

ET03

# Migration, Resettlement and Return

## Key Points:

- 1** Despite state policies, migration has become an important survival strategy for land-poor peasants
- 2** Large-scale resettlement has not solved NRM problems in the highlands
- 3** Resettlement has often exacerbated NRM problems in lowlands resulting in conflicts with local peoples
- 4** Calls for renewed resettlement need to learn from the pitfalls of past

This Briefing is one of a series produced jointly by the Forum for Social Studies (Ethiopia), Centro de Experimentação Florestal (Mozambique) and the University of Sussex (UK). Each is designed to summarise research findings and encourage feedback. The Briefing is part of the 'Marena' research project, funded by the UK's Department for International Development.

## Migration and Resettlement

Peasants are often viewed as tied to the land. However, in Ethiopia migration has a long history, and became an increasingly salient part of survival strategies during the 20th century. Today it is no longer possible to understand the local economy in many parts of highlands, notably in Wello, without taking migration and resettlement into account.

This *Briefing* explores factors promoting different types of migration and resettlement, and the consequences of migration, resettlement and return for livelihoods and NRM.

## State-led Resettlement

State-sponsored population resettlement schemes have grown in importance in the past forty years in Ethiopia. In imperial times, thousands of settlers were moved to several dozen schemes, mainly set up on the initiative of local governors, missionaries or NGOs. The type of settlers varied, and included urban unemployed, pastoralists, ex-soldiers and famine victims.

During the first decade after the 1974 Revolution, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission set up more than 80 schemes accommodating tens of thousands of settlers, most of whom were famine victims.

After the 1984-85 famine, the Derg resettled more than half a million settlers in a couple of years mainly from the North, notably Wello, Tigray and Shewa, to areas to the west, especially Wellega, Kafa and Illubabor. Though the resettlement was intended to be voluntary and a large proportion of settlers were famine-victims, targets were turned into quotas, food-aid was used as a trap, and coercion and victimisation became commonplace.

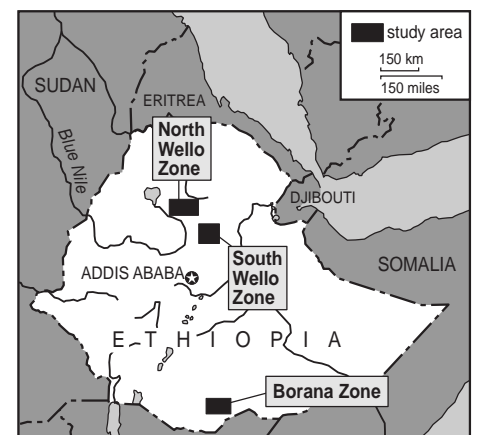
Two kinds of planned settlements were set up: large-scale 'conventional' mechanised collectives in the lowlands on the western border, and small-scale 'integrated' settlements in the highlands, reliant on ox-plough cultivation.

## Spontaneous migration

In addition to state-sponsored resettlement, however, there are also significant 'spontaneous' population movements in Ethiopia. In particular, both push and pull factors promote migration from the Ethiopian highlands. In the north, especially in Wello, push factors include land shortage, drought and famine, inter-generational and inter-personal conflicts. Pull factors include opportunities for seasonal wage-labour, possibilities of gaining access to land, involvement in trade, and a sense of adventure.

Migration has tended to occur to areas of better agricultural potential in the west of Ethiopia. The late 19th century conquest of the south and land grants to soldiers had already promoted movement from north to south. Seasonal coffee-picking in the southwest and the availability of land further attracted northern farmers southwards during the imperial times.

Today, differences in agricultural seasons between highlands and lowlands continue offer opportunities for wage-labour, particularly during the harvesting season. Cotton, peanut and sesame plantations in the Awash Valley to the east and in the Humera lowlands in the west attract migrants from the highlands. Rural-urban migration has also been growing, although the capacity of towns to absorb labourers has been limited.



Despite the linking of rights of access to land to residence in an area during the Derg period, and ethnic regionalisation under the current government, seasonal and longer-term spontaneous migration continues to be significant.

## Consequences of resettlement

Migration and resettlement from north to south is generally accepted to have faced a number of problems. Planners sought to justify resettlement on the grounds that it would provide lasting solutions to the problem of food insecurity in the north. In fact, even if most settlers had remained in the resettlement areas, the removal of an overall average of 3% of the population in the north would have had a negligible effect on reducing population pressure.

Resettlement was also claimed to provide a more rational use of available land, by readjusting man-land ratios. However, this assumption rested on the myth of vast underutilised lands. It also failed to recognise the rights of local people to renewable natural resources (RNRs), the limited carrying capacity of the lowlands and the potential damage to the environment of concentrated settlements. Settlers experienced hardships due to changes in environment, diet and diseases. In larger settlements settlers resented imposed collectivisation.

Although in some cases partnerships were formed with local people, in many areas settlers faced hostile relations with indigenous inhabitants.

## The settlers' return

Even before the fall of the Derg, large numbers of settlers began to return, despite

attempts to prevent them from doing so. At the time of the transition the majority of settlers returned. Those who arrived back in the north early on before the transition and shortly after were able to secure some land, especially in areas where redistributions were carried out. Those arriving later often did not gain more than a house plot.

## Implications for NRM

The resettlement of the mid-1980s was alleged to reduce population pressure. The programme was also used to remove people from forests, hillside plantations and areas allocated for development. In fact, this had little impact on alleviating pressure on RNR in areas from which settlers were taken, and instead created greater pressure on RNR, and conflict with local populations in resettlement areas.

The majority of settlers returned to find their land had been redistributed. Conflicts often ensued. In order to eke out a livelihood, returnees without land often settled on areas reserved for forest or pasture, and became involved in cutting trees, and producing fuelwood and charcoal, exacerbating pressure on natural resources. Landless returnees campaigned for redistributions, but even where they received land it was usually less than half a hectare of poor land, making it difficult for them to attain self-sufficiency.

## Full circle? Resettlement anew

Despite the bitter experiences of the 1980s, resettlement is again on the cards. Land holdings in parts of Wello have become too small to be viable, and conditions of drought and famine keep recurring. Many peasants are migrating spontaneously, others are requesting resettlement.

Given policies of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, the climate is unfavourable for inter-regional resettlement. However, the Amhara Region (ANRS) is responding to demands by peasants by attempting to devise a resettlement strategy within the region.

## Concluding comments

New resettlement ventures may well be inevitable given environmental conditions, growing population pressure, reduced land-holding sizes and limited potential for intensification, and non-agricultural livelihood alternatives.

However, planned resettlement needs to learn from the mistakes of past experience, and build on the strategies of spontaneous migrants, who often prioritise establishing good relations with local people and follow strategies of splitting families to keep a foothold in both lands.

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