

# JOINT DFID / USAID FIELD VISIT: SOUTH OMO

JANUARY 2012

## 1. VISIT

South Omo is in the SE of Ethiopia. The population of South Omo is estimated at 246,000, a cultural mosaic comprising at least 12 distinct ethnic groups. Communities in the region practice a variety of livelihoods, including flood retreat agriculture, fishing, hunting and gathering, and pastoralism. They are vulnerable to food-insecurity.

A joint one week trip was undertaken by DFID and USAID (23-27 Jan 2012) to better understand the economic growth plans of government in the region. During the field visit, meetings were arranged with the regional and local government, international and domestic NGOs, as well as local communities. The group travelled to



Arba Minch, Jinka, Mursi, Turmi, Omorate, Wonga Bayo and Minogelti (see map).

## 2. Methodology

The visiting team self-selected a wide spectrum of stakeholders (as above) to speak to on the visit. This therefore was not a random sample of individuals/groups but rather those that have a sufficiently high profile to be identified from Addis Ababa. Trips to speak with communities and NGOs were undertaken without accompanying government representatives. Translation was usually provided by local NGOs.

## 3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### 3.1 Investment and Resettlement Plans

It is clear that significant investment is planned for the region: hydropower, road building and extensive sugar cane production in particular. It is reported that since 2009, 16 investments covering a total of 200,000 ha have been negotiated for

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commercial agriculture<sup>1</sup>. Government's own plans suggest that 305,511 ha of land for different investment activities has been identified, of which 180,604 ha has been transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) expects that this investment will lead to significant change in terms of lifestyle and livelihoods of the communities. It is anticipated that up to 500,000<sup>2</sup> jobs will be created in a combination of direct agricultural employment and service delivery within the GTP period. Annex A details a map showing Government's planned sugar sites.

To achieve this, Government is in the first stages of implementing its regional re-settlement plan. This plan aims to settle pastoralist communities in sedentary villages and attract migrating workers to the region. It was reported by the Jinka BoFED representative that thus far just 3,000 people had been 'settled' in Saloma Woreda. The group were also shown one proposed site in Omorate, a huge expanse of flat land, upon which Government had begun construction of major irrigation channels.

Following re-settlement Government suggest that improved incomes would be sustained through a combination of (1) labour agriculture, (2) small scale personal farming, and (3) Burnu dairy cattle. The government consistently linked re-settlement to the elimination of harmful practices through improved education.

### **3.2 Community Allegations and Concerns**

The group spoke with representatives from a total of four ethnic groups: Mursi, Bodi, Hammar and Minogelti. The groups varied in their exposure to, and knowledge of, GoE plans. Those that had had most interaction with government were most concerned with the proposed resettlement and reported the most serious allegations. In summary these allegations included:

- Registration and confiscation of weapons and munitions
- Up to eighty arrests of 'innocent' people
- Destroyed grain stores for land clearance
- Government threats including "sell your cattle or we will inject and kill them"
- Confiscation of cattle medicine
- Limited access to seasonal agricultural lands (for flood retreat agriculture) near the Omo river
- Siphoning off of food aid
- Lack of communication – meetings held significant distances away either in Jinka or Hanu [sp?]
- Use of force and intimidation with presence of 'military' [likely federal police]
- Rape of women and in one case a young boy.

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<sup>1</sup> The Oakland Institute (2011), Understanding land investment deals in Africa, Country Report: Ethiopia

<sup>2</sup> Reported to us by the vice-president of the SNNPR region, though other officials stated lower numbers

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As a consequence of these events the Mursi and Bodi in particular stated that they were living in fear, resorting to other food sources or going hungry. The phrase 'waiting to die' was used. Although these allegations are extremely serious they could not be substantiated by this visit. In addition seemingly a minority of some communities were more upbeat about the plans signalling that they would be willing to settle and share land with 'outsiders' in return for better services, most important of which was access to water.

### 3.3 Development Programming

There is limited current programming occurring in the region. Large central programmes such as PBS are supporting services. The group saw a handful of projectised donor and NGO lead initiatives mainly focussed on providing alternative livelihoods. These included GTLI, Farm Africa, and PACT.

## 4. ENGAGEMENT

The dramatic changes afoot in South Omo create significant opportunities for poverty alleviation but also present challenges in terms of the transition to a new economy, especially if there is veracity to the allegations made above.

Given the sensitivities of this topic our engagement should be carefully considered, and might commence with:

**Information:** There are question marks over the extent to which government's plans are evidence based. Government officials did express interest in respect of measures to improve the productivity of the cattle sector. Specific analysis to be developed and shared with Government could include:

- a) A meta-analysis of the benefits to supporting pastoralism
- b) An assessment of the triple economy in South Omo: extensive agriculture, tourism, and small holder agriculture (including pastoralism) linked to availability of resources as well as development needs in and outside the region contained within the GTP.
- c) Based on b) a detailed strategy for development in the region

**Dialogue:** There is need for continued dialogue in this area, including maintaining our robust stance on the need to avoid any human rights violations. In addition we might explore offering to

- a) Provide support to Government's communication of their GTP proposals in the region, since a lack of clear communication is likely a key issue, causing or exacerbating tensions
- b) Undertake a more detailed investigation into the allegations made, based on a robust methodology

Annex A: Map of Government planned sugar plantations

