

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

**An Overview of Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives (APCs) in Arssi, 1978-1991**

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*Abstract*

*Not much has been written on some aspects of the Derg's policy. Official sources, some reports and very limited scholarly works have been produced so far. Thus, this paper investigates what the Derg called the model Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives (APCs), and non-model APCs in Arssi region, southeastern Ethiopia, to shed some light on some historical aspects of APCs in Ethiopia. Model APCs had been founded purposefully and with enthusiasm by the military regime since small scale peasants were expected to follow their suit in Ethiopia in general and Arssi in particular. The article particularly endeavours to assess three model APCs in Arssi and their conditions; whether they could really inspire the formation of more and more APCs in Arssi and elsewhere in Ethiopia. It also points out social and economic impact of these institutions on the members and non-members. The military junta, the Derg, which ruled Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991, swept away many centuries reigned monarchy in 1974. Subsequently, very swiftly, it came up with dramatic social and economic policies. These policies were meant to bring about fundamental changes by establishing socialist system of production and living conditions in general. The Derg from the very beginning looked towards the East and attempted to adopt some of the socialist strategies and policies, especially from patron socialist country of the USSR unquestionably. Among others, it opted for collectivization of agriculture of small scale farmers and their homes to develop peasant agriculture. The study finds out that those three APCs covered by this study were successful because members were carefully recruited and joined them voluntarily. Cooperators here were mostly former tenants and landless peasants suffered very badly during the imperial times. But the three institutions covered by this paper were insignificant minority. The majority non-model APCs were unsuccessful. This was because members here were forcefully drawn to these institutions and were not carefully selected on the basis of their background. As a result, APCs became sites of exploitation for the members by APCs' officials and source of fear and terror for the local small scale farmers, whose land could be grabbed any time by the neighboring APCs; model or otherwise. The article could hopefully add a brick to the existing knowledge of the Derg policies and why these policies were failed in most cases.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since it seized full power on September 12, 1974, deposing Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), the *Derg* (the military junta) that led Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991 had been taking a number of sweeping measures. It started these actions perhaps with the most radical measure of Land Reform Proclamation of March 4/1975 (*Yekatit* 25, 1967). This date remains as a point of departure which still holds a place in the memory of the Ethiopians; mostly among the radicals and the peasantry ever since.

Land Reform was materialized in Proclamation No. 31/1975; “a Proclamation that Provides for the Public Ownership of Rural Lands.”<sup>1</sup> This proclamation is said to be the most radical social measure passed by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC).<sup>2</sup> The nationalization of land was hailed and warmly received by the rural communities in Ethiopia at large. Peasants expressed their appreciation in different ways, particularly in the southern half of the country, where land alienation and tenancy became rampant since Menilek’s conquest in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> In this proclamation’s article 7(1), it is stipulated that former vast lands of commercial farms either be transformed to state farms, co-operative farms or to be given out to the local small scale peasantry.<sup>4</sup> The argument behind this is that, private small scale and scattered peasant farms should not be maintained as they could not boost production and productivity for ages. This was based on the imperial regime’s mistaken view and that of the *Derg* after it seized power. In other words, the *Derg* believed that agrarian development could not be possible by maintaining private small scale agriculture. It from the very beginning opted for large collective farms like APCs

and state farms. This was also believed to effect socialist system of production.

According to Andargachew, before the revolution, 60% of Ethiopian peasants possessed less than 1 ha. He added that, after the revolution, they came to hold either equal to that or even less than that figure. According to the *Derg*, since small holdings could not allow usage of mechanized farming, priority was given to state farms and APCs.<sup>5</sup> The institution vested with responsibility to distribute land according to the provisions of Land Nationalization Proclamation was Peasant Association (PA). The whole chapter 3 of Proclamation No. 31/1975 and its articles 8, 9 and 10 are dedicated to the establishment of Peasant Associations (PAs) (rural *kebeles*) on minimally 800 hectares (*20gashas*) of land.<sup>6</sup> But PAs had been seen only as transitional institutions to be transformed to collective production and habitations. One of the early transient collective institutions were collective farms and Agricultural Service Co-operatives (ASCs). Article 10 (5) of the rural land proclamation refers to the establishment of co-operatives. It particularly empowers PAs “to establish marketing and credit co-operatives and other associations....” Proclamation No. 71/1975 particularly stipulates formation of ASCs (ገጠማዊ ልማት አገልግሎት ማህበራት ማኅበራት). However, the ASCs formation even antedated the *Derg*. It was Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit (CADU) which already commenced the process in the former Chilalo *awraja*.<sup>7</sup> In 1976 (1968 EC) there were already 11 Service Co-operatives in Chilalo.<sup>8</sup> The SCs were only a bridge to the next tighter collectivized institutions envisaged by the government, i.e. Agricultural Producers’ Co-operatives (APCs) to form eventually a socialist economy.

**METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE STUDY**

This study has been conducted according to historical methodology of research undertaking. Several sources of data were sought, explored, gathered and analyzed for the reconstruction of a history of APCs. The observation of the researcher during the ongoing process of APCs could be of help as it provides empirical evidence for the conditions of APCs and their members. In general, data have been gathered by the investigator from primary and secondary sources. Some archives are also found and used after due process of checking and counter-checking for their reliability against other sources. The existing limited literature and official documents have also been used. Oral informants have been selected in snow-ball methodology and interviewed. Informants include APC officials, APC members and eye witnesses among others. In general, qualitative data were collected from the above sources during field work in Arssi and libraries of Addis Ababa University. The data obtained have been analyzed and presented here after vigorous investigation. All sources have been duly acknowledged according to historical methodology of documentation system of Notes and References given at the end of this study.

**DISCUSSION  
Objectives of Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives**

After a series of proclamations towards the formation of co-operatives, it was on June 8/1979 (*Sane* 1971) that the PMAC released a general directives for the establishment of APCs guided by Lenin's principle of co-operative formation. According to the directive (guideline), PAs and ASCs would be transformed to APCs.<sup>9</sup> According to the guideline, producers' co-operatives were defined as peasants' economic organizations, which were

established by transforming privately owned means of production slowly into common ownership through consent of the members. The major objectives of APCs were stated as below:

- A. to do away with exploitation by putting land and other means of production under common ownership and to prevent the reappearance of any basis on which this trend would recur;
- B. to boost agricultural production by using modern technology and by converting small private farms into large scale farms;
- C. to safeguard the political, economic and social interests of farmers by establishing and developing socialist system in rural areas; and
- D. to apply a common plan for common interest so as to bring about development and prosperity for the peasantry.<sup>10</sup>

Out of obsession for collectivization, the government encouraged peasants to join APCs. As a result in Arssi, there are ordinary APCs and model APCs. Let us have a look at some model APCs and non-model ordinary APCs for the purpose of comparative analysis in the region.

**Model Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives in Arssi**

The model APCs were those PCs whose members were also collected into clustered villages. They were accorded more attention. Specifically, they were given more land, granted loan, improved seeds, inputs and other aids. They were generally treated as 'sons and daughters' of the revolution. The APCs taken up in this study were to become exemplary for many other similar institutions in Ethiopia in general and Arssi in particular. Below we investigate in some detail three of them: Hurutaa-Heexosaa,

Leemuu-Camarri and Lolee-Bulchaanaa. They were all located in former Cilaalo *awraja* not very far from Asallaa town, the provincial capital and also of that *awraja*. These were some of the glaring examples not the only ones. The *Derg* established them and highly cared for them to use them for propaganda campaign to move as many people as possible to cooperatives and clustered villages.

#### i. Hurutaa-Heexosaa Producers' Co-opertaive

This PC was established in the mid of 1972 E.C. (early 1980) by 45 volunteers with an outlay of 2700 *Birr*. It was located in Dodotaa district to the northwest of Asallaa, near present Hurutaa town. Due to its thriving prospects, its members kept on increasing. In 1980 E.C. (1987/88), they reached 227 whereas the capital reached *Birr* 548,983. All PA members of the PA joined it except a few who could not work because of either minority or old age or for any other problem. The members' income grew from 120 *Birr* to 230-290 *Birr*/year individually according to the chairman. In 1980 E.C. (1987/88), it developed 842 ha; 439.75ha was farmed and yielded 8334.40 quintals. Output per member was 36-70/quintal while per hectare productivity was 18.95/quintal. It mainly produced wheat, barley, maize, *t'ef*, beans, onions and potatoes. Land member ratio was 1: 1.93ha. The number of oxen was 180 in that year. The secretary of this institution told Cohen and Isaksson's mission (two scholars who led a team to Arssi in 1987 to produce report on villagization) that each member could get 300 *Birr*/month in 1986. This was actually gross exaggeration that contradicts the data provided by the chairman of the same institution almost a year ago as we indicated above. Later the institution could possess 2 tractors, 231 oxen and 40 pack animals. It also bought 1 combine harvester with a neighboring PA. Besides tilling land,

the co-operators also fattened oxen (*sangaa*) and kept beehives. There was also dairy farming. Milk was sold cheaply to the local population.<sup>11</sup> As far as production strategy was concerned, this institution practiced "individual producer based contract system" whereby individual members shared one hectare each. According to the contract agreement, only 24 quintals wheat was delivered to the PC while the contractor member took the excess. Though controversial to party cadres, it was found to be encouraging for increasing production and productivity.<sup>12</sup>

The members were collected into nucleated village. Each house was well built and covered with corrugated iron expending 3000-8000 *Birr*. The money was partly obtained from government in the form of assistance. In February 1987 in this village, a kindergarten was launched furnished with all necessary facilities. It could accommodate 140 children. The village was also supplied with electric light, biogas, pipe water, television set, 3 diesel flour mills, warehouses for the yield, metal and soap production workshops and conference hall and also got telephone centre among others. This PC had short and long term plans to build additional socio-economic facilities. Mengistu once visited Hurutaa-Heexosaa APC and was impressed by this institution's successes and rewarded it. The annual produce and the facilities were found to be attractive to visitors and academics like Cohen and Isaksson who also visited it. According to Cohen and Isaksson, it was 'the most advanced non-Wabe' PC in Arssi. As it was established before the nationwide campaign for villagization, it might have influenced the drafters of the villagization guideline. Its Chairman, *Ato* Zawde Zamadkun, became Comrade and WPE CC Alternate Member. He was also sent abroad for short-term training on further development of co-operatives and was

personally rewarded a car.<sup>13</sup> His promotion to high post in the party and other awards and favours he received, were as much a result of the success of the institution as *Derg's* passion with the formation of many other APCs throughout Ethiopia.

**ii. Lolee-Bulchaanaa Producers' Co-operative**

This PC was founded in *Megabit* 1972 (March 1980) in Digaluu-Xijoo district, southeast of Asallaa town. It is said that, this institution was established with the full interest and will of the members who were farming till that time collective farming. The founding members were 175; mostly tenants and poor peasants known for their diligence. They were chosen from 10 PAs of Lolee area's ASCs, which constituted one of the four ASCs in that district. During the year of its establishment, it was Arssi Rural Development Unit (ARDU), which accomplished the task of farming for the members with its own tractors. ARDU also provided seed and fertilizer on loan basis. The members only worked on weeding during the grooming year. Altogether in the first year, 1000 hectares were cultivated and sown with wheat, barley, rapeseed, peas and horse beans, 480 ha was kept for grazing 20 ha for irrigation development, 100ha for forest development, 320 ha for other development purposes while 80 ha was reserved for resettlement.<sup>14</sup> The land holding size per member was 11.43 ha when we add up all the holdings of the institution and divided among members. For cultivated land it was 5.7ha per member. This was extremely large possession if we compare with private small-scale farmers.

The yield of the first year was 16,599 quintals: 8838 wheat, 5654 beer barley and the rest shared between rapeseed, peas and horse beans. The productivity of that year for wheat was 15.26/ha while this was increased in the following years. All was sold to AMC except what was put aside for

seed and food of the members. They shared it according to the point each member scored. According to former members, they got 10qts of wheat, 8qts of barley and 1qt of peas each. They also received money; the maximum given was Birr 1500 and the minimum was Birr 1200. The large portion of the product was sold, they paid government loan of 1972 E.C. and used to purchase 1973E.C. (1980/81) fertilizer, improved seed and other necessary agricultural inputs.<sup>15</sup>

The co-operators also had many cows, 321 farming oxen, 598 sheep, 40 beehives. Their animals grazed at common pastureland. In 1974 E.C (1981/82) they bought 150 oxen with the yield they sold. In that year, *Birr* 300,000 net income was secured from the sale of yield after loan was paid. In the following years, one tractor, and combiner were bought.<sup>16</sup> In 1975 E.C. (1982/83) the co-operators got 16, 488.09 quintals cultivating the same crops cited above. According to the point allocation of that year, the highest point was given cash of Birr 967.77, the medium 837.90 while the lowest was Birr 701.71. <sup>17</sup> When we see the difference between what the highest point scored could bring and the lowest, it was not much. In that year, it was just *Birr* 266.06. This difference could not encourage production and productivity. In fact, we could not get share of the yield in kind for that year.

In time, some left it claiming that point recording was not fair and also because of lack of hard working spirit by some members. But others joined anew in the meantime. In 1977 E.C. (1984/85) alone 12 new members joined in. In 1978 E.C. (1985/86) the total members reached 232 as a result of which 60 ha of land was also added to their holding raising the total land possession of the institution to 2060 ha. These members were divided into working team of up to 8 groups consisting of 25 members

each. There was also social division of labour. Women worked on the development of vegetables and tending of domestic animals while men covered the duty of farming with the fellow co-operative members away from their common village.<sup>18</sup>

The government gave any support this institution needed and what it assumed was necessary for it. In 1978 E.C. (1985/86), the government collected the Lolee-Bulchaanaa co-operators into common peasant village expending totally about 1,430,000 Birr. The money was actually given on loan basis. The government indeed gave them loan on long and short-term basis. It was ARDU, which played a crucial role in the construction of the village technically, materially and even financially. It assigned its own agents at different levels. According to the villagers, who were also co-operators at the time, each house was built with corrugated iron divided into: a salon, a bedroom, a kitchen, furniture room and toilet. Each house required 1135 Birr to be completed. ARDU also built there a dam which had a carrying capacity of 116,000m<sup>3</sup> water for irrigation and drinking purposes providing large sum of money and deploying its own technicians. It also provided them with hybrid cows. It was also ARDU which toiled hard with co-operativization process in Arssi as a whole. ARDU's aim was to expand APCs further so that the members would increase by leaps and bounds. One official source cites the number of peasant farmers at the village would reach up to 2500.<sup>19</sup>This remained a hollow ambition as the local peasants were not interested in it in spite of the successes scored by APCs like Lolee-Bulchaanaa. They assumed that, Lolee-Bulchaanaa and its likes were traps to capture other peasant farmers into co-operativization and villagization. No equal support was given to many other PCs. They also saw that some cooperators left in disappointment even co-operatives like Lolee-Bulchaanaa abandoning what they

brought to the institution and what they produced during their stay in PCs. They did so because they were prohibited by the guideline to take their means of production when they sought to leave. Some were even imprisoned for leaving co-opts.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, on the whole, Lolee-Bulchaanaa was one of a few success stories. Besides, what we have cited earlier, the village of the co-operators got also other facilities: a kindergarten, 4 large grain warehouses, offices of the co-operatives, conference hall, several mills, clinic, market site, seedling preparation centre and other service rendering institutions. Chairman Maegistu also visited Lolee-Bulchaanaa three times encouraged by its achievements starting on *Sane* 13, 1973 (June 20,1981). Inspired by the efforts and achievements of the members he said in Amharic: “□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□□”<sup>21</sup>, (“one who has patron is organized like this”). He was appreciating the contribution of ARDU in saying that. During one of his visits to the institution, he awarded it a tractor, ordered also tap-water provision, a flour mill and an electric generator. These social amenities were later provided and started operation in October 1982 (*T'eqemt*1975). On the same date of Mengistu's visit, it was also offered certificate by Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) for its transformation from *malba to walba*. It was Lieutenant Selashi, who handed over MoA certificate (as he did so often in Arssi in his capacity as regional party general secretary) to the Chairman, *Ato* Kumaa Kabbada, who appreciated ARDU and the support given to the institution by the government on the occasion.<sup>22</sup>The former members I talked to were passionate about those good old days. They particularly described Mengistu as their “father” in the following couplets:

*Akkawaan nu dhalchee*

As if he begets us

*Qorqoorrotti ol nugalchee.*<sup>23</sup>

He puts us in tin roofed house.

Lolee-Bulchaanaa PC came to an end as co-opt in *Yakatit* 1982 (February 1990). This was done against the will of the members just by the threat of the local population. The local population disliked it so much that after its dissolution for some time the members could not go around for fear of attack. This was particularly intensified after President Mengistu left the country on *Genbot* 13, 1983 (May 20, 1991). The local population ridiculed the members saying: "your father had disappeared what will be your fate?"<sup>24</sup> But the producers prevented any attempt of pillaging and vandalizing of their facilities and dismantling of their village. They did this just by force of arms. Today, 120 houses of the former co-operators are still there at the original site of the former village. The homesteads already became small village town called Bulchana on the way from Asalla to Qersa (the administrative headquarters of Munesa district) in Eastern Arssi. It has schools, including high school up to grade 10. After the end of the *Derg* regime, the dwellers claim that they deserve everything a town needs. They already got hydroelectric power and other facilities.<sup>25</sup> But they are private farmers and traders who already shared the former communal land of PC that they used to farm during the *Derg* regime as cooperators.

#### **Leemmuu-Cammarii**

It was founded in 1972 E.C. (1979/80) in Leemmuu-Bilbilloo district to the south of Asallaa along the main Asallaa-Boqojii road. The founders were 50 individuals. Its initial capital was 17,750. Unlike many other PCs, all members of PA later joined it except the elderly and the disabled who

were given aid by this institution. Like Lolee-Bulchaanaa the members were joined it out of their free will and on the basis of their high working spirit. In many ways it was similar with Lolee-Bulchaanaa. Besides tilling land, Leemmuu-Cammarii cooperators also undertook animal husbandry and vegetable production at higher level. In many aspects it adopted modernization.<sup>26</sup>

In 1980 E.C.(1987/88) its members reached 315 having 174 oxen. That year, they farmed 590.8/ha and produced 10,031.05 quintals. This implied that output per member was 31.84 quintals while output per hectare was 17quintals.<sup>27</sup>The official sources indicate higher figures.<sup>28</sup> Like the two other investigated above, the members of this institution were also villagized. The village was also built by ARDU co-operative work development section along the main gravel road between Asallaa and Beqoji town, the administrative centre of Leemmuu-Bilbilloo district. Each house was covered with tin roofs and earth wall. The village also got hydro-electric transformer of one Mega Watt from which tall households got electric light and electric power for its mills. The members in addition to oxen also used tractor for farming. The institution had one tractor and also a combine-harvester. At its peak, the members reached 329 members and came to possess 13,000 ha of land. Leemmuu-Cammarii producers and villagers became entirely literates by literacy campaign of the time. Thus, all could read, write and compute basic mathematical equations. Women members were trained by the South Eastern Agricultural Development Zone (SEAD) and improved their skills in weaving and producing soap from oil byproducts. The women also ran 16 hectares of irrigated vegetable farms.<sup>29</sup>

This PC did introduce what was called “piece-rate system” like Hurutaa-Heexosaa. It was initiated by SEAD for experiment. This strategy came to increase productivity. It involved the breakup of land into different plots for working teams while Hurutaa-Heexosaa used it on individual basis. Each team farmed only the parcel of land it received on contract basis with communally owned means of production. Yet, it worked according to individual team mechanism and initiation. Eventually, producers were permitted to retain all produce more than 20qts/ha. The outcome was said to be encouraging, i.e. there was increment of production from 18 - 20qt/ha to 32 qt/ha. However, the leadership criticized the private feelings, which they said was re-emerging as a result of which they were looking into another piece-rate system.<sup>30</sup>This clearly reveals that the leadership was concerned not about the growth of production and productivity. They were merely concerned about social organization that followed socialist line. In short, they fostered only political goal rather than economic achievement.

In general, Leemmuu-Camarrii was one of the most successful PCs in Arssi and perhaps also in Ethiopia. According to Backlander, it stood as the second best PC in SEAD Zone. It had won 22<sup>nd</sup> world gold mercury award for its achievement. Its members were also rewarded several times for their unreserved dedication and the brilliant achievements they scored. But its stage could not pass *walba*,<sup>31</sup> the second stage in the growth of PCs. In fact, the three institutions we have discussed in different parts of Arssi were examples of outstanding achievements. They were comparable with Hundee Gaamtaa Raaree Cilaalo in Hararge and Yetnora in Gojjam. The *Derg* took pride in all of them and their facilities as official *Addis Zemen* newspaper and other official documents indicate.

Otherwise, there were other important PCs in Arssi itself like Diksis APC which reached *walba* stage in former Xiichoo *awraja*. This was the first nucleated village transformed into PC in Arssi. Others include Habee Burqituu PC in the same *awraja*. It was used by SEAD as a model PC as well. Their origin was related with the expansion of state farms in the area. Habee Burqituu was one of the Wabe villages. We can also mention Ada'aa-Shaqii and Shorimaa-Shararai in Heexosaa district and Itayya-Shaqii in Dodotaa district.<sup>32</sup>Why the above model co-opts were successful? Could we apply their great achievements to other PCs in the region? This work tries to answer these questions below.

Those three PCs assessed in some detail above were mostly recruited their members voluntarily. This followed the principle of PC guideline, i.e. voluntary membership. This could happen due to necessity. Because most members joined these co-operatives were former tenants who could not succeed if they farmed privately. This could be justified as most tenants had no oxen. They were also conscripted on the basis of their record of hard working experience through acquaintances. The last local criterion served the co-operatives in the post-formation period to thrive. On top of this, as we have seen above, the government promises were realized for them. The government gave them short and long-term loans and sometimes assistance out of its poor coffers so as to attract others to APCs.

ARDU and SEAD were strong supporters of the co-opts in every way they needed in Arssi. The above three co-operatives were the best example of those PCs which the government accorded utmost attention to. They were given the best land and large share of holdings per head. If we take Lolee-Bulchaanaa PC, it had got 1600 ha, contiguous block of cultivable land. When we

share this to members it would be 4.57 ha/member regardless of the number of families. They were given loan of inputs, money and offered also other benefits depending on their demands. During high time of farming and harvesting, it was the government's modern machineries which helped them in the harvesting process. The members were so satisfied that, they tell those days as momentous times and lamented their disintegration and disbanding of the members even today. These PCs were also

located either on the main road radiating from Asallaa or along the feeder roads. This was true for the three PCs we picked up here for special consideration and others more successful ones. They were show cases to be exhibited to higher officials when they came to the region. Those PCs located in remote distant inaccessible areas had not been given equal attention with the ones established along the highways. These points partly explain the secret of their successes.



One of the Waabee concentrated iron roofed peasant villages.  
Source: Addis Zaman, T'e qemt 16/1973 (October 26/1980)

**Non-Model Agricultural Producer Co-operatives in Arssi**

The above co-operatives were insignificant minority and among a few which had been given due attention in Ethiopia. Let us see below the circumstances of the majority PCs in the province. The majority of peasants here were denied the right of joining PCs out of their free-will following the directive of June 1979. Instead, the

party cadres pressurized and even forced the people to join. Others were enticed into PCs under advantages promised by the government and future gains. Where there was no outright coercion, different pressures were put on private farmers. Farming around small holders' plots was one of such measures. This finally resulted in taking the farm lands of the non-members of local PCs.<sup>33</sup> Thus, some peasants joined PCs for fear of land

confiscation which was sometimes done without compensation. Implicitly there was a "regulation" which allowed PCs to seize the best land from anybody. Some peasants compared this situation with pre-1974 land appropriation and grant to the government's favorites. Under this condition, some left their land only to get less fertile land or forced to join PCs. Others, who failed to get compensation, left their ancestral land for good. According to some informants, those who joined PCs in such a way became 'captives' because they were collected there by force.<sup>34</sup> Such APCs were formed by a few members and mostly failed.

In state farm areas, peasants were first moved to common villages by force after which they were induced to join PCs. We can cite the Wabe villages in this respect. This violated Lenin's principle of voluntarism, gradualism and an all rounded assistance by the proletarian state.<sup>35</sup> Thus, according to informants, there was a tangible evidence for application of force and/or pressure against peasants to join PCs. This was against what some scholars like Clapham argues. To quote Clapham's words: "the impression that I have gained from a number of regions, including Harage, Arsi and Wollo, is that cooperatives have spread not through coercion, so much as through the advantages that they have to offer to the peasants' association leadership."<sup>36</sup>

True, the advantages usually pledged by officials could attract many. But it seems that these were minority while the majority were either coerced or put under one or the other pressure. This argument could be strengthened by the findings of Molyneux and Halliday, who state that in resistance against PC formation in former Sidamo province alone, 150 peasants were killed by government forces.<sup>37</sup> In Arssi itself out of frustration, peasants killed the Vice-

Chairman of Qorroo Dagagaa *Malba* PC in Dodotaa district. The government called the killers "anti-public individuals."<sup>38</sup> Alemneh said nothing about compulsion while he emphasizes inducements of the government and ARDU which required much resources and efforts.<sup>39</sup> Dessalegn cites "unethical methods" used to form PCs without citing force for areas he studied. Tariku in his MA thesis said nothing about the process of recruiting co-operators.<sup>40</sup> Wegenie in his study area, particularly, in Amiinyyaa and Asaasaa observed compulsion used as one strategy whereas 'persuasion' was another. According to him, 38% of PC members he interviewed confirmed that, coercion was employed against them by state and members already joined PCs.<sup>41</sup> Almost all interviewed and even MoA's experts confirm this. Partly as a result of this pressure, Gadab-Asaasaa district became the leading district in the number of its PCs. The entire.<sup>46</sup> PAs of the district came to have PCs. They constituted more than 60% of the PA members in the district. Thus, it was the government, which obliged and pushed them into APCs. In Amiinyyaa district, this was done by co-operators against non-members by grabbing land from private local peasants.<sup>42</sup>

But it is apparent that, at the time, peasants were not free to speak out what they encountered. Because they feared the reprisal that the party cadres might take against them. At present, former members, MoA experts of the time, who were interviewed underlined that existence of pressure and also coercion to form PCs.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it could be concluded that though the government was crazy about APCs establishment and did much to induce peasants, many did not join them. In other words, collectivization in whatever way was unpopular with the majority peasants in Arssi. Only some favored by the government scored better result to help

the *Derg* officials for propaganda campaign.

This was also true for the Ethiopian peasants in general who remained small-scale peasant farmers at large. Their number even increased from 6.5 million in 1974 to 7.5 million in 1985 while the percentage of PCs and state farms remained very low. The third stage of APC (*waland*) was not reached in Arssi at all. A few were established in Ethiopia itself. It was Lante in Arba Minch area which evolved in the south.<sup>44</sup>

### **The End of Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives**

As things grew worse, some peasants tried to speak out against co-operatives. The peasant leaders, MoA agents, party cadres and SEAD agents tried to muzzle such peasants by taking different measures. The local government agents tried to hide the reality and waged counter-agitation by defaming the outspoken peasants. Not deterred by these actions, peasants moved into action to dissolve the APCs regardless of the punitive actions that they might face.<sup>45</sup> First, individual peasants abandoned the PCs and fled the area as a whole. But by the end of the 1980s, full-scale disbandment of PCs had started in some areas.

Disbandment and fleeing of the PCs locality as a whole started in 1980 E.C. (1987/88) before the declaration of mixed economic policy. This process first took place in Leemmuu–Bilbilloo district to the south of Asallaa. Members in this district shared oxen, agricultural tools and dissolved nine APCs. APCs chairmen on the whole collaborated with ordinary members. Many left the area for the time being, fearing that the district officials would return them to the co-operatives<sup>46</sup> and perhaps even punish them.

The unilateral disbandment of APCs by members spread to other areas. It happened next in Amiinyyaa district in *Yäkatit* 1981 (February 1989) when the members of 37 APCs disbanded their organizations, sharing all that they had contributed and produced. Before they did so, they expressed their resentment to the district party office and other officials. Every effort was made to avert the disbandment from district regional officials. But in vain.<sup>47</sup> At last, a high official was sent from Addis Ababa to try and save APCs. He was Fasika Sidelel, Alternate Member of the Politbureau of the CC of WPE and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers who was also born in the same *awraja* where the disbandment was taking place at the time. He had no better luck. He was unable to save the ongoing disintegration in spite of making every pledge and promise. He and his escorts were finally made the target of an Oromo proverb (*mammakaa*), which narrated the relationship between a hyena and a donkey:

*Yoo tokoo hareen lafaa irra jiraati. Warabessi mo waqaa irraa jiraata turee. Waytaa waraabessi yuusuu hareen dhageetee. Mal yoo Rabii isaa qonqii isaa bareedu san naf ergee jetee hareen Rabii kadhatee. Rabii mo kadha isi dhagayee worabeesa ergeefii. Waraabesis waqaraa bu'ee harree nyatee. Nus akuma harree tanee. Woytaa kadiireen seenafi wa'ee amrachi nutii himtu ya Rabii amrachi san nufidi jeeneetii kadhatee kunoo innis dhufee nu nyatee.*<sup>48</sup>

### **The translation goes as follows:**

Once upon a time, a donkey lived on the ground while the hyena lived in the sky. When a hyena howled, the donkey heard

the hyena's voice and prayed to God to send down the creature whose voice was so attractive. God responded to its prayer and sent her the hyena, which ate up the donkey. Likewise, we also prayed to our God to send us co-operatives when the cadres taught us about them. It sent us the *amrachiis* (APCs) which ate us up just as the hyena did to the donkey.

The beginning of disbandment and dissolution of co-operatives that was commenced in Leemmuu–Bilbilloo and Amiinyyaa districts had a pervasive effect. However, the final disintegration of co-operatives and villagization came after the declaration of the mixed economic policy ending command economic policy. This economic strategy came out replacing the command economy that had prevailed in Ethiopia for 16 years. Among other things, it stipulated private economic investment of up to 4 million Birr capital, which was hitherto only up to 500,000 Birr. This declaration contained provisions for the contribution of private investment in various sectors of the economy including agriculture. It repealed earlier provisions that had permitted the peasants to end the APCs,<sup>49</sup> contrary to Tariku's reports.<sup>50</sup> The peasants in Arssi and elsewhere in Ethiopia had been praying for the end of APCs for quite a long period of time and grabbed the chance. They unilaterally interpreted special decree No. 17/1990 (1982 E.C) of the mixed economy as a green light to end collectivization and all aspects of the socialist agrarian economic strategy. The whole disbandment took less than 3 months in Arssi. Land, oxen, farming tools and other resources were distributed among the members in an orderly manner.<sup>51</sup> The document itself could be described as a diplomatic admission of failure of agrarian socialism by the regime and President

Mengistu himself, who personally signed it.

Those who shared the APCs' resources are still well off, unlike those who left earlier on their own, abandoning what they had brought to the institution, including land and oxen. They still remain poor and could not even return to their birth places up to the present time. On the other hand, the committee members grabbed the chance of the official and abrupt end of the co-operatives to enrich themselves. This was, especially true for the executive committee members. What one chairman of a PC told to his close associates in a poem describes this best:

*Hinhannee lafaan lindhe*  
We stole much

*Nagayatti amma gargar lindhee!*<sup>52</sup>  
Bye, we are parting ways now!

The above state of affairs was also applied to executive committees of SCs. It should be clear that the process had started before the declaration of mixed economy in Arssi. But complete dissolution followed the declaration of mixed economy. Many PCs were sacked and vandalized. SCs in various parts of Arssi were attacked by local peasants, urban dwellers and hooligans. The peasants did so out of deep hatred, especially for PCs, as it had brought them nothing but destitution.

Thus, collectivization, far from bringing about economic development, brought most of its member's poverty and destituteness. To non-members, it was the reason for their negligence by government and other agrarian stakeholders. Small-scale peasant agriculture had come to assume secondary importance and its continuity had been in doubt. In general, we can conclude that collectivization led to the fall of production and productivity, as

there was no reward for individual effort and commitment.

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#### **CONCLUSION**

Following its seizure of power, the *Derg* sought to keep itself away from the centuries old imperial order in utmost way possible. It began this policy with Land Reform Proclamation of 1975, which was apparently the most revolutionary. This measure even surprised socialist countries with which the *Derg* had close ties. By doing it hoped to get the support of the leftists like Ethiopian People's Party (EPRP) and the broad masses. The *Derg* also adopted APCs arguing that APCs could transform Ethiopia's agrarian development. It was even taken as the only solution for rural development as it suited mechanized farming and would abolish private ownership; to use the socialist term; it would end exploitation of man by man. By doing so, it would increase production and productivity. The previous small scale peasant agriculture was blamed as a reason for backwardness and low production and productivity. A number of PCs were thus formed since 1979 and state farms were also set up taking former big private estates.

The three model PCs investigated in this article were success histories for the *Derg*. It is not clear if their success paid off the toil of its hard working co-operators, who joined them willingly and performed with commitment. They were given the best

lands in the locality snatching from local small scale peasant farmers. They were not given only the best lands but also the best opportunities. They had large possession of land per head. That was why the person at the helm of the regime, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, visited each of them several times and expressed his appreciations verbally and acclaimed them with provision of awards. He was elated by the result scored by those model APCs. Even today, the members joined them regretted their dissolution. This was the case because "APCs were the children of Colonel Mengistu as the former cooperators" told me. Production and productivity had increased by the standard of the time, i.e. 32 quintals/ha on average for wheat. This was a successful scheme then. But could this changed their livelihood in any meaningful way? The conclusion of the research is no. They could not be owner of what they produced; they were controlled from the center. True, the members were happy. This was even not the case for other small PCs and private peasantry that could not be successful. Model APCs in general were insignificant in number and they produced insignificant impact on the agrarian development. Those model APCs or others were thrived at the expense of centuries old scattered private small holding farming; the major form of agriculture in Arssi and Ethiopia. Of course, development could not be attained by abandoning the main form of agriculture so suddenly. The same was true for the majority rural population. At last, APCs came to an end unexpectedly even before the downfall of the regime itself in 1991.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>*Negarit Gazeta* (official newspaper for issuance of proclamations, directives, rules and regulations) in Amharic and English, April 29, 1975 (Miazia 21, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Dessalegn Rahmato, ‘‘Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia’’, in *An Economic History of Ethiopia: The Imperial Era*, ed. Shiferaw Bekele, Vol. I, Trenton, New Jersey, 1995, p.9.

<sup>3</sup>Informants: Zegeye Asfaw, Dalu Wayo, Badhadha Ashami et al.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*; Dinku Tola, ‘‘Changing Land Use Pattern in Gedeb Region: With Special Reference to Ardaita State Farm’’, BA thesis, Geography, AAU, 1984, p. 23 and see for the details *Negarit Gazeta*, April 29, 1975 (Miazia 21, 1967).

<sup>5</sup>Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Aristocracy*, Cambridge, 1993, p.110.

<sup>6</sup>See for details *Negarit Gazeta*, April 29 (Miazia 21, 1967) for Proclamation 31/1975.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, Proclamation No, 71/1975 of December 14/1975.

<sup>8</sup>Cicilia Backlander, *Twenty Years of Development, CADU/ARDU/SEAD in Ethiopia, CADU Publication*, Stockholm, Addis Ababa, 1988, pp. 28-29; Tariku Degu, ‘‘Transformation of Land Tenure and the Role of Peasant Associations in Eastern Arsi (1974-1991)’’, MA thesis, AAU, History, p.58.

<sup>9</sup>Wegenie Yirko, ‘‘The Development of Agricultural Producers’ Cooperatives in Ethiopia: The Case of Arsi Region’’ MA thesis, AAU, Economics, p. 59; Backlander, p.30.

<sup>10</sup>Ketebo Abdiyo. 2010. ‘‘The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arssi: 1941-1991’’, PhD Dissertation, AAU, History, 2010, p.337; *Addis Zemen* (Amharic Daily Official

Newspaper), June 30, 1979 (Sane 23, 1971); See also Wegenie, pp. 50-51.

<sup>11</sup>John M.Cohen and Nils-Ivar Isaksson, ‘‘Villagization in the Arsi Region of Ethiopia’’, Report Prepared by SIDA Consultants to the Ethio-Swedish Mission on Villagization in Arsi Region, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, International Rural Development Centre, Uppsala, 1987, p. 150; *Addis Zemen*, November 17, 1987 (Hidar 7, 1977); informants: Muhammad Haji, Leliso Kawo and Gebi Heyii.

<sup>12</sup>Cohen and Isaksson, pp. 50-51.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*; pp. pp. 45 and 65; *Addis Zemen*, February 22, 1986 (*Yekatit* 15, 1979); Irresso Rabo, Leliso and Abu Baker Jibbo.

<sup>14</sup>*Addis Zemen*, May 16, 1981 (*Ginbot* 8, 1981); Badhadha, Leliso and Haji Gemedi.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*. For instance, in 1982/83 (1975 E.C.) productivity was 22 quintals/ha.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup>*Addis Zemen*, August 19, 1983 (*Nahase* 12, 1975); informants: Badhadha, Mekuriya Gebreyes and Legesse Riqisa.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*; *Addis Zemen*, October 26, 1980 (*Tiqimt*16, 1973).

<sup>20</sup>Informants: Burqa Hirpho, Hajo Ensene and Haji.

<sup>21</sup>*Addis Zemen*, October 5, 1982 (*Meskerem* 25, 1975).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup>Informants: Burqa and Badhasa.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>Addis Zemen, June 18, 1983 (*Sane* 11, 1975). See also the same Newspaper, May 22, 1983 (*Ginbot*14, 1975); Wegenie, p.62; informants: Mekurya and Asefa Wolde-Mikael.

<sup>27</sup>Wegenie, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup>According to *Addis Zemen*, in the 1979/80 E.C. (1988) crop year, the institution cultivated 547 ha and sowed 680 quintals seed and fertilizer. It sowed 600 quintals of barley and wheat. The yield attained that year was 16, 000 quintals while productivity was 32 quintals /ha for different crops. It had a capital of 545, 401 Birr.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*; see also footnote number 25 above.

<sup>30</sup>Backlander, pp. 33-34.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid*, p. 33; *Addis Zemen*, May 22, 1983 (*Ginbot* 14, 1975). The first ranked APC in the SEAD zone was Hurutaa-Heexosaa according to informants.

<sup>32</sup>See for these exemplary PCs *Addis Zemen*, November 16, 1987 (*Hidar* 7, 1980).

<sup>33</sup>Informants: Abdo Jilo, Aliyyi K/Tilmo, Irresso and Ma'za Libarge.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>35</sup>Wegenie, p. 21; informants: Muhammad Hinsene, LaqewTesema, Juneydi Said et al.

<sup>36</sup>Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 173.

<sup>37</sup>Fred Hallday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, London, 1981, p. 109.

<sup>38</sup>*Addis Zemen*, 31 May 1981 (*Ginbot* 23, 1973). The name of the murdered vice-chairman was AmanTuki. He was beaten to death.

<sup>39</sup>Alemneh Dejene, "Smallholder Perceptions of Rural Development and Emerging Institutions in Arssi Region since the Ethiopian Revolution." *Development Discussion Paper*, No. 192, Harvard University, p. 165.

<sup>40</sup>Dessalegn Rahmato, "The Unquiet Countryside the Collapse of "Socialism" and Rural Agitation." *In Ethiopia in Change and Peasantry, Nationalism and Democracy*, eds. AbebeZegeye, Siegfried, London, 1984, p.251; Tariku, pp.54-58.

<sup>41</sup>Wegenie, p. 139.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*; informants: Samuna Rakiso, Leliso, Laqew and Ma'aza.

<sup>43</sup>Informants: Legese, Abdul-Aziz Wahila, Xiqi Dinqi and Amare Lenjiso.

<sup>44</sup>Cohen and Isaksson, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup>Informants: Muhammad Haji, Leliso and Gebi; see also Tariku, pp. 81-82.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid*; the seven APCs were: Hargessa, Moche, Ejersa, Shanan, Gora, Onqolo-Belo and Farachu Mikael.

<sup>47</sup>Tariku, p.84; informants: Ma'aza, Muhammad Abbu, Muhammad Haji et al.

<sup>48</sup>Informants: Ma'aza, Asefa and Muhammad Haji. Quoted also in Tariku, pp. 86-87.

<sup>49</sup>*Negarit Gazeta*, May 19, 1990 (*Ginbot*11, 1982); see also *Addis Zemen*, June 17/1989 (*Sane* 10, 1981).

<sup>50</sup>Tariku, p. 88.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid*; Informants: Debbebe Gebre-Mariam, Laqew and Tsegaye Abebe.

<sup>52</sup>Informants: Hajjo Ensene and Burqa Hirpo.

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Stockholm. Addis Ababa. Clapham, Christopher. 1988. *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*. Cambridge.

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## III. List of Oral Informants

Name	Age	Interview Date	Place	Remark
Aabbu-Bakar Jibboo ( <i>Sheikh</i> )	75	01.05.2007	Hurutaa	Imam of a mosque in Hurutaa town and local elder.
Abdoo Jiloo ( <i>Obbo</i> )	66	10.04.2007	Abboomsaa	He worked as a lawyer. He was also a <i>balabbat-wokil</i> for <i>beta-rest</i> . A very well recognized elder in his locality.
Abdul-Aziiz Waahilaa ( <i>Obbo</i> )	57		Xiichoo	Agricultural agent during the <i>Derg</i> times and still works in that capacity.
Aliyyii KabiirTilmoo ( <i>Obbo</i> )	65	13.04.2007	Abboomsaa	He is a tailor during the interview. He was exposed to problems created by villagization.
Amare Leenjiso ( <i>Obbo</i> )	55	07.01.2006	Arsii-Nageellee	Agricultural expert during the <i>Derg</i> regime and till now.
Asefa Wolde- Mikael ( <i>Ato</i> )	68	31.05.2005	Asallaa	He worked in CADU/ARDU until the end of these institutions.
Badhaadhaa Ashamii ( <i>Obbo</i> )	67	26.02.2007	Lolee-Bolchaanaa Digaluu-Xiijoo district	He was a member of a model APC Loolee-Bulchaanaa.
Burqaa Hirpho ( <i>Obbo</i> )	56	10.04.2006 12.04.2006	Hulluuqoo-Caqasoo Muunessa district	A farmer whose father was well known orator.
Daaluu Woyoo ( <i>Obbo</i> )	78	27.01.2006	Zuwaay (Baatuu) Adaamii Tulluu Jiddoo Kombolcha	Landless during the imperial times who suffered much because of landlessness.
Debebe Gebre- Mariam (Qès)	76	19.02.2007	Buura Jaallee	Local priest who had samon land.
Gabii Hee`yyii ( <i>Haaji</i> )	68	26.03.2007	Itayaa	A farmer who had a number of <i>gashas</i> during the imperial times.
Haajii Gammadii ( <i>Obbo</i> )	65	14.10.2003 10.04.2006	Addis Ababa	Well informed peasant.
Hajjoo Inseenee ( <i>Adee</i> )	60	12.06.2006	Addis Ababa	A daughter of a landlord. She was well informed about landlord-tenant relationship.

Irreessoo Raaboo (Obbo)	67	09.05.2007	Addoo-Goondee Heexosaa district	Well known elder. He had been PA chairman during the <i>Derg</i> period.
Juuneeydii Sa`id (Balambras)	67	30.40.2008	Diksiis	He was son of <i>awwaaree balabbat</i>
Legesse Riqisaa (Obbo)	65	25.02.2007	Qarsaa Muunessa district	Agricultural agent during imperial times.
Laqew Tesema (Ato)	76	25.03.2006	Asaasaa	Well-known local elder. He was exposed to the problems created by APCs.
Leellisoo Kaawo (Haaji)	69	08.04.1998 02.01.2002 07.05.2005 10.10.2007	Addis Ababa	He was a <i>cheqa-shum</i> in 1947 E.C. He also worked as a regional PA committee member. He had been also CADU model farmer.
Maza Libarge (Ato)	91	28.04.2007	Xiichoo	He was a member of local <i>mehal-sefari</i>
Mekuriya Gäbräyas (Ato)	56	01.05.2005	Asallaa	A law expert who served CADU/ARDU from its foundation till its end he tells CADU achievement with admiration.
Muhaammad Aabbuu (Obbo)	85	25.04.2007	Roobee	Well-known local elder who worked as a tailor, lawyer and trader and also farmer.
Muhaammad Haajii (Sheikh)	70	11.06.2007	Itayya	He was a farmer who had been a chairman of <i>awraja</i> PA committee.
Muhaammad Hinseenee (Obbo)	50	27.03.2006	Asaasaa	Well informed about the Haile-Selassie regime.
Tsegaye Abebe (Ato)	60	01.03.2006	Arsii-Nageellee	A farmer who knows a lot about the Nageellee <i>beta-rest</i> .
Samuna Rakiso (Obbo))	55	04.02.2006 19.02.2009	Shaashamannee Addis Ababa	He became a district governor during the <i>Derg</i> period.
Xiiqqii Dinqii (Obbo)	62	05.02.2006	Qarsaa Majaa Arsii-Nageellee district	He was a tenant.

Zegeyye            65        24.01.2008    Addis Ababa  
Asfaw (*Ato*)

He worked as a high official in MLRA and later during the *Derg* regime as a minister of agriculture and minister of justice.