

The Effects of Land Grabbing Policy of the Ethiopian Government on the Indigenous Farmers.

The Study is conducted in the Finfinnee (Addis Abeba) and its environ.

The present Ethiopian government's policy fundamentally undermines the livelihood and food security of the population not only of the Oromo people but also of others who depend on the Oromo farmers produces. The government policy or lack of policy on the proper disposal of industrial pollutants will have lasting negative effects on the wellbeing of peoples of the region as a whole. The insatiable appetite for individual wealth accumulation of the political elite that heads the present regime is the source of the problem. The Oromia highlands supply most of the waters that the majority of the population of the region including those outside Ethiopia depends upon. Thus polluting the rivers of Oromia will affect the health and general wellbeing of millions peoples downstream for a long time to come unless stopped immediately. In addition the rare fauna and flora species of the region could be lost to the whole world by the devastating effects of the environmental degradation that may be caused by the present practices.

The present land policy of the ruling Ethiopian regime is having devastating effects on the lives of farmers and their families in the areas as demonstrated in this following study. We talked with a few of the true owner of the land, the farmers, about the effects of the land grabbing practices in their neighborhood and how it is affecting their lives and that of their neighboring. The study is considerable and therefore we will only present the results as an abridged version. The interviews have been recorded on video and will be available soon online.

Foreign companies/investors from **India, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia**, etc., are involved in flower farms and in the factories that are producing plastics, chemicals, alcoholic drinks, etc. Names of some the companies includes *East Africa Tiger Brand Industry PLC* or *East Africa* in short and *Rain Bow*. In addition to international investors local investors (Ethiopian), particularly those from the national group of the ruling elite, also are heavily involved in flower farms, housing industry and factories of various kinds.

I. Land Grabbing in Finfinnee/Addis Ababa environ in the name of development

A). What is the situation of farmland misappropriation policy of the government in the vicinity of Finfinnee/Addis Ababa?

The Oromo communities within Finfinnee/Addis Abeba and particularly the farming communities in the surrounding districts are devastated by the government policy of so called investment or development. Oromo farmers in these areas are removed from the land they have lived on for generations. For example, the farmers in the district of Galaan

Guddoo (a historical land mark of the Ujuba Tuulamaa Oromo clan), farmlands were taken away and sold by the government to city housing developers to build condominiums and city sewage disposal.

In similar manner, in the districts of Karra Erer, Garji and Boolee Bulbula farmlands were appropriated without fair compensation by the authorities and sold to real-estate developers to build condominiums. As a result of this ruthless action by the government, the lives of many farmers and their families have changed for the worst. To elucidate the harm done to the farm communities, we have interviewed two individuals: former farmers, whose farmlands were taken away. These individuals are now day laborers at new building sites in Aqaaqii, in the district of Galaan Guddoo.

Question (Q): How much do they pay you per day?

Answer (A): A permanent employee gets paid about Birr 30 to 45 (\$1.70 to \$2.60) depending on their experiences and expertise. For example the maximum women get paid is Birr 30 (\$1.70) per day.

Q. What are the problems that exist between you and your employer?

A. They don't pay us on time. Sometimes they are unwilling to pay at all for our labor.

Q. How could you live on Birr 30 (\$1.70) a day? How could this amount be enough to pay for food, rent, clothing, etc. for you and your family?

A. It is not life! Whatever we get we have to pay for food, because we have to keep ourselves alive. Often our children go without food and clothing.

Q. Are all previous owners of the land we see around here working just like you as day laborers around here or what has happened to them?

A. Yes, many of them work around here like me. Like me, they were all paid a meager amount for their lands. That is how we lost our livelihood.

Q. How large is the size of the land that has been taken away in this manner in this district? I mean how many villages are involved?

A. We don't know the size but it is very large and includes several villages.

Q. Are these condominiums constructed by the government or individual owners?

A. It is by government. But the ones who hire us as laborers are contractors. We hear that

they got a large sum of money from the government as contractors but pay us very little to do the job. It is unfair. We come to work only to get some money so that we can buy food in order to survive. The contractors want us to survive so that we continue to work for them for little money. On the other hand, they sale the finished houses for large amount of money. The contractors are cruel and they don't have any sympathy for the poor. Many of them are Tigrayans or strangers who don't know our culture and language.

Q. The original owners of this land around here must have had cattle, what happened to their animals and where do they graze them now?

A. What cattle do they have now! They have sold them all.

The person we interviewed Mr. Jireenya Agarsaa is a guard at the condominiums being built around the town of Aqaaqii.

Q. What is this neighborhood called?

A. It is called Saalonnaagoraa.

Q. What kind of life do the original owners of this land lead now?

A. They are in very bad condition. The money they were given as compensation was small and not enough to buy them another land to move to. They have spent all their money and they are very poor now. Many of them are working as day laborers. Others have run away to other towns in search of work in order to survive. Families have disintegrated and disappeared. We don't know where some of these families are now.

Q. At the beginning, could you have refused to give away your land?

A. It was taken away by force. They told us that the land belongs to the government. We were told that the government can use its own land for development. So we were told to get whatever compensation will be given us and leave the land. So the land you see on this side was taken away from the owners in this manner. The large area you see on the other side will soon be taken away.

The other individual we talked to was Mr. Dabalee Malkaa. He is one of the farmers who lives around Aqaaqii river.

Q. How much does this river affects you farm?

A. As you can see, our farmland is full of plastics and chemicals released from the factory. The plastics stick to the plowshares and make it very difficult to plow the land. It

makes it very hard for the oxen to pull and it makes them tired very fast. We spend a lot of human labor and money to try to clear the fields.

Q. The large piece of land fenced with wire that we see on the other side; to whom does it belong?

A. It is where the sewer for Finfinnee/Addis Abeba is located. It is constructed by the municipal authority of the city.

Q. Doesn't this affect the river? Not only this river, as you know the Aqaaqii river flows into Hawaas/Awash river which flows as far as Afar. How do you explain the effect this sewage disposal?

A. In my opinion, the relevant authorities should be told of the harmful effects that pouring chemicals from factories and sewage from Finfinnee into Aqaaqii River will have now and in the future on us and the environment. They need to seek a solution for it soon.

With a new road construction to Adaamaa underway, the activities of land grabbing are intensifying along this highway. Particularly the land grabbing activity by the **Turks** is frightening. Using the full right that the government granted them, without any hesitation and worry they do ask the authorities to remove the farmers from any area along this highway. Government cadres arrive and tell the farmers that this land is needed for the development of the city and you have to move. The propaganda the cadres tell us is - like other people you can move to the cities or surrounding towns and build a high rise and live there. You can buy cars and use them for business. They ask, for how long do we Oromos avoid living in towns and cities? On the other hand, we do witness that those who were misled by such government propaganda and whose land is taken away are living a humiliating and dehumanizing existence. They have lost the honor and respect they had when they lived as self-sufficient members of their own farming communities. Now, the elders work as guards and the young as day laborers. Particularly, the elders feel humiliated. But these farmers don't have any choice except giving up their lands. If they don't agree to give up their land for whatever compensation offered them, the government has the right to take their land and use it anyway.

The inhabitants of this area are losing land that has been handed down for generations. The Federal government has offered some of them to move some 400 km from their

place of birth to Western Oromia, into the Dhidheessa valley and settle there. When the farmers refused, their farming land was taken and left with small plots upon which their houses stood. However they don't have anywhere to cultivate crops or graze their farm animals. They have to travel long distances from their dwellings to graze their animals in ragged and difficulty terrain.



B). What is the size of the land rented out to rich individuals in the name of development?

The land taken over for city sewage disposal and buildings in the districts of Boolee Bulbulaa, Karra Eerer and Garjii alone covers three districts. The rate at which the land-grabbing is expanding only depends on the availability of buyers or developers. Only the federal government knows the exact size of the sold out farmlands.

C). What is the amount paid to the original owners as compensation? For how much does the government sell the same land for? Is it the regional or federal government that is dealing with the land issue?

It is the federal government that pays compensation to the farmers and who owned the land. The farmers are paid per square meter (m²) of land. Before three years, the government paid Birr 3 or 4 (\$0.16-0.22). However, today the farmers are paid Birr 10 (\$0.60) per sq. meter. Then the government sells the land to local or international investors. But the amount the government receives is unknown. It is a secret. But it is understood that the government get a lot of money for the lands.

It is unknown for how many years the government is going to keep the land. It is also unknown the number of years the compensation covers. On the other hand, it is known that the government rents out land for 10, 15, 20, etc. years. The investors who are renting land come from **India, China, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia**, etc. In addition there are some local developers.

D). What is the living condition of the farmers who lost their farmlands?

Most of these farmers used to subsist by farming only– cultivating different kinds of crops and raising farm animals. They are not accustomed to handling cash or how and where to save. As a result they used up the little cash they received as compensation very fast. Some made frequent visit to bars in nearby towns where they spent their money very fast. After they finished the cash the family disintegrates and the men travel to nearby towns or Finfinnee and if they are lucky get a job as day laborers to keep themselves alive.

To further demonstrate the devastating effects that land grabbing policy has on the farmers, we talked to some of them.

We talked with Mr. Galaan Hawaas, a resident of Galaan Arrabsaa district. He briefly stated: “... *the selling of our lands is not our desire or wish but it is the government who dictated it upon us. In fact, we correctly guessed that our land is sold the day we saw our land was marked. We were never consulted about our land. As for compensation – it is those farmers who could hire lawyers or persist on their demand to get paid who received compensation. The others didn't receive anything and prayed and left everything to their God.*”

E). After our lands are taken away we only saw grinding poverty and suffering visiting upon us. No benefit at all. For now we are surviving on the payment we receive as day laborers constructing fences, digging latrine and breaking stones. Those who couldn't find work just left the area for unknown destination. They just disappeared. There are those who were arrested because they resisted giving up their land and they are in prisons and in many cases their families have dispersed. (Fearful for the safety of this individual

in case the authorities find out who he is, we have left out several important points this individual has raised.)

F. What is expected of those Oromos who understand the problems their own people are facing?

The investors in addition to renting the farmers' lands at very low price in cooperation with the government are now using the cheap labor of the farmers to gain more.

1. Continue to raise the land misappropriation issue to the relevant federal government body in writing repeatedly.
2. To raise the problem at all meetings that the government might call not only in the area but in all Oromo areas by those who have become aware of this problem. We believe that the problem of misappropriation of farmlands from Oromo farmers will not be limited to the Finfinnee area alone. Similarly, Oromos who live outside Oromia and have access to media, human right organizations and governments should make the international community aware of the problems facing Oromo farmers.

Questions that may be raised:

1. To reconsider and raise the amount of compensation for the farmlands.
2. To stop dumping city and towns sewages and chemicals from factories on to the land and rivers in the neighborhoods. This is already having a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of human beings, animals, plants and the environment at large.
3. To stop discrimination based on origin in hiring and give priority to the locals, particularly to those who lost their lands.
4. If all these attempts fail, as a last resort, to close the roads that lead to these areas and take back the lands. In addition, reclaim the land given to new settlers who have built their houses on it.

G). What steps should the people who are directly affected by the misappropriation of farm lands take to remedy the situation?

Steps that the affected people could take includes:

1. To cut off the resources from the area that the city of Finfinnee depends on including drinking water –from Laga Daadhi, Gafarsaa Burraayyu, etc.
2. Cut the roads that lead into and out of Finfinnee.
3. A third party should get involved to re-evaluate the value of the farmers' lands and fair compensation should be awarded. In addition, a priority for employment should be given to those who lost their livelihood through the land grabbing policy.

H). We have gathered evidences on how the land grabbing policy of the government in Finfinnee and its environs is affecting the lives of its indigenous inhabitants, the Oromo peasantry. How can we help these unfortunate farmers? How is it possible to instigate opposition against the government policy of farmlands misappropriation?

The Oromo land in Finfinnee and in surrounding the districts of Galaan, Ada'aa, Yerer, Abbichuu, Walmaraa, Sabbataa, etc. is very fertile on which Oromo farmers have cultivated different types of crops and raised farm animals to feed themselves and thousands of others. Today when millions of Oromos and others are affected by famine and starvation the misguided policy of the government is taking away fertile lands from the traditional producers. We need to make the sure that the negative effect of the government policy on land-issue is understood by everybody concerned.

II. Farmlands polluted by chemicals from large flower farms

What is the size of the land under flower production? And what are the negative effects of flower production on the land and people in the area?

Flower farms are found in several districts around Finfinnee/Addis Ababa such as: Ad'aa (Bishooftuu), Liban Cuqqaalaa, Caffee Donsaa, Walmaraa(holotaa) and Dandii. The size of each flower farm is about 80 hectares or larger.

The chemicals from the large scale flower farms have flooded and contaminated the surrounding farmlands and rivers that led to the loss of farmlands by the inhabitants of the areas and reduction in crop yields. For example it has been reported that the yield of *tef* and barley have been considerably reduced as the result and the farmers in area told us that the yield per hectare for *tef* was 20 quintals (about 4,420 pounds) three years ago and now it has dropped to 12-15 quintals per hectare.

The following is an interview conducted with peasants in neighborhoods of the Sabbataa and Alamgana districts who are employed on the large scale flower farms.

Obbo Tolasaa Dadhii and his wife are residents of one of the neighborhoods (Qabale) in Sabbataa town. We met them harvesting Tef they cultivated on a leftover piece of land from a large scale flower farm. The couple worked hard day and night and did not give up despite the harsh condition under which they are forced to work to earn a living.



Q. We see here a vast land of flower farm. How did the owner of this flower farm acquire such large area from the farmers?

A. About five years ago, he acquired the land by paying Birr 0.70/m²

Q. What is the situation of those who lost their land to this amount of money now?

A. What life do they have? They lost their property.... then, they were told that they would get paid again or they would get their land back for farming was the promise. Now, after five years, they wanted to get paid but they were simply snatched off their lands, no compensation was paid nor their lands repossessed.

The new owners are rather expanding their land holdings.

Q. Are these investors of the flower farms indigenous?

A. We were told they were from Finfinne (Addis Ababa) but we do not know where they are from.

Q. How much the daily laborers on these farms are paid per day?

A. It was 7 Birr (about \$0.36) day in the beginning now about 10Birr (\$ 0.55) per day.

Q. The living cost is now very high. How can they live on Birr 10 per day ... what about clothing, food etc.?

A. What can they do? They have to live on whatever they get!!

Q. How many quintals could you harvest from this piece of land before?

A. About five quintals.

Q. You or the other farmers who also raised animals used the land for grazing and keeping them but what about today?

A. Most of us are working either as day laborers or guards for the farms here if they are willing to hire us. If we ask them to raise our pay, they tell us - “ If you do not want you can go! There are a lot of job seekers who can take it”. They look down upon us and do not even greet us.

Q. When this happens do the people just keep quite? They do not resist?

A. We appealed to the authorities but to no avail. They tell us that the land belongs to the government. What can we do?

Q. Besides the two of you who else have lost their lands in this manner and how could we meet them?

A. All of the villagers you see here have lost their lands. All the families you can see here have lost their lands.

Q. Are there some benefits the community get from the flower plantations, things like roads, electricity etc.?

A. For the first time, only for this village – a few households – they have put running water in place. They promised roads and electricity but have never materialized.

We met another family while they were harvesting on their farm. They are Baalcha Tuchoo and Gurmu Birru

Q. What is this neighborhood called?

A. The neighborhood is called Waajjitu.

Q. Who owns this floral industry here?

A. This one is **Tsega Abebe's**. He comes from Selale. That one is called **Neguse**. He comes from Tigray.

Q. How much did they pay per square meter of land when they acquired it?

A. It was Birr 0.70 (about \$0.03)/square meter. But recently they say it is worth Birr 4.50/ (about \$0.25)/square meter. The peasants were cheated and thought they got a good deal without bargaining much. Now they regret very much, their livelihood has been destroyed and cannot do anything. The elderly and weak were hired as guards and forced to work at night in the cold weather and standing the whole day. They earn only Birr 405 (about \$22.50)/month

Q. What about the daily laborers? How much do they earn?

They pay the men Birr 10 (about \$0.55)/day and Birr 7 (about \$0.40)/day for the women. If they spray chemicals on the flowers, they get paid Birr 12 (about 0.66)/day. For example I was spraying chemicals and while at work the chemical came in contact with my small open wound on my leg and I fell sick. I had to go to see a doctor who told me that the chemicals affected me that is why I fell sick. I had to change the job and started another. I know many individuals who were exposed to these chemicals and have now lost their legs or hands.

At the same time, they disposed off the chemicals on the grazing fields and most of our farm animals perished. Every peasant has lost at least 6 or 7 animals.

Q. Did these people receive any compensation?

A. For those people hurt while working they argued that they were hurt while working and were not considered for compensation. But those people who lost their animals were compensated, even though very small compared to what they lost.

Q. Can you tell me the condition of the workers working with the flower producing companies?

A. The workers spend their entire earning at work place (on the flower farm). Since they have no time to go home and prepare their own food and they buy their food from the company's canteens. The workers take advance credit from the company itself which has canteens on the site. They get paid every two weeks and when they pay day comes, they cannot even pay off the credit and are forced to work there for nothing or for the food they get there. Everybody who works there owes the company some money let alone saving.

Q. Didn't the people resist being pushed away from their lands?

A. There were many instances when they did resist. But what can you do by resisting? They told us that the land belongs to the government whether we accept compensation or not we were to be moved from the land. Therefore, the people were forced to take compensation and sign agreements. That time, the owner of this house ahead of us here was running here and there and confused the people by saying that we are going to lose our lands; the government is going to take the land, etc. The people have been misled into signing the agreement because they could not protest in one voice as they were purposely divided and not able to resist the plot in one voice.

Q. Who is this man you are talking of? Is he working for a government body?

A. His name is Shawa Buzuna. This is his house. He has no authority but canny and has good connection with the authorities. As you see, he is the only one who has an electricity in his home taken from the line that goes into the company compound.

Q. Is this person an indigenous person?

A. He was born here but his father came from the Amhara region.

(We didn't record the whole interview.)

The next person we talked to was Girma Atawu, a resident of Diimaa Manyee peasant association near Sabbata. We met him while he was wondering where he could take his cattle for grazing

Q. Can you tell us how this flower farming company first came here and took your farmland and homestead? How could they get these vast lands?

A. First, the information came through the peasant association. The people did not want

to sell their lands, but they were told by the association representatives that the land was wanted for flower farming and we should accept the agreement and get compensated by the government. Because it was an order, we did not even negotiate the price and were forced to get whatever they offered us Birr 0.70 about \$0.03 /meter square.

Q. For how long was the lease?

A. They said it was for five years. But now it is already over five years. There is no more pay. The people have repeatedly appealed but no one listens to them.

Q. If you get the land back, do you think it would be as productive as it were before?

A. I do not think the chemicals and the cement added to the land would go away and the land becomes productive as before anymore. Probably after a long time perhaps the chemicals may disappear.

The next person we talked to was Aadde Dinqee. She said that she is 70 years old. She told us that there were lots of potable rivers before the different companies were established around Alemgana. Now all the rivers nearby are poisoned and are not good for consumption by animals or human beings. The people are therefore forced to get water from wells some distance from the dwellings.

Gammachuu Tolaa

. At the time we met her Aadde Dinqee was walking to fetch water and carrying a jerry can larger than she apparently can carry.



(We have not transcribed the interview because it is similar to the above story.)

The next person we talked to was Obbo Garoma Bachoo is born in Alemgana town. He works in **Adaree Bayaan flower Production Company**. This company once belonged to an Amhara individual who later sold it to an **Indian investor**. We met Obbo Garoma while he and his brother were digging a pit to construct a latrine on the ground of the company's compound.



Q. How much are you paid per day for this work?

A. It depends on the nature of the job. One could be paid 5, 6 or 7 Birr (\$0.30 to \$0.40) a day. There are also a few who earn Birr13 (about \$0.70)/day

Q. The living cost is so high now, how can you live on this amount of money?

A. What can we do? We could do nothing. Only recently we asked at a meeting for more pay. But the managers told us that the white man, the owner, is not here and we should wait for him. I have worked for six years in this company but to date I have not seen any pay rise. They also discriminate.

The next person we talked to was Alamu Warqu, a 12 year old child. He was looking after a cattle herd on a plot of land taken away from his parents but not yet under flower production. He speaks with bitterness about the dispossession of his parent's land by the so called investors.

Q. Is this land your parents' ?

A. It belonged to us but not any more.

Q. Who took it away from you?

A. The government.

Q. Is that by force or did you sale it?

A. My parents did not want to leave their land but they were forced to sign agreement that they will get paid Birr 5.50 (about \$0.30)/meter square

Q. Did they give them the money.

A. No, they have not, we use the land for cattle grazing only until they pay and take over.

Q. What will you do with the cattle then?

A. We will sell them, that is all we could do. We have no where else to take them for grazing.

Q. They say that because of the chemicals discharged on the field, a lot of cattle died from this area, are there any of your animals that have died?

A. The chemicals disposed on the fields killed seven of our animals.

(Alamu told us a long story but we transcribed only this much.)

The cattle which depend on the rivers contaminated with chemicals from the flower farms were exposed to different kinds of diseases including weight loss, rashes and open wounds. The contamination of rivers and the consequences on the ecosystem is vast and requires an extended research to know the actual damage. Nevertheless, the interviews with local people clearly indicate how devastated the affected communities have become by the flower industry in general.

A company called “**East Africa**” has acquired half of a neighborhood peasant association called Qurquraa land located between Bishoofu and Duukam. We observed that this company is discharging industrial chemicals on farmlands and grazing areas and which having devastating effects on the communities. The following are interviews with the local people regarding this issue. Obbo Getacho Aragga is a resident of Qurquraa No.2 Neighborhood.

*Q. Are you working in this **East African Company**?*

A. I am working elsewhere now. I used to work there.

Q. What is being produced by this company?

A. Soap, Ajax, biscuits, cosmetics, packaging papers, flour mills and also they have many of printing machines.

Q. Are there services for the community after these plants were established here?

A. They promised to provide a lot of services for the community when they were given the land. But they did not do anything for us.

Q. What did they promise?

A. For example they promised to provide electricity, running water and clinics. They constructed only this water well here and even that is going to be lost due to lack of management/protection.

Q. Are the people not asking the company for the promise they made?

A. We asked them every year but authorities are not fulfilling their promise.

Q. How long has this company been here?

A. Fourteen years

Q. Are there chemicals released from this factory. If so how carefull are they for the safety of the people and livestocks?

A.They dispose of all the chemicals in that valley and which flows in to the rivers and farmlands of the surrounding areas. There were many farm animals that perished after feeding on the grass contaminated by the chemicals.

Q. Are there componsations paid for the owners of the animals affected?

A. Not paid. Who do you ask? Who listens to you?

Q. Who is the owner of this company? Is he an Ethiopian individual?

A. **Buzayoo Tadasaa** Obbo Boolee Worqu and a woman called **Alem Dasalegn** – Ethiopians.

Q. Are you working in this East African Company?

A. I used to work there. Now I am going to school.

Q. What is their pay for a day laborer?

A. They pay Birr 10 (about \$0.55)/day by working from 7am- 5pm. If you start at 8 a.m. and finish by 5pm the pay per day is Birr 7.

Q. How is the employer –employee relation in this East African Company?

A. They let you work just for them and they do not want you to work and improve your life. Besides, the chemical is affecting a lot of people's health. A lot of people die even before their illness is diagnosed.

(This interview is too long and only inscribed part of it.)

The next person we talked to was Obbo Boolee Worqu, a resident of Wajitu neighborhood in Ada'a District.

Q. Isn't this dirty water flowing down from this company's ground dangerous for the cattle?

A. It is of course, it has affected even people's skins – rashes and wounds etc. and also has killed a lot of animals.

Q. Did you petition to the responsible authorities?

A. We have filed our complaints to the district administration, but no solution to this day.

Q. How do you describe the effects of these chemicals?

1. If this trend continues, all rivers in our country will be unusable for washing/bath let alone for drinking.
2. It is scary to think of the effects on fish, human beings and the animals, both domestic and wild, which drink from these rivers.



The Sabbata river seen above is contaminated by the chemical from the alcohol factory and currently killing a lot of cattle.

3. The farmers have no grazing lands for their domestic animals, they sold most of their herd and there is none left to pass them on to their children – an important tradition of wealth transfer in the Oromo culture. The land is being taken away that the young generation will have no land to till. This will make the coming generation dependent on foreigners on their own home stead. This is a denial of the peoples' tradition and culture of land protection and inheritance.

For flower production purpose land is dug several meters deep and is filled with chemicals, cement or sand that even if the farmers were to be given their lands back, it will be near impossible grow plants or crops on such land. Given the local technology of farming that our farmers possess, there is no way the peasants can use the land whose top soil is dug as deep as ten meters and filled with chemicals and concrete be converted to productive farmland. It is not hard to predict that such land could fast and becomes uninhabitable.



One of the flower farms in Sabbata

C/ How many peasants were expelled from their lands for this purpose?

1. In sub-zones, in the special Finfinne (Addis Ababa) administrative zone, more than 50% of the inhabitants of the peasant associations have lost their lands. Currently,

most of those affected by this land grab are now daily laborers in the companies in their neighborhoods with a daily pay of not more than Birr 12.00 (about \$0.60). It is reported that the poisonous chemicals used for production of flowers have affected, in particular, many young girls working at these sites without the necessary safety equipments and training. Most of them are now suffering from asma and gastritis.

III. Pollution of drinking water in Finfinne (Addis Ababa) and the general metro area:

The rivers around the capital city Finfinne (Addis Ababa) once provided the Oromo people fresh water for drinking and other daily living purposes. Now, these rivers are totally polluted by chemicals that flow into them from the surrounding factories. Cattle and other domestic livestock are dying from drinking the polluted water, and the rivers are now gradually drying-up as a consequence of man-made environmental degradation.

The aim of this report is:

- To assess how the Ethiopian government's irresponsible and destructive land and environmental policy is affecting the Oromo people living around capital city of Finfinne (Addis Ababa);
- To explore the most severe long term consequences of the government's actions on the socio-economic state of the local communities;
- To explore possible solutions and interventions that takes into consideration the communities' wellbeing within industrial development and to prevent further disaster the wellbeing of the society at large.

Several interviews were conducted with residents of the affected regions. Mr Galatu Birbir lives in Ada'a District, just a few kilometers from Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) and the following excerpt indicates his experience.

Qus: What do you call this river?

Ans: It is called Wadessa River. Flows from Tullu Erer and joins Mojo River and together they flow into Hawaas River.

Q. Do people as well as animals use this river?

A. Definitely, the cattle are drinking from this river. People used to drink too. However, after the expansion of the flower farm in the area, people found themselves in a very difficult circumstance as the results of the pollution of the river. They are facing hardship to obtain clean water.

Q. Why did the people stop using the river since the expansion of the flowers farm? What do you think?

A. The entire flowers factories you see around here release their chemicals and residues into the river. As you see the water is totally polluted by these chemicals.

Q. Isn't it harmful to animals? Why do people allow them to drink from the river?

A. We do not have any choice. Of course the village lost a lot of cattle from illnesses caused by drinking these polluted water. It is very difficult to keep away the animals from the rivers. Yes, we lost our cattle; we continue to lose them because of the pollution.

Q. How is it that the farmers give away such a large area to the flower farming company?

A. As the land in this area is very flat, during the rainy season the Wadecha River overflows and large land area comes under water. The farmers agreed when the flower companies came and asked them to build a tunnel or duct along the river to stop the river from overflowing. When the foreign company owners came and said 'we will control the flow of the river' the local farmers took the idea as a positive and cooperated with the company. At the beginning, no one mentioned what they were going to do to the land, leave alone using the chemicals in the area very close to drinking water.

However, after the completion of the tunnel the flower farming companies came and the farmers were forced to take very little amount of money in the form of compensation for their lands. The farmers were never willingly handed over their lands to the companies but only after the intimidation and harassment by government authorities. The little amount of money paid out to the farmers in the name of compensation, compared to the value of the land, it is nothing for the farmers.

Today, 10 and 11 years old children are working in the flowers farm as day laborers to win their daily bread. They only get coins a day to survive on it. Going to school and getting education already become unthinkable for these children and their parents.

Q. After they regretted, did the farmers try to reclaim their land?

A. Certainly, complaints and ongoing appeal to the government has continued. But the local people never expect assurance or promise from the government authorities, as the flower farms and factories have continued to farther expand.

Q. For how long has this land been leased?

A. From the beginning, there was a fraud. When the flower farming companies were introduced to the area the government forced the farmers to sign a 15 years lease agreement but only paid them little amount of money, in most cases the rent of 5 years.

Q. Do you think if the companies return the land to the former owners so that could be used for farming again?

A. Mixture of sand, cement and various chemicals that have been used for construction of the flowers farm industry already have poisoned the land. After all, it is beyond the ordinary farmer's capacity to clear all these fields even if the land is returned to them.



The bloody appearance of the Wadecha River polluted with chemicals from the flower farms.

We also approached one of the Wadecha River area resident, Mrs. Gaaddisee Tullu, whilst washing clothes with the dirty water fetched from the river. We observed the color of the water she was using for washing. She told us that she has no other choice at all except using what is available, dirty water.

We also saw at a distance, children kept very undernourished and skeletal cattle on the edge of the Wadecha River. We asked the children to lead us along the river. The more we walked along the edge of the river the more we saw chemicals flowing into the water from the surrounding flower farms and factories. The water totally appears greenish from waste products and chemicals. We watched the contaminated water in river flow with a deep sorrow.

The same thing is happening to Sabbata and Alam Gana Rivers. We conducted an interview with 3 residents in the area. The first person was Mr. Mulu Qitessa:

Q. What is the name of this river?

A. It is called Sabbata River.

Q. Why does this river look polluted?

A. The dirty residue flowing from the National 'Arakhe'/alcohol factory is polluting the river.

Q. Is any harm caused by this action in the area?

A. The colour of the river clearly conveys itself. Look, it is very much polluted! No choice at all. Animals are drinking from this River. As the result many animals have died in the area. Not only into the river; chemicals are flowing on to the farm fields from the factory are killing grasses and other plants.

Q, Have the local people complained about this matter?

A. Appealing to the government authorities and relevant bodies had never been ceased. But no reliable response is given. Unfortunately no one is paying attention to our loud cries.

Although many rivers are polluted by this reckless action, the Aqaaqi, Sabbata, Dukam, Mojo, Gafarsa, and Hawaas rivers have been most affected by the factory chemicals. The only solution to prevent further environmental disaster is to stop companies from discharging their toxic waste into the river system. Saving the environment from such unbearable disaster a solution must be found sooner than later. People need to act quickly to stop the investors as well as the government authorities who are giving them cover, from such irresponsible environmental crimes.

Source: An independent study