Briefing

Institutions for Natural Resource Management

ET01

Conflict, 'Post-Conflict', and Natural Resource Management

Key Points:

1 The end of war does not lead simply to a 'post-conflict' transition

2 Two neighbouring areas in Ethiopia have had different post-conflict trajectories

3 Differences include patterns of displacement and return, economic opportunities and land access

4 A post-war power vacuum, and changes in state personnel, affected RNR management in both areas

Why 'post-conflict'?

Identifying the importance of a 'post-conflict' situation to natural resource management (NRM) is highly problematic. First, the formal end of war may bring about significant and clear shifts in governance:

•	the government itself may change;

•	there is likely to be a significant return of de-mobilized soldiers and repatriation of returnees;

•	there may be an institutional vacuum, resulting in a loss of controls over NRM.

Yet post-conflict also tends to be a period of intensification of processes already taking place, including internal population movement, and institutional breakdown and rebuilding. Thus, the gap between conflict and post-conflict can be blurred. The end of war is also often accompanied by the outbreak or continuation of other conflicts. Formal authority may still be contested. Divisions hitherto suppressed may resurface. The end of war does not lead simply to a 'post conflict' transition.

In Ethiopia these issues are given particular salience by the fact that the country was, following a few years of peace, again at war. In this thematic briefing, the term 'post-conflict' is used to describe the period following the fall of the Derg regime in 1991.

A tale of two *weredas*

The impact of the civil war and broader historical processes on NRM can be drawn out better by comparing the experience of different case study areas. In this briefing, our case study areas are Meket and Tehuledere *weredas*.[1] They lie in North and South Wello respectively. Their different experiences during the civil war have resulted in very different NRM regimes and issues.

Differences

The contexts for NRM is different in the two case study areas. Differences include patterns of displacement and return, economic opportunities, and access to land.

Caveat
Of course, a number of factors have had an effect on how people manage natural resources. These have been influenced by, but are not necessarily directly the result of the conflict. They include political history; the effects of insecurity and coercion; resettlement; drought and famine. Also, the conflict officially ended with the change of government. However, its ramifications, especially concerning disruption of government, have continued for years afterwards.

A number of different population groups were displaced from Wello. These included those who were resettled (both voluntarily and forced) to other parts of the country; those who fled the war to go to Sudan; those who left during famine and food shortage; and de-mobilized soldiers (see *Briefing ET04*).

After the war, some of each of these groups returned. However, there are significant differences between Tehuledere and Meket in who stayed on after their initial return. In Tehuledere, returnees have remained in the area. In contrast, in Meket, many returned to Sudan or their resettlement villages.

Economic opportunities
There are also differences in the post-conflict economies of the two areas. Tehuledere *wereda* is close to the administrative centre
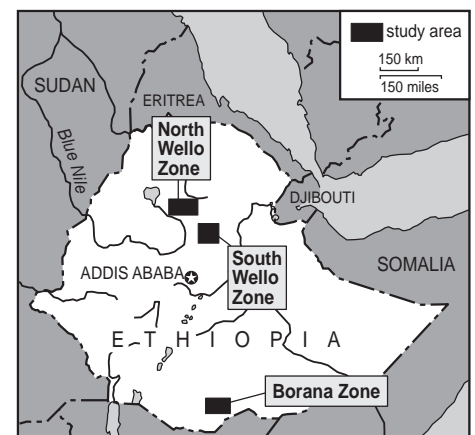
effort during the 1984-85 famine and the World Food Programme distribution depot is still based nearby. The town offers markets for agricultural produce and fuelwood, and wage-labour.

Meket, on the other hand, is much more isolated, geographically, economically and politically.

Access to land

A third difference involves patterns of access to land, which was affected by the pattern of conflict itself. In Meket, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (which subsequently formed the post-Derg government) entered the district at least a year before the fall of the Derg. They implemented a partial land reform which meant that many returnees, arriving after the redistribution then only had access to little and poorer land.

In contrast, in Tehuledere, the TPLF took control only immediately before their final entry to Addis Ababa in May 1991. No land reforms were carried out at this time. Returnees have since been mainly allocated hillside plots in what were previously designated as communal areas. There is localised conflict over these allocations, but for returnees access to reasonable quantities of fallow land is clearly an incentive to remain in the area.

Similarities

There are other elements of the post-conflict transition which are similar in our two case study areas. These include the emergence of a power vacuum in government, and changes in personnel in state institutions.

Power vacuum

After the fall of the Derg there was something of a vacuum in formal institutions for the first couple of years. All reports point to a hiatus where there was a lack of government control as new positions were established and consolidated.

In the forestry sector, in particular, this may have had negative effects on natural resource management (See *Briefings* ET09 and ET11). There are many reports of deforestation in previously state-controlled forests. Some blame de-mobilized soldiers. Others say that farmers were just taking advantage of the situation and reclaiming what they thought was theirs. For people in rural areas, tenure insecurity and memories of coercive government over many years have made them suspicious of government controls of NRM.

Changes in state personnel

The change of government also saw a comprehensive change of personnel, throughout the hierarchy. In some areas, especially at the lowest level, there was a purging of those seen as implicated with the previous regime - known as 'birokrasi'. As a result, many people in positions of power in local government are very young, usually less than 35.

The relative insecurity of these new personnel may have led to the adoption of more conservative positions, especially at local level. People may feel disinclined to 'rock the boat' by questioning prevailing policy. This can result in inflexibility at the level of implementation, even when the policies themselves are ideally participatory and iterative.

Concluding comments

The post-conflict transition phase is a difficult one for NRM. Processes such as refugee return are made more complex by the fact that there is often a vacuum in institutional authority. This may be compounded by changes in power and control. Importantly, disputes over resources such as land do

[1]*Weredas* are administrative units of roughly 200,000 people.

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