**“Villagisation” Joint Fact Finding mission to GambellaRegionState**

**DFID, EU, USAID, UNOCHA, UNICEF**

**13-18 February 2011**

***Contextual Note***

*This report was prepared following a multi-donor mission to Gambella in February 2011. It is, therefore, more than one year old at the time of publication and information contained within does not reflect the latest situation.*

*This report should not be considered in isolation but viewed as one element of the ongoing debate around villagisation and resettlement in Ethiopia. The donor community continues to investigate the situation in Gambella and other regions of Ethiopia and to raise the issue with the Ethiopian government.*

**Summary**

The Gambella Regional State Government has embarked on an ambitious plan of “Villagisation” involving the resettlement of 45,000 households (approximately equal to 100% of the rural population) over the next 3 years, and has requested assistance from the international community. The stated objectives of the programme are to address the challenges of poverty through cost-effective service delivery to previously scattered populations, to protect vulnerable communities from natural disasters and attacks, and change destructive patterns of shifting cultivation.

The original target of 15,000 households within the first year has been increased to over 26,000. Government report that in the first 5 months of the programme to date, 13,000 households have moved to 49 designated sites.

The plan presents some developmental opportunities in line with the above objectives. Very limited improvements in service delivery and more notably security were reported by some communities. However, it appears that the scale and speed of implementation has outstripped available resources and implementation capacity. Sequencing has been poorly planned, with communities being moved before adequate basic services and even shelter are in place. In particular, the disruption to livelihoods poses threats to food security and health, with potentially severe humanitarian consequences in the short to medium term. At the very least, the programme may prove to be partially unsustainable as communities drift away, as is already happening in some locations.

There was no evidence of forced relocation. Communities appear to have agreed to move based on assurances from authorities of food aid, services and land. Thosecommunities that objected to moving have been allowed to stay with consultations on-going.

Some communities are suspicious of authorities’ motivations for relocations, fearing that their original land will be granted to private investors. Although a concurrent plan for agricultural investment in Gambella is underway, authorities state that the Villagisation programme is unrelated.

**Background**

Following requests from the Gambella Regional State Government for international support to a programme of Villagisation and discussions between federal and regional authorities and the international community, a joint team representing donors (DFID, USAID, EU) and the UN (OCHA, UNICEF), visited Gambella from 13-18 February 2011 in order to gain a more in depth understanding of the programme, its implementation and implications for internationally supported programmes. The team met with the Regional President and Heads of Line Bureaus in Gambella Town and officials atzonal andWoreda levels. Community consultations were carried out in 12 of the 49 locations where the villagisation is currently ongoing, across all 3 zones and major ethnic groups.

**Villagisation: Government Plan, motivations and implementation**

In August 2010 (ET 2003), Gambella Regional State launched a “Villagisation Programme Action Plan”. The Goal of the plan is “….to bring socio-economic & cultural transformation of the people”. Major aspects of the plan include:

* Relocation of 45,000 rural households in 49 selected kebeles over 3 years.
* Allocation of 60,000 ha for housing and arable land for beneficiaries.
* Establishment of socio-economic infrastructure in new settlement areas including schools, health, WASH and marketing facilities.

Authorities state that demand for the programme from communities has resulted in upward revision of the first year’s target from 15,000 to over 26,000 households. They also state that relocation of communities is solely on a voluntary basis following community awareness raising and consultation, and that the maximum distance of relocation of communities is 5-6 km, with rights to their original land retained. Participating households should be allocated up to 4 ha of land comprising their new and original locations. Despite fears from some sections of the community that their original land may be provided to private investors, Government state that this is not the case.

Implementation: The plan is carried out under the authority of a Steering Committee chaired by the Regional President, and coordinated by the regional bureau of agriculture. Various sectoral bureaus including education, health and water are responsible for implementation, and have been constituted into a Technical Committee.

The plan is budgeted at some ETB 60 million for the first year (approx USD 3.7m), largely to cover the cost of infrastructure including 19 primary schools, 51 water schemes, 22 health posts and 195 km of roads.

Community consultations began around August 2010 and movement of communities started around November. Government report that 13,000 have already moved to new locations, 15,000 homes and 68 km of roads have been constructed, 28 shallow wells have been dug and 9,265 ha of land have been allocated.

**Observations of the mission**

The team visited 12 of the planned 49 sites where villagisation is currently taking place. Locations visited included all 3 zones and major ethnic groups (Anuak,Nuer and Majengir). A basic questionnaire was used as the basis for community consultations, covering issues of process, access to basic services, food security and livelihoods, and conflict. Sampling and methodology was not scientific but designed to give a snapshot of community perceptions of programme implementation and their current and comparative living conditions.

Some highlights from community consultations include:

* + - * All but 1 of the communities reported that they felt safer in their new location.
      * 3 communities reported improved access to drinking water. 9 stated pumps were too few for the population present.
      * 6 (out of 12) communities reported being relocated more than a 2 hour walk (or estimated 8km) from their original home.
      * 0 communities reported awareness of formal systems to raise or address issues faced during the villagisation process.
      * 0 communities had functioning latrines. Only 1 had any under construction.
      * 7 communities reported that people had left the new site since arriving.
      * All communities had been promised 4 hectares of land per household prior to moving and assistance in clearing this land. 4 were aware that it had been allocated. None had received agricultural inputs or assistance in clearing new land.
      * 6 communities reported improved access to education.

**Analysis of observations**

Process

The team saw no evidence of forced relocation. Those communities that objected to moving have been allowed to stay, albeit with reported pressure and in some cases intentions to encourage that they move in the future. There were concerns from one community that, in refusing to move, they may not receive government services in their current location. Follow-up is required to ensure that these communities continue to receive services at the same levels as previously.

Communities appear to have agreed to move based on assurances from authorities of food aid, services and land. All feel that these assurances have not been fully met, and most stated that they may leave if they are not met shortly. In some locations many community members had already left due to a lack of food security or services.

In one centre visited the population included individuals who had moved from the current site due to internal displacement resultant from conflict, and their return was an opportunity for those involved to be resettled and reintegrated in their previous place of occupancy.

Community consultationsappear to have been“top-down” in nature. Indeed, setting targets amounting to 100% of the rural population to be relocated could be seen as pre-empting a meaningful consultation process. Woreda level officials appear under pressure to reach targets of households moved within set timeframes, but resources and implementation capacity appear too limited to deliver the benefits promised to communities. There is limited community choice or participation in the location of resettlement, and some locations, such as Bildak village in Nuer Zone, are on land that may be prone to seasonal flooding. The timing of villagizationahead of construction of shelters and demarcating/clearing of land and non-availability of services also indicates limited participation of communities.

In all locations visited, the community could not describe the mechanisms of redress, appeal or raising issues concerning the villagisation process, with some voicing concerns to development agents and local authorities or sending messages to regional authorities. Issues raised did not appear to be addressed systematically.

Service Delivery

Some communities reported minor improvements in the availability and utilisation of basic services. However, the level and quality of service provision remains very low, despite some new and developing infrastructure.

In particular, healthcare is widely lacking. Most communities reported that they rely on traditional medicine to treat minor illness, and take people to Gambella town for serious illnesses. Health posts and centres lack sufficient medicine (most report none at all) and health workers are few, if any, in most locations. Symptoms of respiratory infections (ARI), skin diseases and malnutrition (kwashiorkor) were observed amongst children in some communities. The very low level of health services in the new sites is of concern, especially considering the increasing populations.

Sanitation, particularly waste disposal, is almost completely unaddressed, with no functioning latrines present in any of the sites visited. This is comparable with the lack of latrines in original locations and general practice of rural communities in the region. However, an absence of sanitation facilities and programming in the more densely populated villagisation sites (some locations house more than 2,000 households) poses an increased risk of water-borne disease outbreaks, particularly during the forthcoming rains.

Education is generally more accessible in relocation sites, and more children appear likely to attend school when it resumes. It is possible that larger classes will lead to a more economic use of teachers. However, there is a shortage of equipment (desks, books etc.), and in some places school buildings or classroom space.

Many communities that were previously using river or rainwater for drinking now have access to safer water through hand pumps. However, in most cases the number of pumps was too small for the increased numbers of people.

Food security and livelihoods

The scale and speed of relocation is causing major disruptions to livelihoods and poses threats to food security, with potentially severe humanitarian consequences in the short to medium term. Productivity from original land will be substantially decreased due to the limited ability to farm areas more than a short distance from new locations. Meanwhile, land in new locations has largely not been allocated and little or no assistance has been provided to begin clearing land and cultivation. In most cases, this land requires mechanical clearance and communities require farming inputs. It appears very unlikely that newly allocated land will be productive for most communities in the coming agricultural season. Access to other critical food sources in communities’ original areas, such as fish and fruit, has also decreased. Close monitoring of the food security and nutrition situation will be required over the coming months in all the 49 sites.

Communities interviewed also cited other essential services promised to them before moving, including grinding mills, farm clearing tools, seeds, livestock for breeding and ploughing oxen, and cooking utensils. These were yet to be supplied in almost all cases.

Specific livelihoods and land use strategies of pastoralist groups and traditional forest groups appear to have not been adequately considered in the villagisation process.

Communities were promised food assistance for a period of up to 8 months if they moved. Most communities visited had received food, sometimes in exchange for work, such as clearing the site or constructing their shelters. The amount and regularity of distributions appears low and irregular and the commodities unsuitable in some cases (CSB-plus was distributed in at least one site). Moreover, it would appear that internationally funded food aid intended for free distribution for relief is being used to encourage community participation in the programme. There is a risk that relief needs may not be met if food is prioritised to support villagisation.

Shelter

All communities were building their own huts. The grass for roofing had been provided for at most half the population moved and in some instances much less. Many households were therefore staying in the open.

Security

Many communities reported insecurity and attacks in their original locations and felt that staying in larger groups in less remote areas was safer. Only one community reported the threat of conflict due to competition over resources with neighbouring communities in their new location. We heard that authorities are supporting local militia and recruiting police to protect communities and were able to speak with militia in one location.

**Implications for international donor and UN-supported programmes**

There are both practical and reputational risks to donor supported humanitarian and development programmes in Gambella with regard to their alignment with the Villagisation programme. But it is clear that villagizationin Gambella (and elsewhere in Ethiopia) is happening at scale and likely to continue. The challenge for the international community is therefore how best to engage in order to mitigate risks to communities, while continuing to provide development support where needed and humanitarian support when necessary.

Developmental assistance

Due to the shortcomings outlined above, it is unlikely that international donors or aid agencies would be able to provide any additional developmental financing explicitly aligned with supporting the Gambellavillagisation programme. At the very least, a thorough review of the programme against relevant international standards such as the World Bank’s guidelines on resettlement and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement would be required. Such assistance also risks exacerbating the unmanageable scale and speed of the programme.

Humanitarian assistance

Villagizationof communities ahead of the provision of basic services and shelter, and without adequate consideration of livelihoods and food security, risks creating or exacerbating humanitarian needs amongst affected populations. Unlike development assistance, established humanitarian principles indicate that assistance should not be withheld from populations in need on the basis of causality. Therefore, it may be necessary and appropriate in some contexts to provide humanitarian assistance invillagization locations.

However, it will be important that the nature of any humanitarian assistance provided mitigates against risks of encouraging further relocations or perceptions of communities or government of international developmental support for the villagisation programme. Therefore, assistance should be tightly focused on the primary humanitarian objectives of saving lives, alleviating suffering, and maintaining human dignity. Assistance should also be coupled with engagement at regional and federal level aimed at reducing the causality and exacerbation of humanitarian needs and respect for citizens’ rights.

Regarding food assistance in the immediate term, there is concern: that emergency food aid is being redirected to villagised communities to support them in the absence of a comprehensive short-term livelihoods/food security strategy.that WFP emergency food assistance is being distributed improperly to villagised communities without any basis in assessed food security vulnerability; and that food provided has been minimal and at times inappropriate (such as CSB-Plus). In the medium term, there is a risk that food support to villagisation could divert emergency resources away from acutely vulnerable populations in the region. Further, there are concerns that an inability of villagised farmers to plant in the Belg season could further erode food security and precipitate an actual need for emergency food response to address the population's acute food insecurity in coming months. This could become a vicious cycle as the detrimental impacts of villagisation on food security increases relief food needs, and the increased food is being used as an unsustainable alternative to a planned approach to food security.

**Comment**

The above observations illustrate some of the dilemmas the international community faces in deciding the way head. It should be acknowledged that villagisationinGambella is already underway at scale and is likely to continue, with implications for international organisations programmes and reputations.

Authorities’ efforts to provide access to land, increase productivity and access to basic services and markets can be seen as a positive shift in terms of predictable property rights and promotion of livelihoods. It was not apparent in a systemic way that the population, given fair consultations (on balance), would have opted out of the programme. Rather the failure to deliver on promises outlined in the implementation plan and consultations may undermine benefits and sustainability.

The return and assistance provided to IDPs in one location represents an improvement in acknowledgement, respect and response to IDP issues and principles, even with non-compliance with the minimum standards in this instance.

In short, there may be practical opportunities for engagement with programme issues on the periphery of Villagisation that could provide leverage in terms of policy in order to maximise benefits and mitigate harm to affected communities. However, such engagement would need to be balanced with maintaining organizational reputations and remaining within mandates and policy frameworks.

**Recommendations**

**For government…**

* The villagisation programme should be re-evaluated in terms of its scale, speed and sequencing in order to ensure that the benefits of improved service delivery and food security can be incurred without risks to the wellbeing of communities.
* Further relocations under the villagisation programme should be reconsidered in order to prevent further disruptions to livelihoods. Available resources should be focused on delivery of commitments to communities that have moved.
* Community participation and consultation should be intensified, with more focus on how communities or households can seek redress on issues related to the program. The numbers and timing of households moving should be established based on their will to participate and readiness of services, rather than pre-set targets.
* Increased transparency and regularity is required in terms of land use in order to assure communities rights are upheld and dispel suspicions of freeing up land for private investment.
* Relief food assistance should be provided free, on the basis of need, and not used to encourage relocations or provided in return for community works. Close collaboration with WFP on adherence to agreed programme guidelines, targeting and monitoring is required.
* The current standard villagisation model including 4 hectares of farmland per household does not take account of varying livelihoods strategies including pastoralism traditional forest livelihoods. These should be reconsidered to ensure appropriate attention.

**For international donors and UN agencies**

* Additional development assistance specifically aligned with the implementation of the Villagisation Programme in its current form would likely be inappropriate according to established international standards, guidelines and best practice.
* Donors and international agencies should continue and intensify engagement with federal and regional authorities on resettlement policy and principles.
* Further analysis of the implications for donor-funded developmental programmes delivered through government channels is required to guard against practical and reputational risks.
* UN agencies and partners should closely monitor the food security and humanitarian situation in villagisation sites in Gambella over the coming months through their usual mechanisms. Humanitarian assistance may be appropriate in some contexts, but should be tightly focused to avoid promotion of further relocations or perceptions of developmental support for the process.
* WFP should urgently engage with authorities to ensure that internationally funded relief food aid is used for intended purposes and with sufficient accountability.
* Donors should engage with federal authorities to promote transparency in the negotiations with private investors for long-term land lease contracts.
* The humanitarian community under the leadership of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator should advocate for the limitation of further relocations in order to avoid creating or exacerbating humanitarian needs.