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Revisiting Rural Development in Ethiopia Through a Gender Lens

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Contextual Background

In the last three decades, faced with a complex, extremely diverse and rapidly changing reality, approaches to rural development has gone through many twists and turns. At the global level,, a major critique of both mainstream rural development and one which has gained a considerable momentum is what started as 'women and development and has presently been modified to 'gender analysis'. The shift form 'women' to gender is indicative of changes in theoretical perspectives. Until the late 1960s, rural development was premised on economic growth models, which were expected to 'trickle down' to the poor farmers. It was believed that men and women shared development projects and programs equally. The handful of women's projects was restricted to social welfare concerns such as nutritional education and home economics. These policies known as 'the welfare approach' identified women solely as wives and mothers. By 1970, the critique to the trickle down approach to poverty alleviation became firmly established and new approaches to development began to emerge. For instance the short-lived 'basic needs approach to development emphasized the need for the provision of health, education, sanitation and secure livelihood .

It was at this time that Esther Boserup's book entitled *Women's Role in Economic Development* was released. Contrary to the prevailing myth , the book demonstrated the differential impact of development on men and women. One of the major attempts of the book was its illustration of the variation in female agricultural participation across continents and countries. Of equal importance of Boserup's demonstration of how the gender division of labour in agriculture has been modified by changes in such factors as type of cultivation systems and forms of property, as well as the introduction of new crops and technology. It argued that agricultural innovations adversely affected women and most development programmes tend to place women at a disadvantage vis-à-vis men. Another highlight of the book was its emphasis on the specificity of the gender division of labour in Sub-Saharan Africa, which it classified as the 'Female Farming System'. In this system, women played a pre-eminent role in food production.

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In the belt of 'classical patriarchy' stretching from North Africa across the Middle East and Northern Asia, it is men who have the major responsibility for household food provisioning. However, this does not mean that women are absent from agricultural production, but that "women's labour contribution is subsumed under male controlled processes" (Razavi & miller, 1995:10). Highland Ethiopia, with its plough – based agriculture would be classified in this category.

Coming as it did in the early 1970s, a period of " considerable ferment and change, with the emergence of new ideas, new actors, and new policy approaches" (Sen, G,1994:65), Boserup's work and the Untied Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985, fuelled an avalanche of literature documenting women's role in production and reproduction. This work which is known under the rubric of 'women in development ' (WID) tried to establish women's issues as a serious development concern and advocated for an equal share of development resources for women. Contrary to earlier assumptions of women as 'house wives', WID advocates demonstrated that women participated

actively in production, reproduction and community managing work and called on the state to provide political and economic autonomy by reducing inequality with men.

This form of advocacy which become known as the 'equity approach' best exemplified by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provided for women's rights to receive training, equal access to credit and marketing facilities as well as equal treatment in agrarian reform. There were others who emphasized the importance of changing the gender division of labour and the need to properly value women's unpaid labour (Young, 1993: 131). The equity approach which translated into a call for redistribution of power was not well received by development agencies who were not willing to "tamper with unknown and unfamiliar social variables"(Buvinic,1983:26).

The equity approach was as short lived as the basic needs approach in mainstream development paradigm as the world economic crisis led to a return to economic growth models via structural adjustment. In this model the state was no longer viewed as the primary engine of growth and hence its functions were to be minimized. Contrary to expectations of increased state support for 'women's issues', austerity programs led to drastic declines in real government expenditures on the social sectors. The subsequent increase in poverty further aggravated gender disparities. Cuts in social expenditure resulted in shifting the costs of welfare from the state to the 'household'. In reality this has meant relying on women's ability to take on an increasing burden of unpaid work.

The disarray in mainstream development policy was matched by new and divergent approach in the field of women and development. The WID framework itself has never been homogenous. But by 1980, it has been subjected to numerous critics. A major critic was directed at the use of an undifferentiated population of women. The focus was then shifted to 'gender' that is to relationships between men and women. Accordingly, the unit of analysis has changed from an emphasis on the individual women and the household to socially distinct groups of women and men and the relations between them. In a global environment where 'talking economics' has become preeminent, in some circles 'gender' has been rendered less political that is 'unthreatening and accessible' (Razavi&Miller, 1995: 15). In this technocratic approach to gender, the gender division of labour is primarily conceptualized as a relationship of separation. In other words, it shies away from addressing the process of what Kabeer has termed "social connectedness" (Kabeer, 1992: 14). Or those iintrahousehold power dimensions of gender relations that Amartya Sen conceptualized as 'cooperative conflicts' (1984).

Emphasis on the difference between men and women without providing an account of the relations between them fails to explain the process of social change and conflict. Likewise, while it is erroneous to assume a unity of interest between all household members, this should not be taken to mean a total separation of interest between them. The social relations analysis highlights the need to take account of the ensemble of relations governing the process of production and reproduction, distribution and consumption. As gender cross-cuts with other forms of social differentiation, such as

CCRDA

age, class, ethnicity, there are both similarities and differences among women. Social relations are embedded in a wide range of institutions through which social groups acquire their livelihood such as the household, the community, the market and the state (Kabeer,1994). Gender subordination is constructed by the rules and practices of these various institutions and can not be fully understood by a focus on households.

How then is the process of more equitable power sharing to be achieved? Gender efficiency advocates put more weight on changing conceptual frameworks by policy planners and policy makers. The first point emphasized by those who put emphasis on social relations is that redistributing resources between the genders is that it will involve conflict. But as gender relations involve both conflict and collaboration, " men and women are engaged in a constant process of negotiation and re-negotiation. The priority of those interested in improving women's status, therefore must be to provide women with greater bargaining power within this process" (Razavi& Miller, 1995: 31). Women's relative autonomy will have to be self-generated. " All that a gender-transformative policy can do is to provide women with enabling resources which will allow them to control of their own lives, to determine what kinds of gender relations they would like to live within and to devise the strategies and alliances to help them get there (Kabeer, 1994: 97). The enabling resources would have to be created by the state and a diverse civil society

Gender Profile of Rural Development in Ethiopia

Out of an estimated population of 58,652,158 slightly over 50 million people reside in the rural areas. A glimpse at social indicators such as life expectancy, literacy, child and maternal mortality or access to health, water and sanitation seem to indicate that rural development has not been a priority of government policy. In agriculture, subsistence production, which is by far the dominant sector, began to attract some attention only in the 1960s. Influenced by the success of the Green Revolution, the Ministry of Agriculture with substantive support from multi-lateral and bilateral donor agencies launched regional agricultural development projects in a handful of high-potential agricultural areas of the country.

These included the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit which was set up in 1967 with support from the Swedish Internaitonal Development Agency(SIDA), the Wolayita Agricultural Development Unit (WADU) which was set up in 1970 with support from the World Bank and the ADA District Development Project (ADDP) which was launched in 1972-1973 with support from USAID. Of these, the most well known and more comprehensive project was CADU. Its major activity included agriculture research, the dissemination of improved seed and fertilizer, improved livestock husbandry, provision of credit and marketing services. It also included the construction of feeder-roads, water supply afforestation, women's project and training of project personnel.

In the first two phases of its existence which lasted from 1967- 1975, its highly publicised success included identification of high yielding wheat varieties, better animal husbandry practices, credit and input delivery program which enabled smallholder

CCRDA

households to substantially increase the production of staple grain and dairy products. Located in a region of high population density, the second package programme, WADU put special emphasis on population resettlement in addition to the development and diffusion of yield-increasing inputs, provision of credit and marketing of agriculture produce. While there was a marked increase in yield and in the volume of marketable crops, the reorganisation of settlement plots and the facilitation of new households were far short of the original plan. ADDP located in a district with a very close proximity to the capital city and an area well endowed for the production of Teff provided a similar service of providing inputs, credit and marketing services.

The first indication of gender bias in these early package programmes is the absence of information on women in these three areas in the documents written about these projects. I can only therefore speak of my own experience as an employee of CADU. In this well funded and comprehensive project, the "women's unit ' within the Social Development Section was a peripheral. The numerous publications of CADU on socio-economic issues or agronomy hardly mentioned women. It was assumed that women only performed reproductive tasks. Hence, the home economists provided them with training in traditional home-based activities such as child-care and home management particularly 'good nutrition.'

The project did not have a research component. Hence there was no information on the gender division of labour, time use, access to resources and decision making in the household. When women did not turn up for their training on time or did not implement what they were taught in terms of better child care or nutrition, it was blamed on the ignorance of rural women. The home economists have to teach at least three classes in very scattered villages. They would walk, ride horses to a very long distance and arrive for their early morning class only to find an empty room or at best one or two women. The home economist is only worried about being late for her nest class and being blamed by her male supervisor. The rural women, for her part has to accomplish numerous tasks such as feeding her husband before he takes of to the field, fetching water, feeding the children and animals and preparing lunch prior to coming to class.

The project failed to provide women access to the full range of skills that would in turn have accelerated the hoped for rural development. It was only much later that income generating was tagged on to the rest of the project but even this only focused on traditional skills such as spinning which fetched very little income. Women could not implement what they learnt about 'good nutrition' or child care because they did not have the time or the control of the other necessary resources. The event I am describing took place in the mid 70's and it could be explained away by the lack of gender awareness that prevailed at the time. But in my field visits during the last four years, I am confronted with the same types of 'women's projects' , some of which are only upgraded to 'gender programmes'.

In a recent review , Amartya Sen highlighted three distinct but related types of inequities suffered by women:

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1. Material deprivation, deep seated and far—reaching gender inequalities, which affect the economic lives of women, in the real world;
2. Political disempowerment, the de facto (and often de jure) derogation of women's authority in public and private decision-making processes which reinforces material deprivation;
3. Theoretical degradation, the neglect or distortion of women's position and contribution in the world of theory-including economic theory.(Sen,A. 1995:51).

Rural development in Ethiopia has thus far failed to address any of these major inequities suffered by women. For rural women, the major indicator of their material deprivation can be traced to their lack of access to land, the most significant livelihood-sustaining asset. Unlike other countries where a considerable amount of detailed studies of changing gender relations have been produced in the last two decades, there is very little research based information on the reproductive, productive and community work of rural women in the various agro-ecologies of the country. There is only one book length study of one rural area (Pankhurst, H. 1992).

The source of a persistent gender bias in rural development in Ethiopia is the narrow conceptualisation of agricultural production. Most account of agricultural production tends to focus on performance of tasks associated with agricultural fieldwork. Given the nature of mixed farming ,accounts of agricultural production ought to include both crop and animal production. Such an approach would help us understand the gender division of labour and to accurately measure women's participation in agriculture. In areas of plough cultivation, there is a cultural taboo against women ploughing and sowing. With the exception of these two tasks however, women participate in every aspect of farm production such as weeding, harvesting and post harvest activities. Similar to the widely documented experience of other African countries, hoe-based cultivation depended on extensive female labour input into all aspects of cultivation. Women also play a significant role in animal husbandry.

Existing records underestimate or completely ignore women's considerable participation in the mixed farming system. For example both the 1984 and 1994 population and housing census of are based on a highly gender biased conception of "economically active" population which undervalue women's economic activities. Furthermore, as rural households can no longer sustain their livelihood through agricultural activities alone, men, women and children in rural households engage in a variety of off farm activities all throughout the year. Here too women's contribution to the total household income is not negligible.

The Gendered Nature of land Rights

A clarion call of the broad-based political uprising that erupted throughout Ethiopia in 1974 was 'Land to the Tiller'. Just as the package programmes promised to substantially increase agricultural production and increase the standard of living of the rural population,

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the land reform promised to put an end to the archaic imperial agrarian system and 'usher a process of social and economic justice'. The enthusiastic and broad based support that the reform has received soon died don as 'subsequent policies and practices transformed what was potentially positive measure to an instrument of rural impoverishment ' (Dessalegn, R. 1997). For most women the reform exacerbated both their material deprivation and their political disempowerement.

A gender aware reading of the land reform proclamation clearly reveals the biased assumptions about women's needs, roles and capabilities in the framing of the policy. Although the Proclamation stated 'without differentiation of the sexes, any person who is willing to personally cultivate land shall be allocated land", in most cases, the implementation was discriminatory towards women.

Initially land was distributed by family size and registered under the male head of household. In using the household as the unit of allocation, the policy assumed that households were uniform and failed to take account of the intra-household distributional relations. Secondly, the policy assumed that the gender division of labour in agriculture was immutable and classified women with persons whom due to illness or age cannot personally cultivate their holding. In other words, the reform failed to challenge the cultural taboo against women ploughing and sowing and hence reaffirmed the beliefs, practices and contracts which governed the relations between women and men.

Consequently, most women failed to obtain possessory right to land. The situation was much worse for women in polygamous unions, divorced women and those who came of age after the initial land apportionment. Given the predominant practice of early marriage in most rural areas, divorce is frequent and the rate of divorce has accelerated due to the numerous socio-economic changes. Women in polygamous marriages were also negatively affected as men tended to register just one wife. Although female-headed households are allocated land, often this is of minimal size. Moreover, to the extent that they depended on male labour for a significant proportion of farm labour, they have very limited control in deciding land use priorities as well as in the control of the produce.

Beyond these obvious constraints, there were other factors which severely limited women's right to land. Land was distributed to peasants who were organized in peasant associations and who were entitled to land only as residents of the Kebele. Very often women who married outside their community 'lost' the share of land allocated to them in their parental home. Similarly, divorced women lost their share of land if they left (as often they had to) their marital household. However, the degree to which women gained some land rights or were dispossessed depended on the pre-reform practice of female inheritance to land or the absence thereof.(Dessalegn. R, 1993; Pankhurst,1992). In other words in areas where the practice of women's inheritance right existed, it tended to strengthen women's claim to their share of land in cases of divorce or on returning to their natal village. Another critical factor was the willingness of the peasant Association leaders and judicial tribunals to accommodate the possibility of women acquiring rights to land following marital break down.

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In a context of a rapid population growth rate and land supply limitation the anticipated land distribution by family size could not be sustained. In the 1980s landlessness become a glaring reality. Land shortage, increasing poverty and the general social dislocation generated a process of increased marital instability and began to transform the rights and duties inherent in marriage and divorce procedures often to the determent of women. However, the existing literature on problems of access to land mostly refers to 'landless male adults'. The size and gravity of female landlessness remains unexplored.

The reform was accompanied with the establishment of new rural institutions and subsequent reforms such as villagization resettlement schemes and collectivization. Each of these processes had a differential impact on men and women. In general terms women were far more disadvantaged but in spite of the monumental difficulties the various processes of dislocation also loosened some of the cultural taboos and offered women a limited space for the emergence of new identities.

New Rural Institutions

In terms of institutional development, the most important rural institution was the Peasant Association (PA). In addition to the management and implementation of the land reform, the PA's controlled the life of the community as it had judicial tribunals, which were mandated to adjudicate cases involving land disputes and legal cases. With the exception of female-headed households, most women are excluded from membership in these institutions as only heads of households are registered as members.

By 1990, it was estimated that women were only 12 per cent of the Peasant Association membership, mostly female-heads of households or those engaged in small businesses. However, by the early 1990s, female membership in PAs was estimated to be between 20-25 per cent. The growth is most likely due to the death and destabilization caused by the civil war, resettlement and other calamities. Moreover, there is no evidence that this increase in membership translated into active participation. Similarly, women made up only 7.5 per cent in producer cooperatives. Hence, most women were and absent from those arenas where legal, social and political rules are made.

A Promising but Inadequate Reform

One of the major opponents of the military regime was the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) currently the ruling party in Ethiopia. Since its inception in 1976, the TPLF has experimented with various forms of land reform and the formation of new rural institutions in the areas under its control. A noteworthy feature of the evolving land distribution system under TPLF was the granting of usufructuary rights over land to individuals in a household and not the household as a unit. Up until 1987, a married status was a prerequisite for the acquisition of land rights. The Land Law which was promulgated in 1987 abolished this pre-condition and land was granted to females and males of minimum age of 15 and 22 respectively irrespective of their marital status and the asset of their parents.

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Unfortunately, this form of land distribution and the attempt to reduce early marriage by females was not accompanied by challenges to the rigid gender division of labour in agricultural particularly the cultural taboos against women ploughing and sowing. Although women joined the liberation army and performed what were considered exclusively 'male tasks' including ploughing, the end of the war has meant a return to pre war beliefs and practices as far as the gender division of labour in agriculture is concerned. In other words, although women have possessory right to a small piece of land, they depend on male labour for the cultivation of the land. (Chairi G.P ,1996; C.I.P.L.D.P, 1997). The extension programme discriminates against women, "because they do not usually cultivate land by themselves" (Chairi,G,P, 1996:48). And yet , the case study of one Wereda goes on to note that " Although statistically marginal, agricultural wage labour represents an important source of income especially for women. Of that 7%, female labourers account for 70% , out of which 86% come from female-headed households. " Unfortunately, the author does not tell us which agricultural tasks are performed by the female wage labourers. But he goes on to note that" 14 % of the urban sample households with a small plot of land near the house almost exclusively cultivated by women with maize and in a few cases with vegetables" (Chairi, G.P. 1996:30).

Land Policy Since 1991

Following the demise of the military government in 1991, a new Transitional Government was established which lasted until late 1994. Under the new dispensation , Ethiopia become a 'democratic' Federal State with 10 'Regional National States' based on ethnicity. On coming to power, the present government promised that the land issue which has become perhaps the most contentious, political, issue in Ethiopia through a National Referendum but soon abandoned the idea. The issue was dealt with first in the new Constitution and subsequently through land redistribution in Region 3 known as the Amhara region.

The new Constitution retained state ownership or rural and urban land as well as of all natural resources. As far as women's rights are concerned, the Constitution states that women "have equal rights with men with respect to access, use, administration and transfer of land. They shall also enjoy equal treatment in the inheritance of property. The critical challenge is the mode of implementation of such seemingly egalitarian provisions. Four years after the reform, there is no evidence of special effort to make women aware of these constitutional rights and to implement these provisions.

In March 1977, The Rural Land Redistribution Proclamation of the Amhara National State was promulgated. Article 9 of the Proclamation provides for the distribution of land equally to both men and women. However, the distribution was limited to single women involved in income generating activities for their livelihood and has thus far omitted

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other categories of women such as widows, divorcees and single adult women who are still dependent on their parents and other family members (Original, W. 1997). In his case study of one Kebele Yigremew found that not all the women who applied got land and those who did get land got a smaller size than the men (1997: 11).

Beyond the absence of special measures to advance the interests of rural women, the issue of gender equality in the unfolding process of land redistribution was overshadowed by the over all ethos of the implementation process. It appears that the redistribution had a strong punitive element as it excluded those it deemed as beneficiaries of land and other positions of power during the previous two regimes. Hence, women whose husbands were members of the previous 'bureaucracy' and women who themselves were members of the various committees during the military regime were excluded from the new redistribution. Given this highly charged context, there was little space for focusing on the need for specific attention to the inequalities suffered by rural women.

Subsequently, the Federal Government of Ethiopia has issued a new Proclamation known as The Federal Rural land Administration Proclamation which makes provisions for the enactment of a land administration law by each Regional Council which would ensure "free assignment of holding rights both to peasants and nomads, without differentiation of the sexes." With the exception of the aforementioned region, to date, this Proclamation which was issued on July 7, 1997 has not yet been implemented. In addition to granting women legal rights to land, the new government has set forth principles of equality between men and women in the areas of political, cultural, educational and economic rights.

It is crucial to note that the gap between stated legal and policy goals and implementation is indicative of broader problem of developing a rule of law in Ethiopia. Until this larger legal framework is seriously addressed, it is unlikely that we will witness the development of law as a source of enforceable economic and social right and an adequate economic and structural support for implementing gender sensitive laws in the foreseeable future in this country. This problem is further aggravated by the absence of a vibrant autonomous civil sector which advocates for women's rights. At present we only have a glimpse of an independent women's movement. For example the Women's Lawyers Association has begun to make a dent in defending women' legal rights and to advocate for legal reforms and to create public awareness of the plight of women during the short time of its existence.

But gender-transformative policy such as the provision of independent right of land would require a multiple and simultaneous points of intervention. Students of rights in land underscore the diversity of forms that it can take. They argue that land rights can be in the form of ownership or usufruct associated with differing degrees of freedom to lease out mortgage, bequeath or sell.(Agarwal, 1994; Latarria-Cornhiel,1995) Land rights can stem from state transfer as in the case of Ethiopia specially since the 1974 land reform. It can stem from inheritance, community membership as in the 'Rest' system of Northern Ethiopia prior to the land reform. Land rights may also stem from tenancy arrangements and purchase.

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More importantly, land rights are "claims that are legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimized authority be it a village-level institution or some higher level judicial or executive body of the state" (Agarwal, 1994). In the case of women's land rights, it becomes imperative to examine the difference between the legal recognition of rights and the social recognition and the enforcement of those rights. The major lesson from seemingly gender sensitive laws and policies both here in Ethiopia and elsewhere is that a women may have legal rights on paper but it is meaningless unless it is enforced and socially recognized.

Another important aspects of land rights is its temporal and locational dimension. Land may be hereditary or accrue only for a person's lifetime or for a lesser period and they may be conditional on the person residing where the land is located. Since the land reform, in Ethiopia, the locational dimension has become critical and especially for women as they very often loose even the minimal right they might have on leaving their natal village at marriage or following a marital breakdown.

Moreover, to fully appreciate women's land rights it is imperative to distinguish between access to control of rights to land. For example, women can have access to the plot of her brother's or other kin but she can not claim it as a right. Control of land has multiple meanings such as the ability to decide how the land is to be used or how its produce is to be disposed of or whether it can be leased out, or bequeathed. (Agarwal, 1994).

There can not be a blueprint of a gender-equitable land reform as this would legitimately take a variety of forms.(Lastaria-Cornhiel: 1995). The important principle is to grant them effective rights that is not just in law but in practice. Independent rights in land would provide women access to economic and social resources for survival in their own right and provide them a fall-back position in cases of marital breakdown and domestic violence. Likewise with such rights women will be able to implement their own land right priorities e.g grow vegetables instead of cereals and control the produce from the land.

A gender-equitable land reform requires the establishment of structures of governance and local institutions which promote women's active participation in decision-making and structures of management so as to challenge long standing institutional power relation. Making women aware of new land laws and reforming customary laws that discriminate against women is another essential component of ensuring women's land rights (Sunde, 1997).

For example, promoting laws which guarantee equality in inheritance and recognize women's right to administer property independent of their husbands and other male kin is another essential component of a successful reform and a mechanism which will create the social legitimacy of women's claim to land through fostering changes in deeply entrenched social attitudes. To be truly effective, such a reform also necessitates the adoption of special measures to advance the interests of rural women such as access to credit, information and technical knowledge and markets.

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Most land reform programmes as was the case in Ethiopia use the household as a unit of allocation as it is often assumed that the household is an undifferentiated unit where the members of the household pool and share resources equally. Such an approach fails to pay adequate attention to the power relation within the household and the wider social and political environment which mediate women's and men's effective access to resources. Critics of such an approach have demonstrated that household forms vary and are often sites of 'cooperative conflicts' and hence should not be analyzed from a set of a priori assumptions. Moreover, a comprehensive appreciation of the dynamics of households requires an analysis of the complex relations that extend beyond the households and should include consideration of the community the market and the state. Understanding the gender component of land reform policies and their implementation requires an analysis of power relations at each of these different sites of intra-household relations.

In what follows , I will provide a synopsis of the preliminary findings on a research Project on "Women's Land Rights in Ethiopia". The fieldwork was conducted in two Weredas in North Shoa, Ormo Region; Two Weredas in Wello; and two Weredas in Welliata. Due to the limitations of time and resources, the sample was limited to only 30 household in each Wereda. The methodology used included a lengthy questionnaire on demographic profile of households, household assets, particularly land and animal stock, land redistribution; determinants of men's and women's access to land including pre-existing and emerging cultures of inheritance; dispute settlement mechanisms; division of labour in agriculture, animal husbandry and marketing including time spent in each activity ; household income and decision-making and participation in social networks. Moreover focus group discussion was conducted with women deliberately composed of married women, widows, divorced and single women in an attempt to solicit qualitative observation of the various experiences of women and to counter check the accuracy of data generated through the questionnaire as the answers were provided mostly by male household-heads.

Preliminary Findings

The overall landscape is composed of very small land holdings, deepening poverty and growing attempts to diversify livelihood strategies by men, women, girls and boys. Of the three regions only women in Wello, have access to what women informants told us were often extremely small- well below the average holding- and marginal land. In one of the two research sites, Haiq the population is predominantly Islam and land seemed to be allocated according to Islamic inheritance practice where in their natal village women inherited only half of that allocated to their male siblings. In the other two research sites women only had limited land rights when they are widowed and in the absence of male siblings. In all three regions, female-heads of households with grown or adolescent children are relatively less disadvantaged than those who are the only adults or those who have only daughters. The latter depend on their children for 'male tasks' and do not have to depend on relatives, neighbours or enter into sharecropping arrangements.

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While most female-headed households are indeed poor especially those who have no grown up sons, it would not be accurate to generalise and over gloss the plight of women in male-headed households who have very limited decision-making on household assets.

In addition to marital status, another factor, which determines women's land right, is the type of marriage. The wide prevalence of polygyny in all three regions further constraints women's land rights in the context of growing land shortage. In the Southern Region, the IDR and Brown University study found that more than 30 per cent of women in their sample reported that their marriage was polygamous. In our group discussion women confirmed the validity of the findings of the Community and Family Survey conducted by IDR and Brown University which found that "polygamy has economic implications as a man with several wives can command more resources, produce more food for his household and achieve high status due to the wealth he commands"(1997: 95).

In Wello all the women in the group discussion in both research site opposed polygamy and appeared to have had some success in reducing the practice. In Wellaita, restrictions on polygamous marriage come from the spread of the Protestant Religion, which prohibits this form of marriage. Our informants told us that when a man joins the Protestant Church, he is asked to keep only one wife. This has often meant that the other wives are left to fend for themselves and denied access to the resources they accumulated with their previous husband. One of our informants who has been abandoned but who has also converted to the Protestant religion informed us that she has brought her case to the church leaders and was awaiting their response.

In North Shoa, particularly in Gerera Jarsso, most women had no land rights. In an answer to our query, do women have land rights, most male households not only affirmed the absence of such a right, but almost all invariably stated 'what will she do with it if she has land? A much more serious cause of women's dispossession in this area results from a strongly entrenched practice of very early marriage. In this Wereda, girls as young as seven years old are given in marriage and could be divorced soon after marriage. During our discussion with one of the newly elected female district councillors, we were informed of a pending divorce case of a seven year old girl.

The Councillors especially the 20 per cent female members were sympathetic to the plight of the young girl but given the wide spread nature of the problem in the area, the case was faced with a lengthy deliberation. From our lengthy discussion, it was obvious that the provision in the new constitution regarding minimum age of marriage and the other provisions regarding women's rights is not being implemented and we left wandering if the Councillors were even aware of its existence.

Women's access to land or the benefit they could draw from land even in cases where they had limited rights is severely limited due to the gender-division of labour particularly the cultural taboos against women ploughing and sowing. Women in all three areas do not plough nor sow but are engaged in weeding in the case of the two cereal producing areas, and in harvesting in all three areas. In North Shoa, women carry the plough to the field and back to the house but they can not plough. As women cannot grow

CCRDA

cereals on their own, female-headed households without grown children enter into share-cropping arrangements. This limits both their food security and their cash earning ability. In the case of married women, their access to cereals for household consumption or to the sale of cereals depends entirely on the benevolence of the male head of household.

Gendered Time Use Patterns

The time intensity and duration of women's labour input differs considerably from those of their husbands in that women's labour input is much higher. Partly this is due, to the overall underdevelopment of the country which has been exacerbated by environmental degradation. Tasks such as fetching water and fuel which are almost exclusively women's tasks are arduous and time consuming. Similarly women with the help of children daily undertake other forms of 'housework' which also consume considerable time and energy.

While the gender division of labour has remained highly rigid in agricultural production, it is interesting to note that the rigidity is clearly shifting in terms of production of new crops especially vegetables and public works. The ever shrinking land holding and the recurrent drought particularly in Wello and Wellaita has resulted in chronic food insecurity for a majority of rural households. In response multilateral organizations and NGOs have introduced food-for-work programmes consisting of the provision of relief in exchange for people's labour in constructing roads, planting trees, building wells and environmental conservation projects. A growing number of women enthusiastically participate in these various forms of public works and earn cash or food.

Increased but Undervalued Contribution to Household Income

In all three areas, increasing numbers of women are taking up vegetable growing and marketing. These small often backyard vegetables gardens provide them with direct access to cash. However, married women also sell household cereals received or stolen from the 'household' granary which they often use to purchase other manufactured goods or other condiments. Women also brew local drinks and food items for sale. Had women independent land rights even to a small plot of land, they would clearly have been able to draw a much more substantive benefit from their off farm activities as most of these activities. While it was clear that women both married and single or divorced women living with their parents or other kin make a substantive contribution to household income and livelihood, it appears that very little value is given to that contribution by other household members.

The predominant cultural construction of gender tends to conceal new situations where experience has changed but gender ideology has not yet changed. Most male respondents and state officials continue to deny the importance of women's work and income to family livelihood and cling to the notion of the male breadwinner.

Rural development agencies both state and NGOs focus almost exclusively on women's practical needs and maintaining or slightly ameliorating women's existing skills such as weaving and sowing with a focus on home management skills and improved child

CCRDA

care. In all three regions, there is no attempt to provide technical agricultural knowledge, information, financing and markets. Similar observation have been made about development projects in the Southern Region of Ethiopia (Jones,B.1996).

Intrahousehold Allocation of Resources

In answer to our query regarding household income, all the male respondents emphasised joint decision making and pooling of resources which governs intrahousehold resource allocation while women during our group discussion in all three areas the existence of this declared ideology of sharing. They asserted that men were taking a more self-centred approach to their own and family resources and to their own consumption. They particularly lamented men's expenditure on drinks and the resultant domestic violence. .

Social Networks

In addition to resources from household production and marketing, both men and women argument household well-being through social resources. While land shortage and deepening poverty has tended to reduce access to resources from the natal family, social networks are critical resources for rural households. In addition to contributions in cash and in kind, rural households invest a lot of time and labour in maintaining social networks. Relative to men, women's lack of income limits the type of advantages they could draw from some of these networks such as small saving and credit schemes.

A Glimpse of the Future

All three regions have inadequate schools often located far from most rural households. This reality, the prevailing gender ideology which perceives women only as housewives together with women's heavy workload constrains girls schooling and educational attainment. In all three regions studied overall educational attainment is low but much lower for girls implying an intergenerational transfer of gender disadvantages and poverty. However, young girls who are involved in market activities and generating income for themselves and the household appeared to be more confident especially of their future prospects.

The socio-economic and political transformations appear to have increased divorces, male mortality, desertions and migrations. The resulting process of increased female-headship appears to have reduced the social stigma attached to being an 'unmarried women' although marriage continues to be a highly respected institution.

While the access of most women's to the public world is still mediated through men, more and more women are making a self-conscious appearance in public arenas like kebele justice courts and even Wereda courts on their own behalf.

There are efforts by local party/state structures to organize women into what appears as saving and credit associations. Given the legacy of Revolutionary Ethiopian Women Association (REWA) of the military regime, this efforts has not generated any enthusiasm

CCRDA

by women and we witnessed signs of coercion in spite of emphasis by Women's Affairs Offices in Wereda Councils on the voluntary nature of these emergent association.

The emergence of Associations such as the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association marks a significant progress in the struggle for women's rights. However given the immensity of the problem, there is a need for many more autonomous associations and groups who are committed to promoting women's active participation in challenging power relations within households and the state.

The experience of this country and other countries indicates that for women to be truly beneficiaries of land reform, the land laws have to be explicitly committed to gender equality and include mechanisms of enforcement and public awareness. In addition to the implementation of the law, building social legitimacy of women's land claims through public education is a more promising option.

Women will have to be fully aware of their legal rights and be literate. Moreover, they will have to have increased access to government officials who administer land-related matters and also have economic and physical access to legal machinery, lawyers and law courts; It is also imperative that women have a fall back position, that is access to economic and social resources for survival outside the support system of contending claimants.

CCRDA

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Rural Organizations and Rural Development in Ethiopia

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Acronyms

ADLI	**Agricultural Development - Led Industrialization**
APC	**Agricultural Producers Cooperative**
ASC	**Agricultural Service Cooperatives**
CBO	**Community Based Organization**
CSA	**Central Statistics Authority**
E. C.	**Ethiopian Calendar**
EPRDF	**Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front**
FAO	**Food and Agricultural Office**
LO	**Local Organization**
NGO	**Non-Governmental Organization**
PA	**Peasant Association**
PC	**Producers Cooperatives (agricultural)**
SC	**Service Cooperative (agricultural)**
WB	**World Bank**

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Rural Organizations and Rural Development in Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is predominantly a rural nation with peasant agricultural economy. About 85 per cent of its population is rural, agriculture contributes about 50 per cent of total GDP and accounts for 85 per cent of export and total employment. This nation is also characterized by appalling rural poverty. According to the World Bank (1992) estimate among the country's total population of 51.9 million, 59.9 percent (about 31 million) were classified as poor. Out of this, the rural poor constituted 38.5 per cent (about 20 million). With a very low level of agricultural productivity and technology, the farming population has an average farm size of 1 ha (Central Statistics Authority [CSA] 1997) , and about 30 per cent have no oxen at all while 27 per cent have one (Dessalegn 1997). Yet, the average family size of the rural households is estimated to be 5 (CSA 1997). The rural people do not get minimal services like education and health. Underdeveloped physical infrastructure of the country has also resulted in a kind of isolation to the rural societies. With such rural features, Ethiopia's rural development efforts highly determine its overall development.

The concept of rural development is more about the strategies for the improvement of the lives of the rural poor which include the landless farmers, tenants, and small-scale farmers. As such rural development strategies require channeling resources to the rural sector, well developed rural land policy, rural institutions policy, rural employment policy, education and research policy, agricultural price policy, agricultural extension policy, and policies on other related areas. Moreover, rural development requires efficient and effective implementation of such policies.

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The institutional aspect of rural development especially at the local level had long been a critical element in these development strategies. Uphoof and Esman (1984:29) noted the following: "One of the first efforts to assess systematically the relationships of local organizations to rural development was our own comparative study of 16 countries' experience. The findings demonstrated 'a strong, empirical basis for concluding that local organization is a necessary if not sufficient condition for accelerated rural development, especially development which emphasizes improvement in the productivity and welfare of the majority of rural people'. " It was argued that rural development required institution building which will provide peasants with more adequate institutional structures for articulating their needs, protecting their interests, management of resources, and for provision of services. These rural institutions can be of different types and serve different purposes. Some are large, formal, state-initiated and state-controlled. Others are small, informal, member -owned and member-controlled. However, all are indispensable instruments for sustainable rural development.

In Ethiopia there are a number of important rural institutions. These institutions have been playing important roles in the lives of the rural people. The traditional ones like *mahiber, iddir, iqub, debo*, and the like are autonomous membership organizations. Since the 1960s, new, modern, types of rural organizations such as cooperatives and peasant associations have also been introduced.

However, while Ethiopia's traditional rural organizations were totally neglected by the government, the state-initiated and state-controlled ones have been grossly mismanaged and abused. Currently, it seems that we have not learned much from our past. Enough attention is not given to these important institutions. Yet, Ethiopia's rural development efforts can only be sustainable through such viable rural institutions. Hence, it is high time that policy makers, administrators, researchers and all students of rural development thought and worked towards this critical element of the country's development effort.

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In line with such understanding, this paper is an attempt to examine the role rural organizations can play in Ethiopia's rural development efforts, to assess our past experience and present conditions in dealing with such institutions, and to draw lessons which will help in our future efforts.

2. Rural Organizations in Ethiopia

Ethiopia badly needs a concerted rural development effort and this effort highly requires rural organizations. Ethiopia's experience in establishing and maintaining such institutions has not been given enough attention. The literature on the subject is characterized by two features: first, the information on rural organizations is very scanty, no comprehensive studies are available; and secondly, any information available is more on those modern type of rural organizations mainly on cooperatives and peasant associations which are state initiated and state sponsored ones. If there are any studies on traditional local organizations, these are about those commonly found in urban areas such as *iddir, iqub* and the like not about those rural ones. As a result of this situation, the discussion here about those traditional rural organizations is rather a kind of preliminary observation.

2.1. Traditional rural organizations[1]

It is very appropriate that traditional rural institutions be subjects for urgent consideration by academicians, researchers, and policy makers. This is for various reasons: First, currently the rural societies are virtually devoid of those rural institutions like cooperatives and peasant associations. Although they were not established by the will and initiatives of members, and were somewhat discredited by the rural societies, they had been providing some important services and their unpopularity was a result of government failure not inherent to these organizations. So a kind of alternative, and/or complementary institutions should be sought. Traditional rural organizations can be one of the possible alternatives or complementary institutions but *how* is the most important question to answer. This requires understanding the nature and functions of these institutions.

Secondly, there is a growing interest by some NGOs other development agencies in working with these institutions. Experience in other parts of the world shows that this move should be dealt with caution. The intervention can have serious, and at times, unintended effects either positive or negative (for instance, see Esman and Uphoof 1984). So, all possible efforts should be made to acquire enough knowledge on the subject.

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Thirdly, given the situations of the rural organizations, and that of the trend of NGOs and other development agencies' intervention mentioned, it will be important to be aware of what the issue of the relationship between the government and those indigenous rural organizations was, is, and will be.

Ethiopian rural society is endowed with a variety of important traditional institutions. These institutions are of different kinds and have their purpose, functions, membership, etc. Some are socio-religious and self-help associations like *mahiber*, *sembete*, *iddir*; others are a kind of labor sharing like *debo*, *wonfel*, *jige*; others are more engaged in keeping harmonious social relations and solidarity, like elders councils; still others are more economic ones like *iqub*. However, as the rural societies themselves, these organizations are very dynamic, diverse and complex, they need closer study and understanding not hasty generalizations. For instance, some of those rural organizations now found in rural areas like *iddir* were urban phenomena; and some inherently rural ones like *mahiber*, have diversified a lot in terms of their functions, structures, and their management.

Through their local organizations rural people mobilize resources, share benefits and risks. These organizations provide a kind of social security services that during rainy days they provide the victim with moral support, labor, materials, and money. For example, members of a given *mahiber* help each other both during some cultural activities which require allocation of relatively big resources such as weddings, as well as during incidents like death or temporary incapacitation by accidents or disasters. They serve as a forum where the rural people meet and discuss issues of their interest - problems and opportunities. Elders councils are best institutions of facilitating negotiations, handling grievances, and applying social pressure as a disciplinary mechanism. They also serve as a quasi-legal institution where contracts and agreements are made. If one browses through a wooden box, or any other bag-like container of a respected local elder, he will find that these are archives, very valuable documents most of which do not belong to holder but they are documents containing issues where he was playing a facilitating, mediation or even arbitration roles as a member of elders councils.

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They also contribute a lot in keeping the social order in their communities. Had it not been for such valuable rural institutions, in such a fragile political environment where incidents of power vacuum are not rare the Ethiopian rural people would have been just victims of all kinds of social evils and disaster.

These rural organizations are important mechanisms of interactions between the state and the rural people. These days, for instance, government officials use them as an important forum to communicate whatever official information they have.

Whenever the rural people are convinced enough, they also mobilize resources through their organizations. A very good example of rural peoples and their organizations' ability to do so are those magnificent and costly religious buildings

found throughout the rural communities built and maintained by the rural people of small villages (I have found that individual peasants contribute as much money as one thousand birr for such purposes). Rural local organizations like *mahiber* and *sembete* are also very important and efficient institutions in managing natural and other resources. For example, they allocate, maintain, and protect communal grazing land, forests, water points etc.

For instance, a study made in Bugna woreda, North Wollo, (Yeshiwas, et al., 1995) shows that *Kires* (*iddirs*) are common in rural villages. These *kires*, in addition to their traditional functions associated with burial services, they mobilize resources through internal mechanisms as contributions and fines. This money is then effectively used in the form of loan with and without interest. These loan services are provided on a rotation basis with priority to the most needy and repayment is highly ensured with the necessary reinforcement mechanisms. They are engaged in the task of natural resource management particularly protection of forests and grasslands, water resources. In some of these activities even guards are employed and paid from contributions made by members.

The question to be raised will then be, can these indigenous rural organizations be partners in development efforts made by outsiders? The researcher would like to answer this question affirmatively. Of course, in orthodox development thinking, these institutions are characterized as traditional and as not development oriented, conservative, elite dominated, not participative, and not suitable for dynamic development activities. There are a lot of examples of such views. Esman and Uphoof 1984 noted the following:

> Existing [traditional] organizations are too readily ignored in most project planning, usually on the presumption that since the existing situation is deficient, it must be totally changed. Too often, little is known in detail about the prevailing situation. This applies particularly to local groups; if recognized at all, they are likely to be viewed in stereotyped terms by outsiders (p. 241). One of the principal reasons often given for avoiding existing LOs [local organizations] is that their leadership, drawn from elite strata, may be unrepresentative, domineering, and exploitative (p. 244). We do not accept the categorical conclusion ... that "participatory projects require a modern organization" (p.245).

CCRDA

It seems that such views still exist, if not prevalent, among some NGOs working in Ethiopia. The following case illustrates such views.[2]

> **Box 1.** *"Most indigenous organizations are elitist and conservative..."*
>
> Within Ethiopia, there is limited experience in the area of participatory development. ... Many funding agencies have been actively financing indigenous partners to be able to deliver more effective development impacts in their communities. However, most of these efforts have miserably failed to produce the intended impact for one or a combination of the following reasons: 1. most of indigenous organizations (*Ider*, *Ikub*, *Mahber*, etc.) are elitist and conservative in their nature. 2. indigenous organizations were not given the space in defining and managing their own agenda. 3. most of the attention has focused on improving administrative and financial management rather than on democracy, civil society, and human rights. 4. lack of clear understanding as to what constitutes community participation and empowerment. Thus the challenges facing funding or local development agencies is to ensure that the necessary instruments are in place to facilitate democratic, open, representative, transparent and result-oriented organizations. These organizations can provide real link with the local community for those agencies interested in change. But are we interested in change? Why do we look at an elitist structures rather than more dynamic structures which have been at force for change in other parts of the world? In light of the above argument, key element of SDC2 activities is the establishment of Kebelle Development Committees [new institutions]. (emphasis added).

Ironically, problems mentioned (under No. 2, 3, and 4) might have been real sources for failure. The more realistic view, then, might be that traditional organizations were made scapegoats for failure of other agencies.

CCRDA

But there are a number of NGOs working with such traditional organizations and a completely contrasting view was manifested by another forum and a study report of an affiliate of NGO:

> **Box 2. "The experience of 26 NGOs confirmed that community based organizations can serve as development intermediaries."**
>
> The results of the study showed that there is growing interest by NGOs to use CBOs [community based organizations] like *edir*, equb, *debo* as channel of development intervention to alleviate poverty and ensure sustainable livelihood. A range of activities such as saving and credit, agricultural input supply, natural resource conservation, and health care are being channeled through CBOs. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that there is a trend of success in working with CBOs because of their credibility and voluntarily organized to exert social pressure on their members. They have accountable leadership to satisfy collective needs and mobilize resources and that they are instrumental to interpret indigenous and location specific knowledge with less effort and cost . . . The experience of 26 NGOs confirmed that CBOs [community based organisations] can serve as development intermediaries between NGOs or GOs [government organizations] and the community at large. The NGOs ... have carried out a range of activities with CBOs to address poverty. These include: saving and credit scheme, spring protection and sanitation schemes, natural resource conservation, and health care services, particularly with prevention of transmitting diseases, health education and MCH programmes (Bekalu 1997 pp.1, 8). (emphasis added).

CCRDA

Other researchers noted such views in the following manner: "Several further assumptions concerning the nature of local institutions themselves are shaping BIRDP's [Bugna Integrated Rural Development Programme] approach and relationship with the community. Without citing particular references or statements, it is possible to highlight certain general misconceptions regarding CBO membership and function." They mentioned that CBOs are not confined to social and cultural activities; that the *kires* are not exclusive membership organizations; that CBOs have the capacity to organize and manage regular saving and loan facilities with priorities to the vulnerable, and utilized for emergencies, for social security, and for production; and that new responsibilities do not appear neither to overburden CBOs nor to distract them from their original purposes (Yeshiwas et al 1995: pp. 25-26).

There are ample examples demonstrating that indigenous organizations could be valuable partners of development. Esman and Uphoof (1984) concluded that traditional organizations represent valuable social capital, they are dynamic not static, their leadership even elite ones can also be opportunities, they are very

familiar to the people while externally introduced organizations may not be understood by the members and will not engender commitment. They also noted that "pump-priming" of new organizations based primarily on outside resources seldom results in effective and sustainable organizations while indigenous ones have proved success in these aspects. It is true that indigenous organizations may not be appropriate for all kinds of development tasks. But the most important thing to do will be to seriously study and understand them first. Dessalegn (1991) has noted the merits of indigenous organizations which include their flexibility, familiarity, practicality and being based on real needs, interests and knowledge of the rural people.

On Ethiopian case two illustrations may demonstrate the dynamism and flexibility of traditional organizations:

Box 3. Traditional organizations are dynamic and flexible (urban example)

In the 1960s, two government agencies The Municipality of Addis Ababa and the Ministry of Community Development and Social Affairs and some other development agencies took the initiative to promote *Iddirs* towards playing developmental roles. Seminars were organized on the role of *iddirs* in urban community development. A coordinating committee was established where sixteen iddirs from Ras Desta Sefer were brought together and represented. The first urban development center was created which soon embarked in the activities of adult literacy, women's educational program, recreational activities, kindergarten, schooling for children, weaving, dyeing, and other vocational training. More activities were planned by the coordinating committee and financial resources were mobilized including from external sources; 2,500 birr were collected and a kindergarten built, and 15,758.33 birr used to built a school. By 1972 some 147,603 birr were mobilized for additional social and economic development activities.

At the same time in Teklehymanot area, a confederation of 125 iddirs with a membership of 12, 131 people contributed 60,000 birr and built a school for community use. These satisfactory performances of iddirs in development motivated the Ministry to replicate the endeavor in provinces outside the capital and by 1972 there were thirteen urban development centers established throughout the country in collaboration with those iddirs established in the same way to the first one with 16 iddirs. Summarized from Kebebew (1978: 15-29).

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A more recent and rural example also shows that these institutions are even undergoing major changes by their own initiative and without any assistance from outside.

Box 4. Traditional organizations are dynamic and flexible (rural example)

In 1997, while I was doing field research in Gojjam, I had a chance to visit an indigenous peasant organization known as *Mariam Mahiber*. It is said to be established in 1910 E.C. (1917/ 18). Members told me that in the 1970s its members were something like less than 30 elders and what they were doing was to meet together at the Mariam Church and have a kind of modest feast and discussions. The leadership consisted of one *mussie* (a kind of chairperson). There was no any kind of financial contribution in any form and it was a totally voluntary organization for the elders living in that kebele.

But what I found in 1997 was a totally new big institution. I observed that now it has more than 300 household members, both male and female. There is entrance fee and fine which both enabled the mahiber to have some seed money. Now it has elaborate leadership structure - one *mussie*, one assistant to the *mussie*, one secretary and one treasurer. There is a book where accounts and other activities are recorded. It is no more a simple mahiber where people get together once in a month but has embraced a lot of functions: it serves as a burial society (*iddir*) - which was not found in the surrounding rural area before one or two decades - , and even with better services - now not only assistance (material, and other) is given during funeral activities but all those extended religious services thereafter are also borne by the mahiber; it provides credit services for those who are very needy members; it is a forum where villagers discuss their problems and share their views; it is used to settle disputes and to attend grievances. Member peasants said to me that it is everything to them. It is important to note that the villagers have abandoned other smaller *mahibers* and *sembetes* as a strategy to establish and develop this stronger and multi-purpose association. Moreover, many of these functions are new to such kind of organizations.

Then, while it is important to understand that these institutions are dynamic and flexible, their small size and their informality should not also be viewed as problems. Both are effective strategies contributing to their resilience. The size, nature of organization structure and leadership styles are appropriate to the tasks what they have been performing. Small size dose not attract much attention which will be important sometimes. Moreover, they have demonstrated like in the case of Addis Ababa *Iddirs* and Mariam *Mahiber* (both mentioned above) that they are flexible and respond in both respects required. Although there are tasks for which indigenous organizations may not fit to, *it is also necessary to design those development projects in the way that they fit to the existing structures.* Experiences throughout the world show that the 'blue print approach' did not work much in rural development (Hulme 1995, Korten 1980, Chambers 1987, 1983, WB 1989).

While informality may be an advantage to traditional rural organizations, there is also some discomfort within some NGOs involved in rural development that rural organizations are not registered and have no legal personality (see, for instance, Bekalu, 1997). Of course, registration is one requirement for having legal

CCRDA

personality which is again important to establish legal relationships, like entering into legal contracts, opening bank accounts, etc. However, it is important to note that being formal and big attracts attention from different angles some of which are not welcomed. Registration will unavoidably lead to government interference - which may be a threat. The past experience in terms of government linkages, i.e., control and assistance, particularly with cooperatives was debilitating rather than facilitating (see, Yigremew 1996). Registration results in suffocation of institutions with cumbersome rules and regulations, organization structures, payments, and other dealings with officials. Even we do not have enough administrative mechanisms to register (Dessalegn 1990, noted that by 1986 only 10 % of producers coops were registered in the country and the requirements to fulfill for such registration were extremely technical and complicated, Yigremew 1996). Formality may even lead rural organizations towards being victims of officialdom and subordination.

The political and legal environment pertaining to indigenous rural organizations should also be given attention. To a large extent, the Ethiopian governments' policies towards these institutions seem to be what Esman and Uphoof (1984:38) called 'pragmatic politics' that governments know that attempts to repress and control all local organizations, some of them with deep and long standing roots, would deplete their coercive resources and their legitimacy. Then, except when local organizations threaten the regime, the prudent policy is to live and let live. So generally speaking, it is the general observation of the researcher that traditional organizations like *mahiber* and *iddir,* are functioning with no much difficulty with the government relative to other kinds of associations (see also Bekalu 1997, Yeshiwas *et. al.* 1995).

Although the provisions of the 1960 Civil Code (Chapter 2 Arts. 404-482) on associations provide requirements for registration and a number of concomitant issues to fulfill which may be applicable to these rural institutions, it is known that this was not enforced even in cities. Of course, this acquiescent behavior of the government may be partly attributed to the fact that these traditional institutions are engaged in those activities where the government is not involved or not interested.

However, it is not meant that there are not government surveillance and some interventions by the governments. For instance, Kebebew (1978:20) reports an incident that happened during the Derg regime and its far-reaching consequences:

> The legal status and activities of the ethnic iddirs have been affected as a result of the involvement of an iddir in subversive political activities. A general who was the president of the Mecha Tulama Mahiber, was accused of having advanced political motives through the mahiber... This incident precipitated governmental actions of serious consequences as far as the formation and expansion of iddirs and private organizations were concerned. The government not only disbanded the Mecha Tulama association but also strongly suppressed other associations of similar nature. Even other

CCRDA

iddirs were required to register with the Security Department and their constitutions were to include phrases similar to the following: "This iddir will not interfere with any government policy or will not pursue any political objective, ...".

Another report (Bekalu 1987: 1) states the following conclusion: "The study has also shown that in spite of the pivotal role that CBOs [community based organizations] can play on the development process of the country, there is little enabling political and legal environment to back up the potential contribution of CBOs. In most cases, CBOs are not perceived as legitimate social entities and sometimes perceived as a threat to the function of the formal government structure."

The researcher has also observed in the Amhara Region, for instance during the 1997 rural land redistribution, there was a negative attitude expressed by government officials towards traditional rural organizations like *iddir*. These organizations were viewed as forums of anti-government policy elements labeled as 'remnant feudal' and 'birokrats'; their activities were also under constant surveillance.

It is the researcher's view that Ethiopian traditional rural organizations are effective and valuable organizations to their members, to the community, and the nation at large. The problem is lack of understanding them correctly. Their resilience regardless of such precarious situation of the rural life assures this fact. The problem will be the difference of views and attitudes existing between their members and outsiders: to their members whose majority are poor peasants, the services they get from their organizations are very valuable and these organizations are effective as far as they provide such services.

The blame that traditional organizations are not development oriented does not sound much. When survival is endangered, the peasants preoccupation are about their survival not development so the orientations of their organizations more towards social and cultural practices is not a result of being conservative. Who assists the rural people in meeting their social obligations like weddings, funerals and other concomitant religious rituals, during disasters and accidents like loss of property, sickness etc.? It is also very important to bear in mind what De Swaan has noted:

"The problem of the poor is to stay alive: the problem of poverty is a problem for the rich." De Swaan quoted in Wuyts *et. al.* (1992:13).

In addition, number of these institutions have demonstrated their dynamic nature including their involvement in developmental activities. So the evaluation of these organizations should be based on the purpose they are established for not on 'outsiders' criteria. It seems that the misunderstanding resulted from a situation what Chambers (1995) called "two realities". So it is important that all the

CCRDA

necessary effort be made first to understand these precious heritage and second to exploit all their potentials for survival and development. Two things should be noted here: first, what these organizations are doing is something important, it is part of development, and should be encouraged; secondly, projects can be designed in such a way that they fit to these organizations - as they are or with some modifications - or they can play a complementary role without abandoning their primary objectives.

2.2. Modern rural organizations

By modern rural organizations is meant here simply agricultural cooperatives and peasant associations which were recently introduced to the rural areas by governments or other development agencies. These have not been part of the traditional associative endeavor of the Ethiopian peasantry but introduced by governments and with instrumental purposes for the accomplishment of the policies of government and other development agencies.

Peasant Associations (PAs) and agricultural cooperatives, particularly agricultural service cooperatives (ASCs), were the most ubiquitous and the most government-sponsored phenomena in rural Ethiopia particularly since the 1974 revolution. They were established to carry out government policies.

2.2.1. Peasant Associations

Peasant Associations (PAs) were introduced by the Derg government as one of the radical measures of its rural land reform efforts. The 1975 Public Ownership of Rural Land proclamation - No. 31/1975 provided the establishment of PAs at the Kebele, Woreda and Awraja administrative levels. The rationale was that such radical agrarian reform had made it indispensable the active participation of the peasantry who were deemed to be primary beneficiaries of such change. Distribution of land, administration and conservation of public property, rendering judicial services, establishment of different cooperatives, building of schools, clinics and similar institutions were among the primary functions assigned to PAs. Subsequent legislation were issued which enlarged both the powers, functions and organizational levels of PAs. For instance by late 1975 they were granted legal personality, powers to safeguard and administered themselves as well as the duty of establishing defense squads. By 1976 they were assigned the responsibility of rural tax collection and by 1977 policy was given to provide for the organization of PAs at national level. By 1975/76 there were 15,989 PAs established throughout the country having 4,550,918 members. After four years - by 1979/90 the figure increased to 23,506 PAs and 7,049, 209 members (Yigremew 1990).

At the beginning, PAs were democratic and representative local organizations with their general assembly as supreme body. Of course, PAs were not membership organizations in a true sense of the term. Membership was area based and their

CCRDA

functions were governmental rather than that of an association. In addition they had no real decision making power. So, they were neither local government nor membership organizations. They functioned as field agents and hence they were a kind of *local administrative units*. Although they were effective local organizations in mobilizing peasants and successfully accomplishing the land reform, the system could not let them develop as genuine peasant institutions.

What happened was that gradually they lost their democratic features, their representative character and the hope of peasant emancipation disappeared. The military government took total control of these institutions and they became mere extension of the bureaucracy and functionaries of the political party. Elections for leadership were carefully prescribed, irregular, and candidates were hand-picked. The criteria became political affiliation and leaders were made accountable to the political cadres rather than the electorate. They were effectively incorporated into the political system. Wide-spread corruption and embezzlement as well as abuse of power became common among PA leadership. Members lost hope, interest and became indifferent.

Kirsh *et.al.* (1989: 161-62) expressed such loss of hope of peasant emancipation through PAs as "missed opportunity." They also noted the following.

> The land reform has resulted in a far-reaching re-organization of the Ethiopian Peasantry. At first, it was hoped that the peasant associations might develop into genuine autonomous grass-roots organizations. Had they been given the chance, they might well have done so. But this would only have been possible in a "soft" state, where the government was unable to control the rural areas. All hopes of such development were shattered when the hard-liners within the government took over and started to establish a Stalinist form of rule which the political cadre misleadingly describe as "democratic centralism." As a result, the mass organizations ceased to be forums of participation of the people in the country's political, economic, social and cultural life, and became instead a local-level government instrument, which could be influenced and exploited by the political cadre.

CCRDA

They also stated that Ethiopian peasant associations had been politicized and bureaucratized. And as soon as the government had subdued opposition movements the situation of PAs had deteriorated, their leadership were replaced, PAs were integrated into the administrative and control network of the government, they lost their autonomy, were reformed and manipulated and finally they lost their functions as pressure groups or trade unions for the rural population.

Dessalegn (1984: 78) characterized PAs as "Janus faced, with a dual role and a dual personality: as mass organization, it is entrusted with representation of the interests of the peasantry, and appears as an independent body; as the link in the administrative chain, it is integrated in the machinery of local government and appears as an arm of the state apparatus."

However, the most serious causes of the alienation of PAs from member peasants were their involvement in the implementation of the government's unpopular policies which were highly resented by the peasants: delivery of grain quota, resettlement and villagization programs, obligatory military recruitment, collection of various contributions and others.

All the above problems have contributed to the discredit of PAs by the peasantry. By the time the military government was overthrown, PAs were already unpopular and unwanted institutions among the rural society. Then they became extinct, with other similar structures, when Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power and dismissed them by a radio announcement alleged as creations of the Derg and its political party. So their misutilization and final abolishment was really a "missed opportunity" in that they were the first attempts of a representative, democratic and grass-roots peasant organizations with all important developmental, administrative and political functions.

From the dismissal of PAs in 1991 until the 1995 elections and establishment of kebele administrations as the last tier of the formal administrative and political structure, the rural society has been administered by a number of ad-hoc committees. During the political turbulence peasants have been administering their community by their usual traditional mechanisms. Whenever there is such power vacuum, the rural people organize themselves and elect elders and reputable members of the society with some kind of administrative experience and tactful character and effectively keep order and security in their villages.

While this is the conditions of peasant associations it will be important to note in passing what is happening to other kinds of organizations in the rural areas. I have been asking and observing cases of those associations like youth, women, and farmers which were once in vogue. I have been informed by some Woreda officials, cadres and peasants that the new officials are attempting to re-establish these associations. The unfortunate and desperate youth are still serving the regime on hand and foot. The young people between their late 20s and early 30s constitute the bulk of politicians and government officials. School dropouts are among those who have been channels of communication between the Woreda administration and rural Kebeles. They also play the role of an administrator and adjudicator. Most of them consider such services as a requirement for getting employment and this is something to pay a price for in the face of severe unemployment and poverty. Then, there is an attempt to exploit such a situation and organize the youth under a political party. However this is still an 'underground' work and no official youth association was established in the study area.

There is also an attempt to approach the rural women to form women associations. The old tactic of providing promises - of credit, grain mills, etc. - is used to attract the target group. But I was informed by political cadres, administrators and the women themselves that the previous bitter experience of endless meetings,

CORDA

committee duties, contributions (labor or other resources) and of all other political and governmental activities is still a living memory in the minds of the rural women. Hence they avoid as much as possible such meetings with political cadres and it seems it will take time to get them recruited. There is also an idea of farmers organizations (*Ye abatoch dirigit*) where adult men are to be organized separately. However this is just an idea and I did not come across any practice of such a story.

Currently, there is no any indication that the government has an intention to develop a policy towards the establishment of genuine and representative peasant organizations. It is very important to acknowledge that peasants, like other sections of the society, have the right to establish their own organization. This organization will serve to protect the interests of its members, like all other interest associations, labor unions and professional associations. It should also be structured with different tiers from primary to national so that it can be a strong pressure group in enhancing the interests of the peasants. An FAO sponsored study on rural organizations in Ethiopia recommended that primary peasant organizations and service cooperatives be the main rural organizations to be established. Peasant organizations were recommended not to carry government administrative functions like tax collection as what has been done previously, but be responsible for land management, environmental and resource protection, and for enabling development activity in their communities (Dessalegn 1992).

2.2.2. Agricultural Service Cooperatives (ASCs)

Ethiopia has been experimenting with agricultural cooperatives since the 1960s. However, it was since the 1974 revolution that these institutions became the most preferred forms of institutions for rural development. These institutions were addressed by the military government in its 1975 rural land reform policy. The land reform law presupposed to lay down the basis for the development of the whole society through cooperative work and the stated functions of PAs included the establishment of cooperative societies.

However, it was after the government adopted a socialist line of development and after it embarked on the policy of socialist transformation of agriculture that it intensified its efforts towards the establishment of cooperatives. It was argued that such transformation of agriculture required large scale mechanized forms of production with collective and state ownership - cooperatives and state farms being the means to do that.

By late 1975 (Proclamation No. 71/1975) details of agricultural service cooperatives were for the first time provided. They were assigned objectives of providing crop production services, marketing agricultural produces of members, providing loans at fair interest rates, supplying consumer goods, giving education in socialist philosophy and cooperative work in order to enhance the political consciousness of

CCRDA

the peasantry and to provide education with a view to establish producers cooperatives.

It is important to note here that, a closer examination of the case showed the ultimate objective of the government was to establish collective farms but not cooperatives.[3] That was to be achieved step by step from ASCs to agricultural producers cooperatives (APCs), and then to collectives. So more attention was given to APCs. Neither the rationales for what they were created nor the practical experience were valid grounds to maintain APCs so all were disbanded by the peasants when opportunities to do so were available. So the focus here is on ASCs.

By the year 1975/76 there were 308 ASCs with 275,724 members and 2,704,031 birr capital. By 1990, however, the figure increased to 3,233 ASCs with 3,571,738 members and 210,652,879 birr capital. They had been providing some services to their members with their objective of avoiding the middle-men and capitalist exploitation of peasants, they had been distributing consumer goods and other commodities to their members. For instance, during the period 1982/83 to 1989/90 on the average ASCs annually purchased and distributed a commodities worth of birr 110.6 million; only in 1990, 1,238 ASCs had distributed 826,942 quintal of fertilizer to member PAs. By 1984 it was indicated that there were 177 clinics, 269 schools, and 1747 flour mills established and run by ASCs. By 1990 they had 2504 warehouses and they had employed 10,067 employees to run those establishments and they had fixed and current capital worth of 210,652,879 birr (Yigremew 1996). Another report shows that by 1991, there were 4,159 SCs organized by 18,200 PAs having 4.5 million members, and 211 million birr capital. During the late 1980s, SCs distributed about 80,000 tons of fertilizer and 40,000 tons of seeds and purchased 100 million birr worth of consumer goods annually; they had established 3,036 stores, 230 coffee processing facilities, 1,500 flour mills, 435 primary schools, and 246 clinics (Southern Region Cooperatives Development and Credit Project 1993? :3-4).

Alemayehu (1993) had noted that ASCs had played the roles such as: a) Linking the state and peasant sectors - provision of credit, provision of new technology, serving as an outlet in distributing basic goods to the rural population and serving as optional sites for extension agents. b) Increasing access to marketing and social services for the dispersed rural population - through their retail shops, milling services, schools, purchasing of outputs etc. c) Equitable distribution of basic goods to farm households - they have contributed to price stabilization and to an equitable rationing of basic goods in rural areas. d) Promoting rural employment - they have been important centers for job opportunity in rural areas. e) Developing marketing and social infrastructure in rural areas warehouses, retail shops, grain mills, schools, kindergartens, clinics and others.

These and other services were so vital to the Ethiopian peasantry in particular and to rural development in general. In such poor country with predominantly peasant

CCRDA

economy, very underdeveloped infrastructure, very limited government capacity, etc. cooperatives could have been a very valuable options to resort to. To some extent, ASCs were means of self-help, of resource mobilization, forums of experience for collective work and administrative and technical capabilities, important intermediary channels between government and the dispersed rural people, means of protecting the interests of the rural poor and they would have been the most affordable agents of sustainable development.

However, Ethiopia's experience with these valuable rural organizations is another missed opportunity like PAs. ASCs lacked most necessary conditions for an effective grass-roots organization which plays an important role in promoting development. They were besetted with a number of problems: they were created by government fiat not based on the peasants consent; they had no the necessary autonomy but suffocated and dominated by government rules and orders; they were used to carry out unpopular government functions like collection of unnecessary grain quota, obligatory contributions; government and party control have created corrupt and unscrupulous leadership, unaccountable and unresponsive to the demands and needs of the peasants; they had anomalous structure with cumbersome leadership and a number of committees, and no higher level organ to assist; and lack of the necessary linkages from the government.

In general ASCs were created and used by the government to implement its unpopular policies. They were transient and instrumental institutions used to achieve the objective of collectivization. In such a way, they lost all their power to decide and to act, they had become field agents of the government, they were used to extract resources from the peasantry. As such there was no genuine cooperative movement in Ethiopia and the so called 'failure of cooperatives' was rather failure of such high-handed government policies. In the mean time we lost two golden opportunities: development of genuine cooperatives using those initial trends and, the peasants' enthusiasm, interest and confidence in the future to establish such valuable institutions.

So, with such instrumental role, they became unpopular among their members. As a result, peasants lost interest in these institutions and they became moribund since the government shifted from its agrarian socialism to mixed economy in 1990. As they were created and manipulated by the government as agents of change towards socialism, they were also thought no more useful when that objective was dropped. Consequently, when the peasants were given the freedom to decide on the fate of cooperatives, they almost totally dismantled APCs. In fact peasants appreciate the value of ASCs and they want them provided they serve their interests and are their own organizations. For instance, ASCs were not automatically dismantled by their members like APCs. The new government's radio announcement of dismissal of all popular organizations alleged creations of previous government had an effect to the neglect and destruction of ASCs.

CCRDA

The new Ethiopian government and its party have positive policy pronouncements on cooperatives. For instance the EPRDF's Development, Peace and Democracy Program (1987 E.C.) acknowledges the decisive role of peasant organizations in the rural development efforts of the nation. The most important organizations mentioned as requiring special attention were cooperatives, women associations, and kebele peasant associations. By 1994 the Transitional Government enacted its first agricultural cooperative law. In that law the government stated its intent of making cooperatives play their roles properly in the free market economic system by getting rid of government interventions. Thereafter a number of meetings and some other activities have been conducted which included officials both at federal and regional levels. For instance in 1989 E.C. (1996/97) a draft cooperative law was prepared by the federal government. In that law it was suggested to bring all kinds of cooperatives under a single jurisdiction - a commission at the federal level and bureau's at regional levels.

Cooperatives were also to be organized at primary, union and regional and federal level. However, at the federal level no progress has been made since then while regional governments have been moving at their own capacity. For example Tigray, Oromiya and Southern Ethiopia regions have already promulgated their laws on the establishment of governmental agencies responsible for such cooperative matters. In the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region, a huge project work is going on.[4] In all cases these agencies are directly accountable to Executive Committees of respective Regional Councils and presidents of regional governments and no line ministry, including the Ministry of Agriculture, has been entrusted with cooperative affairs like what happened in the previous regimes. At the federal level also some follow-up unit is found in the Prime Minister's Office while in the Ministry of Agriculture the cooperative unit has been demoted to lower level and is not active currently.

The government media continuously provide glorious reports about these organizations. For instance, it is reported by officials responsible for cooperative affairs in the Prime Minister's Office (August 1998) that only in three regions, Tigray, Amhara, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, there are 3,555 farmers cooperatives with 4 million members and 300,000,000 birr capital.[5] But the report also noted that there is no any government agency at the federal level responsible for cooperative affairs, no policy, and this has negative influence on development of cooperatives. They added that the government is currently preparing to bridge this gap.

It may be necessary, however, to cite a first hand information in the field about what is practically going on. In 1997, in the Amhara Region, where the researcher had been doing a two-month field research particularly in two woredas in West Gojjam, the following have been observed. The institutional aspect was that there was an Office for the Follow up of the Peasant Cooperatives Affairs (OFPCA) established in 1996. The agency had its offices also at the zone and Woreda levels.

CCRDA

At the regional level the office has five employees, head of the office, three cooperative professionals, and one secretary. At the zonal level there are three people, one head and two technical personnel while at the Woreda level there are two, one head and one auditor.

It was reported that in the Region all APCs were dismantled during the political turbulence and 180 out of 1200 ASCs were also abolished. By 1997, 1021 ASCs were reported existing out of which only 44 (4.3%) were reorganized as per proclamation No. 85/1994 of the Transitional Government. However, these figures are very misleading. A good deal of ASCs in the visited two Woredas were dormant. Many of them have been looted, and their money embezzled by those unscrupulous committee members. The following table shows this fact. There were 13 ASCs in Jabi Tennan woreda until 1991. While two of them had been totally destroyed and forgotten the rest were in the following condition.

Table 1. Conditions of Jabi Tehnan Woreda ASCs in 1993.

Ser. No.	ASC	Office	Ware-houses	Flour Mills
1	Birr Sheleko	No	No	No
2	Mankussa	No	No	No
3	Abasem	No	No	No
4	Gueray Wonz	No	No	No
5	Yelmdar	No	No	No
6	Kolla Aklat	No	No	No
7	Lematen Mesk	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Adis Amba	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Gedam Wuha	No	No	No
10	Teyim Wonz	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	Tabech Mesk	Yes	Yes	Yes

CCRDA

Source: Jabi Tehnan Woreda Agricultural Office 1993 report.

As the table shows out of eleven ASCs in the Woreda only four had those necessary services. And these are those SCs reported as reorganized after 1994. The report also shows that among those four SCs with such fixed assets important documents and some movable properties of Lematen Mesk and Addis Amba had been looted and had not been fully recovered. The rest of SCs had been totally looted and destroyed. Two SCs had already been destroyed and forgotten and this was because of, according to an official from the Woreda Cooperative Affairs Follow up Office, the fact that they had owed no debt to any source so the government had no interest in reactivating these ones. This may imply, interestingly, that one of the reasons for reactivating ASCs is to get the government money back.

This is not again the whole story. These institutions were highly indebted. For instance out of those 11 SCs, by March 1993, 9 of them had the following outstanding debt.

Table 2. Debt ASCs owed

	SC	Amount of Debit
1	Mankussa	75,209.10
2	Abasem	57,510.82
3	Gueray Wonz	8,244.22
4	Addis Amba	35,811.45
5	Kolla Aklat	44,497.05
6	Lematen Mesk	21,090.71
7	Teyim Wonz	24,949.67
8	Tabech Mesk	18,848.46
9	Yelim Dar	26,917.57
	Total	312,974.97

Source: Jabi Tehnan Woreda Agricultural Office 1993 Report.

The loan was given from different governmental and non-governmental sources and used for different purposes like purchase of oxen, grain mills, agricultural inputs and the like.

Still another chronic problem of ASCs embezzlement which has been the main cause for their unpopularity and loss of members confidence in the previous time was still perpetuating. As before, now also no one is responsible for and has a duty of protecting these institutions. For those unscrupulous committee members, SCs have been a very good source of wealth. Once they embezzle enough, no one will take them to the court or take any other measure. This practice had been and is still rampant. For instance the following table shows the degree of such misappropriation until the year 1995/96.

CRDA

Table 3. Money embezzled from ASC in Jabi Tehnan Woreda

Ser.No.	SCs	Money Misappropriated only in 95/96 (Birr)	Total Amount Misappropriated Until 1995/96 (Birr)
1	Lematen Mesk	2,551.66	63,689.83
2	Teyim Wonz	2,438.85	65,700.96
3	Addis Amba	9,799.30	49,802.49
4	Tabech Mesk	455.45	7,369.24
5	Guedam Wuha	-	13,519.13
6	Gueray Wonz	10,568.68	30,358.33
7	Birr Sheleko	1,910.87	20,390.27
8	Yelimdar	697.50	28,776.42
9	Mankusa	9,604.61	18,535.70

Source: Jabi Tehanan Woreda Agricultural Office 1995/96 Audit Report.

All perpetrators were committee members mostly treasurers and salesmen and most of them were reported living in the same kebele and doing well with the money. The situation is not better in Kuarit Woreda. The 1997 audit report of 11 SCs shows that a total of 226,567.26 Birr has been misappropriated up to that date. They also had 83,250 Birr outstanding debt. They are moribund and only their previous head counts are reported. Among five service cooperatives I visited in the two Woredas only one (Lematen Mesk) is just in a good condition and with an operational grain mill.

Currently, ASCs had a lot of problems: lack of the necessary installations and assets, rampant embezzlement, heavy indebtedness are not the only disease crippling ASCs; lack of proper legal framework and working guidelines; inadequate institutional set-up, both at the federal, regional and wereda levels; government undue interference and control in their activities, election, and administration of assets; serious organizational problems resulting from maintaining the previous membership of peasant associations while this has been totally changed.[6]

Peasants would have benefited form ASCs particularly in the case of input distribution like fertilizer. Such services have these days been too costly and too bureaucratic for the peasants. For instance, I found that in 1997 in Jab Tehnan Woreda entirely and in Kuarit the major share of distributing fertilizer is done by Ambassel Trading Co. in collaboration with the Amhara Saving and Credit Institution. Unfortunately this credit institution charges the peasants a 12.5% interest rate when they pay back the credit within 10 months. Moreover, they use a group system consisting of 10 to 30 peasants to forward the credit and that has to be

CCRDA

agreed up on and ensured by the kebele administration. Some people complain that there is even a kind of discrimination in nominating group numbers.

As a result of all the above problems, the figures reported in the media are more related to historical figures than present realities. In the final analysis the most critical questions determining the fate of SCs are two: *first, people are insistently asking for the recovery of their embezzled money; and second if the first question is not answered, who will supply the necessary amount of assets (capital & other) to SCs to enable them to start their business?* Currently, both questions seem to be vary difficult to answer. Recovery of cooperative assets and money has been attempted by a kind of committee work but was not successful. And under the new economic policy, the very bad record of SCs in repaying loans and the government's little concern, free supply of credit and other necessary assets does not seem forthcoming.

Without answering these two critical questions, neither the political rhetoric nor the usual false promises will bring about the zeal and the will of peasants towards reviving ASCs. For example, in southern Ethiopia 142 SCs were surveyed and asked to indicate their development programs: all requested working capital, 58 requested flour mills, 106 demanded for input loans, 96 demanded loans for oxen.[7] Peasants have good experience in that the government had good interest in getting cooperatives services (grain quota collection, distribution of commodities, distribution of agricultural inputs, collection of contributions etc.) but not serious concern about their problems. So, the peasants' kind cooperation and confidence seems somewhat eroded.

3. Conclusion

As things stand now, traditional rural organizations seem to be the only real local organizational structures available to the peasants. Independent and genuine peasant associations do not seem existing in the agenda list of the government, and ASCs are not yet activated. Of course, peasants lack and have lost many things: no organization representing their interests, no supply of commodities timely and at fair prices, no warehouse and credit facilities to save them from the unfair and distorted seasonal prices for their produce, no infrustructural services, no proper channel between the government and other agencies and the peasantry, and more important no good memory, experience and hope in such valuable institutions like cooperative societies. All these are also losses to the government as well.

In the past, there were false promises; instrumentality of peasant organizations to capture the peasantry; exploitation of peasants by way of lower prices, direct misappropriation of their resources, corruption, obligatory contributions and the like; peasant oppression by forceful measures like physical attack, humiliations, imprisonment, obligatory military recruitment, etc. and others which all worked against peasants' zeal and interest for cooperation, enthusiasm, and development in

CCRDA

general. All these evils have resulted in a very suspicious, risk averter, and indifferent peasant mentality.

Currently, it seems that no appropriate effort is done to redress those infliction. The rural poor of the country are found trapped in a situation what Chambers (1983) called "deprivation trap": made up of clusters of disadvantage - poverty (lack of necessary assets), physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, and powerlessness. Any effort to improve this situation requires local organizations. Currently the Ethiopian government has a rural-based and agricultural development strategy (Agricultural Development Led Industrialization, ADLI). The government economic policy stresses the need to extend assistance for rehabilitating peasant farmers, to expand construction of rural roads, to expand the distribution and use of improved agricultural inputs, and to increase extension services.

Both ADLI and other goals of the economic policy in particular, and rural development in general, require a well-functioning local organizations which will supplement the government effort and which will assist to make any effort sustainable. This can be demonstrated by making reference to some important issues.

Currently, there is no adequate service provision in rural areas which include health, education, credit, marketing, input supply, etc. For example, there are no rural credit services adequate to assist the poor farmers in their efforts for livelihood. Some efforts done like in the Amhara Region by the Amhara Saving and Credit Institutions are very expensive (12.5 % annual interest for fertilizer purchase), monopolistic (no other private institution), and bureaucratic (carried out through the formal bureaucratic channels).

CCRDA

It is very important that attention be also given to improve agricultural technology suitable for the peasants. There was an effort to strengthen a huge tractor factory while we import sickles; peasants use those traditional implements used for centuries; more attention is given to diary farming than the improvement of oxen, traction power; no proper attention for forage production. In the countryside donkeys do not carry water, and oxen and horses do not pool carts. Even in the current extension program, many people are expressing their apprehension that while agricultural inputs are going more and more expensive, output prices are very low particularly for the peasants who have no marketing services. This situation is important for continuity and sustainability of the program.

We are also embarked on structural adjustment program which is well known for increasing the vulnerability of the rural poor. In the absence of well developed private sector, government's quick retreat from the provision of important services and support to the peasants will aggravate rural vulnerability. All the money coming from outside sources in the form of loans and assistance to facilitate the adjustment will not also be available after a given period of time. More

importantly, as experience shows, structural adjustment program will make governments more needy for external resources when the time of debt servicing comes. With all external resources and involvement, our rural development activities have also totally become projects. Experience shows that rural development projects in developing countries have commonly failed mainly for lack of proper institutional development and sustainabilty.

Therefore, all the above mentioned points imply that rural organizations are necessities if our rural development efforts are to be more comprehensive, well-directed, and *sustainable.* Then, it will be important that government and other development agencies, like NGOs, as well as researchers give more attention to the strengthening of existing rural organizations and establishment of new ones. The effort should start with proper understanding of the role rural organizations can play which again implies gaining proper knowledge about these institutions.

CCRDA

Endnotes

[1] Uphoof and Esman (1984) noted that the difference between 'traditional' and 'modern' organizations is their degree of formalization, the former being more informal, and the latter more formal. Then to avoid the difficulty of classification, they used terms 'existing' and 'new'. In this paper the terms 'Traditional' and 'modern' are then used for lack of better terminologies. Traditional here implies those indigenous organizations including those which are carrying out 'modern' functions like development associations.

2. Lealem Berhanu (1998: 14-15) Working for Furra Development Studies Centre, Sidama.

[3] For the differences between cooperatives and collectives and about the analysis of the case, see Yigremew adal, 1996.

[4] This may show that cooperatives are needed to facilitate cash crop production and marketing as this is of great interest both to the government and other international agencies like the World Bank.

[5] See, *Abiyotawi Democracy*, an organ of the ruling party (EPRDF), 9th year, number 258 Nehase 7 - 13/1990.

[6] (see Yigremew 1996). The boundary of peasant associations have been changed when they were replaced by kebele administrations. For instance in Kuarit and Jabi Tehnan weredas a kebele administration has almost twice an area of previous peasant association. In Jabi Tehnan wereda 64 PAs have been changed to form 33 kebele administrations. Only one ASC in each of the two weredas remained with its previous territory.

[7] See, Southern Region Cooperatives Development and Credit Project (1993 ?)

CCRDA

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CCRDA

PRIVATISATION OF RURAL LAND: TO PROTECT WHOSE SECURITY?

CCRDA

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PRIVATISATION OF RURAL LAND:
TO PROTECT WHOSE SECURITY?

I. Introduction

This paper comprises part of a bigger ongoing research project undertaking whose general hypothesis reads as follows: In the last four or so decades in this country, the various forms of interventions made by the successive regimes regarding the agricultural and rural development were not only -with the exception of the 1975 agrarian reform bill - inappropriate and misguided, and inadequate, if gauged in terms of their object, but also inconsequential in purposes, if viewed in relation to question of agrarian development. In that research undertaking we posited that the primary object of agrarian transformation is none other than transforming the peasantry itself and the conditions of its life. We argue that since the interventions of those regimes were not in that direction and hence because they followed inappropriate and misguided strategies of development, the word `crisis' has become the defining and determinate characteristic of the agrarian economy and, by extension, it has also become the major feature of the whole economy.

In the above mentioned research project, I intend to present theorisation of the Ethiopian state and the changes it has undergone in its nature and how that shaped the development strategies of the successive regimes: the Imperial regime, the military regime, and EPRDF. That would make it necessary to examine the complex interplay between politics and economics or, put differently, to establish the interrelations between politics and economics focusing on the dominant political ideas and state actions and economic ideas and processes.

My presentation today does not involve in any theorisation on the subject under consideration: privatisation of rural land. It will be a brief methodological and substantive critique of the arguments for the privatisation of the rural land. Some scholars believe and argue that the privatisation of rural land and the concentration of the latter in the hands of a few `enterprising and efficient farmers' would lead, in the long run, to overcome some aspects of the structural problems of the agrarian economy. Some important policy implication of this argument are that the government has (1) to undertake a full privatisation programme; (b) to create the necessary conditions for the emergence of a `class' or a stratum of those types of farmers; (c) to promote the interests of those farmers through various policy instruments including, in the main, providing free access to land and their tenure security. This will definitely lead to a total reversal of the 1975 agrarian reform measures the fundamental element of which was enabling the overwhelming majority of the country's peasants to have access of land. The basic argument is that government control of land led to the peasant insecurity of holdings.

The arguments presented here against the privatisation of rural land are deceptively simple

CCRDA

and the lines of enquiry posited here seem to be general and obvious to the point of banality. The first line of enquiry concerns whether the arguments for the privatisation of rural land have a well-grounded empirical base. The second line of enquiry posits that the question of land tenure, the central element of the argument for privatisation, should be located in a broader context which takes into serious consideration the roles of other factors whose contributions to the country's agrarian crisis cannot be de-emphasised.

The tenure insecurity of holdings is the basic proposition around which the whole argument of privatisation seems to have been sustained. This raises some important methodological and substantive questions some of which are briefly discussed in the following pages.

II. Some Methodological Problems

Any meaningful analysis of the agrarian system of Ethiopia comes up with a set of formidable methodological problems. Here I use the term methodology to mean a theoretical perspective which is instrumental to analyse the empirical data. In any scientific analysis of any social or physical phenomenon, the organic link between the two (i.e. theory and empirical data) becomes inseparable. Theories can be derived from solid empirical data, although the latter are not the only basis for theorisation. In our analysis of the agrarian crisis we need both theories and sufficient and reliable data on the various aspects the agrarian economy and the factors which influence its performance. Now the question is: do we have sufficient and reliable information to analyse the generic crisis of the agrarian structures of the country leading us to come out with an earthshaking proposal like the one under consideration, namely, the privatisation of rural land. More importantly perhaps the enquire that concern us here is whether there have been any researches done, whether there have been any serious debates and discussions on the implications and possible outcomes of such possible dramatic changes of the agrarian structures which could be similar in depth and magnitude to that of the 1975. I am sure a great number of people still regret that the declaration of the 1975 land reform policy which was undertaken without having enough information (`knowledge') about the dynamics of the then agrarian structures and without analysing the possible social, economic and political outcomes of such radical policy.

CORDA

So far we have two sources of information about some aspects of the country's agriculture. One is the official source, the main one is the *Statistical Abstract* of CSA and some others. The other source is private sources which include field researches. Both sources have problems and the validity of their data are highly questionable. Moreover, private sources of individual researchers or of NGOs are mostly case studies which focus on specific areas and on specific problems. In the case of agriculture, most studies have focused, though understandably, on drought/famine prone areas and their scopes an purposes are different and limited. *I have never come across either a country-wide study or a large number of case studies on the peasant insecurity of holdings.* In case, if there are, which I have not come across, what are their findings regarding the impact on the peasant insecurity of holdongs, on production and productivitt (land productivity and labour productivity), on the environment, and also on peasants' capacity to cope with economic distress and material insecurity?

There is another dimension of the problem which is of prime importance and this concerns the question of privatisation. In this connection, it is pertinent to look into the basic issue

which concerns whether the existing production system has run its course and thus there is an urgent call to change it. *Would the various researches and studies so far done, the data so far available, and the analyses made based on them would lead us to conclude that the existing production system has exhausted itself and hence a need to change it.* I believe, they do not!

Let us have a look at some areas where there is a dearth or paucity of data on the following important subjects. We shall mention only a few of them which we believe are important.

1. The agrarian history of this country has never been systematically studied. There is a dearth of information on, say, the agrarian class structure and the social conflict that arises in the creation and appropriation of surplus, the relations between the state and the peasantry, the social organisation of production including the systems of land tenure, rural poverty, environmental problems and the like. This is not to deny that various researches on some aspects of the agrarian system have been done by some Ethiopian and expatriate scholars. In this connection, the names of some of the prominent contributors who have enabled us to get some information about the rural world of this country could be mentioned: R. Pankhurst, Taddesse Tamrat, Dessalegn Rahmato, Eshetu Chole, Bahru Zewdie, Mohammed Hassen, Gebru Tareke, Mesfin Wolde Mariam, M. Stahl, D. Crummy, and some others. The two best books of the post-war period agrarian studies and economic history are Dessalegn Rahmato's **Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia** (1984), and **An Economic History of Ethiopia: The Imperial Era 1941-74** (vol.I), edited by Shiferaw Bekele. This book contains quite interesting articles by prominent Ethiopian scholars, Shiferaw Jammo, Shiferaw Bekele, Dessalegn Rahmato, Eshetu Chole, Bekekadu Degefe and Alula Abate.

2. Related to the above is the paucity of reliable and enough data, say, for example, on the total amount of the actual and potential arable land and the shortage of arable land and the changing pattern of land use; cultivated and cultivable area; the aggregate production, types and production of food and export crops and household production. Serious studies are lacking on the types of farm technology used in different parts of the country, and the same goes for animal traction. Hydrography and environment are new areas virtually untouched by researchers and the same could be said about the social and physical infrastructure.

3. Serious and systematic studies are lacking particularly in the following areas: the systems of land tenure before the 1975 land reform; the causes and extent of peasant insecurity of holdings under (a) the Imperial regime; (b) the military regime; and (c) EPRDF. How much has this specific problem affected production and the peasant sense of alienation from the land and from his/her production? The same questions could be asked about the fragmentation of holdings? Are there some regional variations regarding these problems? Why did the project of `progressive farmers' of the early 1970s promoted in some rural areas by external financial agencies fail? Were large-scale mechanised commercial farms of the late 1960s and early 1970s self-sustainable or profitable? How much land was brought under cultivation by those farms? What were the social and political consequences of those enterprise in the areas they were set up and operated?

CCRDA

4. There is a lack of information also on investment (in its various forms) in agriculture under the successive regimes. What was the nature of investment and what were the shares of different sub-sectors?[1]

5. One basic question: what went wrong with the 1975 agrarian reform and why? This would raise important theoretical, methodological and empirical issues. No thorough, systematic and country-wide studies have been made regarding this basic question. This is not to deny the significant contributions made and published in the form of books, articles and case studies that have been made by some prominent Ethiopian scholars[2] including some expatriate ones on the subject.

6. There is also a tendency, on the part of Ethiopian scholars, to look at the Ethiopian agrarian problems in isolation as if we do not share some features of the fundamental agrarian problems with other countries, particularly in Africa and Asia. For instance, does not the international division of labour between the industrialised West and the capitalist periphery which was in place by the second half of the last century have to explain largely or, to some, partially the agrarian crisis Africa? How much information do we have on the extent of privatisation of land in some African countries like Kenya, Malawi, etc. and what were the effects on production, both food and export crops, and on peasants' insecurity of holdings ? What were the other social and political consequences? Why agriculture in some South East Asian countries, where the average size of holdings per household are either similar with or smaller than those of ours, are much more productive, both in terms of land productivity and labour productivity? Can we learn something from other experiences?

7. I would like to add two more important points to this overly long list of methodological problems. I put them at the end of this list not because they are the least significant; it is on the contrary. One is the absolute lack of gendered-studies of the system of agricultural production and the question of women's access to land and to other productive resources. What are the nature and institutional manifestations of

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1 Thanks should go to Ato Shiferaw Jammo, who provided us with investment data of the Imperial regime. See his article which has some invaluable information and insight on the general features of the Ethiopian economy. Shiferaw Jammo, 'An Overview of the Economy, 1941-74', in the forthcoming book, AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA, The Imperial Era 1941-74, (Vol. 1), in Shiferaw Bekele (ed.)

2 Ato Dessalegn Rahmato has done a massive amount of researches on the different aspects of the agrarian economy and has published two books and a number of articles. It was through his works that I have come to gain some nodding acquaintance with some important issues of the agrarian problems. I think many of us are fortunate that we have this scholar still around as usual still actively engaged on studies on aspects of the agrarian economy.

CCRDA

the sexual division of labour and what effects do they have on the productive lives of women? No less important are to examine and understand women's role in production and the problem of remuneration for their labour power.

The other one is the lack of debate and discussion among the scholars on major aspects of the agrarian problem. I take this as a methodological issue because it is through research and discussions that different theoretical and analytical apparatuses can be developed. It is also through sustained debates and discussions that different theoretical approaches and methodologies could emerge and can be employed to analyse the various aspects of the agrarian problems. One serious methodological flaw is the lack of multi-disciplinary approach to the agrarian problems. I think that reflects our intellectual origin, backgrounds and arrogance or, better said, vanity.

CCRDA

III. PRIVATISATION OF RURAL LAND: ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST

3.1. Arguments for Privatisation of Rural Land

After the seizure of state power by EPRDF, there have been limited intellectual voices for the privatisation of rural land[3] in this country. One is from Dessalegn Rahmato, the pioneer of what might be termed as `Ethiopian Peasant Studies'. The other is Mesfin Wolde Mariam, who, because of his earlier profession, has travelled a lot in rural Ethiopia. There has been of course an unwavering `concern' of the World Bank for the Ethiopian peasants as it usually has to peasants elsewhere who are agonising under its draconian structural adjustment policies. My arguments are not against those of the World Bank because it does not listen to other voices, particularly from scholars or governments of the so-called Third World. Its political and ideological mission is unmistakably clear and unswerving!

In this presentation on the question of privatisation of rural land, I would like to take issue with the two scholars whose names I have just mentioned. Here I would also like to make two points clear. The primary purpose my reaction in this paper to the question of privatisation is to provoke further discussions on this timely and pertinent rural development issue. Actually, the two voices seem to have a larger but abeyant intellectual constituency. The second point concerns my own shortcomings: for various reasons, I could not get enough time to develop my arguments as fully as I should hav wished. I just jotted down the major points of my arguments.

Tenure insecurity of holdings is a common central element in the arguments of both Dessalegn and Mesfin on the privatisation of rural land. They developed their arguments around this central issue but Mesfin adds fragmentation of holdings as being another major agrarian problem. Dessalegn eloquently and forcefully presented his arguments for privatisation in his article `The Land Question and Reform Policy: Issues for Debate', in **DIALOGUE** (vol. I, no. 1, 1992:43-57). Two year after his he presented his arguments for the privatisation of rural land, Dessalegn came up with another novel idea, apparently (fundamentally) departing from his earlier position of privatisation. This new idea, what he called `associative ownership', was briefly discussed in his article: `Land policy in Ethiopia at the crossroads' (Dessalegn, 1944:1-20). He further point out that land would be vested in the community and in this connection he says that

> The underlying premise behind associative ownership is that *land belongs to the community and the individual land users in it;* it does not belong to the state or some distant authority. The rights of use and transfer therefore reside in the individual user, and of management and regulation in the community. Individual land is to be held in freehold, with all rights this involves; land not in individual hands is to be managed by the community (Italics in the original).

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[3] There has also been arguments for urban land privatisation by some members of the business community and others. I am faintly acquainted with the arguments and besides it is not my immediate concern.

CCRDA

He came back to the question of tenure insecurity of peasants and its implications on rural development in his latest short article (see Dessalegn, 1997). After a graphic description of some major aspects of the agrarian problems, he summarises his earlier arguments for privatisation. His points out what he calls the `profound consequences of this policy [i.e. the 1975 land reform policy]. The first is `periodic redistributions and levelling down of holdings that gave rise to meant that there was now little incentive in investing on the land and in managing it properly since one's holdings could be transferred to others at any time' (Dessalegn, 1997:8). He further states that this created a problem regarding `security of tenure and efficient land use'. `Secondly, the legal prohibition of land transfers has meant that the consolidation of plots and the more efficient use of land can not be undertaken' (ibid:9). The third consequence has discouraged rural-urban migration as absence of an individual peasant for a an extended time period of time from his domicile is in a certain Kebele would lead him lose not only his rights to his holdings but also the land itself if he fails to be present at the time of land redistribution. In order to accommodate the younger generation more demographic pressure is put on the already small holdings and thus are made to carry more than their physical capacity (ibid.). I believe that all these points are true and that his arguments are strong. But what solution does Dessalegn propose to come out of the crisis of the agrarian economy whose dominant features are, in his words, `*small-holder agriculture* and *micro-agriculture*' (ibid:7; Italics in the original)? In a word, his proposed solution is privatisation of rural land and accumulation of land in the hands of what he refers to as the `efficient and enterprising farmers. In other words, and according to him, the existing agrarian system `denies the efficient farmer the opportunity to accumulate wealth....' `....offering encouragement to enterprising peasants to get *secure* access to *more* land, to use the land more efficiently, to expand their operations....(ibid; Italics in the original; parenthesis mine).

Dessalegn's notion of `associative ownership' is something that lacks theorisation based on empirical analysis. It substitutes the `state', an abstract entity, for the `community', another abstraction. How would one conceptualise (even theoretically comprehend) the community? What would be the social composition of the *imagined* community and would all those resident in that community be members, regardless of social positions, differences based on gender and age? Would the ethnic and social elements go into the physical delineation of the community? Who would be the leading members of the community who could impartially manage and regulate land right claims? What would be the role of local government institutions in the imagined community? If the younger generation does not get job opportunities elsewhere in the other sectors of the economy, would not demographic pressure on smallholdings increase? I think Dessalegn needs to develop his notion, if he still thinks that it would be one of the possible solutions to the existing agrarian system. More importantly perhaps, how does his notion of `associative ownership' jibe with his proposed solution of privatisation which attempts and encourages `progressive' farmers who possess the inherent talent of `efficiency' and greed to accumulate land at the expense of the micro-holders?

Privatisation of rural land and accumulation of land in the hands of `enterprising' and `efficient' farmers would lead to the creation of large-scale farms which can be achieved at the expense of smallholder peasants' eviction. Dessalegn's argument also raises some technical and substantive issues. How is `efficiency' defined? what makes larger farms more efficient than smaller farms and efficiency of what are we talking about? Does Dessalegn refer to `technical efficiency' or `economic efficiency' of small and large farms? The former could

CRDA

be defined as `the greatest output for any set of inputs in a given period of time', while the latter refers to `the whole farm operation rather than to only one activity' (Vogler, 1981:89). Relative technical efficiency concerns productivity per unit of land, where small farms are said to have advantages over large farms. It also concerns productivity per unit of labour input, net return per unit of capital employed, and the amount of marketable surplus produced per unit of land. The argument that large or larger farms are more efficient than small or smaller is difficult to sustain and in our case the subject requires a detailed study which we do no currently have it.

Mesfin raises and discusses the question of land tenure and land fragmentation and `argues' that these are the major problems of `food security and the condition of land holding'[4] Unlike Dessalegn's, I have found Mesfin's arguments to be more political and ideological. There nothing wrong in that except that it is done at the expense of a dispassionate analysis. Let us look at his proposition: `The way I perceive it, the problems of Ethiopia's agriculture are two types: one emanates from the farmer himself and his mode of work; the other comes from the defective policy of the authoritative political systems'[5] (Mesfin, 1997:3). He has not say anything in the text how the farmer becomes the problem, except that blaming the victims of socio-political circumstances and condemning him for being, according to him, the author of his own miserable life. His contentions of land fragmentation and insecurity of holdings are not substantiated even with a modicum of evidence. He points out that `to the Ethiopian farmer land is not only a symbol of wealth but also of his personality and citizenship (ibid:4). What a defining psychological characteristic of the Ethiopian farmer?! Would not such psychological symbol equally apply to the former Rhodesian white settler farmer, or to the Ethiopian landlords in the southern parts of Ethiopia before the pre-revolutionary days?

The other point raised by both Mesfin and Dessalegn is the attachment and love Ethiopian peasants have to their pieces of land. This is to undermine the blind force of capital and its destructive capacity. Leaving aside this assumed unique characteristic of the Ethiopian peasant, the recent agrarian history of this country (peasant eviction and the displacement of pastoralists); the destruction of African peasantries in the face of colonialism and colonial accumulation of capital; the recent total annihilation of the three-century old American `family farms' - the source of the ideological symbols as enshrined in the `family' and `private property' - by agribusiness (multi-national corporations) could be the eloquent examples that capital is a strong and irresistible force.

In sum, the above were the basic arguments of Dessalegn and Mesfin on the question of rural alnd privatisation.

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[4] Mesfin's article which appeared in ECONOMIC FOCUS (vol. I, no. 2) is written in Amharic and title is 'ye-migib wastina-na yemeret yizota huneta'. I translated this as 'food security and the condition of land holding'.

[5] Rendition into English from Amharic is mine.

CCRDA

3.2 Arguments against Privatisation of Rural land

Let me start with some methodological problems related to the question of land tenure as presented by Dessalegn and Mesfin. I think nobody would doubt the significance and relevance of the question. Robinson (1979:41) puts the materiality of the question of land tenure as follows: `The main influence upon the organisation of agriculture and the distribution of its products is the system of land tenure.' Land tenure thus influences the organisation of the system of production and also the conditions in which the direct producers generate surplus and how that surplus is appropriated by the owners of capital or those who wield state power. Unquestionably, land tenure is important in shaping `the organisation of agriculture and the distribution of its products,' but there are a host of other factors whose influences are equally weighty. Such factors would include, say, lack of investment and technological change, the diminishing size of holdings, environmental degradation, the influence of external environment which emanates from the international division of labour, the nature of rural institutions, population growth, the other various forms of relations between the state and the peasantry. In other words, any analysis of the question of land tenure should then be seen in relation to these and other similar factors.

The two scholars mentioned above did not consider other possible options of agrarian transformation. For instance, can there be a possibility for internal transmutation of the agrarian economy dominated by smallholder production into a capitalist economy if the necessary conditions for that to take place are made available. Dessalegn seems to consider that option but his identification of the `agency', namely, `enterprising farmers,' seems to bank on something non-existent. The emergence of that category of farmers does not only depend on just having private ownership of some plots of land but also on other factors such as access to capital and the like. Seeing the experiences of some other countries, especially in South East, the possibility of the sort of transmutation just mentioned can hardly be ruled out as an option for consideration.

I hope the thrust and thread of my argument against the privatisation of the rural land could be gathered from the foregoing discussion on methodology. I believe that the effects of the proposed agenda of privatisation will be as ecumenical as that of the 1975 land reform in a different sense. That reform enabled the landless and poor peasants to have access to land by simultaneously removing the parasitic landlord class from the rural scene. Now, the proposed agenda of privatisation of land will create a massive eviction of peasants and the displacement of pastoralists. Landless and poor peasants, who coprise comprise the overwhelming majority of the rural population, will be the first victims of that policy. Moreover, the pre-reform period land lords, who battened on the meagre `surplus' produced by the peasants, mostly tenants, will now be replaced by `capitalist' farmers who will alienate small peasant from their land. The `choice' for those peasants will be what is called the `Hobson's choice' or, a `choice' to be eaten by a shark or a lion.

That said, firstly, there are serious socio-economic and political questions which will arise as a result of privatisation of land and its concentration into the hands of a few well-to do farmers: what will happen to those evicted peasants and displaced pastoralists? Since the other sectors of the economy are as underdeveloped as agriculture and hence do not have the capacity to absorb more labour than they already have, would not creating employment opportunities for them be very difficult? Actually, a more fundamental question is: why

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should they be evicted and displaced? To create large-scale mechanised farms and to protect the tenure rights of the owners? In our own life time, we have witnessed that a limited penetration of capital caused massive misery to small peasants and tenants. Small holders lost their land and tenants lost even their slave-like status as producers. The contributions of those farms socially, in creating employment opportunities, and economically, in generating more surplus for accumulation, were inconsequential, if the latter is seen at the national level. Moreover, that penetration of capital in agriculture took place in the central and southern parts of the country where land is relatively fertile. The victims of the onslaught of the penetration of capital were peasants and pastoralists from the oppressed nationalities. It gave rise to the exacerbation of the oppression and exploitation of peasants and pastoralists of those nationalities. Should the same thing be allowed to happen again because capital covets to swallow their plots of land?

On argument for the privatisation of large-scale commercial farms would be that they could serve as an engine of economic development and of agrarian transformation. This raises a number of questions. Let me start with the most important issue of that contention: transformation of what and whose economic development in a country where the overwhelming section of the total population are peasants? It is transforming the peasants themselves by transforming the conditions of their existence. Their social, economic and political welfare should be the guiding principle in working out any agenda of social and economic development. Secondly, agriculture in any country is the most protected sector of the economy and often protected from foreign capital invasion. It would follow from this that under conditions where domestic private capital is weak, it could be argued that such invasion could not only unavoidable but also desirable by some people. That will be opening the doors wide for multinational corporations whose ceaseless drive is accumulation at a global level. Except causing destruction, particularly the environment, developing agriculture in any country is not part of the logic of their drive. Thirdly, even if domestic private capital has the necessary wherewithal to engage in large-scale commercial production, I entertain strong doubts that it can serve as a vehicle for agrarian transformation and economic development. A development strategy of this sort has been adopted by any African countries and they are cited as the best example of the failure of the borrowe strategy of development for obvious reasons: (a) being large-scale and highly capital-intensive, they imported everything they needed: new agricultural inputs (fertilisers, insecticides, pesticide, fungicides, etc) and machinery including tractors and combine harvesters, all labour displacing modern technologies; (b) since their production was highly export-oriented, they produced export crops. The effects were that (1) they could not manage to compete in the international market because it is dominated by multinational corporations and hence found it difficult to get enough foreign currency to pay for the technology they imported from other countries. (2) Focus on the production of export crops led to the total neglect of the production of food crops for domestic consumption and hence the crisis of food security. (3) Such farms being highly mechanised, their labour absorption capacity was very limited and hence could not provide employment even to the peasants and pastoralists whom they evicted or displaced. The failure of that borrowed strategy is one of the explanatory factors for the crises of African agricultures. Even the small number large-scale mechanised farms which appeared in in this country were nothing but social and economic disaster. Some people might argue that the same model might work this time; it might if they can twist the logic of the global accumulation of capital. But I see no guarantee that large-scale and capital-intensive commercial farms could do better now.

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What is the possible alternative to the privatisation of rural land? Before attempting to answer this question, let as have a brief look at the basic characteristics of the subject and object that need transformation. Based on the scant information so far available, the following are some of the general characteristics of the agricultural economy dominated by the system of small production.

The first one would concern to examine the structural constraints of the agrarian transformation in Ethiopia, and the way in which they have been aggravated by the conjunctural and cyclical problems such as civil war, sporadic eruptions of military conflict with the neighbouring countries, drought, etc. A look at the main characteristics of agriculture that cut across the period under the three successive regimes would reveal the malaise of subsistence farming which is the dominant economic activity. Dwarf and small holdings, used for crop production and animal husbanry continue to grow smaller due to population growth. This in turn means (a) a lower average of the availability of arable land and a progressive decline in the rate of harvested area and other natural resources per household; (b) in the absence of any other alternative occupation, the ever increasing number of the household members still cling to the land to feed themselves and that compels them to farm it intensively; (c) this, coupled with the vagaries of nature, has further led to the deforestation (as household members attempt to acquire more land by clearing forests), soil erosion and exhaustion, thereby depleting nutrients. Arguably, all this has led to a ceaseless depletion of the ecological base which perhaps has reached in some areas beyond it is physically possible for agriculture to sustain a productive life.

Secondly, what has been said above is intimately related to the use of handed down and antiquated agricultural technology which failed to give rise to the division of labour - except that based on gender and age - and specialisation and the development of new techniques of production.

Thirdly, the low level development of social and physical infrastructure: rural Ethiopia is characterised by a high rate of illiteracy, a lack of even the most rudimentary medical facilities, a high level of infant mortality. In terms of physical infrastructure (roads and other means of transportation and communication), the country is one of the least developed in the world. This has severely hampered the movement of goods, services and labour.

Fourthly, at a different level and generally, the structural constraints of agrarian transformation have to be located within a political and social setting which determines the productivity of agriculture. The nature of the state defines the relationship between the state itself and the peasantry, and that crucially influences the overall agrarian development policies. In the past, the development of agriculture was neglected by the successive regimes. To mention some examples where that neglect was conspicuous include (a) the skewed of resources; (b) unwarranted or ill-considered frequent government interventions in agriculture; (c) the lack of appropriate policies regarding environmental protection. Perhaps the most conspicuous forms of all interventions concerned the top-down 'development' policies which excluded the participation of the peasants whose lives are affected directly by those policies. Sod

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id they exclude the interests of other stake-holders.

As a consequence of all this, fifthly, the rural Ethiopia has remained to be the world of massive poverty and economic stagnation. Agriculture has been unable to feed the direct producers themselves, let alone the whole population of the country, and this is the best testimony that the sector has not been given the necessary policy consideration that it deserved. It is fragile and its fragility has been demonstrated time and again by its failure to withstand even one season's drought.

There are no simple answers to the question posed above regarding what could be done now to overcome the agrarian crisis. I think the first thing that needs to be done is to carry out serious researches and studies by public and private institutions convening the various aspects of the basic problems of the agricultural economy situating that within the broader context of the overall national economy and the latter's link with the global economy. Such studies are absolutely indispensable to see the available options for a purposive action to transform the social and economic organisation of agriculture dominated by a system of small holding peasant production.

If the existing social organisation of production has not yet run its course, which I assume, it has not, the requisite course of action to take would be to assist the sector's economy to develop its productive capacity through synergetic efforts of all those who have a stake in it. This would call for taking a judicious social and political action and working out a realistic development strategy underpinned by an unswerving commitment of those who are involved in promoting economic could possibly mark a new departure from the existing production system this in the main would concern the development and use of land-saving, capital-saving and employment-generating technologies; effort have to be made to promote an encourage cottage-scale and small-scale technologies; the introduction of modern agricultural inputs to raise production; the creation of independent and democratic rural institutions such as cooperatives; facilitating access to credit facilities; construction of small-scale irrigation schemes and micro-dams; controlling rampant diseases such as malaria and pestilence; protecting peasants from eviction and assisting them to cope with the pressing problems of life. In the middle run, aim should be to create rural industries geared to the promotion of land and labour productivity and, in the long run, linking those industries with urban industries which presumably could develop to level where they would be in a position to utilise resources generated mainly from agriculture.

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FORUM FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

INAUGURAL WORKSHOP On

ISSUES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EHIOPIA

Friday, 18 September 1998

Red Cross Training Centre
Addis Ababa

SCHEDULE

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Morning Session

9.00 – 9.25	Registration
9.25 – 9.30	Welcoming Statement *Prof. Bahru Zewde* *Chairman of the Board* *Forum for Social Studies*
9.30 – 9.45	Opening Address **H.E. Ato Girma Birru, Minister** **Minstry of Economic Dev'p & Co-operation**
9.45 – 10.00	Introducing the Forum for Social Studies *Dessalegn Rahmato* *Manager* *Forum for Social Studies*
10.00 – 10.20	Coffee Break

	Berhanu Nega **Businessman, and Chairperson** **Ethiopian Economic Association** **Addis Ababa**
10.20 – 10.45	Revisiting Rural Development through a Gender Lens *Zenebework Tadesse* *Forum for Social Studies*
10.45 – 11.10	Land Tenure Issues and Rural Development *Gebru Mersha* *Addis Ababa University*
11.10 – 11.35	Rural Institutions and Rural Development *Yigremew Adal* *Institute of Development Research*
11.35 – 12.25	**General Discussion**
12.30 – 1.30	**LUNCH**

Afternoon Sessions

Chairperson	**Zemedu Worku** **Agricultural Research Expert, and** **Member of the Board** **Forum for Social Studies**
1.30 – 1.55	Resettlement: A Strategy for Vulnerable Groups? *Kassahun Berhanu* *Addis Ababa University*
1.55 – 2.20	Fertility Change in Ethiopia? *Aklilu Kidanu* *Miz-Hasab Research Center* *Addis Ababa*
2.20 – 3.00	**General Discussion**
3.00 – 3.20	Coffee Break

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Chairperson	**Konjit Fekade** **Faculty of Technology** **Addis Ababa University**
3.20 – 3.45	Role of Science and Technology in Rural Development *Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission*
3.45 – 4.10	Indigenous Knowledge Systems & Agricultural Development *Belay Tegene* *Addis Ababa University*
4.10 – 4.50	**General Discussion**
Closing Session	
4.50 – 5.10	Reflections on Future Activities of FSS *Management Committee of FSS*
5.15	Closing Remarks **H.E. Ato Asrat Bulbula** **Commissioner** **Ethiopian Science and Technology Commission**
5.20	**End of Workshop**

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