

Adequate Consultation And Dialogue With Local Community; Unlocking The Untapped Potential For Peace And Development; Evidences From South Omo Zone

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Abstract: The paper argues that adequate consultation and public wide dialogues at the grass root level are the two potential entry points in times of development interventions. This will foster peace among the nearby people and led a foundation for the subsequent development. The study was undertaken to examine whether the agro-pastoral communities of South Omo zone were jeopardized as a result of the Omo Kuraz Sugar development project or not. It also targeted whether there was adequate consultation with the local people at the earliest days of the project. Adopting Ethnographic design, the study accompanied by primary data collected through participant observation, focus group discussion and key informant interview indicated that there were attempts to consult the indigenous people, though not adequate. It also indicated that despite the absence of compensation for the local displaced people due to their mobile life, the people were not endangered as a result of the project. This project, as a development project that is established at the communal land of the agro-pastoralists, is providing training for the nearby people to hire them in its various offices. Far from the claims of the various oversees institutions propounded as if the agro-pastoral communities were miserably suffered from such a project, the people consider it as if it is their own project. The study implied that South Omo zone is a counter example of how local level consultation and a wide range of dialogue are indispensable preconditions to foster peace and development in many pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of the country.

Index Terms: local people, Consultation, development, peace, dialogue, south Omo

1 INTRODUCTION

Background Information of the Study

The potential Sources of conflict in South Omo zone could be observed emanated from four dimensions, namely the Omo-Kuraz development project, benefit sharing with Omo-Kuraz, villajization of the pastoralist community and the subsequent pastoralist grazing lands. With regard to the Omo-Kuraz sugar development project, the DAG mission, in its 2014 argued that attempts were made to engage the communities and consider some of their feedback. This was followed by the report of the DAG mission 2016, and saw little improvement by Government to undertake meaningful participatory consultations with communities, improve communities' stakes in discussion where land acquisition occurs, or to inform communities of the assessments. With regard to benefit sharing from the project, the local communities have a sole right to have a fair benefit from the nearby development project as it will affect their life. Despite some encouraging beginnings, however, much is left to be done to train and employ the people in the various offices of the project. Concerning the villajization project, the government's development intervention in South Omo zone is following a "two-track" villagisation process. The Omo-Kuraz plantation associated villagisation started in 2012 has already affected the peoples of Bodi, Mursi and Nyangatom areas. The second track supports "water-centred development" and is primarily in Dassanech, Nyangatom and Hamer woredas. Much of the issue with regard to the pastoralist grazing land, however, is debatable. The Zonal administration, in its turn, stated that adequate grazing lands will be preserved for community use and there are no any potential dismays as such. In Salamago woreda too, the local people reported that they continue to have access to their grazing lands. Such communities in Hamer woreda, however, stated that they have already lost grazing land to developmental projects, and it seems a bit sound. Thus, the expectation is that inter clan conflict could

also intensify as pressure increases on remaining rangelands, and as trade-offs become clearer between the requirements of commercial farms, the Omo-Kuraz Plantation and existing rangelands.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In the Southern parts of Ethiopia, "conflicts now cause high numbers of human death, damage to assets, displacement and migration, poverty and greater dependence on food aid" (Asnake et.al, 2013). As groups of people whose livelihood is solely dependent up on livestock production with cultivation of crops, land is many things for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The loss of land translated to massive decreases in the numbers of their livestock, which forced many people to adopt alternative livelihood strategies: cultivation and fishing. Despite the existence of plethora of conflict related claims by local and foreign institutions, evidence based empirical study is badly available in South Omo zone. The **most blamed** groups among the multitude of ethnic groups in South Omo zone are those of the Bodis (Tewolde and Fana, 2014). They resorted to both projects (Omo Kuraz Sugar Development Project and Villajization), for the very reason that they have little or no experience in sedentary way of life; most of them are pastoralist, and few of them are agro-pastoralist. The implication of these two projects is that they will lose their grazing lands and will result in the reduction of herd sizes. In the later days of the project (Omo Sugar), however, they surrendered for the continued dialogue, and agreed on the demarcation of grazing lands.

1.3 objectives of the study

The study has the following specific objectives.

1. To examine whether the agro-pastoral communities of South Omo zone were jeopardized as a result of the Omo Kuraz Sugar development project or not.
2. To ascertain whether there was adequate consultation

with the local people at the earliest days of the project.

3. To examine whether the rights of indigenous people were compromised as a result of the existing development interventions.

2. A CRITICAL REVIEW OF CLOSELY RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The term development refers to different things for different people; for Amartya Sen, it is about the expansion of choices and freedoms; for Dennis Gullet, it is about the fair distribution of goods and services and the subsequent betterment of life thereof, and according to IDMC (2010), it is a collaborative approach "where communities contribute to development process by giving up their land, they have not only a right to just compensation but also to receive an equitable share of the benefits." Based on the claims of IDMC (2010), Mossissa in his 2012 publication argues that there must be adequate consultation which allows the indigenous people to participate meaningfully in all parts of the process, including the planning phase, that are relevant to their lives. His work further emphasizes that the state must obtain communities free and informed consent in accordance with their customs and traditions if a development or investment project will have a major impact up on them. This work and others underscore the need to consult local people and did not refuse undertaking development in pastoral areas. Thus, so long as it coerces people in a way that does not keep the traditions, ways of life and interests of indigenous people, the natural resource should be exploited for the transformation of the local people in particular and the GDP of the nation in general. In the context of South Omo zone, villegization is sought to be the development model, as the local people are scattered and lead mostly mobile life. Villegization models, however, entertains a wide range of criticisms from different scholarly works on the ground that it is associated with the minds of policy makers (Guyu, 2012; Yimer, 2015). The notion of villajization in some other scholars work is appreciated; Mhando, 2011, for instance argues that rural development is rhetoric without the establishment villegization programs. Much of the debate observed, however, lies on the notion that could pastoral life systems be sustainable in this era, characterized by frequent hazards, drought being the most responsible factor for the death of thousands of livestock in the low lands? That is a question of survival and not a question of identity, ways of life, traditions, etc. That is why policy makers underscore, the villegization scheme as a development model that could be sustainable. As there is a strong nexus among the rights of indigenous people, villegization and development, the issue worth to note here is how to undertake villegization? Should it be always accompanied by consultation? What if the indigenous people refused to do so? Should the development project be sluggish as a result of the disagreement? Will not be there a tendency for violent conflict? And what prospects will be there at the post conflict setting? All these questions pose significant challenge for promoting development in pastoral areas, as the indigenous people are preoccupied with the mindset that only the size of herds determine their survival and not quality. With the few exceptions of transformation to agro-pastoral system, they are skeptical of sedentary way of life (Yimer, 2015).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Rights Based Approach

A Rights-Based Approach to development puts the protection and realization of human rights at the centre. It uses established and accepted human rights standards as a common framework for assessing and guiding sustainable development initiatives. From this perspective, the ultimate goal of development is to guarantee all human rights to everyone. This approach to social policy starts from poverty alleviation as merely a development issue to poverty eradication as a matter of social justice and dignity and from state-centered approach to participatory, multi-actor approaches involving media, corporation, communities and individuals.

2.2.2 Poverty and Development in a Rights-Based Approach

A Rights-Based Approach holds the notion that a person for whom a number of human rights remain unfulfilled, such as the right to food, health, education, information, participation; is a poor person. Poverty is thus more than lack of resources – it is the manifestation of exclusion and powerlessness. In this context the realization of human rights and the process of development are not separate. On the contrary, development becomes a sub-set of the process of fulfilling human rights. In this case, far from being antithesis, development could be taken to be an instrument for the realization of human rights. The establishment of the various agri-business development projects in the various low lands, including the South Omo Sugar Development project, is therefore, part of an effort to alleviate poverty.

2.2.3 Basic Assumptions of the Theoretical Framework

Among other things, the rights based approach (rba) is founded on the following basic assumptions. It;

- Considers the redistribution of the existing resources
- Using participatory methods to actively engage rights-holders in influencing, designing and monitoring education policy and delivery, ensuring that complex information is translated and repackaged to make it more accessible at the grassroots.
- Violations of rights are taken as the starting point, which leads in to analysis, and actions at the structural and macro levels.
- Has a tendency to work more with people whose rights are most violated or denied.
- Carries legal force to development work
- Helping people to restore their dignity by claiming their rights as human beings and citizens

Theoretical Explanations of the problem in the study area

As far as the notion of the theory considers the redistribution of the existing resources, the reality that the Sugar development projects are not targeted at collecting wealth at the expense of the indigenous people in South Omo zone. The intention of the state is simply to create a mutual environment which endorses the juxtaposition of development and the rights of the people in the area. In this regard, the establishment of the Sugar Development projects entails expansion of opportunities to work, in the first place, for the people in the area. In addition to its contribution in terms of job creation, the factories indirectly will support the local

livelihoods in terms of forage production for their livestock from the factory bi-products. This intern will enable the local people to adopt better livelihood strategies in keeping quality of their livestock and for better marketing values. Moreover, the establishment of these projects necessitated the construction of several networked roads in the area, allowing the local people to have access to markets. Secondly, the theory of right based approach demands to use participatory methods to actively engage rights-holders in influencing, designing and monitoring education policy and delivery, ensuring that complex information is translated and repackaged to make it more accessible at the grassroots. This notion of the theory is emanated from the context that, if people are aware enough about, the project concerning its undertakings, causes, consequences and implications through an open and frequent dialogue, they could be potential owners of the project. The people, far from being pessimistic about the project, they will allow to undertake it sometimes at their own risk, if they are fully consulted and genuinely informed prior to the official launch of the project. On the other hand, the rights based approach asserts the notion that violations of rights are taken as the starting point, which leads in to analysis, and actions at the structural and macro levels. The violations which will occur as a result of development interventions could range from displacement to that of security threats. The key point here is that every society is skeptical to change. In most cases, the first days of the development intervention are usually unfavorable accompanied by fear and suspicion among the state and the local people. Situation may call up on the state to utilize force to keep peace and order. Initial and frequent works in making people aware about the probable effect of the project on their life, and the adequate compensations thereof, are primary obligations of the state. It should also be noted that the people should be consulted and fully informed that the project will result primarily in the improvement of their life in many ways. In this case, the people will tend to calculate the incoming macro gains for relatively small economic costs. This comprises the structural analysis part of the result of the project on the lives of the local people. In addition to the issues discussed above, the rights based approach envisages quite important issue that there should be a tendency on the part of the state to work more with people whose rights are most violated or denied. People may get their rights violated in the form of displacement from their valuable lands, which they see them vital for cultural, economical and psycho-social reasons. The project should provide priority for revitalizing the people in this setting in the first instance. The constitution and other laws of the state strongly underscore the mandatory nature of adequate compensation. This entails a compensation which is commensurate with the economic costs incurred as a result of the impact of the project. Some of the literature, emphasizes however, this may not be necessarily paid in cash, rather should come in the form of empowerments in the long run. Finally, the rights based approach theory emphasizes helping people to restore their dignity by claiming their rights as human beings and citizens. So long as the mission of development is concerned, people are not instruments to be manipulated. After all, the aim of development is to get choices available and make people lead qualitatively better lives. In this regard, development could be conceived as a war against poverty, to make people declare their independence from the chronic arena of poverty's colonialism. The development intervention, therefore, should

aim not only to restore the previous dignity of people in the area, but also to construct and reconstruct a better identity and dignity.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF SOUTH OMO ZONE

The South Omo zone is located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples regional state. It accounts to 24,249 km² of the total area of the SNNPRS. The Zone has eight Woredas and the Jinka town administration (the Zone Capital). Sixteen ethnic groups are considered indigenous to the Zone, while a considerable number of people fled from other parts of the country also live there. According to the population projections for 2016/17 based on the population and housing census conducted in 2007 (Central Statistical Agency, 2008), the Zone has a total population of 767,915. With regard to economic activities, pastoralism is the main provider to the mobile and semi-sedentary communities in the Omo Valley of Ethiopia. It sustains the lives of people and their livestock in this fragile, conflict prone and largely neglected region. Livestock are not raised with market considerations, but both in times of need and for goods like food and clothes, agro-pastoralists sell livestock. In addition, all pastoral groups have exclusive or negotiated access to river banks, and engage in flood retreat agriculture. For most ethnic groups in South Omo such cultivation is practiced along the Omo River, while some use Mago and Woyto.

3.2 Research Design

The study is qualitative cross sectional study based on Ethnographic design. The research design is purely descriptive depending on the nature of the issue. Most recent studies undertaken in such topics as pastoralism, villegization, consultation with indigenous people, land acquisitions, etc, used qualitative approaches.

3.3 Sources of Data and Data Gathering Instruments

The study employed mainly primary data and secondary ones to some extent, where relevant. Specifically, participant observation, focus group discussion with the officials of Omo Kuraz Sugar Development project, and key informant interviews with selected leaders of the villages, were used to collect the relevant data.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were transcribed and lightly edited for coherence. The concerns raised during the interview and focus group discussions were carefully presented and triangulations were made.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part of the paper discusses the data collected from key informant interview, focus group discussions and triangulated with the insights of field observation undertaken over the period of two months in South Omo zone. The following key informant interview provides a situation where discussion will win the interest of groups and only this discussion and consultation is viable than forced displacement.

The villegization program and the Omo-Kuraz Sugar development projects brought challenges to our lives in that both of them are responsible for destruction of

traditional communal land ownership systems, loss of grazing, limited amount of animals, low or reduced production of milk, reduced income, low resilience capacity, etc. We don't think that these two projects will benefit us greatly, but what options do we have other than claiming these are our lands. The government, in the various pastoralist days, however, promised many things that will improve our livelihood particularly up on the completion of the Sugar project. Although we were pessimistic on the villegization and Sugar project, what made us to agree is that they (government bodies) frequently informed us we will be employed in the sugar plant, schools, health centers, etc, will be available and we agreed.

As the above discussion indicates, though there were dismays on the two projects, particularly, in relation to their pastoral life, with regard to communal land ownership and the subsequent effects on their lives, they indicated that frequent dialogues between the local people and the government resulted in an agreement. As the key informant clearly indicated, land is everything for pastoralists. Through land, they will have an opportunity for grazing and enlarge their livestock. Above all, the survival of indigenous peoples intrinsically linked to the survival of their territories, most importantly land and land-related resources (Young, 2010). Thus, the local people requested the zonal administration to demarcate some grazing areas in the oasis areas. The zone also responds positively and this created a fertile ground for agreement, peace and development. The focus group discussion which was held among the authorities of the Omo Kuraz Sugar development project on the duty of the state to consult the indigenous people indicated that there were dialogues and consultations.

We believe that the local people shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programs for national and regional development which may affect them directly. And we did this in the varied intervals since the inception of the project. We informed them as the project is of their own in the sense that it will create temporary and permanent employment opportunities to them. Moreover, the project will provide forage for their livestock and will empower the nearby people through income diversification activities.

Concerning the existence of consultation, the existing literature indicated that there were rooms for consultation and dialogue among the local people. In this regard, Ayele (2015) clearly indicated that "project has employed public consultation with mass participation at various-levels through Steering Committees organized to facilitate and conduct public dialogue, follow up and monitor the project activity, and plead with the local community over the development ventures." It also explained the fact that, "despite the minimal role of the local communities in agenda setting", the consultation process "established efforts in mass mobilization, soliciting local support and creating social services. However, the process narrowly viewed consultation as participation." The second issue of the focus group discussion was on the impact of the Omo Kuraz Sugar development project on the livelihood of the nearby pastoralist communities. The content of the discussion is stated here under.

The project will not have any externality up on the lives of the local people. To this effect, we have conducted impact assessment projects. These impact evaluation results informed us the impacts are positive. The Omo Kuraz Sugar development project, therefore, was accompanied by scientific and rigorous impact assessment projects.

Although the focus group discussion result tried to inform us that there were no negative impacts up on the lives of the local people based on the results of impact assessment programs, the latest literatures stand to refute the concern of the authorities. Ayele (2015), for instance, argued that "The project has abrogated communal land title and traditional land administration; restricted access to the river, biodiversity, wild food and environmental interaction; marginalized pastoralists from their spiritual, cultural, social and economic tie with their traditional lands; and transformed pastoralists into a sedentary livelihood."

The key informant interview, in its turn, indicated that they were not negatively affected by the project, and they are rather started to live in a defined village which is accompanied by social services. Some of our members are employed as guards in the project, while some others were trained and working in food production activities in the enterprise. The informant added that as a pastoralist community, we were living a mobile way of life, which had been subject to frequent drought, animal death, food insecurity, flood, and other disasters. Now, as a result of villegized life which came in to effect partly due to this sugar project, our life is institutionalized. We get protection, health centers, water, and education for our children, etc.

Thus, despite the dismays of the researcher, Ayele's 2015 publication failed to include scientific environmental impact assessments that inform whether the project really affects the local people negatively or not. Moreover, the concerns of the study are only from anthropological point of view. Therefore, based on the claims of the key informant and the results of the focus group discussions, it is valid to deduce that there are no clearly observed negative externalities of the project on the lives of the local people. The other part of the key informant interview was on the villegization program in South Omo zone, particularly in Salamago district, where the sugar development project is taking place. The question posed was on whether the villegization program was started as a result of the Kuraz Development project or not and whether that was voluntary, based on consultation and extended dialogue with the nearby people.

Villegization is not a new phenomena and is not strictly linked to the Omo Kuraz Sugar development project, as it has already been started earlier in different woredas of South Omo zone. It was proposed, according to the authorities, to make us (the scattered pastoral people) resilient from the drought shocks. The process of villegization was not as such coercive, as there were discussions with us, but there were no genuine responses for raised questions from the people. The authorities will dictate

sometimes, indicating that the villegization project is inevitable as it was directed from the federal government. Therefore, it lacks some sort of flexibility. The sugar project, despite taking our grazing land, is not disastrous.

As it is clearly stated above in the discussion, one can see that the villegization program is not initiated as only a result of the sugar development project, rather due to extremely variable natural hazards such as drought. The existing literature also could indicate this claim. According to the study by Tewolde and Fana (2014), the villegization programme in Salamago Woreda at the planning stage is not particularly associated with the Kuraz Sugar Development Project, but the needs of the project seem to have accelerated the pace of implementation. The other thing to be noted, is whether the villegization program was voluntary, accompanied by consultation, or was /is it accompanied by coercive measures? In this regard, diverging views have been reflected from the various bodies. Some of the literature provided us with top down approach and somewhat forced (Yimer, 2015; Ayele, 2015), while others observe it as using pulling strategies like availing social services and infrastructures (Fana and Tewolde 2014). Still some others claimed that pastoralists were forced to move to villages and were accused of being anti-development (Oakland Institute, 2015) for the reason that they resist the land grab practices.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

Most of the struggles exerted to protect the rights of indigenous people while not infringing development endeavors revolve around the protection of lands, territories and resources against expropriation by the state, by corporations or by the dominant populations. Integral to this struggle is the assertion that traditional political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual systems of the indigenous peoples be respected. What is clearly stated in South Omo zone along with the trajectory of contemporary development is the issue of development with identity and culture. The central point of the assertion is that indigenous peoples have the right choose their own ways of life, their values of solidarity, reciprocity amongst themselves and with nature, manifested in their spiritual and cultural relationship with their lands and waters, should not be destroyed by so called development. However, leaving the development of the vast fertile oasis areas unexploited could not be any more viable. Therefore, in an attempt to make the local people beneficiary from the nearby development must follow bottom –up approached and should be based on the genuine participation of the community under discussion.

5.2 Recommendation

The indigenous people in South Omo zone are leading pastoral and agro-pastoral life, and exploit the vast communal lands for their grazing. The aforementioned development interventions, particularly villegization and the Omo-Kuraz Sugar development project, brought some fundamental changes up on the ways of lives, economies, institutional set ups of these somewhat mobile people. Now, they start to lead a settled life, with limited access to grazing and better access to water. In such settings, extended dialogue and more

meaningful participation of the people should be in place so as to overcome a potentially combustible conflict from increased competition for scarce resources. This should be really meaningful consultation with the region's indigenous groups, reflecting their unique situation and needs, and respecting their right to give free, prior, and informed consent before their land is used, as stipulated by the country's constitution.

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