

Migrants cause Potential Social and Environmental Crisis in Bale

A joint mission by the UN-Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Oromiya Regional Government

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Introduction and background

This article reports on migrants who left their villages with their entire families due to persistent and cumulative drawbacks in their livelihoods further accompanied by current critical food insecurity in the country. They have moved from different woredas of East and West Hararghe and Arsi Zones and have temporarily settled in Bale Zone of Oromiya Region. The Bale Mountains and its National Park are best known for being home for some highly endangered animals such as the Abyssinian Wolf and for being vital to the eco-system and its biodiversity.

The primary purpose of the mission was to assess the migrants' livelihood situation and understand their reasons for having left their homes to settle in Bale. Furthermore, the mission was to identify humanitarian needs and interventions and to recommend appropriate short and long-term action for these migrants.

The rationale behind the mission was to be able to supply useful information and recommendations to the Government of Ethiopia that could then be incorporated into its plan to establish and assist voluntary resettlement programmes as formulated in the National Food Security Strategy. The Strategy, published in March 2002, states that the voluntary resettlement programme will be carried out intra-regionally and that regional governments will identify suitable areas within their regions. The main idea behind the government's plan for the resettlement programme is to put the "under-utilized land" under economic use resulting in the improvement of the welfare of the resettled people and contributing to economic growth. But as far as farmers are concerned, they do not believe that there is any unoccupied or under-utilised land left in Ethiopia. Land is used with different intensity to provide a variety of services to farmers, pastoralists and agropastoralists.

Discussions were held with Oromiya Regional DPPC, Bale Zonal Administration, Bale Zone DPP Committee, Woreda Departments of Agriculture and Woreda Administrations, Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees, groups and individuals of the indigenous people and of

the newcomers. The team visited the new comers in Mana Hangetu, Berbere and Gololcha Woredas of Bale Zone.

Mission Results

The migrants, their reasons for migration and their contemporary status

According to both zonal and woreda officials' information, the migration started already in 1996/7. Even prior to this time there was migration to different woredas of Bale zone but it was not noticed since it was on a very small scale. Those in Gololcha Woreda, for instance, started coming to the area (in mass) in December 2001 and soon started sharing resources with the people who had moved from Hararghe to Bale zone in 1997 and officially settled in the same kebele. It is since September 2001 that the regional government promised to stop the displacement and find a solution through resettlement programmes planned in the region. The people were waiting for the promise but as it was too late they took action and migrated. The migrants in Gololcha (Bullalla Harar kebele) and Berbere woredas are dispersed form in different kebeles of the woredas. Most of the people in Mana Hangatu woreda, are for the time being in an abandoned military camp in a place called Shawe.

The migration intensified in May 2002. Since then almost 100 to 150 people arrive daily in Mana Hangatu, Berbere and Gololcha woredas of Bale Zone. Over 80% of the migrants travelled by trucks (500km from Asebe Teferi/Chiro (West Hararghe) to Robe town (Bale)). To reach Asebe Teferi (Chiro), most people walked from their homes in East and West Hararghe. The remaining 20% of the migrants in Bale walked and crossed the Wabe Shebelle River. Until end of October 2002, 20,093 people, of whom 45% female and 30% children under-five, were registered on the rosters prepared by the respective woredas. The number is rising because the flow of people arriving continues despite the regional government trying to stop these migratory movements. For details and breakdown of the figures please refer to the tables in Annex 1 and 2.

Government officials seem to have been aware of the migration. But so far no action has been taken to prevent an eventual social and environmental crisis in the areas where the migrants resettled. Appropriate action and intervention would have helped to avoid present hardship the migrants are now enduring in their resettlement areas of Bale Zone.

The migrants themselves described the reasons for their migration first and foremost resulting from years of cumulative effects and sufferings from gradual and consistent natural resource degradation in their home areas and secondly triggered and initiated by current drought conditions that led to livelihood conditions below subsistence that in the longer term did not allow neither survival nor livelihood improvement. In other words: for most of the people who decided to leave their homes in Hararghe and Arsi lowlands, the present conditions did not leave them with any other alternative or option.

An old man who is among the migrants explained the following: "Since nearly two decades we failed to produce sufficient crops or raise enough animals to feed our children and ourselves. We have always been losing children due to difficult livelihood conditions and we now have enough of

these extended crisis situations year-after-year. We have been eating unconventional wild foods such as weeds and grass-like plants due to chronic food shortages. We were patient enough to give a chance for rains to come and improve our lives but things continued to become worse with the years. We decided to leave our homes and to move to Bale Zone in search of food and eventually a more decent life with fewer life threatening hardships”.

The migrants lack food, shelter, clothes (mainly night clothes), cooking utensils and access to medical services. As they are living in abandoned and run down huts without windows and doors and with leaking roofs there is danger for spread of transmittable, contagious and epidemic diseases such as malaria, meningitis and measles. Many children, elderly and women are weakened due to viral and other diseases. Cases of malnutrition are clearly identifiable. Furthermore, lack of personal hygiene and environmental sanitation are aggravating health problems. It was reported that over 10 children died in Shawe camp due to extended stress, disease, malnutrition and the absence of medical facilities. The food situation in the lowlands of Bale Zone is generally bleak and currently 144,800 people are under humanitarian assistance (excluding the recent arrivals of these migrants from other parts of Oromiya Region).

Humanitarian actions taken to avert the crisis are inadequate

The regional government should take action and provide these people with a minimum of assistance. For example the huts in the abandoned Shawe military camp could be refurbished with windows, doors and roofs at a minimum cost by providing second hand building materials. Some relief food should be provided as a start up and technical advice should be provided to the migrants in building and handling latrines. Health crews could be assigned to teach and guide the people in handling their environmental sanitations to avoid outbreaks of diseases. The same water sources were used indifferently for human and animal consumption and for washing clothes. Hence, water contamination is very high. This largely contributes to poor health conditions. Budget constraints at woreda level are an important bottleneck. It seems also that the responsibility for handling the present problem in Bale with the migrants lies with the regional government of Oromiya. The woreda administrations are doing their best but without adequate additional support from the Region such as transport and fuel supply. According to Mana Hangatu Woreda Administrator, the woreda council had borrowed fuel from a private fuel station for a value of 900 Birr (~100 USD) to coordinate and follow up the situation of the newly arrived migrants, but could not yet repay.

The migrants in Mana Hangatu woreda received one-month ration of relief food (in September 2002). This relief food was obtained through reallocation of relief food destined for areas in the Bale lowlands. However, migrants in Gololcha and Berbere woredas did not yet benefit from any assistance, be it humanitarian or else with the exception of some CSB deliveries (> one MT) for children under five years of age. Already established settlers in Gololcha woreda are now facing food shortage due to food sharing with the newcomers.

Origins and social status of the migrants and reasons for migration

According to interviewed newly arrived migrant groups, better off households and the poorest people did not leave their places of origin. Most of the migrants are those who have limited assets and stocks for sale that could be used to cover for transportation costs. The poorest could not leave their homes due to wealth constraints. They do not have anything to sell to get cash for transport. The better-off households are still able to cope and are hoping that livelihood conditions might improve. A group of women contacted during the visit reported to have paid more than 160 Birr per person to travel from Chiro (West Hararghe) to Robe (Bale) by truck. Those who walked suffered from physical exhaustion especially children and elderly people. Not being able to carry much with them, they arrived almost empty handed lacking basics such as food, seeds and cloths. Local indigenous people and especially previous settlers from the three targeted woredas assisted the newcomers first. The reasons for people from the Hararghe and Arsi lowlands to migrate to Bale are firstly that previously already families and individuals moved from their homes to these places in Bale. Previous migrants maintained good relations to their places of origin through occasional visits. Furthermore, areas in Bale zone have been selected by the Oromiya regional government for future voluntary resettlement programmes. Many families from chronic food insecure places in Hararghe and Arsi lowlands enlisted into future voluntary resettlement programmes that were in a planning stage before this recent drought struck hard. Rumour was spreading that they might be resettled in places in Bale in the near future. But with the harsh and unbearable livelihood conditions they had to face once more this season, they decided by themselves to take the risk and move out of their homes before it might be too late. In some cases the newcomers got jobs offered by the local people but with only very meagre income. Some of the newcomers share homes with local families most probably due to their family ties or their same places of origin.

The prospects of the migrants in Bale

In perspective of the new planting season early next year (belg) it will be necessary to adequately assist these new settlers with the necessary basic needs such as seeds but also a place where to live, otherwise it is very likely that these families will encroach the nearby Bale National Park considering it as unoccupied land to be used for settlement. Needless to state that the encroachment will go along with environmental damage, destruction of natural resources and land degradation that will further destroy natural forest coverage in Ethiopia of which already little is left.

Khat production flourishes in those areas where migrant settlers moved from Hararghe since previous years. These settlers and also the recent newcomers are and will engage in this cash crop for home consumption but also for market production.

Migrants do not seem to wish to go back to their original villages and homes but will try to settle and resume their normal living activities in Bale. The migrants ask for land on which they can start agricultural activities. Their livelihoods pretty much depend on government decision to address their desire to settle and to help them in the process of doing so. Some settlers need and request assistance in basic needs such as provision of relief food. Once decision has been taken that these people are allowed to settle, land should be allocated, farm inputs (farm tools, seeds, fertilizers

and livestock) should be provided, and access to safe water and basic health facilities should be offered.

Efforts made so far by the regional government to provide assistance and to face this migratory movement are not sufficient. It is doubtful if this migratory movement from Hararghe and Arsi Zones can be stopped or at least guided to limit damage because many people consider Bale Zone as unoccupied and vacant place ideal for settlement. Furthermore, the recent national decentralisation process leaves the zonal authorities powerless and with no budget to tackle the problem. On the other hand now woredas have been given more responsibilities and also more financial means but staff within the woreda administration often lack experience and capacity to deal with the matter.

Conclusion and recommendations

In association with the migratory movement to Bale zone one has to remember that initially the plan was and still is in conjunction with the Food Security Strategy, to resettle people on a voluntary basis from chronic food insecure areas of the Hararghe lowlands to places in Bale zone that were in the process to be selected by the regional Oromiya Government. However, due to persistent drought conditions voluntary migrants decided to depart from their homes without waiting for the Government's resettlement programme to be ready for implementation. Eventually, the region could not stop the continuation of the migratory movement and faced difficulties to assist those on need with basic relief support.

Resettlement is by no means the last and only solution to food insecurity. Though huge capital investment is essential and crucial in terms of improving living conditions, doing every possible development efforts in the chronic food insecure areas should be one of the top priorities. These development efforts could take different forms of coordinated activities such as water harvesting (roof water and runoff) for domestic consumption and agricultural activities, irrigation development mainly small-scale irrigations, water development including ground water, participatory and catchment's approach, environmental conservation and management, and eventually the provision of credit facilities (both in kind and cash forms).

Short term recommendations

As these people acted and moved, migrated out of a drought emergency situation in their home areas that is both of chronic and acute origin they need immediate humanitarian assistance. These people should receive relief assistance such as food both general rations and supplementary, clothing, shelter and health care. Furthermore, basic health care and sanitation, personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, and family health planning programmes are needed. Relief assistance should continue until the people are offered a better solution, most ideally a place where they can settle permanently and start agricultural and other economic activities. There is a potential environmental danger if relief assistance is stopped and no viable and convenient solution is proposed and found for these migrants: They might start to encroach the Bale National Park cutting trees and destroying forests to generate income for survival.

Long-term development solutions

Once living condition of these people have been normalised through humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation activities, basic production assets such as land and farm inputs (seeds, fertilizers and farm tools) should be provided as a start up to become self-sufficient. Bale Zone is endowed with rivers that have potential for irrigation (though some of them might not be easily harnessed) investing in the development of small-scale irrigation might be a viable and adapted solution. Rivers like Yadot and Dimal Rivers have got a reasonable potential for irrigation. In fact, financial resources need to be generated by both the government and other development partners to be able to implement whatever solutions are proposed. The Administrator of Gololcha woreda stated that unless land could be offered to settle to the new migrants, they would not be able to stay. The only remaining areas to be occupied are the lowlands that unfortunately do not offer ideal environmental conditions for settlement. If these lowlands are to be offered to the new migrants then the settlement programme should include among others, small-scale irrigation schemes. Understandably, unless intensive and sustainable development activities are implemented in the places of origin of the migrants in East and West Hararghe and the Arsi lowlands, the migratory flow is unlikely to stop and will eventually lead to severe environmental damage in places of Bale zone where these people are heading to.

ANNEX

Annex 1: Number of the IDPS and their locations in Bale Zone.

Woreda	Villages where the people are temporarily settled	Number of the IDPs (end of October '02)		Remarks
		Households	Total family members	
Mana Hangatu	Shawe old military camp, Chirri, Sodu Walmal**, Anole, Hangatu, Sodu Lalaftu, Kumbi**, Hawo**, Buluk Shawo	2433 295F + 2138M	17,067 7,745F + 9,322 M	Scattered in 10 PAs of the woreda; ** Parts of the Park
Berbere	Haro town and its environs, Burqitu, Darasa, Gabe and Hambala (most of them),	434 30F + 404M	2,560 1163F + 1397M	Most from West Hararghe Zone
Gololcha	Bullalla Harar (from Tullo and Masala)	154 17F + 137M	466 181M + 285F	
TOTAL		3,021	20,093	

F = Female; M = Male

Annex 2: Original places where the IDPs came from.

Original Places	Woreda	Number of Households	Total Family members	Remarks
East Hararghe Zone	Metta	1,098	6,352	
	Malka Bali'oo	381	4,678	
	Qarsa	103	536	
	Badano	85	453	
	Dadar	7	43	
	Goro Gutu	4	22	
	Gurawa	2	13	
	7	1,680	12,097	
West Hararghe Zone	Daro Labu	555	4,443	
	Chiroo	202	1,398	
	Tullo	189	892	
	Masala	87	264	
	Boke	6	41	
	Anchar	3	19	
	Guba Qoricha	1	5	
	7	1,043	7,062	
Arsi Zone	Gololcha	298	934	
	1	298	934	
TOTAL	15	3,021	20,093	

Abbreviations

CSB:	Corn-Soya bean Blend
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
Mt	Metric ton
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PA	Kebele
USD	United States Dollar

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