPRDF, 2010).

From the ruling elite point of view, supporting fast agricultural growth through commercialization is the only feasible solution to sustain the country’s transformation in the long run. While maintaining a system of state ownership that guarantees the ruling party with greater leverage over land allocation, resource distribution and control of the countryside, agricultural commercialization is underpinned by a project of social engineering with clear political objectives. This reflects an on-going dynamic of state formation to the extent that the negotiation of land and local resources becomes central to the constitution of citizenship in the rural areas. Liberal concerns about strengthening tenure security and sustaining market development by means of involving the private sector, intervene into a context where the state, and particularly the local administrative structures, has increasing powers over land and resources allocation. People negotiate the rural space by trying to validate their claims to land and natural resources through these overlapping, although sometimes incompatible, “normative systems” and, depending on their relative position vis-à-vis the local power, elaborate, challenge or contest the political project behind it (Chinigò, and Fantini, 2015).

The present-day agrarian transformations in Ethiopia reveals a dynamic of “*glocalisation*” to the degree that agricultural commercialization is implemented by means of rescaling normative arrangements at supra-national level; through the selective involvement of global capital in large-scale commercialization; as well as downwards to regions, Wereda, and Kebele; through the support to commercialized smallholders. The peculiarity of the Ethiopian case is that the land policy is closely related to the plan of state building, as it indicates the attempt of the ruling elite to institutionalize its power by means of the territorialisation of state rule in the rural milieu, and by an increasing involvement of global capital (Ibid)

IMPACTS OF LARGE-SCALE AGRICULTURE IN ETHIOPIA

Here, we try to assess the impacts of large-scale agriculture in Ethiopia in particularly by giving due attention from the indigenous perspective. Addressing the socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts is essential to indicate whether commercial agriculture project is relevant to be continued or not.

Displacement and Its Outcome

In past years, consecutive Ethiopian governments had tried population resettlement schemes to varying degrees. The Derg's villagization and relocation venture is often recalled for its inconceivable scale, as well as for its lack of articulated planning, inefficient in implementation and the misery and loss it occurred on relocated populations. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), brought jointly against the ill political intentions and high social costs of this effort. In early 2000s, however, population relocation schemes were revived and reintegrated into Ethiopia's food security and rural development strategies. But the implementation of villagization had to remain on paper till 2009 (Fana, 2014). Then after, the Ethiopian government planned to "villagize" around 1.5 million individuals by mid 2015 as per the GTP. The aim of villagization scheme according to EPRDF government was to provide social services through the flocks of households spread within a five-kilometer radius to a common village. Ethiopian diasporas and international activists have opposed the scheme, arguing that it is "a sugar-coated" name for the forced resettlement of local people to make way for land investments. But the government counter arguing that the two; land transfers and villagization; are completely independent (Ibid).

As different literature attested that, to implement large-scale agricultural investments, the government has performed on a vast program of clearing the land together with resettling indigenous communities in designated villages across the lowlands. Federal proclamations 455/2005 and Council of Ministers Regulations 135/2007 have empowered regional and district administrations to resettle peasants on the basis of a vaguely defined "public purpose." Different literature indicates that almost all lowland reallocations of the indigenous people occurred before the land has been given to the investors. Even though the resettlements have not been completely dispossessed of access to land, by distancing them away from the riverbanks that are being made available to investors, the program to resettle them in villages is depriving the indigenous communities of their extensive commons and grazing land. As the various findings affirmed that the intention of resettlement is to create conducive environment for the local people to get social services like school, clinic, pure water, electricity and other administrative services from the government. But there is no any evidence that supports the government claim rather defiantly (Fana, 2016; Makki 2014; Buffavand, 2016).

The resettlement programs have given only emphasize to the general outcomes of dispossession and enclosures, and although the pledged schools, clinics, and clean water materialize, do not mitigate the structural reliance and liability caused by the concentration of land in the hands of a few large-scale producers. The general substitution of indigenous food crops by cash crops for outside markets is only one of the indications of this structural uncertainty (Makki 2014; Tsegaye, 2016). The long-term goals of Ethiopian government have been its actively engaging in the politically and economically expensive villagization program indicates to make over short-lived forms of livelihood into permanent form of cultivation and/ or livestock rearing, hand in hand with applying "social engineering". In this process, there is an assumption that indigenous people would "benefit from increased productivity and improved social service delivery, and the state could more easily govern the territory and population. The Ethiopian government is criticized on how the program is being implemented rather than what the objectives are. Therefore, there seems to be implicit accord in the need to rationalize natural resource use in the lowlands (Fana, 2014). Studies

in Gambella clearly affirm that villagization is the precondition for large scale investment. For instant the fact that discovered by Human Rights Watch (2012) attests this as illustrated here under;

Residents of six communities told Human Rights Watch that government officials informed them that the underlying reason for villagization is to provide land to investors. One farmer said that during the government's initial meeting with his village, woreda officials told them: "We will invite investors who will grow cash crops. You do not use the land well. It is lying idle.

Even though the 1994 Constitution approved that pastoralists and agro-pastoralists "have a right not to be displaced from their own lands" and consequent announcements affirmed that those relocated have to be appropriately remunerated. The evicted peasants are compensated in money rather than through a land substitute, acquiring new farmland has proven to be difficult, contradict the principal discourse about the availability of wide expanses of empty farmland (Fana, 2016; Makki, 2014). De facto unused/ empty land there is little if any certification is presented and titling has so far taken place, are not afforded even the minimal protections stipulated by federal law. The main argument of existing laws remarks that "communal holding rights may be subject to privatization at any time without the consent of the communities concerned", and that there is a confusion in legal provisions as to whether or not communally held land is to be compensated (Tamrat, 2010). The displaced indigenous people exposed to marginalization and exclusion, and many are obligated to look for seasonal employment on new commercial farms where their knowledge and skills are consistently low-cost. Most of the investors and commercial agriculture companies preferred to employ outside the indigenous people since they are considered inexperienced and unfit to the so called modern working environment (Buffavand, 2016; Tsegaye, 2016; Makki, 2014).

There are various arguments concerning the villagization programme in addition its contribution to the LSLAs by "disabling the agency of members of the local community by making them legible, governable, and controllable by the state". It has the potential to substitute old ways of life with settled ox-plough farming and at the same time place each household under nearer inquiry of the kebeles (the lowest administrative level), development teams and one-to-five teams, a structured below the kebele, and the police. This augments the state's capacity to follow up and control and minimizes the local community's aptitude to negatively counter to the LSLAs (Fana, 2016:19). Thus, from the above argument one can figure out that villagization is a process and mechanism of state apparatus to control the volatile lowland population in addition to make the land free for investment.

Taming of Space and Social Ecology

In order to substantiate these large-scale enclosures, the government, the World Bank, and agribusiness investors have increasingly arranged virtual ideas of empty space/ unused land. The bases for this argument are the relatively sparse population of the western and eastern lowlands, averaging about 30 persons per square kilometer, and the reality that agro-pastoralists inhabit a great amount of the national territory although they constitute only 11 percent of the total population. But this one-dimensional conception of the social and ecological reality of the lowlands is deeply misleading and obscures the ways in which space is constituted through social relations and material practices just as much as social relations are spatially constructed (Buffavand; 2016; Makki, 2014; Tsegaye, 2016).

Various people/ community organize and understand space in unique ways, and the modes of appropriating space necessarily vary across time and cultures. The spatial organization of pastoralist societies, which occupy different parts of land at different times of the year, is profoundly different from the ways in which space is conceptualized and organized in agrarian empires, where power tends to coagulate into centers and progressively recede toward its peripheries. Agrarian empires have, in turn, a different conception of space from those of modern nation-states that are defined by their boundaries rather than their centers (Anderson 1991). The discourses of “terra nullius” invariably squashed and deform the variable production of space, intentionally bewildering the particular ways in which the social relations of village or pastoral communities are specialized (Buffavand; 2016; Makki, 2014). Makki (2014) justified the type of social organization, adaptive strategy of nomads and agro-pastoral of Ethiopia as follows;

In the nomadic and agropastoral zones of the eastern and western lowlands, for instance, transhumance is generally characterized by household ownership of livestock and communal appropriation of pastures. The migratory cycles are typically wide-ranging so that wherever water fails to come to the land, people and animals move to water, and the seasonal movement from one pasture to another means that land is never a fixed possession. Social organization in these societies is consequently spatially extensive rather than intensive. The livelihood of the indigenous communities in these lowlands is determined by the availability of pasture and water, and access to the village or pastoral commons is central to their subsistence and survival strategies. Their kinship patterns emphasize the breadth rather than the depth of their connections.

Unlike the argument forwarded by the World Bank and the Ethiopian government, the arid and semiarid lowland parts of Ethiopia is place for grazing, ritual, cultural construction and place of worship for the indigenous people. This controversial view is also illustrated by Buffavand (2016) as here under in her Lower Omo Valley study;

The development processes impose a separation between nature and culture, including the sense of the sacred, upon communities for which ‘living, non-living, and often times supernatural beings are not seen as constituting distinct and separate domains’. They break the continuity between these domains, and the local people react by reaffirming it. The Mela appeal to mythical beings while the government appears to obliterate all indigenous meanings attached to the land (483).

Thus, the discourses of no one’s land normally ignore the particular ways in which space is socially created; the surrounding natural habitat is likewise reductively imagined as a motionless backstage for the recitation of human history. The same actions that seek to instrumentally rationalize land use detached the land from the wider fauna and flora that compose the ecosystem, spinning nature into a “fetishized and commodifiable” resource. The biodiversity of the regions beleaguered for enclosures are, therefore, viewed as external to the development process and assigned an essentially passive role. Under such situation, the general shift from “smallholder-based polyculture to a capital- and chemical-intensive monoculture” is probable to hasten biodiversity loss at the same time shifting the trouble of environmental costs against communities (Makki, 2014; Fana, 2016).

Deforestation and its Aftermath

The other consequence of large-scale commercialization agriculture in Ethiopia is deforestation. Large scale agriculture has been implemented via clearing vast areas of forests in western and eastern lowland of lands. This is manifested in what has already become known in the Gambella region, one of the major areas of large-scale land alienations. The region comprises on the dense carbon-rich rain forest of the south west, the source of livelihood for many indigenous communities and wildlife. This forest composed the second largest area of over land mammal migration in the world and is believed to be one of the most important biodiversity regions in the world, in large part because it lies at the intersection of the Sudan-Guinea savannah biome and the Somali-Masai biome. An important ecological feature of the region is its vast wetland areas and the four river systems that drain the wider basin and sustain over 110 fish species, six of which are endemic to the region. With little regard to this ecological heritage and the vital ecosystem services that wetlands and forests provide, the regional government of Gambella has ceded parts of the “formally designated national park, protected area and wildlife sanctuary” to private investors (Rahmato 2011; Makki, 2016).

The large-scale agriculture does not give due attention to environmental degradation. Since 1990 it devastated an estimation of 100, 000 hectares of forest in the region, with incalculable loss of biodiversity and species extinction. Comparable ecological intimidations be present in the other regions nominated as “terra nullius spaces”, including the Benishangul-Gumuz administrative region, where the Renaissance Dam is currently being constructed near the headwaters of the Blue Nile, and the Lower Omo Valley in the southwest, which has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its unique cultural and ecological landscape (Buffavand, 2016; Oakland Institute 2013; Tsegaye, 216). Tsegaye’s (2016) finding also ascertains how commercial agriculture and other investments in Benishagul-Gumuz affect the ecosystem as such;

A major troubling development attributed to commercial land investments across the region has been the considerable environmental destruction that occurred in recent years. The arbitrariness of the land allocations, implemented without the necessary detailed socio-cultural, economic and ecological studies, has had adverse impacts on the environmental and natural resources. This in turn has had a considerably negative impact on the indigenous communities, whose livelihoods are heavily based on access to natural resources. In contrast to the widespread concerns and initiatives addressing environmental degradation in the country’s highlands, no attention has been paid to the environmental impacts of the current land investment trends in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

As the result of deforestation, the local communities have already begun to face declining forest food sources, the deterioration of their livelihoods and the resulting growing need for food aid. This is due to the forest has been a source of traditional food items for the Gumuz, including plant shoots, roots, leaves and fruits. Wild forest foods have not only been consumed in times of crop failure or food shortages, but also as part of the group’s regular diet. Losing all these assets is a devastating consequence for socio-economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing for the local people in particular and the counter in general (Tsegaye, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

Land grabbing is a phenomenon that is taking root in Ethiopia, which was fueled by global factors such as bio-fuel crop production and food insecurity reasons. Through the recommendation of the World Bank, the Ethiopian Government allowed foreign companies and local investors access to local farmers', pastoralists' and agro-pastoralists', land, and forest, which is aimed at accelerating economic growth through the process of accumulation via extraction of local resources.

The two political developments in the early 2000s; that is the split within TPLF and the 2005 well known and contentious elections created an alert for Ethiopian government to change the political economic discourse. Thus, the government took a swift political-economic policy change from its peasantry basis to commercial agriculture. Thus, the 2010 (2010-12014) GTP policy document outlines the new strategy for agricultural commercialization in Ethiopia. Agricultural commercialization has been taken as the main political priority for fast rural transformation, and towards making Ethiopia a middle-income country by 2025.

To implement large-scale agricultural investments, the government has designed program of clearing the forest together with resettling indigenous communities in designated villages across the lowlands. Federal proclamations 455/2005 and Council of Ministers Regulations 135/2007 have empowered regional and district administrations to resettle peasants on the basis of a vaguely defined "public purpose." That means, the resettlement programme occurred in the lowland parts of Ethiopia based on the pretext of making access to social services. But as supported by evidence from Human Right Watch (2012) affirmed, the intension of resettlement programme is directly related to large scale agriculture project of the government.

The impact of the land grabs in Ethiopia has threatened the livelihoods of local communities who use the land and its natural resources for subsistence. The local people detached from their land on which they live for centuries and it also serves as ritual place, cultural landscape, playing ground and sources of livelihood. Thus, the commercial agriculture in Ethiopia has negative impacts on the indigenous people through destruction of the environment on which their livelihood totally depends. Villagization destroys the culture and social ties of the indigenous people since it detached them form nature which is considered as their cosmological and religious base. By putting these negative impacts aside, the government of Ethiopia claims the commercial agriculture is timely and it can and will improve the life of the citizens.

One can evaluate the success or failure of Ethiopia government's commercial agriculture policy by taking the minimal development standards that forwarded by the liberal ideology of development. This line of thinking affirms immense threat in the global rush for land but understands that there are substantial chances that could benefit host governments and their populations. The hopes of the future here consider that given "responsible decision-making and equally responsible investment, the costs and damages assumed to be inherent in land grabbing could be minimized", pave the way to a situation where both "host countries and investors could benefit in equal measure". Supporters of large-scale investment focus on the necessary for improved land administration, improved quality and

transparency of land transactions and greater institutional capacity of host countries for sound contracts, oversight and follow-up.

But development projects in Ethiopia in general and commercial agricultural in particular fails to fulfill the minimal standard of development concepts let alone the concepts and criteria of sustainable development. Therefore, the large-scale agriculture in Ethiopia is characterized by the center periphery relations ships. This approach has been supported by international activist organizations which have argued that the acquisition of land by foreign entities in poor and vulnerable countries creates a menace to their economies and livelihoods and puts at risk their chances of achieving food security and improved nutrition. The more controversial description of this line of thinking speaks of a new form of agricultural neo-colonialism, and accuses the international financial institutions of promoting aggressive land grabs in poor countries through support to investors and host governments.

REFERENCES

- Borras, S. &. (2010). Towards a broader view of the politics of global land grab: rethinking land issues, reframing resistance. *Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies Working Paper Series* , 1, 1-39.
- Buffavand, L. (2016). 'The land does not like them': contesting dispossession in cosmological terms in Mela, South-West Ethiopia. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* , 10 (3), 479-493.
- Chinigo, D. &. (2015). Thermidor in Ethiopia? Agrarian Transformations Between Economic Liberalization and the Developmental State. *EchoGeo* (31).
- Deininger, K., & Byerlee, D. (2011). Rising global interest in farmland: can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits? The World Bank.
- Desalegn, R. (2011). Land to investors: Large-scale land transfers in Ethiopia (No. 1). African Books Collective.
- FDRE. (2010). Growth and Transformation Plan. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: FDRE.
- Gebresnbet, F. (2014). Governing the horn of Africa's lowlands: land investments and villagizations in Gambella, Ethiopia. African Program Brief.
- Gebresnbet, F. (2016). Land acquisition, the politics of dispossession, and state-remaking in Gambella, Western Ethiopian in African Spectrum. African Program Brief.
- Hailegbriel, A. (1990). Generating marketed surplus of food through state farms: a critical evaluation of the Ethiopian experience. *ISS Working Paper Series/General Series* , 72, 1-90.
- Horne, F., & Bader, L. (2012). *Waiting Here for Death: Forced Displacement and "Villagization" in Ethiopia*. Human Rights Watch.
- Makki, F. (2014). Develoment by Dispossession: Terra Nullius and the Social-Ecology of New Enclosures in Ethiopia. *Rural Sociology* , 79 (1), 79-103.
- Makki, F. (2012). Power and property:commercialization, enclosures, and the transformation of agrarian relations in Ethiopia. *Journal of Peasant Studies* , 39 (1), 81-104.

Mesfin, A. (2013). Effects of large-scale agricultural investments on smallholder farming in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Case study* . Ethiopia.

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, M. (2008, November). Agricultural investment potential in Ethiopia. *Ethiopia Building on Progress: A plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty* . Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Nalepa, R. (2013). Land for Agricultural Development in the Era of Land Grabbing: A spatial Exploration of the Marginal Lands' Narrative in Contemporary Ethiopia. *Land Development Politics Initiatives Working Paper* .

Tamrat, I. (2010). Governance of large scale agricultural investments in Africa: the case of Ethiopia. *World Bank Conference on Land Policy and Administration* , 26, 27.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gubaye Assaye Alamineh, lecturer and researcher, Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University

Kumilachew Siferaw Anteneh, Lecturer and Researcher, Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bahir Dar University