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Modernist Land Development-Induced Villagisation: Deconstructing Socio-Economic Rights of Pastoralists in South Omo, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT Based on an ethnographic case study of Bodi and Mursi pastoralist responses to sugar industries in South Omo, Ethiopia, this study aimed to comprehend the approach of a modernist land development-induced villagisation programme and its effect on the socio-economic rights of pastoralists. The article probes how and why land development activities and the related villagisation programme in the pastoral lowlands created structural challenges and marginalised people's socio-economic rights. The findings establish grounded insights into the modernist nature of land development-induced villagisation and the village-centred approach of the government in the reconstruction of socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. Integral to the state's approach are 'state-centred' narratives, guiding principles, actor participation, and outcomes of the villagisation programme. This modernist and state-dominated programme is shown conflicting goals; flawed assumptions; poor design; disregard for the complex social and environmental factors of the South Omo lowlands; and disruptive social mobilisation and implementation methods. It obstructs effective consideration of the agency, livelihood, traditions and knowledge of the pastoralists, thus leading to outcomes that deconstruct the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists.

KEYWORDS: Villagisation; basic services; socio-economic rights; pastoralists; modernism

Introduction

Bodi and Mursi peoples strongly emphasise their pastoral livelihoods, which is mainly cattle herding on the vast grass and forestlands of the lower Omo Valley, and shifting cultivation. For long, Bodi has an established historical, socio-economic and cultural agency and autochthonous identity with their communal land (Buffavand 2016), and the Mursi people maintained their political identity and autonomy in their territory through warfare (Turton 1999). In the post-2010 periods, however, Omo Kuraz Sugar-cane Factories (OKSF) introduced wide-ranging social and environmental changes in this pastoral land. Together these four factories constitute the largest state-owned

commercial farm ever developed in Ethiopia (Kamski, 2016) that cover 245,000 hectares of pastoral land.

In 2011, Omo Kuraz Sugarcane Factories One and Two introduced a land development-induced villagization programme in Salamago District of South Omo Zone. The programme aspires to transform the territorial based, scattered and mobile lifestyle of Bodi and Mursi pastoralists into a sedentary settlement and livelihood, by offering them ‘a contentious’ ‘modernist’ development packages. This massive social and environmental reengineering programme has affected the pastoralists living in the area. Over 2400 households of Bodi and Mursi pastoralists were resettled into six villages between 2011 and 2020 (Salamago District Pastoral Development Office 2018; South Omo Zone Pastoral Development Office 2018). At the end of November 2020, due to the expansion plan for the sugarcane plantations, this resettlement programme was still ongoing. The programme imposed a non-negotiable condition on the pastoralists and assisted the state-led land development to secure enough space for sugarcane plantations. According to Pattnaik (2013), one may see this as ‘land development-induced villagisation’, since there is a direct and causal link between land development and resettlement practices. In particular, Gebresenbet (2021: 210) correlated this causal relationship as ‘two sides of the same coin’.

The narrative of the state presented villagisation as the government commitment to realise the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists – rights-holders. Villages are the centre of rural development policies, where access to basic services is defined and presented in terms of the developmental state’s commitment to ensuring access to modern development packages to improve ‘living standards’ (Ministry of Economic-Finance and Development 2010; National Planning Commission 2015; Ministry of Federal Affairs 2011). The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (2012) assessed this programme as being a remarkable strategy to strengthen pastoralists’ socio-economic rights by improving their access to basic services. The Commission reproduces the state’s villagisation approach of reconstructing the socio-economic rights of pastoralists based on its narratives, principles, actor and outcomes of the programme. The government’s anti-poverty and developmental goals identified villagisation as a method of consolidating ‘unutilised’ land and natural resources to attain the national dream of economic growth. Furthermore, according to the political discourse of the ruling party (Zenawi, 2012), pastoralists lacked an organised social base to exercise revolutionary democracy; thus development policies aspire to create such a social base.

The villagisation programme creates both synergies and tensions between the modernisation aspirations of the state developmental project and the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. It provides opportunities to enhance the socio-economic rights of pastoralists, and improve their capabilities to exercise their rights, manifested as a state plan to reconstruct the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. However, it also has the potential to displace people, disrupt long-established socio-economic and cultural preferences, and exacerbate marginalisation and vulnerability, which would result in a deconstruction of the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists.

Fundamentally, the programme appears to manifest the failed modernist aspirations of the 1980s characterised by administrative ordering of nature and society (Scott 1998). Its technocratic tendencies towards technical problems and technical solutions tend to oversimplify the deep-rooted structural challenges faced by pastoralists (Easterly 2013). Even worse, related empirical studies see the programme as a source of gross human and environmental atrocities (Cochrane and Skjerdal 2015); unsustainable livelihoods (Eneyew 2012); dominance over and exploitation of land and natural resources (Rahmato 2003; Fratkin 2014); and increased vulnerability to natural calamities and conflicts (Devereux 2006; Gebre and Kassa 2009). By comparing settled with unsettled pastoralists, Stevenson and Buffavand (2018) question their significance in the ability to improve food security for the pastoralists. Similarly, during fieldwork for this study, the pastoralists were found to be uncertain about their future, denouncing the importance of the villagisation programme, and raising concerns about access to sufficient grazing land and other natural resources.

Therefore, based on an ethnographic case study of the experiences of Bodi and Mursi pastoralists, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of the Ethiopian state's approach to land development-induced villagisation and its implications on improving or obstructing the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists.. It probes how and why the programme has caused structural challenges and marginalisation of socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. Being grounded on the case study, it interrogates the state approach concerning its obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. In the subsequent sections, the article introduces the research background and approach, and then it systemically discusses its findings, mainly providing insights into the state's modernist approach to land development-induced villagisation and analysing how it obstructs the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. Finally, it presents the impacts of the modernist development approach on the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists and discusses the post-2018 policy developments in Ethiopia.

Background and research approach

Villagisation in Ethiopia

In the post-colonial period, some African countries employed villagisation as a rural development strategy. Mozambique introduced villagisation as a method of urbanising and modernising the countryside thereby enabling rural people autonomy (Coelho 1998). In Tanzania, Nyere introduced villagisation with the concept of Ujamaa to emulate the traditional values of familyhood in his rural socialist villages' aspirations (Berstien, 1981). In Ethiopia, through villagisation, the Derg regime attempted 'to regroup the scattered homesteads, small hamlets and traditional villages of the entire countryside into a completely new pattern of grid-plan villages, laid out in accordance with central directives' (Alex 1991: 231). In these countries, villagisation

commonly displayed promises or narratives to improve socio-economic conditions, involuntary approaches, the dilemma of control or protection, and impacts on use and access to land, environment and social harmony (Gebresenbet, 2021; Lorgen, 2000).

Even though ‘villagisation’ and ‘resettlement’ concepts have different meanings and are used in different contexts, they are often confused and used interchangeably. In a rural development context, the word ‘resettlement’ is used to explain the broader phenomenon of moving and settling groups of people from one area to another, due to various factors. On the other hand, ‘villagisation’ refers to the specific process of ‘moving people who live in dispersed settlements into large, government designed villages’ (Stevenson and Buffavand 2018). In the Ethiopian Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation, villagization is part of the state strategy to reform the ‘tribe based communal landholding system’ and encourage investment in the pastoralist areas.¹ Article 14 of this proclamation defines it as a ‘strategy of settlement’ and ‘development of social services’ that could bring ‘a better system of rural land utilization’. The Ministry of Federal Affairs (2011) further explained these strategic goals of settling ‘transhumant and mobile tribal groups in centralised villages, to provide them essential socio-economic infrastructure and services, to ensure food security, sustainable peace and good governance’. Therefore, villagisation is a strategy to regroup pastoral communities into villages, while resettlement relocates urban or rural people to promote development goals.

Villagisation has been a trajectory in the history of Ethiopian rural development. In the 1960s, the Imperial Government promoted a resettlement plan to reallocate land for its modernisation projects, expand employment opportunities and increase government revenue (Rahmato 2003). The *Derg* (1974-1991) made massive attempts to bring Ethiopia’s traditionally scattered homesteads into ‘modern’ villages through resettlement and villagisation programmes (Pankhurst and Piguet 2004). This military regime permanently resettled about 1.5 million people from drought-prone areas in the north to the southern and south-western lowlands (Woldemeskel 1989). This was proposed as a long-lasting solution to food security, and better utilisation of unused land and natural resources, to accelerate rural modernisation and agricultural collectivisation of peasant associations (Rahmato 2003). However, others saw it as a military strategy against guerrilla warfare in the north and the Somali war (De Waal 1991). Later, the *Derg* was forced to halt this programme, due to human, social and environmental costs and resistances (Rahmato 2003).

In the post-1991 period, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) early discourse rejected villagisation projects of the past. Yet later, its rural development programme consolidated villagisation on the pastoral lowlands as a development strategy by stressing anti-poverty and developmental goals. The

¹ House of People Representatives, Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation, Proclamation No. 456/2000, six paragraph of the preamble

policies invoked the concept of villagisation as a method of enabling access to basic services and organised political participation of pastoral people living in sparsely populated areas. Since 2006, the World Bank has financed the programme through the Promoting Basic Services Project, which aims to expand and improve access and quality of basic services such as education, health and water supply (World Bank 2019). In the post-2010 period, villagisation has been a serious state commitment in most of the lowlands of Ethiopia including Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Somali and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's (SNNP) Region; the plan was to resettle close to 4 million people in all these regions between 2010 and 2013 (Inclusive Development International 2014).

Villagisation in South Omo

In South Omo, villagisation was introduced in 2010 – a year before the establishment of the factories. It was heavily pushed after the land development, where the Omo Kuraz Sugar Factory One and Two sugarcane plantations brought villagisation as an ought-to-be condition for Bodi and Mursi pastoralists.

The Pastoral Development Bureau of SNNP is the owner of the villagisation programme, but the sugar factories play a dominant role in the process. The factories assume the obligation to develop basic services infrastructure, coordinate steering committees established at regional, zonal, district and *Kebele* (the lowest administrative unit) levels, and mobilise and relocate pastoralists (Ministry of Federal Affairs 2011; SNNP Pastoral Development Bureau 2012). These initiatives are considered an obligation to 'compensate the pastoralists for their loss of land and natural resources'.² Furthermore, the Public Mobilisation and Participation departments in both sugar factories engaged in the programme by establishing a Social Mobilisation Task Force. Local political actors and pastoral elites were brought into the task force to convince Bodi and Mursi pastoralists to cooperate with the land development and enter the designated villages.

The task force resettled 1429 male-headed and 987 female-headed households into six villages from 2011 to 2019 (Salamago District Pastoral Development Office 2018; South Omo Zone Pastoral Development Office 2018). Factory One started the programme in the Gura *Kebele* by establishing four villages, namely village 1 (Koklo-meri), 2 (Belelong), 3 (Elgobiya) and 4 (Gura 1) for Bodi people and a few Bacha people who entered Belelong and Gura 1. Later, in 2015/16, Factory Two introduced the Gura 2 village for Bodi people. In 2014/2015, the Romos 1 village was introduced for Mursi people. These statistical reports show an increment in participation by the pastoralists in the villagisation programme over time. In 2011/13, only 81 households entered Elgobiya and Belelong; this increased to 134 households in 2012/13 and 288

² Interview with sugar factories management, Main Town One (5 July 2019) and Main Town Two (2 July 2019, 4 and 5 December 2019)

households in 2013/14. The highest participation was recorded in 2015/16 when 1462 households moved into all villages. In 2017/18, 294 households were moved to Koklomeri, Gura 1 and Romos 1. Due to the expansion plan of the sugarcane plantations, the Mursi people living in Moizo-Bongozo *Kebele* are under a resettlement plan into Romos 1, but not realised until December 2020.

Villagisation also involves the reallocation of land and food aid. One hectare of prepared land was distributed to each resettled household, and a further hectare of land was added for every second or third wife of a pastoralist (if applicable). Every household was required to construct its traditional hut. Besides food aid, domestic utensils such as a machete, plastic water jars, cooking pans, plates and cups were distributed. The resettled pastoralists were offered the use of local basic services including water, flourmills, health and education. In return, pastoralists are required to engage in the *Kebele* structures and cooperatives, and participate in administering basic services such as farms, water pots and flourmills.

Research approach

The empirical evidence in this study is based on rural and institutional ethnography. The rural ethnographic study explores individual household and group experiences of the villagisation programme in the Gura and Hailewuha *Kebeles* of the Salamago District. The customary bond of friendship called *Jala* with Bodi and Mursi men enabled collaborative ethnographic fieldwork and long-term involvement with the pastoralists. Interviews and informal discussions among elders, elites and youth were used by considering the pastoralists' experiences, including their roles and reflections on the modes, content and procedures of the villagisation programme. We also conducted observations in a variety of settings including villages, pastoralist households, farms and cattle grazing lands, and basic service utilities such as water points, schools, health centres, flourmills and agricultural extension service units. These social associations facilitated access to the institutional settings of the sugar factories to conduct institutional ethnography in the form of observations and interviews with workers, which enriched the empirical data and enabled triangulation of facts and stories. Further methods enriched the data collected for this case study, including interviews with the district, zone and regional pastoral development officers. It also involved a review of official documents, such as regional and federal government reports, policies and manuals.

The interpretation of these empirical materials constituted a grounded research approach, intending to draw grounded insights from the case study. The data analysis process involved reading the threads of field notes, identifying common themes and tracing their relationships. It draws grounded inferences by going iteratively between the transcripts, the government documents and the body of knowledge on rights-based approaches to look into the convergence or divergence of the goal, process and focus of the villagisation programme with the socio-economic rights of

the pastoralists. Accordingly, our interpretation engaged with the approach of the government in the villagisation programme in the light of human rights strategies mainly rights programming. Rights programming involves development programme evaluation tools: ‘aim, process and focus’ (United Nations Development Group 2003) that embraces ‘equal attention to the outcome and process’ of a development (Munro 2009). Relevant to this, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) concept of new modernization also emulates this rights-based approach. It integrates Sen’s (1999) capability motives in the development goals to shift into cultural self-expression values and enable people to demand and defend their autonomous choices.

In relation to the economic, social and cultural rights of the pastoralists, this rights-based approach is significant to articulate the positive obligations and conduct of the duty-holder or state. In the international human rights regime, the state has the obligation to respect and protect socio-economic rights, mainly the right to an adequate standard of living, social security, property, and take part in cultural life. By way of facilitation to improve or direct provision of basic services (Eide, Krause and Rosas 2001), state also has the obligation to fulfil socio-economic rights. Concerning vulnerable groups, including indigenous people, the human rights regimes expanded these obligations to provide special protection. With this guiding rights-based approach, the investigation and analysis of this article focused on the particular salient features of socio-economic rights: the free will of livelihood, voluntary participation, access to the basic services and biodiversity, and autonomy of cultural and spiritual practices. The study also engages the global compliance strategy in a few instances, to see how the international human rights norm of ‘forced eviction’ retains critical force within the development programme in attempting to improve the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists. In particular, this viewpoint assisted our analysis of the reasonableness and proportionality of the state approach regarding the phenomenon of forced eviction in development-induced villagisation programmes.

The nature of the land development-induced villagisation programme

Our critical analysis of the aim, the process of implementation and key focuses of the land development-induced villagisation programme in this case study reveals a modernist approach that was characterised by flawed technocratic assumptions, poor design, disruptive modes of implementation, and unjust and unsustainable outcomes. Accordingly, the following sections discuss the particular defining elements of the modernist nature of the villagisation programme. ***Flawed assumptions and poor design.***

The concept of ‘flawed assumptions’ embedded in villagisation policy (Gebeye 2016) is an observable reality in the land development-induced villagisation programme in this study. The sugarcane plantations have the ultimate goal of modernising and transforming ‘traditional’ small-scale pastoralist livelihoods into settled agrarian and labourer lifestyles. They narrate and present settled agriculture as a ‘civilised’ livelihood option. Irrespective of the pastoralists’ contexts and choice of settlement

patterns and livelihoods, the villagisation programme invokes sedentary livelihood as an ‘ought-to-be condition’. Such flawed assumptions are the result of technocrats’ prescriptions based on an exogenous ‘modernisation’ desire. Perhaps, as Fratkin (2014) claims, villagisation serves the technocrats, and land development is a tool to reorganise the rural population and the environment, thus extending their administrative and political control over the land. As the empirical case materials suggest, the essential goal of the programme is not to improve socio-economic conditions for the pastoralists – rather it is to control settlement patterns and create open space for the sugarcane plantations.

Most importantly, the villagisation programme is not consciously designed by considering the multi-dimensional reality of the pastoralists. The villagisation manuals openly claim that pastoralism is ‘traditional’ and ‘backward’, and strongly demand that the community should change their livelihood patterns by introducing villagisation as an exclusive alternative. The manuals stress the importance of the ‘water-centred villagisation programme for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the pastoralists’. Based on this principle, the regional, zonal and district political cadres and the task force continuously preach and demand that the pastoralists should change their way of life, cope with modern and settled agrarian practice, send their children to school etc. Furthermore, the Amharic term *zemecha* refers to a ‘campaign’, but its idiomatic expression vividly describes the observed phenomenon of unconsciousness towards the pastoralists’ multi-dimensional reality, as well as the aggressiveness of the social mobilisation process in implementing the villagisation programme.

In the beginning, the land development project and its villagisation programme lacked a baseline study (Turton 2012), so three years after relocation, an environmental impact assessment was conducted (Ethiopian Sugar Corporation 2014). The assessment acknowledged the environmental costs of relocation, but barely considered the social impacts and mitigating methods, besides a generic proposal for a resettlement action plan. However, except for numeric plans of the village and household relocations, it is hardly possible to say that the programme has been consciously designed, nor is it attentive to the pastoralists’ socio-economic context and rights.

Emotionality and disruptive modes of implementation

In a discussion with some members of the task force, we noted the following experiences that expound the drastic, disruptive and emotional aspects of the programme implementation:

In January 2012, for the first time, the task force found 60 Bodi pastoralists, who agreed and entered Elgobiya village. Upon their arrival, they found nothing except a few unfinished infrastructures. It was dry time but there was no water; the promised basic services were not there. The task force members ran into the district and sugar factory officials. After a long exchange, they were instructed to allocate residential land for each household in the village, ask the pastoralists to construct their huts,

and promise to provide food and household utensils by the next day, but only to those who had begun building huts. The pastoralists were tired and frustrated, and they had no choice except to settle in the shade of bushes and trees. A few members of the task force remained and stayed with the pastoralists overnight. They assisted the men in cutting bushes, making shade and creating comfortable areas; while the pastoral women foraged the maize and shared it with all. At night, during fireside talk, the taskforce members were ashamed and kept silent, but the pastoral youth kept asking about basic services, promises and their future. On the second day, the sugar factory trucks brought food and household utensils. After distributing the aid, the factory plantation workers were shown the farms and irrigation canals designated for the pastoralists. Finally, they departed after promising to follow up and ensure the functionality of the social service utilities. With some improvements, the programme continued for seven consecutive years with increasing participants, but they all remained confused. A few weeks later, the pastoralists started deserting the villages, and the basic services deteriorated or became ruined.³

According to this fieldwork note and a key informant reply, many of the programme activities are ‘carried out emotionally in a *zemecha* form and lack systemic engagements’.⁴ They are heavily loaded with ‘awareness creation’ and ‘social mobilisation’ campaigns, with the aim of influencing pastoralist decisions in favour of the land developments and villagisation programme. The campaign raised expectations among the pastoralists by narrating the potential advantages of the villagisation programme, and promising to deliver water-centred and well-functioning villages, offering the ‘potential of economic opportunities available for the pastoralist in the sugar industries’.

Unfortunately, on the ground, the implementations are neither goal-oriented nor decent, and the promised basic services (including animal and human health centres, water services, agricultural extension services, schools, transports, and roads) are either not ready or dysfunctional. In the beginning, the sugar factories and their task force supported the functioning of the basic services. However, later, the factory management reduced its role by alleging that ‘it is a business corporation that owes corporate social responsibility’ and stressing the obligation of the district administration to oversee the functionality of public institutions.⁵

The finding in this study manifests a disruptive implementation approach that rushes to move pastoralists to the resettlement villages based on a one-time commitment, with observed emotionality, poor coordination, and lack of follow-up.

3 Interview with pastoralist men working for Sugar Factory One, Main Town (5 July 2019)

4 Interview with sugar Factory Two management, Main Town Two (2 July 2019)

5 Interview with sugar factory managers at Main Town One (5 July 2019) and Main Town Two (2 July 2019, 4 and 5 December 2019); Interview with the Head of Public Organisation, Relations and Social Affairs Directorate, Factory Two (2 July 2019)

Unjust and unsustainability

Several times, government men asked us to move to the new villages. As they told us, the village will offer us water abundantly, we will drink clean water, our cattle will no longer travel long distances to get water ... They promised to change the way we live. Health clinics will be there if we get sick, every village will have animal health services freely ... They asked us to learn and adapt to cultivating our land with irrigation, to send our children to school, to take our products to market, to use modern transport, to cultivate sugarcane ... We said 'let's see' and we entered the villages ... They talk, talk, talk ... but none of that is real ... We see that Konso people are invading our land; the sugar factory is expanding. So, most of us left the villages to return to the remaining land ...⁶

This story vividly portrays the unjust and unsustainability of the programme regarding the pastoralists' livelihood choices and their social, cultural and spiritual values. Culturally, their settlement patterns are widely separated; they graze their cattle separately and maintain their pride by living across distances according to their lineage and preferences. Village settings are also inappropriate for pastoralists' ritual practices since traditional leaders should not live together in a confined specified space among ordinary people, with their ritual utensils and practices.

The pastoralists contest state controls and the idea of structured social settings, finding themselves more vulnerable and insecure against enemies. They see resettlement villages as a state intervention to control pastoralists, as opposed to traditional strategic methods of securing themselves, controlling the movement of their enemy, and administering family, cattle and grazing land by keeping distance and pride among their men. A pastoralist said 'we fight among our neighbours; we should inspect if our neighbours are coming to attack and raid our cattle ... culturally we believe that living closer by is unhealthy for us ...'.⁷ Thus, the programme sustained the past challenges observed by Pankhurst and Piguet (2004), including autonomy, vulnerability to insecurity and social harmony.

Furthermore, the programme has encountered environmental sustainability issues. For instance, in the beginning, basic service infrastructure was developed by using agro-stone; however, this was neither compatible with the environment, nor could it withstand the wind, extremely hot and changeable environment, and termites. The agro-stone houses were easily ruined, then honey bees colonised them and pastoralist children destroyed them while hunting for honey, only buildings constructed with concrete and cement withstand the local environment.⁸ As the result, most of the constructed basic services are found either ruined, dysfunctional, unjust or unsustainable.

6 Interview with a Bodi man, Gura 1 village (4 June 2019)

7 Interview with a Bodi man, Arbujo (4 June 2019)

8 Interview with the then Salamago District Administrator, Hana (9 July 2019)

Village-centred service, governance and rights

Ethiopian rural development policies and practices define villages as the smallest social structure necessary to exercise organised political participation and improve socio-economic conditions for rural people. In exercising revolutionary democracy, the former ruling party (EPRDF) assumed that pastoralists lack an organised social base (such as permanent villages); and their development policies aspired to transform pastoral livelihoods, thus creating such social bases (Zenawi 2012). Key development goals in promoting village-centred permanent livelihoods were not only to enhance pastoral people's access to basic services but also to deepen government structures in pastoral territories. The pastoralists' access to basic services is defined in terms of the developmental state's commitment to ensuring the 'economic beneficiary' and 'access to the modern development packages' and thereby improving the 'standard of the life' (Ministry of Economic-Finance and Development 2010; National Planning Commission 2015). Thereby, the government authorised a 'village centred', settled, agrarian mode of socio-economic development, with expectations of political participation by a given community.

Based on these policy discourses and reports on the large-scale land development projects, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (2012) acclaims the government's approach to villagisation and how it has 'remarkably improved' the socio-economic rights of pastoralists. Similarly, this ethnographic case study on the state-led, land development-induced villagisation programme illuminates related approaches of the state. However, in practice, the desire to enable the socio-economic rights of pastoralists has been entangled in its modernist development approach. Therefore, this section establishes the modernist approach of the state to construct the socio-economic rights of pastoralists and its apparent deconstruction outcomes, by analysing state-centred narratives, guiding principles, actor participation, and outcomes of the villagisation programme.

Narratives on villagisation

State narratives present the origin of the villagisation programme as a development strategy to meet the socio-economic development needs of the pastoral community, address environmental changes, and balance settlements with resources according to the national desire. The principles adopted under the rural development strategy include the appropriate utilisation of agricultural land, the expansion of human resources to the agricultural sector, and the encouragement and support of diverse agricultural methods in different agro-ecological zones (Ministry of Economic-Finance and Development 2003). The development policies pursue the allocation and use of agricultural land for commercial agricultural investment and use; and hence they opt for the identification, preparation and transfer of land, making villagisation the ultimate reality.

A Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) identified growth corridors based on agro-ecological zones in the pastoral lowland areas, to serve as growth centres (Ministry of Economic-Finance and Development 2006). Growth and Transformation Plan One (GTP 1) identified 5.1 million hectares of land on the extensive pastoral lowlands for irrigation (Ministry of Economic-Finance and Development 2010); similarly, GTP 2 increased the identification and transfer from 2.4 million hectares in 2014/15–3.1 million hectares by the end of 2019/20 (National Planning Commission 2015). Thus, villagisation became an instrument for this development strategy and investment in the pastoral lowlands, as a result of land preparation and transfer.

Similarly, the Ministry of Agriculture (2013) policy framework presents villagisation as a method of ensuring accelerated, equitable and sustainable development of pastoral lowlands and regions that require special support. In particular, the manuals that guide the villagisation programme defines its aim as state commitment to improving living conditions for the pastoral community by developing water-centred villages to settle scattered settlements permanently; creating access to an integrated development programme called ‘basic services’; ensuring food security; and reducing natural disasters, livestock diseases, and degradation of the environment and natural resources (Ministry of Federal Affairs 2011). The World Bank financed this programme, with the intention of ‘expanding access and improving the quality of basic services’ in education, health, agriculture, water supply and sanitation, and rural roads (World Bank 2019).

However, in practice, these policy narratives are found to be doubtful in terms of their essential goal to improve the socio-economic rights of pastoralists. In the Salama District, the provision of basic services is viewed as an attempt to ‘compensate the pastoralists’ for the loss of environmental and natural resources caused by the sugar factories.⁹ Such an ‘exchange’ of pastoral lowlands for sugarcane plantations disregards the constitutionally defined obligation of the state ‘to allocate ever-increasing resources’ to fulfil basic demands of ‘public health, education and other social services’.¹⁰ Instead, the state-led, modernist developmental discourse invokes ‘progressive realisation’ of socio-economic rights of the pastoralists in the form of created economic opportunities and benefits from the ‘trickle-down economy’ to enhance national growth; but this is at the expense of the pastoralists’ who compromised their sources of livelihood with limited or unpractical benefit packages.

The narratives consider villagisation as a means to utilise unexploited land, rationalise resource use, ensure household food security, and support pastoralists in learning to lead settled lifestyles (Ministry of Economic-Finance and Development 2010;

9 Interview with sugar factories management at Main Town One (5 July 2019) and Main Town Two (2 July 2019, 4 and 5 December 2019)

10 FDRE Constitution, House of Peoples Representatives, Proclamation No. 1/1995. Addis Ababa, Article 41 (4)

2006). This aspiration is embedded within the plan to balance settlement with national resources by developing the pastoral lowlands, thus creating employment opportunities and shifting the growing working force from the central highland areas of the country. In practice, as the modernist approach expounds, the villagisation programme pays more attention to controlling pastoralists' settlement options and natural resources than actual improvement in their socio-economic rights. As of July 2019, for instance, in Factory Two, out of 1100 permanent employees and more than 3000 temporary employees, only 96 (10 female and 86 male)¹¹ and 251 (30 female and 221 male) respectively are Bodi or Mursi people.¹² Above all, the narratives and practices demonstrate the instrumentality of the programme in pursuing an extractive ambition of the state. The findings of this study question the relevance of the villagisation programme and validate counter-narratives that define the programme as a social engineering project of the state, in order to control land and natural resources (Gebresenbet, 2021) thus appropriating space for large-scale agricultural developments.

Furthermore, the policies and practices specify the 'village' as a prerequisite for access to the promised basic services and improved living standards for pastoralists, while overlooking their multi-dimensional reality. Thus a normative precondition was set, requiring pastoralists to consent to changing their livelihood to a settled agrarian way of life and entering into designated villages. Practically, this norm neither considers alternative development packages nor is it consistent with the nature of the livelihoods and lifestyles of the pastoralists. For instance, in the Romos 1 village, children's right to access education is compromised due to dysfunctional basic services and/or inconsistency of the education system with the pastoralists' lifestyles. Even if the school were functional, the absence of water – both in the school and in the resettlement village – continues to challenge the continuity of education. Most children need to follow their families to different pastures in search of water and wet grasses; this means that either they stop attending school, or some of them need to walk five or six kilometres to reach the school.¹³ This 'I know what is right for you' approach of the programme maintained the past narratives of 'for their own good' (Lorgen 2000) and trapped the pastoralists' socio-economic conditions. Such state-centred modernist narratives are neither considerate to the free will to livelihood choices nor the state obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the socio-economic needs of the pastoralists.

Guiding principles of the programme

The government manuals present several guiding principles and standards for the villagisation programme, which are discussed in this section.

11 See note no. 12

12 OKSF 2, 2018/2018 Budget Year Annual Report, Amharic, June 2019.

13 Interview with the principal of Romos Primary School, Romos (8 June 2019)

Voluntary resettlement of the pastoralists is one of the fundamental principles of the programme. Despite claims by human rights groups of forced resettlement, the programme manuals stress the free will and voluntary participation of the pastoralists (Cochrane and Skjerdal 2015). This case study in the Salamago District reveals an absence of direct use of force to compel the pastoralists to cooperate with the villagisation programme. However, the development approach is inconsistent with the principle of free prior informed consent by invading their free will on the choice of livelihoods and the right to access the biodiversity, which they have livelihood, cultural and spiritual attachment. In particular, the aggressive social mobilisation programme appeased the pastoralists by offering promises to improve their socio-economic conditions. The various ‘awareness creation’ programmes and educational tours justified the programme as a state commitment to provide modern development packages and water-centred villages for pastoralists. Public officials made ‘promises’ to provide houses, domestic utensils and functional basic services if the pastoralists cooperated with the land development project and moved into the resettlement villages. Further, the government deployed the military and SNNP Special Force and operated counterinsurgencies against the resistances on the land development. This created unbalanced power relations by compelling the pastoralists to believe in the government programme and accept that any resistance was pointless. During a drought in 2011/2012, according to Factory One social mobilisation taskforce, the factory arranged a tour of the sample irrigation farm. The productivity of the maize farm surprised the pastoralists and led them to believe in a rumour that claimed ‘the government conspired with *Tumo* (the sky and rain god), they denied us rain and we shall cooperate with them’. Also, during this drought season, the regional government and the sugar factory used aid in the form of food and household utensils as a precondition for participation in the villagisation programme.

These factors forced the pastoralists to cooperate with the land development project by giving their partial consent in the form of ‘let’s see’, and hence, it is hardly possible to accept the voluntary claims of the programme. Tewolde and Fana (2014) argue that it is a non-coercive ‘pulling strategy’; however, the absence of direct coercion doesn’t define the programme as ‘voluntary’. The modernist approach of the programme and its heavy-handed campaign compelled the pastoralist to cooperate; and even when some of them rejected the villages and returned to their former lands, they found that wet grazing had been lost. The irrigation canal for the sugarcane plantations restricts access to the Omo River basin and compelled pastoralists to scatter in any remaining open spaces, including the Mago National Park. Our findings show that the villagisation programme invaded the pastoral people’s free will, the ability for independent decision making, and freedom from impositions in deciding on and choosing their livelihoods.

Secondly, the villagisation programme maintains the principles of ‘sufficient basic services’ and ‘water-centred villages’; but this case study questions their practical significance. The field observations from May to December 2019 found only a few

functional educational and health services; instead, most of the animal health posts, farmers' or pastoral training centres, *Kebele*, police stations and stores were empty, dysfunctional, ruined, or lacked the required material and human resources. Water is a fundamental element of the villagisation programme, and so its deficiency renders the villages irrelevant for pastoralists. It was hardly possible to identify a single functional water spot during the fieldwork – most of them were dry, with broken pipelines and concrete. We observed attempts by the sugar factories to address these gaps by sending water tankers to schools and health centres in Bealong and Romos 1, building a pond, and providing access to the irrigation canals for some pastoralists in Gura 2. However, such support was neither adequate nor sustainable in trying to meet the demands of pastoral households and their cattle – in particular, watering in the sugarcane irrigation canal is practically impossible for the cattle, due to its depth. Hence, due to the absence of access to basic services, it became very difficult for pastoralists to remain in their resettlement villages, and they were forced to move to different corridors in the district.¹⁴

Such a deficient water supply has a related impact on other basic services such as education, health and agricultural extension services. For instance, field workers in this study came across five children looking after cattle in the Bealong Elementary School compound (5 June 2019). They didn't know when their teachers would return and school would resume, but they knew the class was not finished and their teachers abandoned the school due to the shortage of water. A similar observation in a relatively functional school (Romos Elementary School) shows how the shortage of water affects the continuity of education. The school principal confirmed that the shortage of water disrupted the school feeding programme, forced a teacher to abandon the school to live in a town, and caused students to travel long distances or quit school and move with their families to look for water and grazing land.¹⁵ Similarly, a health officer at the Haylewuha Health Clinic confirmed that water is a major challenge in trying to improve services, and the lack of access to clean water is a chronic cause of diarrhoea among the pastoralists – the greatest health problem in the clinic.¹⁶ Another example is that agricultural extension workers in Bealong justified the irregularity of their services due to the scarcity of water.

Thirdly, the programme did not respect and protect the communal land use rights of the pastoralists; rather, it ascribes to the principle of reallocation of sufficient irrigable land. The case study questions the reasonableness and sufficiency of the land reallocation in relation to the household's food security. After resettlement, one hectare of land was distributed to each household, with an additional hectare of land for each additional wife (if any). But the sugar factory convinced villagers in Koklomeri,

14 Discussion with Aklilu Abayneh and Eniyew Worku, South Omo Zone Pastoralist Development Office, Jinka (17 May 2019)

15 Interview with the principal of Romos Primary School, Romos (8 June 2019)

16 Interview with a health worker at Hayelewuha Health Clinic, Romos (8 June 2019)

Belelong, Elgobiya and Gura 1 to participate in an outgrower scheme by contributing 0.75 hectares of their land; accordingly, their household food security is dependent on the remaining 0.25 hectares. By merging more than 1100 household members, four pastoralist outgrower associations were formed and entered a contractual agreement with the sugar factory. Yet the factory failed to commence production, the outgrowers' cane waited and was destroyed on the farms, and the land remained idle until the end of 2019. Not only is 0.25 hectares too small to ensure food security (Kamski 2016) for members of the outgrower scheme, but so is the observed reality of one hectare of land per household for villagers in Gura 2 and Romos 1, who are not included in the scheme. Besides, most of the distributed lands do not have access to irrigable water and the pastoralists complain about uneven and irregular access to the irrigation canals.¹⁷

This case study shows that the guiding principles of the villagisation programme hold only rhetorical significance, in order to mobilise the pastoralists and encourage them to cooperate with the land development. Therefore, the land development-induced modernist villagisation approach failed to meet its obligation to respect and protect communal property rights, and freedom to choose and exercise livelihood. The programme also could not establish the principle of reasonableness and proportionality of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997) to facilitate and ensure access to basic services.

Participation of actors in the programme

The villagisation programme claims to encourage the participation of a variety of actors, including government agencies, pastoralists and civil societies. However, this case study shows that the state's dominant role has been institutionalised in a top-down structure. The government established steering committees at federal, regional, zonal, district and *Kebele* levels, with the mandate to follow up, evaluate and ensure successful implementation of the programme (Ministry of Federal Affairs 2011). However, at each level, only state actors are members of these committees. The Federal Government coordinates and supervises its activities by providing technical and financial support, the regional Pastoral Development Bureau own and coordinate the zone and district pastoral development offices (SNNP-Pastoral Development Bureau 2012). In particular, the villagisation manuals envisage the government bureaucratic tools including 'revolutionary change army' and 'one-to-five development groups' at all levels (Ministry of Federal and Pastoralists Development 2018). In practice, the sugar factories dominate the coordination of the zonal and district structures, actualises the state-centred prescriptions, controls resources, and reshapes the social structures of the pastoralists.

¹⁷ Discussion with Bodi men, Gura 2 village (5 December 2019)

In some ways, the implementation process engaged the pastoralists, but it failed to consider their wishes and desires or to improve their agency meaningfully. A few ‘pastoral elites’ were involved in the Social Mobilisation Task Forces, but they were found to be instrumental (as well as becoming victims) in implementing the technocrats’ utopian plan of ‘social transformation’ from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ livelihoods.¹⁸ Besides, even though the social mobilisation process involved the pastoralists in various public dialogues, they played neither an agenda-setting role nor were they able to control the process in any way (Yidneckachew 2015). Moreover, the role of civil society organisations is almost none, and even if the customary leaders of both Bodi and Mursi people are powerful, the structure failed to synchronise their institutions and indigenous knowledge with the functional system. It is only Factory Two that involves 21 representatives of the pastoralists in Gura 2 and Romos 1 through a Peace Council. Although this council is intentionally designed to ensure industry peace, it also represents and highlights the concerns of the villagers.

Due to the modernist approach of the villagisation programme, this case study observed various instances of poor coordination, and an absence of common understandings among the actors involved. In particular, after relocating the pastoralists, monitoring, follow up and support to the villagers and the new infrastructure were not considered. There is also a lack of clear guidelines about the ownership and management of basic services. For instance, the district administration expects the sugar factories to support or ensure their functionality, whereas the sugar factories invoke their corporate nature and demand that the district administration should accept the obligation.¹⁹ Since the basic services infrastructure was not properly transferred to either a functional government structure at the *Kebele* level or to cooperatives or customary institutions, confusion and misunderstanding are common about ensuring its functionality, maintenance and evaluation.

Furthermore, the lowest government structure – the *Kebele* – is neither functional, nor understood or accepted by the community. Even if *Kebele* offices are constructed and a chairperson is assigned, they do not operate as required. The chairpersons try to function from their homes,²⁰ and – except for a few instances – the *Kebele* functions are not regular, structured or systematic. Bodi and Mursi people listen to their traditional leaders and institutions; they refer to government actors and civil servants as ‘government slaves’ who lack legitimacy and the people’s trust. Therefore, this case study found that the dominant role of the state and the insignificant role of the pastoralists and their customary institutions impede the pastoralists’ free will and agency.

18 Discussion with a Bodi man, working for the sugar Factory One, Main Town (5 July 2019)

19 Interview with sugar factories management at Main Town One (5 July 2019) and Main Town Two (2 July 2019, 4 and 5 December 2019)

20 Interview with a Bodi man, Gura 2 (5 December 2019)

Outcomes of the programme

The narratives of the villagisation programme aspire to enhancing the socio-economic rights of the villagers by improving access to basic services, food security, living standards and a clean and healthy environment. On the contrary, the case study witnessed that the development approach to social mobilisation and modernist promises have generated unrealistic expectations, dependency and environmental vulnerability for the pastoralists. The programme continuously offers promises to transform the livelihoods of the pastoralists – in part, this has deceived them, since they expect substantial improvements from the government, which they see as omnipotent. The programme failed to establish and communicate clear guidelines – including the required obligations of the pastoralists, who are not well informed about the limits of the programme. Furthermore, its modernist approach failed to utilise available resources and finances adequately, and hence, the basic services infrastructure easily deteriorated and fell short of pastoralist expectations.

Further, after eight years, the villagers' food security is still dependent on the sugar factories, district pastoralist development, and support by agricultural offices. The district pastoralist development and agricultural offices, who seek technical and financial support from the sugar factories regularly, prepare most farmland and provide seed. The factories provide tractors and employees, whereas the district pastoral development offices coordinate and ensure the preparation of pastoral farms. The agriculture office provides fertiliser and seeds, sometimes independently and sometimes with the support of the Regional Pastoral Development Bureau. For instance, in 2017/18 the district pastoral development office reported that 561.5 hectares of pastoralist land were prepared and covered by maize, farmed in collaboration with the district agricultural office and sugar factories (Salamago District Pastoral Development Office 2018).

This mode of operation hampered the programme desire to transfer knowledge and introduce irrigation skills among the pastoralists. Even if the sugar factory claims commitment to 'providing small-scale training, including technical skills',²¹ in reality, it has dominated the provision of actual services since 2011. The villagers are unable to feed themselves and are dependent on food aid (Stevenson and Buffavand 2018). Therefore, the aim of ensuring sustainable food security through the development of water-centred villages has a precarious outcome.

These unmet expectations and the need for continuous food aid manifests the growing dependency syndrome among the villagers, and the district political actors are cognizant of this outcome, as described below. In June 2019, field workers in this study came across two young girls carrying parcels of maize flour on their heads. The flourmill in their village (Belelong) was found to be non-functional, and they were forced to seek the service in the neighbouring village (Kokilomeri) which is seven to 10 kilometres away. The flourmill in Belelong had been locked for more than six months; the mill string is broken and the operator has left. The villagers

21 Interview with the then Salamago District Administrator, Hana (9 July 2019)

are waiting for its maintenance, but they don't know how, when or who is responsible. The field workers brought this case to the attention of the district administrator, but he defended the local administration 'fruitless' attempts since 'the pastoralists won't get out of government aid'.²² Similarly, the head of the pastoralist development office recognises 'the dependency syndrome' created among the pastoralists, saying 'we cannot blame the pastoralists', and admitting that 'the promises were given and the way we managed the entire process defined the behaviour of the pastoralists in this way'.²³ As found by Abbink et al. (2014), expectations from development-induced resettlement programmes often turn out to be delusional.

Conclusion

Based on a case study in South Omo, Ethiopia, this article has explored the approach of the modernist state land development-induced villagisation and, probed how and why structural challenges and marginalisation of socio-economic rights of the pastoralists emerged. The findings establish grounded insights into the modernist land development-induced villagisation and the integrated elements that affected the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists, including state-centred narratives, guiding principles, actor participation, and outcomes of the villagisation programme. It argues that the modernist nature of the land development-induced villagisation programme obstructs the integration of rights-based principles and procedures in attempting to improve the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists.

The approach of the state is entangled between two competing goals: enabling socio-economic rights of the pastoralists versus achieving national economic growth. The modernist extractive narratives of the programme pay much attention to the national goal of developing resources, creating economic opportunities, and balancing settlement patterns with national resources. The programme is instrumental to structure the social base, redefine the communal land regime, create space for large-scale agricultural developments, and exploit resources. It enabled the state to assume a dominant role in reallocation of land and provision of basic services. Perhaps such a will to relocate, train and modernise people, as Li (2007) and Gebresenbet (2021) claim, reflects the government's desire to control social domains and resource distribution, and ultimately monopolise power. This understanding of development is based on a process through which the state actualises a national dream (Stevenson and Buffavand 2018) while seeing development and socio-economic rights separately and sequentially (Brems et al. 2015). Unfortunately, such understanding challenges the convergence of socio-economic rights of the pastoralists and national economic goals, and ultimately hinders their mutual reinforcement.

22 Ibid

23 Interview with a representative of the then Head of the District Pastoralist Office (November 25)

The programme also weakened certain salient features of socio-economic rights of the pastoralists, including free will and autonomy of livelihood, voluntary participation and access to basic services. The case study demonstrates flawed assumptions of technocrats, poor design, a disruptive mode of implementation, and unjust and unsustainable outcomes that resulted in the misjudgement of the pastoralists' livelihood and traditions. The instrumental rationale for the establishment of villages depicts Easterly's (2013) and Li's (2007) observations of the development approach's continuous misjudgement of pastoralists' social, cultural and environmental concerns as being a mere technical problem amenable to technical solutions. The drastic changes and aggressive social mobilisations fashioned 'high' or incumbent modernism that invades the free will of the pastoralists. As Scott (1998) argues, it is the 'administrative ordering of nature and society' and commitment of 'high-modernist ideology' that trapped the pastoralists' social domains, land and natural resources, overlooked the deep-rooted structural challenges, marginalized customary values and institutions, and failed to improve the socio-economic capacity of the pastoralists.

These state-centred norms and structures eroded the agency of the pastoralists'. Developmental ideological convictions, an emotional and disruptive social mobilisation approach and counterinsurgencies of the state actors invaded the pastoralists' free will to decide on their livelihoods. Practically, the case study established the inadequacy of the programme to meet not only the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997) principles of 'reasonableness' and 'proportionality' but also its standards of 'sufficient basic services' and 'water-centred villages'. The dysfunctional basic services – including inadequate access to water – infringe other indivisible rights of the pastoralists and sustain the vulnerability of women and children. Further, the programme established unrealistic and unfulfilled promises, and failed to establish and communicate clear obligations. This generated expectations and dependency among the pastoralists, and impeded their food security. Therefore, this villagisation model lacks robustness and pragmatic relevance for the intended reconstruction of pastoralists' socio-economic rights but resulted in their deconstructions.

Nonetheless, the post-EPRDF (or the post-2018) political developments introduced new legal developments for people affected by the eviction. The new law (proclamation No. 1161/2019) repairs the defects of the former proclamation No. 455/2005 by defining obligations and resettlement packages. It obliges the regional and local governments to 'establish a fund for compensation payment and rehabilitation', including 'resettlement packages that enable displaced people to sustainably resettle'.²⁴ These policy reforms will have a critical impact on the expansion plans of the sugarcane plantation and future resettlements among the Bodi and Mursi

24 House of People Representatives, Expropriation of Land holdings for Public Purposes, Payments of Compensation and Resettlement of Displaced People, Proclamation No. 1161/2019, Article 16 (1)

peoples. It is early yet, to assess these legal and institutional reforms, but this article underlines the fact that improving the socio-economic rights of the pastoralists requires conscious design and consideration of their agency, free will, livelihood and traditions, as well as various complex social and environmental factors.

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