

Resettlement and Food Security Nexus in Ethiopia: A Case from Nonno Resettlement Sites, Central Ethiopia

Synopsis of a PhD Dissertation¹

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Abstract

The overriding purpose of the dissertation was to investigate whether or not the current government-sponsored resettlement program (alternatively termed access to improved land program) is a successful option to attain sustainable food security and improved livelihoods in rural Ethiopia. In order to achieve the fundamental intent of the study, the necessary data were drawn both from primary and secondary data sources. Systematic and purposive sampling techniques were used to select sample households both from the host and the resettler communities in and around the resettlement sites. Household sample survey, key informant interview, focus group discussions, story telling and field observations were the principal means of generating first hand data. As issues related to resettlement and food insecurity are very intricate, different techniques, indices, scales and models were applied to adequately address the objectives of the study. Livelihood frameworks, IRR Model and different food security indices were adopted to holistically examine the overall well-being and food security status of the resettler households. The results of the analyses revealed that quite a large number of the resettler households were able to produce sufficient food for their family at least for the moment. However, the current traditional agricultural production systems seem to be environment-unfriendly and ruinous to the expected sustainable development in the area. Erratic rainfall, scarcity of moisture and soil degradation have been the main driving forces of impoverishment and food insecurity in the sending areas, and the subsequent massive and prolonged population displacement over the last couple of decades. The results and discussions of the study also show that resettlement-induced risks can be eased through comprehensive resettlement implementation strategy incorporating clear

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duties and responsibilities of the resettlers, the host, aid agencies, NGOs and government bodies. Environmental rehabilitation efforts in overworked areas and integrated watershed management practices can contribute a lot to enhance the livelihoods of the rural people within their ancestral areas. In cases when/where planned resettlement is inevitable, the following points should be taken into account to minimize possible risks: comprehensive planning, unhurried and deliberate implementation, well thought-out and genuine recruitment and site selection procedures, adequate understanding of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation as well as environmental protection practices, and efficient assistance to the resettlers.

Background Issues

Over the past several decades, adverse environmental, socio-economic and political situations have resulted in numerous population displacements in various parts of the world. Refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and asylum-seekers are widespread worldwide. Unsurprisingly, the greatest number of refugees and IDPs are found in Africa and Asia. As noted in Mberu (2006), internal migration has become a salient feature of life in most countries of Africa, Latin America, Middle East and the Pacific as a result of economic instability, political dissension, social contention and environmental degradations. Similarly, over the years, Ethiopia has become home to hundreds of thousands of IDPs who abandoned their habitual residences in the form of either planned resettlement and/or spontaneous migration. Such displacements have almost always been caused by the appalling environmental and climatic conditions in the country coupled with the consequential failure in agriculture productivity inevitably leading to some well documented humanitarian crises.

Although the displacement process has been spontaneous for most part of Ethiopian history, planned/sponsored resettlement only began in 1958 when the then Imperial government established the first known planned resettlement site in the present day SNNP Regional State (Cernea 2000, Dessalegn 2003, Gebre, 2004, Fosse 2006) and has unsteadily continued to date. The current Ethiopian government, although reluctant initially to consider resettlement programs as viable options for improving food security of its citizens, was forced to embark on intra-regional resettlement program in 2003 following the severe drought in the early 2000s. In this

process, Nonno and Dano *woredas* of West Shewa Zone were selected as two of the most suitable areas to receive 'voluntary' resettlers from eleven *woredas* of Oromiya National Regional State. As a result, a total of 2226 households or 14,899 people were resettled in these two *woredas* in 2003 and 2004.

Statement of the Problem and Justification

The current government claims that its recent voluntary resettlement program has been a success in improving the food security status of the rural households. However, several researchers strongly argue that government sponsored resettlement schemes have never been successful in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the world. Research outputs (Cernea 2000, Dessalegn 2003, Pankhurst and Piguet 2004, Gebre 2004, Hammond and Bezaeit 2004, de Wet 2006, Fosse 2006, Mberu 2006, Hammond 2008, Alula 2009 Cernea 2009) point out that most resettlement schemes during the *Imperial* and the *Derg* governments in Ethiopia failed to meet the intended targets. Some recent research outputs (FSS 2006) also argue that the recent FDRE's resettlement program does not promise to realize the expected improved household food security. It was with this argument in mind that Nonno Resettlement Sites were selected as a focus of this study, and it was against this backdrop that this research was conducted. Particularly, the research was initiated to assess the current food security status of the new resettlers in Ethiopia with special emphasis on the resettlement sites in Nonno *Woreda*.

Objectives of the Study

The overriding objective of this research was to investigate the role of the current population resettlement program in food security attainment in Ethiopia with special attention to Nonno *Woreda* resettlement sites. The research was intended to assess whether or not the resettlement program

improved the food security status of the resettlers as compared to the situation in their sites of origin; or alternatively, whether or not it caused more risks and impoverishment to the resettlers. The research sought to discover the current livelihood status of the resettlers not only as compared to the case at their site of origin but also as compared to some national or global standards. On the whole, livelihoods and food security status of the resettlers, the push factors and livelihood strategies in sending areas and the prospects of the biophysical conditions of the receiving areas with the major emphasis on land use/land cover changes were the major study targets.

Location of the Study Area

The district of Nonno, the focal point of the study, is found within the central Ethiopian tableland commonly known as Shewan Plateau in the upper catchment of the Gibe River. Nonno is a flat terrain milieu with altitudes ranging from about 1126m above mean sea level /amsl/ (in Gibe Valley) to about 2192m amsl. All the resettlers in this *woreda* were recruited from eleven *woredas* located in Arsi (Dodota, Hitosa, Marti, Zeway Dugda and Sire) and East Hararge (Badano, Gurawa, Gola Oda, Jarso, Kurfa Challe and Meta) administrative zones of Oromiya National Regional State.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

In order to achieve the fundamental intent of the study, the necessary data was drawn both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data collection process involved intensive and frequent fieldwork at the receiving area and brief information-gathering field excursions to some of the sending areas. Systematic and purposive sampling techniques were used to select sample households both from the host and the resettler communities in and around the resettlement sites. Transect walk, household sample survey, key informant interview, focus group discussion and GPS-based fieldwork were also the principal means of generating first hand data.

Secondary data was obtained from a range of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Concerted efforts were made to adequately understand the livelihoods and food security status of the resettled households in view of the livelihoods framework, IRR Model and other rigorous indicators such as Coping Strategy Index (CSI), Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS), Household Hunger Index (HHI), Food Consumption Score (FCS), Dietary Diversity Index (DDI), Household Food Balance Model, Precipitation Concentration Index (PCI) and De Martonne Aridity Index (DMAI). The food security status of the households was investigated based on the core components of food security: availability, access, utilization and sustainability. The IRR Model was used to gain insights into the resettlers' impoverishment risks. Moreover, food availability was examined by assessing the agricultural output of the resettlers. The access component of the resettlers' food security status was investigated by the use of HFIAS and CSI while utilization, as a critical component in food security analysis, was investigated by means of a simple arithmetic known as Household Food Balance Model through which the total food output per year per household was converted into its equivalent per capita kilocalorie.

Findings of the Study

Thorough investigations into the resettlers' livelihood strategies, their achievements and challenges have shown some interesting results. Firstly, season-based rain-fed subsistence crop cultivation, and traditional livestock production were unsurprisingly found to be the economic base of both the resettlers and the host community in resettlement sites and the environs. This is because the receiving area (i.e. Nonno) receives more annual total rainfall and is endowed with more agricultural resources (flat and fertile environ) unlike the case in sending areas. At least in recent times, the resettlers have been found to have fairly adequate agricultural output as they have better access to fertile and sizable farmlands though this never guarantees the sustainable development in the area.

An attempt was made to find out if the resettlement sites contain any special elements that enabled the resettlers to engage in diverse non-farm sources of livelihood. Accordingly, the resettlers were found to be more

business-minded arguably because they moved from areas where cash crops (such as *chat* and coffee) are well produced and contraband was more practiced. As a result, numerous individuals were found to be interested in petty-trades, particularly clothing items, traditional fast foods, and *chat* trading. Moreover, store rental and grain hording, flour-making, donkey-drawn carts rental, retailing consumer merchandizes, small-scale bakery, and brokerage were found to be important off-farm activities augmenting the resettlers' income.

At the time of the study, the resettlers were found to have accessed improved livelihood and socio-economic resources like fertile and sizable farmland, irrigation service, potable water supply, health services, all-weather roads, primary schools, more predictable and sufficient rainfall condition and better housing units. These are assumed to have made a favorable contribution to the prospective livelihood situation of the resettlers.

The HFBM analysis shows that about 43 percent of the resettled households were found to be somehow surplus producers, about 36 percent were only self-sufficient and the remaining 21 percent failed to meet their daily food requirements. The HFIAAS analysis similarly shows that about 38 percent of the resettled households are adequately food secure, and about 33 percent, 15 percent and 14 percent are mildly, moderately and severely food insecure, respectively. Generally, it is safe to conclude that most resettlers are at better dietetic status than when they were in their original areas where they used to live entirely on food aid for years.

An attempt was made to look into the coping strategies of the resettlers in case of difficulties. The resettlers' coping strategy patterns (indicated in Figure 1), were modeled to show the sequence of responses that the households employ. According to the model, the coping strategies at the lowest stage of the ladder, such as limiting food portions and restricting adults' intake, required little commitment of domestic resources. The resettlers at this stage can easily recover from anxiety once the crisis has been relieved due to ripening of crops or intervention schemes like food-for-work. The worst problem occurs if the crisis persists and forces them into a greater commitment of resources such as eating seed stocks and selling-out farm assets to cope with the shortfalls. They may also be forced to collect firewood and burn charcoal for sale to meet subsistence food

needs. Such practices certainly damage the natural vegetation cover leading to subsequent dreadful environmental and climatic events. As the state of food deficit worsens, they might employ more irreversible coping strategies like selling crucial domestic assets, making the situation harder to restore to its pre-crisis state. The strategies at the highest level of the ladder, such as begging, are signs of complete failure to cope with food crisis that may lead to further impoverishment and site abandonment.

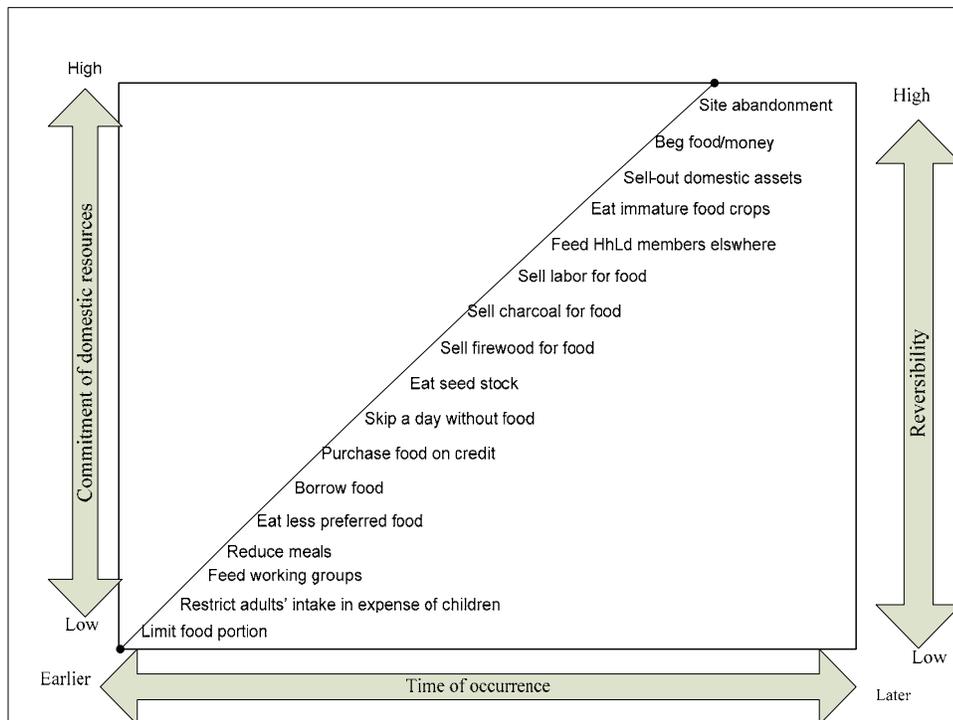


Figure 1: A model of coping strategy to food insecurity in the context of Nonno (Source: Modified to Nonno resettlers' situation from Frankenberger (1992))

Alongside the achievements discussed earlier on, the resettlers in Nonno were found to have been entrapped by numerous challenges in the drive to attain their food security and reconstruct sources of livelihoods. The observed challenges include social disarticulation, swift environmental

degradation, rainfall variability, prevalence of endemic human and livestock diseases, inadequate traction power supply, limited access to financial services, inadequate off-farm livelihood opportunities, bureaucratic and inadequate institutional support, extravagance and insufficient use of time, and insufficient public services.

The findings of all the techniques confirmed that the livelihoods and food security status of the resettlers were far better than the case when they were in their ancestral areas. However, this does not mean that each and every resettler had physical, social and economic access to fairly sufficient, safe and nutritious food at all times.

By looking at the ongoing severe environmental degradation and rapid population growth, it is safe to predict that the resettlers' prospects may be unfavorable though the future is uncertain. The main attributes determining the daily food per capita was explored by using multiple regression equation. The result of the analysis indicated that among the explanatory variables, family size, access to irrigation, commercial fertilizer input per hectare, and annual grain output per household were the major determinants of per capita dietary supply in the area. In addition to the qualitative approach, the resettlers' perceptions and perspectives on their own lives were assessed in order to investigate the issues qualitatively in more depth. In this regard, the life historical narratives of the case study households has given a clear picture of the pre-resettlement and post-resettlement status of the households and the impoverishment risks that they might have faced.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the relevant theories, reviewed literatures and empirical findings of the study, the research concludes that the environmental factors, in particular those related to erratic rainfall, moisture scarcity and soil degradation, have been the main driving forces of impoverishment and food insecurity in the sending areas, and of the subsequent massive and prolonged population displacement over the last couple of decades, which could have been avoided through integrated environmental rehabilitation and rural development intervention programs in the area. In case of the inevitability of the resettlement programs, it may also have been possible to

avoid the associated humanitarian and environmental risks. Resettlement-induced risks can be eased through efficient policies; comprehensive resettlement implementation manuals incorporating clear duties and responsibilities of resettlers, the host, NGOs and government bodies in case of planned resettlement operation and good governance. Environmental rehabilitation efforts in overworked areas as well as development of irrigation schemes and suitable water harvesting techniques can contribute much to alleviate poverty and enhance the livelihoods of people within their ancestral areas.

In cases when and where planned resettlement is inevitable, the following points should be taken into account to minimize possible risks associated with the program: comprehensive planning, unhurried and deliberate implementation, well thought-out and genuine recruitment and site selection procedures, adequate understanding of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation as well as environmental protection practices, and efficient assistance to the resettlers.

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