



Intra-regional Voluntary Resettlement in Amhara: A possible way out of the chronic food trap?

Assessment Mission: 1 - 16 March 2003

By Abraham Sewonet, Field Officer, UN-Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia

1. Introduction and background

A combination of population pressure, small land holdings, land degradation, erratic rainfall and a number of negative economic factors such as low cereal prices has left over 11 million rural Ethiopians in critical need of relief food aid this year. The acute crisis of this year, combined with chronic food insecurity over the past many years has driven the Ethiopian government to think of solutions more durable than food aid. Resettlement has been resurrected as part of lasting solutions to the continual impoverishment and destitution of Ethiopian rural communities.

The voluntary resettlement programme is one of the most important food security strategies of the Federal Government of Ethiopia under the general coordination of the Ministry of Rural Development.

With this aim, Amhara Region has initiated an organized and voluntary resettlement scheme for the most chronically food insecure people from all zones of the region (except West Gojam), to the North Gondar Zone Woredas of Metemma, Quara and Tach Armacheho. Settlers include people from North Gondar, South Gondar, Wag Hamra, East Gojam, Oromiya, North Shewa, North Wello and South Wello Zones.

From 28 to 30 January 2003, a few weeks before the new resettlement programme began in Amhara region and elsewhere, a joint workshop was organized by the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists and the United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, entitled: **‘Settlement and Resettlement in Ethiopia: Population Displacement, Pastoralist Sedentarisation and Peace Making’**¹. The workshop presented findings of a wide range of complex socio-economic, cultural, environmental, institutional and political implications of resettlement carried out in the 1980s, indicating that if successful resettlement is to be carried out in the future, it should be based on a very careful, gradual planning and voluntary participation, taking into consideration key issues discussed at the workshop.

¹ Proceedings of the workshop will be made available at the UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia and Addis Ababa University Department of Sociology.

Following reports that resettlement activities started in mid-February 2003, the UN-Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia undertook a field mission from 1 to 16 March 2003 to Amhara region to look into various socio-economic aspects concerning the implementation of the current resettlement scheme. The mission met officials at the regional, zonal, woreda and kebele levels in Bahir Dar, North Gondar, North and South Wello. For a balanced view, household and community interviews were held with settlers and the host population at a resettlement site in North Gondar Zone, Metemma Woreda where the resettlement is taking place.

Due to time constraints, the mission was only able to visit Metemma, but not the two other resettlement sites. Any future visits by interested parties are thus encouraged to visit the other two sites (Quara and Tach Armacheho) where it is reported that resettlement sites are less favourable in terms of infrastructure.

2. Mission Findings

2.1 Observations on the new voluntary resettlement programme in Amhara Region

Discussions at the regional, zonal, woreda and kebele levels unanimously indicated that the potential settlers are better off in Metemma Woreda where there is sufficient arable and fertile land to support tens of thousands of people. The regional and zonal governments organized first hand visits for community representatives of potential settlers from each zone (except for North Wello due to shortage of time). These visits confirmed the above assertions. The resettlement programme is entirely based on voluntary² and full participation from targeted settlers and host communities. Local officials assert that the fact that a number of farmers cancelled their trip to resettlement areas after registration to 'wait and see the forthcoming Belg rain performance' is one proof that the resettlement is voluntary.

For some, the government is just trying to systematize and organize the spontaneous resettlement already initiated by the farmers themselves. Unlike the Derg's resettlement scheme that promised already built fully furnished iron-roofed modern



New houses for the settlers in Metemma Woreda (Photo by Abraham Sewonet, UN-EUE, March 2003)

² Despite some unofficial reports, government officials have confirmed that food aid is not used as an incentive/or disincentive for resettling people. The government rather warned the community that food aid should not be considered as a fall back whenever there is drought and that people should not depend on it. For the time being, food aid will be provided for the settlers for one year, until they become self-sufficient in their new sites. Interviews with settler community also confirm that they came on their own initiative hoping that they will overcome their chronic food insecurity in the near future. Officials have also denied the allegation of quotas, but confirmed that initial number of potential settlers exists for planning purpose.

houses awaiting them (Abute, 2003), this time, the settlers are informed that with the support of host communities and local governments, they will be responsible for constructing their own houses. The mission has observed in Metemma that some houses have been constructed with the support of the host community (see picture on previous page).

Currently, social services such as health and education facilities are not available for settlers, though they are planned to be provided as soon as possible. Meningitis vaccines have been provided to settlers at Addis Zemen, before reaching the destination areas.

The government has also assured that the settlers' land at the origin will be reserved for the next two cropping seasons (two years) and that the settlers are free to decide whether to stay at the new sites or not. Meanwhile, they have full autonomy to travel back and forth between the new homes and their original villages during this time. However, what might be worrying is that most settlers who are now at the new sites have already sold most, and in some cases all of their belongings including their cattle before coming and do not have anything to fall back on if they wish to return back home.

At the moment, the principal focus is to resettle those who are capable of working and people from lowland areas³, who are already used to the hot weather conditions so that they would easily adapt to the hot climate at the resettlement sites. As much as possible, the settlers are encouraged to go to resettlement sites together with their families to help maintain family support mechanisms.

According to officials, integration packages in the form of food aid and agricultural tools including an ox and three hectares of land per family will be provided to the settlers this year until they become self-sufficient. It is hoped that all settlers can be installed in their new homes by the end of March and the beginning of April 2003 in order to benefit from the upcoming rains to be able to plant during the forthcoming agricultural season in their new homes. However, the settlers are in desperate need of seed as last year's *meher* season failed. Provision of seed should be an important part of the integration package.

If everything goes well, officials and settlers reported, next year they will be able to produce their own food and will not need food aid anymore. Some officials however complain that this is too hasty and ambitious and is over stretching local staff assigned at resettlement sites to support the coordination of the resettlement process.

To date there are indisputably inadequate social services available at the new resettlement sites. There is only one primary school and a few inadequate water sources and no health care centres at all. Even scaling up the existing meagre infrastructure will not meet needs. Developing new hospitals, schools, water systems and other social services is a matter of utmost urgency to avoid further impoverishment of settlers.

2.2 Feasible resettlement sites and number of voluntary settlers

³ People from highland areas will be resettled next year, when seasonally cooler weather begins.

Various feasibility studies have so far been undertaken on resettlement issues particularly in Amhara Region since 2001 such as a European Commission fact-finding mission to Metemma Woreda (Vivero & Beernaert, 2001). A committee comprising of regional and zonal line offices, including Bureaus of Health, Education, and Rural Development, with the Regional Food Security Unit as a Secretariat conducted a feasibility study in North Gondar Zone from December 2002 to January 2003. Each line office was given tasks according to its mandate.

Based on the feasibility study, three woredas, namely Metemma, Quara and Tach Armacheho, were identified as suitable for resettlement in Amhara Region. The initial plan, according to the study, was to resettle 3,300 households (about 15,000 individuals) from all zones of Amhara region except for West Gojam. This initial number, however, has eventually raised to a little over 20,000 households (more than 100,000 individuals)⁴. According to officials, the reason why they decided to increase the number of people to be resettled is because the potential of the destination areas particularly of Metemma is proved to be a lot more than what they anticipated, and that it is believed the destination areas are fully capable of hosting the revised number of households, and even more. However, there is no concrete evidence to support this claim. Therefore it is important that further studies need to prove the feasibility of the planned increase of households that can be settled, and for planning of additional services required.

These figures might still change based on farmers' willingness and/or unwillingness to be resettled. In North Wello Zone, for instance, while the plan was to resettle 3,000 individuals, to date about 2,000 are registered and willing to move. Some farmers have cancelled their registration upon hearing the launch of SC UK's Relief to Development project (R2D)⁵. In South Wello Zone, Dessie Zuria Woreda, while the plan was to resettle 850 households, to date only 74 households are registered to resettle. This is said to be due to their bitter experience of Derg's resettlement scheme in the 1980s.

2.3 Metemma, Villages 6,7 & 8 most suitable for resettlement in terms of infrastructure and social services

⁴ These figures are for the first year (2003).

⁵ From Gubalafto Woreda, where R2D has started, only 77 households are registered to resettle, while in Bugna Woreda, where there is no R2D, about 330 families are registered to resettle. North Wello officials are trying to persuade (not coerce) the farmers that R2D project is only for three years, and that resettlement is a more sustainable solution.

Amongst the three destination woredas and sites, villages 6,7 & 8 in Metemma woreda (in North Gondar Zone) are considered to be the most suitable for resettlement in terms of infrastructure and social services⁶. These villages are located 40km Northwest of Shehedi, the capital town of Metemma Woreda situated along the Sudanese border. According to a report by a multidisciplinary team from regional government offices, villages 6, 7 & 8 have 8,127 hectares of arable land.

Agro-ecologically, the area is lowland, 550 meter above sea level. While average temperature is 33 degrees Celsius, it reaches 45 degrees Celsius during the hottest months. It receives an average of 750 – 800 mm rainfall during June – September. 80 – 90% of the soil is reportedly black and fertile (EC – FSPCO, 2001), suitable for production of sorghum, cotton and sesame, the main income and consumption sources of the local residents.

The local residents, numbering approximately 230 households and are found along the Guang River, are people who are originally from Wag Hamra, Gayint, and other parts of Amhara Region and came during the Derg's resettlement programme in the 1980s. Some have also come spontaneously in previous years in search of better options⁷. They are mostly agriculturalists but they also own large number of cattle. Given the fertile nature of the soil and relatively untouched natural resources, they are considered self-sufficient throughout the year in terms of food production and therefore they never received food aid.

Though there are inadequate social services available, apparently local authorities are now hoping that they will be able to benefit from additional social services and infrastructure that will be provided soon for the newcomers.

2.4 Social services at the 'new home' never adequate

One of the preconditions for successful resettlement programmes is the availability of social services such as health, education, road, water, etc at the resettlement sites **before relocating people**. Past lessons from Derg's resettlement programme illustrate that such programmes often fail when the government relocates people before putting social services in place at the resettlement areas. As Chris de Wet pointed out (de Wet 2003), resettlement often goes wrong principally because of lack of proper inputs and hence lack

⁶ Metemma Woreda reportedly has added value in terms of market development given the recently opened Ethio-Sudanese cross road facility with Galabat in Sudan. Incense and gum Arabic are also reportedly abundant in these settlement areas to supplement farmers as additional income sources. However, the question of the rights of ownership of incense and gum between the government, settlers, local residents and people from Tigray should be worked out carefully. It is reported that the local residents are excluded from incense collection (Jose Luis & Frank, 2001).

⁷ According to officials, as the plan now is to resettle people from the same origin such as people from Wag Hamra and Gayint, social reintegration will be easier. It is believed that the new settlers will find it much easier to live with their 'country men' who are in some cases even related. This is believed to contribute to easy re-establishment of traditional social institutions and networks that bind communities' wide range of relationships. Besides, the fact that settlers will not be expected to clear bushes for house construction, but rather will be integrated into an already established village is said to be one of the most important differences between the current and the Derg's resettlement programmes.

of social services that gives rise to the inevitable impoverishment risks, leaving settlers worse off than before.

Based on the mission's observations and the feasibility study report by government line offices, the following is a summary of what is available (and not available) at the resettlement sites in Metemma in terms of social services. As confirmed by government officials, social services available at this resettlement site are not adequate. The mission strongly believes that this is where international and local NGOs together with government are to intervene.

To date, however, the government has not yet invited NGOs and other development bodies to participate in the various resettlement programmes.

Health

According to field observation and discussions held with officials in village 6,7 &8, despite high incidence of malaria and meningitis, there are no health facilities in the area that the local residents themselves have to travel between 7 and 12km to access health facilities. As mentioned above, in Addis Zemen town, before arriving at the resettlement sites, the settlers have been vaccinated against meningitis. At the moment the local government is preparing to construct a satellite health post. Although this would provide at least basic services for a portion of the population, it would be insufficient for the needs of the eventually expected 100,000 people.

Education

There is only one elementary school (grade 1 – 5) where 164 local children are attending. There is no question that additional classrooms, chairs and tables are required immediately for the number of settlers who are arriving.

Road

A good road exists due to recent road maintenance between Gondar and Sudan. A relatively good, 30km all-weather road exists from Shehedi (Metemma town) to a junction. From the junction to the resettlement villages, about 10km is only dry weather road. In order to provide the necessary services, the road to the villages should be upgraded to an all-weather road.

Water

Though three water well facilities are available for the local population, none of them are functional at the moment. For the time being, Guang River is the main source of water for settlers and local people. Intervention for the provision of clean water is urgently required in the area. Without clean water, resettling more people poses a significant health risk.

Storage facilities

As the local residents were never food aid beneficiaries before, there is a lack of storage facilities in the area. At the moment, the relief food (for settlers) is being kept in open air. As relief food distributions are expected to continue for several months, storage facilities are urgently required before the rainy season begins in June.

Other facilities

A satellite rural development office is available which facilitates agricultural extensions to local farmers. The office, however, cannot accommodate provision of further services for the new settler population. Veterinary services are also absent in the area, despite large number of cattle raised by local residents. There is only one grinding mill available for the locals and this will not be enough to accommodate newcomers.

As indicated earlier, these resettlement sites are believed to be favourable for agricultural production, particularly of sesame, cotton and sorghum, and therefore suitable for potential investors who would like to start mechanized agriculture of the above-mentioned crops.

It is important to mention here that seed provision might be essential as the settlers have sold most of their properties including their seeds at their original places before coming.

A case study of a new settler from Wag Hamra

Ato Yimer, 55, came from Ziquala Woreda, Wag Hamra Zone. He has been in his new home for a few days already. He decided to leave his village because his land was gradually depleted and did not produce enough anymore to feed the family. Even if he finds it hard to be away from home, he says he thinks he will be able to make the new place home soon, especially if he starts producing his own food. He was happy to be registered when he heard that the government was arranging to move people from his home area to a place where there is fertile land where he would be given three hectares of land. He says many of his neighbours are registered but there are also many who did not register to come because they are afraid of unmet expectations. His four children accompany him, but his wife could not come with him because she was too sick. He is now waiting to receive three hectares of fertile land allocated to him, and once he gets settled he will go back to Ziquala to bring his wife. 'I know the local people who are here now.

They used to live with us in Wag Hamra, but now they are very rich here. Thanks to them they are assisting us by providing wood and other materials for house construction. I am staying at a friend's house from Wag Hamra until I get my own house', he says. 'This place is hotter than our home, but we will get used to it. We cannot expect everything to be perfect. My only concern is health; there are no health facilities here'.



Food distribution upon arrival in Metemma, Villages 6, 7 & 8,
(Photo by Abraham Sewonet, UN-EUE, March 2003)

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the fact that millions of rural farmers are faced with chronic and acute food insecurity year after year, there is no question that the Ethiopian government is right in its view that Ethiopian rural communities' poverty and food aid dependency should be overcome once and for all through a more sustainable and long-lasting solution.

The government's current initiative to resettle people from the most chronically food insecure areas of Amhara Region to a less populated, relatively fertile part of the region should be viewed as a genuine attempt to contribute to resolving farmers' continual poverty. As many people in the field expressed, 'anything is better than the state that the Ethiopian farmers are now in!' What worse could farmers face than being dependent on food aid for more than two decades under precarious living conditions? Whether we like it or not, we can no longer sustain rural farmers with food aid for long, and we need to think of lasting solutions. Organized resettlement could indeed be a lasting solution for those few households that will be able to cope and develop a new living.

State sponsored, organized resettlement programmes can be successful if they are executed in a very careful and gradual manner by taking into account a wide range of socio-economic, cultural, institutional and political issues (Pankhurst, 2003).

However, the government should not be over ambitious in its plans to relocate **too many people at once** (increasing numbers from the originally planned 15,000 individuals to 100,000), before putting adequate essential social services at resettlement sites. Resettlement should be a process, starting as a pilot and replicated at a wider scale if proved successful. It must be realized that effective social service delivery induces people to voluntarily move to resettlement villages.

Environmental impact should be carefully taken into consideration when settling large numbers of people in a given location where natural resources are still for the most part intact. Environmental protection and rehabilitation programmes should go along with resettlement programmes. Unfortunately this issue does not seem to have been thoroughly considered in the original feasibility study. Therefore an additional study (for example to examine fuel wood sources) is highly recommended.

There is significant infrastructure that needs to be in place at the resettlement sites, but understandably the government unilaterally will not be able to fulfil all the necessities. It is worthwhile to mention here that field discussions with regional, zonal and woreda authorities clearly showed that the government did not request international or local development organisations and NGOs for programme and project support. No project proposal is readily available for funding in terms of interventions particularly in provision of social services at resettlement sites. It is recommended (and agreed by government authorities) that a **call for programme and project support** by the government to the international community, particularly development organisations such as international NGOs should be initiated without further delay.

Some of the potential intervention areas for interested development organisations include technical assessment and provision of farm tools, pack animals, oxen, shoats, housing, water development, health facilities, education, credit facilities, seeds, veterinary services, etc. Provision of integration packages such as temporary food aid could also be considered. Protection of human rights issues of settlers could also be an area of intervention.

As much as possible, separation of settlers from their family, community, social and religious environments should be avoided at the new resettlement sites. The government should try to maintain and strengthen traditional social activities such as Idir, Iqub, etc. It must be realized that these are important **psychosocial and cultural** components of rural communities that need to be maintained and supported.

On the positive side, some lessons have been learned from the mistakes of previous resettlement programmes. The current resettlement initiative is a way of moving people from the same ethnic, language and cultural background. Furthermore, they are all (at least in the first phase) from lowland areas so that they would easily adapt the hot climate at resettlement sites. Finally the settlers' land at their place of origin will be reserved for the next two years and until then people are free to go back and forth between their new home and original localities. These provisions clearly show an important step forward compared to the Derg's resettlement scheme where people from completely different cultural background were forced to live together, and movement of people out of resettlement areas was virtually impossible.

DISCLAIMER

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of the UN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

26 March 2003

UN-EUE
PO Box 60252
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Tel.: (251) (1) 51-37-25
Fax: (251) (1) 51-12-92
E-mail: un-eue@un.org
www.telecom.net.et/~undp-eue/

Annex

References

Pankhrust A (2003) Longer-term Implications of Resettlement in Ethiopia . Workshop paper, Settlement and Resettlement in Ethiopia: Population Displacement, Pastoralist Sedentarisation and Peace-Making, January

Wet de CH (2003) Why do things so often go wrong in resettlement projects? Workshop paper, Settlement and Resettlement in Ethiopia: Population Displacement, Pastoralist Sedentarisation and Peace-Making, January

EC – FSPCO (2001) Mission to Metemma Woreda. European Commission’s mission report

Vivero J L & Beernaert F (2001) Report on Assessment Mission to Metemma Woreda (North Gondar)’, Fact-finding trip to the potential host areas for the planned resettlement scheme, Delegation of European Commission to Ethiopia, March

Wolde-Selassie A (2003) Social Impact of Resettlement in Beles Valley (Pawe), Metekel. Workshop paper, Settlement and resettlement in Ethiopia: Population Displacement, Pastoralist Sedentarisation and Peace-Making, January

Acronyms

DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
R2D	Relief to Development
SC UK	Save the Children United Kingdom
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia