



Landlessness and Youth in Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

Land is a critically important resource in countries such as Ethiopia where livelihoods are very much reliant on smallholder agriculture. In the rural context, indeed, having land is the most important, if not the only, means of livelihood for the poor farmers. While demographic growth is the single most crucial factor, land appropriation, a very sluggish rural transformation and insufficiency of holdings are also contributory factors for landlessness in Ethiopia.

On top of that, recently, there are emergent multiple interests in land that escalates the pressure on farmland. These include large-scale agri-investments, small-scale intensive agri-businesses such as floriculture, investments in other sectors that require their raw materials from agriculture (for instance the flourishing breweries), industrial constructions and aggressively expanding cities and towns. These have visibly exacerbated land shortage and landlessness. Though shortage of land and landlessness is affecting broader category of the rural community, the youth are disproportionately hit by the problem. This has a far-reaching and multiple implications: low income, food insecurity, and vulnerability to poverty, very severe competition over land, migration and in the worst scenario political instability. This policy brief is written based on data gathered through two distinct approaches: fieldwork in Oromia in 2016, 2018 and 2020, and in Amhara in 2019 with focus on land and youth, and review of other related works.

2. Mode of Acquisition of Land

Land redistribution/allocation by kebele, inheritance and donations/bequeath are the three major means by which the present landholders managed to acquire the land they are holding and using. The first two are the most important mechanisms of accessing land with variation between regions. According to a survey data collected in 2006 on the four major agricultural areas:

Mode of acquisition	Amahara	Oromia	SNNPR	Tigray
Kebele allocation	58.8	61.5	20.6	88.4
Inheritance	39.8	35.6	73.3	10.6

Adopted from Teketel and Melsaw (2018:142)

The kebele allocation started with the 1975 land redistribution under the motto “land to the tiller” and mainly continued up to the end of the Derg regime. The Amhara Region undertook very contested land redistribution in 1997. Farmers had complained that the redistribution was politically motivated and it targeted members of the previous government. In the table, the bigger proportion of Kebele allocation than inheritance indicates either the region enjoys better land holding size or it has made land allocation recently or landholding is less dynamic due to the less importance of the land from the perspective of the potential inheritors. On the other hand, low proportion of kebele allocation and higher proportion of inheritance like in SNNPR (in the table)

shows a critical level of land shortage and fragmentation by inheritance. The variation is visible between districts of the same region. For instance, in Oromia Region, in Kuyu district of North Shewa Zone, where landlessness is a serious problem, the proportion of inheritance has reached 40.4% while in Limu-Bilbilo district of Arssi Zone, where land availability is better, the proportion of inheritance is found to be around 16%. The important role inheritance plays with the continuing land shortage implies: 1. land is currently concentrated in the hands of old people.

2. Inheritance transfers land to young energetic people, but the danger is land fragmentation. The proportion of land holding of parents (in hectares) in relation to potential inheritors in SNNPR: 0.09 hectare, and Oromia: 0.14 hectare. This shows that unless contained at a certain level, inheritance will fragment the land to what some researchers called “micro” holding that can neither be divided further nor help to use for farming.

3. The critical importance of inheritance exacerbates land-based conflicts, especially within a family.

Next to kebele allocation and inheritance, land donation is also important. Among many societies in Ethiopia, it is customary for parents to give a piece of land to their sons up on their marriage at least for a house construction. However, with the formalization of donation (2005 land Proclamation) and land certification, parents have shown reservations, and instead of donating land, parents allow their married sons to construct their houses in their parents’ homesteads keeping their sons relationship to the land dubious.

3. The State of Landlessness and near landlessness in Rural Ethiopia

Landlessness¹ and near landlessness have become grave concerns for rural inhabitants in Ethiopia. It is seriously affecting the rural farmers’ livelihood. There is a dearth of research on establishing the state of landlessness in Ethiopia. Local administrations such as kebele and woreda do not have a list of landless households. Actually, in most of the kebeles the number of the registered members is equivalent to tax-paying or landholding population. In other words, kebeles do have full information only for the tax paying households. According to one survey in Oromia, 38.3% of the rural household in the three kebeles where the survey took place are landless. On top of this, among those who are registered landholders, significant

¹ operational meaning of landless rural household in the policy brief is a household which resides in a rural kebele and which does not have a right to land that is supported by a landholding certificate.

size of the households have less than 0.5 hectares, which the Ethiopian government considers minimum size for certification. The following table shows, a summary of land holding size of selected woredas in Oromia and SNNPR:

	Arsi Negele	Shashemene	Wondogenet	Damot Sore	Total
HH holding land less than 0.5	18	26	71	76	47.7
HH holding land less than 1.0	45	58	88	95	71.5
Household size of current member	7.5	7.9	7.3	6.1	7.2

Source: Sosina and Holden, 2014: 263

The table shows how much shortage of land alarmingly a critical problem in the country. In the woredas where above 70% have less than 0,5 hectares seems that households’ reliance on land has reached a tipping point while the average household size is still pretty high. The combined figure of landless and near landless, the household size and the very stagnant rural transformation in Ethiopia has to alarm policy makers in the country.

4. Landlessness and inter-generational divide

The single most important factor for landlessness is the demographic factor – population growth since the last land redistribution. This reveals that landlessness has a inter-generational differentiation. In Oromia, for instance, 87.7% of the landless households were too young to benefit from the last kebele allocation that took place before the demise of the Derg regime. In other words, the households were established since 1991. Similarly, in Amhara region 84% of the landless attributed their landlessness to population growth. In

SNNPR 72.6 of the landless households are between 20-29 years old; 21% are between 40 and 59 years old, and only 6% of them are above 60 years old.

Administrative and policy approaches have some contradictions. On the one hand, in the face of critical absence of land, it is no surprise that all regional proclamations forbid or discourage redistribution of peasant or pastoralist or semi pastoralist's land, with minor differences. On the other hand, all regions and the federal land use proclamations state that access to land is a constitutional right for rural residents. For instance, the 2005 Rural Land administration and Land Use Proclamation states "Peasant farmers/pastoralists engaged in agriculture for a living shall be given rural land free of charge".

Besides population growth, investments and land degradation are the two major factors exacerbating land shortage and landlessness. The impactful investments are mainly concentrated in peri-urban areas such as Addis Ababa and Bushoftu affecting very agricultural productive areas.

Effects of Landlessness

The major effects of landlessness are household's food insecurity, inability to develop asset and take the children to school. In one survey up to 87% of the landless rural households in Oromia face the challenge of food insecurity, while one-third of them are encountered the inability to send their children to the local public school. However, the tipping point of this challenge would be when the landless households fail to find a piece of land for house construction, which they usually obtain from parents or relatives. At present around 3% of the landless population suffer from lack of a piece of land even to put on their huts. This number is expected to rise as the children of the landless households – those who inherited landlessness–have reached marriage age. Lack of grazing land, wood for house construction and firewood for daily consumption are also other serious problems. In some kebeles there is no single hectare communal grazing land. Every standing tree is owned by individuals. In that situation it is not difficult to imagine what would happen to a landless poor household in rural Ethiopia. The marginalization of the landless households in rural development initiatives even worsened the problems. Initiatives such as irrigation schemes and provisions of agricultural inputs target the land holding and exclude the landless category.

5. Existing Coping Mechanisms

The landless and the land short households currently live on diversified survival strategies based on their marriage status, household size, age and gender. For the relatively big size households, survival strategies are sought mainly through renting and sharecropping. Currently more than half of the landless households depend on the two for their survival. But, the ever increasing of price of renting and worsening of sharecropping arrangements are critical challenges of the landless and land short households. They supplement these by involving in daily labors, petty trades and seasonal migrations.

Renting and sharecropping are preferred due to the fact that the rural society's skills, knowledge and practices have been attached to land. The better off farmers rent more land to produce extra for market. Civil servants rent in land to supplement their livelihood. All the eyes are on land. These have increased the value of land evidenced in the price of renting. Interestingly, even the insignificant government interventions to support the unemployed youth and the landless also focused on teaming up the youth and looking for a piece of land to provide them on temporary bases.

For most of the unmarried youth who studied beyond elementary school, shortage of land is a big discouragement to pursue involvement in farming. They do not see agriculture as potentially rewarding in their future livelihood. Thus, their coping strategies are mainly different. Most of them resort to internal and international migration. In Amhara region 62% of the landless proposed migration to the nearby and distant places as a solution. In terms of age 79.4% of the internal migrants from SNNPR are between 18 and 34. Internally, they just move to the nearby and far away towns and cities.

Recommendations

1. The challenges the landless households in rural Ethiopia are facing require sustainable transformation of the national economy. Landlessness cannot be solved sustainably by focusing on land. Ethiopia cannot increase access to land for the significant number of landless citizens. The demography does not allow that and therefore it needs structural transformation. Industrialization, urbanization and strong service sector that absorb the youth would bring a lasting solution.
2. Family planning is a crucial and urgent area of intervention. As it stands now, many landless

households do have very big family size that extremely complicates the endeavor to cope up with land shortage and landlessness.

3. The rural development interventions need to recognize the landless farmers and the challenges landlessness is posing. Landless portion of the population is too big to ignore. First of all, the local administrations need to have basic information of the size of the landless households in their locality that helps in planning. Then, local development initiatives such as local planning, agricultural technological transfer trainings, provisions of inputs etc should include them.
4. There is an urgent need for land use planning to reduce the pressure of other development sectors on agricultural land. With the absence of land use planning, industry zones, flower farms, factories, institutions and training facilities are all built on prime agricultural land. A good example is Ada'a district in Eastern Shewa Zone of Oromia, which is a home of the best teff in the country. Now that critically important agricultural land has been taken over other sectors that can be done somewhere else.

5. The challenges of landlessness is not unrelated to other structurally entrenched problems of governance in the country such as corruption, lack of good governance, severe unemployment etc. Without solving these structural problems, it would be difficult to address the challenges of landlessness. Landless rural households are mostly poor, and corrupt and inconsiderate officials would not be interested in taking up their concerns.

6. Landlessness is absolutely one to one related with poverty and hopelessness. In a survey in Oromia about one-fourth of the landless reported that with some additional support and efforts they managed to live some descent live of the local standard. These require availability of productive land for renting, manageable family size and availability off-farm opportunities. The government would help them in relaxing restrictions on rental market, like what Amhara region did, inclusion of the landless in provision of agricultural inputs and giving them priorities in any rural initiatives.

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Source:- ፍቃዱ አዳኛ (2012) መሬት አልባነትና ወጣቶች በኢትዮጵያ

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