

The Effect of Large Agricultural Investment Projects on the Local People in Ethiopia “The Case of Gambella Region”

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Abstract: *This study was conducted to assess and examine the effects and opportunities of large agricultural investment projects offered to the local people in Gambella regional state. The research designed used for this study was survey and cross-sectional research design. In response to the research problem, both qualitative and quantitative were used in this study. Simple random sampling technique has been applied. In light of this, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was obtained through questionnaire, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The survey questions were collected from a sample of 300 local people living surrounding the farms; interviews were also held with 90 government officials and farms manager, enabling the sample to be 390. Secondary data was obtained from published materials, books, journals, Regional and Woreda annual report as well as project reports and maps. Descriptive statistical tools such as percentage and frequency were used to analyze the data.*

Therefore, the general finding of this research disclosed that large agricultural investment projects have both advantages and disadvantages. The major advantages of large agricultural investment projects was job opportunity it offered to local people, while its effects on local people in the study area were:- deforestation, diversion of river and destruction of wild life habitat and land eviction that increase the hardship on local people. In the process of land allocation to the investors' local peoples were not consulted and even participated in deal. This caused a serious concerned among local people about the motive of business. In addition, the study revealed that large agricultural investment projects failed to conduct EIA which make it difficult for some stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the effects of the large agricultural investment projects on the environment.

Key words: *Large agricultural investment projects, its effect on local people and environment, participation of local people in land deal in Gambella Regional State, Ethiopia.*

1. Introduction

The Ethiopian economy is heavily depends on agriculture which contributes nearly half of the GDP, 85 percent of exports and 85 percent of total employment (Tamrat, 2010). This sector is dominated by small holder farmers who earn their livelihood primarily from subsistence rain-fed agriculture with only limited use of modern inputs. Agricultural sector in Ethiopia is suffering from various setbacks such as fragile soil and environmental degradation, small and declining size of holdings, fragmentation of farm plots, poor farm management, population pressure, poor infrastructures networks and weak markets linkage, and poor human development (Bishow, 2001). About 55.7% of farming households cultivate less than 0.5 ha and some 80% cultivate less than 1 ha. Only 4.1% of farmers have more than 2 ha and the average holding is 0.81 ha. Farm plots are fragmented with an average of 3.3 per holder (CSA, 2003 cited in Getnet, 2011). As a result, the country has always been suffering from persistent food shortages particularly evident in times of famine.

MoARD cited in Gobena (2010) to alleviate the poor performance of the agriculture, the EPDRF government has been implementing various package programs to enhance the productivities of small holder farmer through intensification extension program. Despite the agriculture sector growth, there is a strong argument that agricultural production and productivity are lower and agricultural land resources were not efficiently utilized (MoARD,2010). In line with this, the government has initiated private large scale

agricultural investment as supplementary measure to increase and sustain agricultural productivity in the country (MoARD, 2010). The Ethiopian government adopted Agricultural Development-led Industrialization (ADLI) in 1993 as the overall development strategy. The government believed that agriculture as a leading economic sector and that the developments of the other sectors depend upon achievements of the agricultural sector. These beliefs has enable the government to formulated the three development plans that make agriculture as a base for other sectors: the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP), which covered the years 2002/03-2004/05; the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) for 2005/06-2009/10; and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) for 2010/11-2014/15.

Based on these development plans, the FDRE government adopted policies and strategies to address agriculture and rural development. These are the Rural Development Policy and Strategy (RDPS) and the Food Security Strategy (FSS). The overall development strategy and RDPS focuses on smallholders. It envisages that productivity of small-scale farmer will be increased through the distribution of improved seeds, fertilizers, tools, and pesticides; provision of improved extension services; construction of small-scale irrigation schemes; minimization of post-harvest losses; and development of livestock resources through improved feed and veterinary services, and increased use of improved breed and livestock products. Further, RDPS intends to address the issues of the proper land use, expanding rural infrastructure (health, education, access to clean water, and rural roads), improving smallholders' access to the rural financial system, and developing and strengthening rural institutions (MoFED,2002).

The SDPRP policy and strategy was slightly modify when the PASDEP was adopted that give due attention to large-scale farming. The PASDEP places a strong emphasis on commercial agriculture and private-sectors were encouraged to involve in mechanized farming to accelerate growth and reduce poverty (MoFED, 2006). These commercial/mechanize farming would be undertaken especially in low land areas where there is ample land and adequate rain like Gambella and Benshanguil Gumuz Regional states. Recently the government formulated a new five-year development plan (2010/11–2014/15), called the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), which emphasized on agricultural investments. This plan made a clear shift towards private-sector development in agriculture. The government is

committed to making meaningful changes to the role of private investment in agriculture. The plan envisages that private investors in agriculture will focus on the lowlands, where land is abundant.

The government assesses and identifies suitable land and records it in land bank, establishing an effective land-administration system and implementation agency and providing the necessary support to attract local and foreign investors. The government plans to identify, prepare and transfer 3.3 million hac of land to commercial farming investors within the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) period, primarily for export crops (MoFED, 2010).

The transfer of large scale land to investors and the shift to large scale agriculture is being forward by the Ethiopia government and international bodies such as the World Bank as an essential measure for agricultural modernization and the improvement of productive efficiency which is believed that it could lead to increased in food production and economic growth (MOARD 2008, 2010; World Bank 2010). Therefore, the shift to large scale agriculture is mainly motivated by export and foreign currency earning which is good for economic growth. However, critics criticized these large scale agriculture investment and the incentives that the government provides have been done at the expense of small holder farmers that contributed the bulk of food to the country (ibid). According to the studies conducted by many researchers the total large scale agricultural land transfer is about 1,205,000 hectares. Out of the 1,205,000 hectares of land, 49,000 hectares were allocated to domestic investors while the remaining 1,156,000 hectares which constitutes about 96 percent of the large-scale farms were allocated to foreign investors (Ibid).

This study mainly emphasized on effects of large agriculture investment projects on the local in Gambella regional state, Ethiopia. In the region, there are 649 large agricultural investment projects with capital of 200 billion birr. But here what are the reason for large agricultural investment projects not enhance the life of local people; was not known. Therefore this research is designed to study the effect of large agricultural investment projects o the local people in Gambella Region, Ethiopia.

2. Objectives of the study

General objective; The objective of this study was to assess the effects of large agricultural investment projects on the local people live in Gambella regional state, Ethiopia.

Specific objectives; The specific objectives of this thesis includes:-

- a) To assess the opportunities that large agricultural investment projects offer to the local people.
- b) To identify the effects of large agricultural investment project post on the local people

3. Research question

Given the above objectives of the research, this study attempt to explain the following questions.

- a) What are the benefits that large agricultural investment projects offer to improve the living condition of local people?
- b) What are the effects of large agricultural investment projects on local people?

4. Significance of the study

Having clear picture and information on the status of large agricultural investment projects and its effects on the local people living in study areas, this study would provide basis for a detailed analysis of the contribution of large agricultural investment projects to the country in general and region in particular. The study would provide directions for further research, extension and development schemes. In addition, the result might identify areas of intervention to solve the impact that large agricultural investment projects post on local people in Gambella, Ethiopia.

5. Literature Review

Large agricultural investment projects is different from substance agriculture, as the main objective of large agricultural investment projects is achieving higher profits through economies of scale, specialization, introduction of capital intensive farming techniques, labour-saving technologies, and maximization of crop yields per hectare through synthetic and natural resources (fertilizers, hybrid seeds, irrigation, etc) (Kathiresan;2010).

The recent financial, food and fuel crises have forced many nations to rethink about their agricultural policies and started to acquire more lands in countries where lands are ample particularly in Sub-Sahara Africa (Cotula, et al, 2009). Despite the differences meaning given to the recent large farm project, the things that make them commons are their effects on communities, including employment opportunity, transfer of technology on the one hand and distortion of livelihood systems of local peoples, disorientation of nested local networks, and marginalization of rural poor particularly women (Kachika, 2010). According to the World Investment Report (2009) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) highlights the facts about foreign direct investment in agriculture. It

notes 'significant growth' foreign direct investments (FDI) in agriculture since 2000, 'particularly in developing countries'.

The total flows went from less than USD 1 billion per annum between 1989 and 1991, to more than USD 3 billion per annum by 2005-2007. Africa took the lion share of these investments. The share of agriculture in FDI now reaches between 6 and 9%, for countries like Tanzania, Mozambique and Ethiopia (UNCTAD, 2009). Foreign acquisition of agricultural land has become a hot and widely discussed issue, fueled by numerous media reports as well as increasing attention payee by the researchers and practitioners community in the recent years (Ruth and Markelova, 2009).

This trend is driven by wealthy food-importing nations that have the capital to invest in agriculture, but scare land and water resources to produce enough food on their own. These farmland deals, whether in the form of purchases or leases, have many economic, social, and political implications for both investors and host countries. Advocators of large agricultural investment argued that, this kind of investment may bring economic growth and create opportunities for raising local living standard. For developing countries with ample land, foreign investors may bring capital, technology, know-how and market access, and may enhance rural development (World Bank 2010).

But critics like (Grain 2008, Mackenzie 2008 and Baxter 2010) reject these views by claiming that large agricultural investment may result in local people losing access to the resources on which they depend for their food security and their entire livelihood. However, large agricultural investment can be useful if the processes of the socio-economic and environmental impact assessment are conducted according to the set standard of national and international rules. In addition, the effects of large agricultural investment projects may differ from place to place and country to country due to diverse socio-economic, political and environmental factors (Gobena, 2010).

6. Over view of Ethiopia agricultural policy

The Ethiopian economy is heavily depends on agriculture which contributes nearly half of the GDP, 85 percent of exports and 85 percent of total employment (Tamrat, 2010). This sector is dominated by small holder farmers who earn their livelihood primarily from subsistence rain-fed agriculture with only limited use of modern inputs. Agricultural sector in Ethiopia is suffering from various setbacks such as fragile soil and environmental degradation, small and declining size of holdings, fragmentation of farm plots, poor farm management, population pressure, poor infrastructures networks and weak markets linkage,

and poor human development (Bishow, 2001). About 55.7% of farming households cultivate less than 0.5 ha and some 80% cultivate less than 1 ha. Only 4.1% of farmers have more than 2 ha and the average holding is 0.81 ha. Farm plots are fragmented with an average of 3.3 Per holder (CSA, 2003 cited in Getnet, 2011). As a result, the country has always been suffering from persistent food shortages particularly evident in times of famine.

MoARD cited in Gobena (2010) to alleviate the poor performance of the agriculture, the EPDRF government has been implementing various package programs to enhance the productivities of small holder farmer through intensification extension program. This extension approach is based on providing high yielding variety seeds, pesticides and fertilizers, small-scale irrigation development, training and technical supports. The extension program includes rural infrastructures expansion, marketing, finance and capacity building. As the result, the agriculture sector which had been stagnant and not productive for long time is being changed. For example, from year 2005/6 to 2009/10 the agricultural sector registered 8.4% annual growth (MoFED, 2010). Despite the agriculture sector growth, there is a strong argument that agricultural production and productivity are lower and agricultural land resources were not efficiently utilized (MoARD, 2010). In line with this, the government has initiated private large scale agricultural investment as supplementary measure to increase and sustain agricultural productivity in the country (MoARD, 2010). The Ethiopian government adopted Agricultural Development-led Industrialization (ADLI) in 1993 as the overall development strategy. The government believed that agriculture as a leading economic sector and that the developments of the other sectors depend upon achievements of the agricultural sector. These beliefs has enable the government to formulated the three development plans that make agriculture as a base for other sectors: the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP), which covered the years 2002/03-2004/05; the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) for 2005/06-2009/10; and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) for 2010/11-2014/15. The Growth and Transformation Plan made a clear shift towards private-sector development in agriculture. The government is committed to making meaningful changes to the role of private investment in agriculture. The plan envisages that private investors in agriculture will focus on the lowlands, where land is abundant.

Based on this, the government have identify, prepare and transfer 3.3 million hac of land to

commercial farming investors within the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP1) period, primarily for export crops (MoFED, 2010). The transfer of large scale land to investors and the shift to large scale agriculture is being forward by the Ethiopia government and international bodies such as the World Bank as an essential measure for agricultural modernization and the improvement of productive efficiency which is believed that it could lead to increased in food production and economic growth (MOARD 2008, 2010; World Bank 2010).

Large agricultural project in Ethiopia began in the late 1960s and early 1970s when agricultural expertise's and some entrepreneurs established modern farming. This was further extended by Derg regime that forms many large farms that were not effective to achieve its goals (Elias, 2011). However, the recent rise interest in farm land created a good opportunity for Ethiopia government to lease some land to investors.

According to World Bank cited in Rahmato (2011) the total land transferred to investors in Ethiopia between 2004 &2008 was 1.2 million hectares. Furthermore, Rahmato says that around 28 large scale agricultural land transfers (670,000 hectares) have been made in different regions of the country other than in Gambella (Rahmato, 2011). According to the studies conducted by many researchers the total large scale agricultural land transfer is about 1,205,000 hectares.

Out of the 1,205,000 hectares of land, 49,000 hectares are allocated to domestic investors while the remaining 1,156,000 hectares which constitutes about 96 percent of the large-scale farms are allocated to foreign investors (Ibid). According to MoA (2011) the shift to large scale agriculture in addition to small holder farmers is believe that it will contributed to poverty reduction and foster technology transfer to small holder farmers, improve infrastructures and easier the accessibility of market for the products of rural people.

7. Large scale agriculture investment projects and its effects on the local people

In general terms, large scale agricultural investment projects can enhance economic development and contribute to poverty reduction by initiating growth in the local economy. But it also can post a negative impact on local economies by detracting access to a production factor that are of outstanding importance for the development (Matthias, et al; 2009).

8. Economic effects of large farms on the local people

According to (FAO, 2009) large agricultural investment projects have direct positive socio-economic effects such as:- increasing agricultural productivity by using better agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizer and capital or by applying technologies that raise yields and reduce post-harvest losses and by educating employees and farmers as well as investing in irrigation schemes that could lead to more efficient use of existing resources, augmenting of marginal land by melioration measures. Again large farm project could create market access for farmers in rural areas, generating income by leasehold that could in turn generate additional employment. In addition, large farm projects has potential to Improve infrastructure by building roads, or investing in transportation and communication and increasing agricultural exports due to increasing overall productivity and product quality.

Furthermore, some of the indirect benefits that large farms may offer are additional revenues, foreign currencies and additional taxes which may expand the scope of national governments to invest in projects that improve living conditions of local people (ibid). However, production activities in agriculture may harm the environment through their damaging effects on water, soil, air and biodiversity if they are not managed in a sustainable manner. Some of the negative effects of large farm project may affect the following areas: reduced food security in the target country when food crops are not available for local consumption, biased distribution of benefits that could fuel social conflicts, increase of local and regional unemployment when it applied labour extensive mechanization (ibid).

9. Environmental effect of large agricultural investment projects on the local people

The ecological sustainability in agricultural production is an important subject in the context of large-agricultural investment projects. Applying intensive agricultural production has an impact on biodiversity, carbon stocks, and soil as well as water resources. The lands that were given to investors for large agricultural investment projects were occupied arable land, land used for grazing, woodland, forest land, savanna grassland, and wetlands. This can be observed in Oromyia and Gambella, where land inside a formally designated national park, protected area and wildlife sanctuary was given to investors for large farms (Rahmato, 2011).

The enclosure of the land, clearing of forest will soon have a negative impact on land resources, wildlife, biodiversity, water sources and the natural environment as whole. The damage to people’s livelihoods is beginning to be evident in many

ways: it has led to loss of farm land, pasturage and grazing rights, sources of water, and the loss of access to firewood and useful plants (ibid). Christine and Pascal (2010) argued that in spite of the negative externalities associated with large farms, some studies conducted by some scholars like that of Colin, et al, (2008) show that certain advanced production techniques introduced by foreign investors may be environment-friendly and reducing erosion which may have spill-over effect for other farms and lead as a kick-off for a comprehensive natural resource management.

10. Research Methodology

The research was descriptive where both qualitative and quantitative data was used. Triangulation was used for it helps to increase the reliability of the results by comparing the data obtained from one source with the other sources.

11. Data collection methods

In this study, both primary and secondary data were used. The primary data was collected from households of the five Woredas, owners of the farms and experts of agriculture by using structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. The secondary data was collected through reviewing relevant literatures that includes annual reports, publications, institutions’ performance report documents, policy documents and other types of documents were utilized.

12. Methods of data analysis

Depending on the objectives of a given study and nature of the data available, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies used to analyze the data. In this study, descriptive statistical tools such as percentage and frequencies used to analyze the data. In addition, the data collected through interview and focus group discussions were also analyzed descriptively.

**Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion
Socio-economic characteristics of the members**

The socio-economic characteristics of the sample members selected for the studies are: sex, age, marital status, occupation, educational status, family size, and annual income. Hence, an attempt is made in this section to analyze the socio-economic characteristics of the members.

Table 1 Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	240	61%
	Female	150	39%
Total		390	100%
Age (years)	18 - 35 Yrs	234	60%
	36 - 53 Yrs	59	15%
	54 - 67Yrs	58	15%

	67 >Yrs	40	10%
Total		390	100%
Marital status	Married	315	81%
	Divorced	75	19%
Total		390	100%
Educational Level	Illiterate	116	30%
	Literate	274	70%
Total		390	100%

As show in the Table .1 out of the total respondents (390) covered under this study, the distribution of household heads is dominated by male. Thus, (61%) of households' respondents were male and (39%) were women.

In terms of the Age groups of the respondents (60%) were found in age group of (18-35) and

13. Opportunities offered by large agricultural investment projects to local people

Large agricultural investment projects have offer a greater opportunities for economic development and poverty reduction by initiating growth in the local economy through job and income creation, technology transfers, and infrastructural improvements. This is similar to what large agricultural investment projects offer in Gambella regional state by employing many people that could reach around 3000 to 4000 whose many of them despite their low level of education are local people.

Table 2. Access of local people to employment opportunity offered by the large agricultural investment projects

Sex		Very good	Good	Uncertain	Poor
Male	Fr	142	51	28	19
	Per	36%	13%	7%	5%
Female	Fr	90	35	15	10
	Per	23%	9%	4%	3%
Total					100%

The study revealed that, (36%) of male and (23%) of female respondents replied that they have very good access to job opportunity. Similarly (13%) of male and (9%) of female claimed that they have also good access to job opportunity. However, contrary to this (8%) of respondents replied that large agricultural investment projects do created less job opportunity to the local people. Based on this survey, the researchers can concluded that large agricultural investment

(10%) of the survey informants were found in age group of (60 & above). The majority of respondents who participated in the study were drowning from age group of (35-55). This implied that majority of respondents were found in productive ages and these age groups were positively or negatively affected by the large agricultural investment projects surrounding their villages.

It is also evident from Table 1; (81%) of the respondents were married and the remaining (19%) were divorced with their partners. The result of the survey is line with the findings of Soyebo et al (2005) that agriculture is very much practiced in rural areas by married people.

With regards to educational levels, a high proportion of the respondents (88%) were illiterate, while the rest (12%) were educated. This implied that majority of the respondents were illiterate.

projects despite the criticism come from different directions, they have a great potential to create more job opportunity for rural people surrounding the farms sites. These projects have further enhance the living condition of the local people by haired them in various area of works that does not requires more skill.

This can be observed in the Table 3 below here:

Table 3. Living Standard of local people after the implementation of projects (using access to employment opportunity as measurement)

Measure	Frequency	Percent
Significantly improved	108	27.7%
Improved	230	58.97%
Remain the same	24	6.15%
Worsened	28	7.17%
Total	390	100%

Table 3. show that majority of respondents' claimed that their living standards have improved since the operation of the projects. This is disclosed by (58.97%) of the survey informants that their living standards have been improve since the operation of those projects. While, (7.17%) of respondents replied that their living standard have worsened after the implementation of project. The reasons mentions by the respondents as the causes for the worsening of their living are the clearance of forest and soil contamination that reduce the fertility of soil.

Table 4. On technology transfer to local farmers

S/N	Measure	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	123	32%
	No	267	68%
Total		390	100%

Table 4. show that (68%) of the respondents replied that the transfer of technology is very poor; while (32%) of the survey informants argued that those projects have transferred technology to the local people cover by this study. This implies that the recent operation of the projects and the sophistication technologies they used has caused problems to the farmers to adopt it.

Table 5. On social services provision

Response classification	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagreed	258	66%
Disagreed	132	39%
Uncertain	59	15%
Agreed	40	10%
Strongly agreed	24	6%
Total		100%

Table 5. disclosed that (66%) of the survey informants replies that large agricultural investment projects have not provided social services to the local people. However, (6%) of the survey informants said that large agricultural investment projects have provided social services to the local people. This implies that large agricultural investment projects have done nothing regarding social services provision to the local people.

14. Effects of large agricultural investment projects on local people

The acquisition of land by the projects in Gambella raised mixed reactions and aroused broader questions as regards to large scale land acquisition in Ethiopia. The local people in Gambella argued that the alienation of hundred of thousand hectares of forest land to agricultural investment projects is to bring to an end the livelihoods sources on which they depend.

Table 6. On effect of large agricultural investment Projects on the environment

Response	Deforestation	River diversion	Soil contamination	Wild life habitat destruction	
Yes	Fr	247	30	71	42
	Pe	63.33%	7.69%	18.20%	10.76%
No	Fr	0	0	0	0
	Pe	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Total	r

Table 6. show that (63.33%) of the respondents says that large agricultural investment projects have greater effect on environment particularly on forest and (7.69%) of the survey informants argued that large agricultural investment projects is less diverting water to its field. The finding of this study goes in line with views of Oakland Institute (2011) and World Bank (2011) on large farm projects which confirmed that agricultural investment could caused deforestation, wild life habitat destruction, shortage of water and soil pollution by using different chemical to increase their productivity. Furthermore, this views was strengthen by the interviews and FGD made with different stakeholders such as :- Woreda administrator, Investment agency staffs and the project managers who confirmed that large agricultural investment projects is really causing environmental problems which originated from lack of Environmental Impact Assessment(EIA) carried out by projects, limited capacity of the concerned stake holders such as Regional land administration and environmental protection authority, Investment agency and Agricultural Bureau to monitor and evaluated the activities of projects operating in the region whether they are using environmental friendly technologies or not.

Table 7. On Participation of local people in land allocation and managing the risks of the project

Response classification	Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	76	19.50%
Low	258	66%
Uncertain	50	12.8%
High	6	1.5%
Very High	0	0%
Total		100%

Table 7 above show (66%) of the respondent replied that the participation of local people in land allocation was very low, while the remaining (1.5%) claimed that their participation was high.

This implied that local people had not participated in land allocation due to the centralized nature of large agricultural investment projects, the nature of land law of the country and ignoring the contribution of local people for the successful of such projects

15. Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey showed that large agricultural investment project is considered to be one of the

sectors absorbed more labor force and improved the living condition of local people in the region. In addition, large agricultural investment project had failed to transfer technology, provided social services and had caused a serious environmental problem which threatened the livelihoods of local people. The research also found that this agricultural investment had failed to involve local people in land deal.

Conclusion, the Ethiopia Federal Government and Gambella Regional Government should monitor the design and implementation of large agricultural investment projects and ensure that local people and other concerned stakeholders have participation in process particularly in land deal. Furthermore, ESIAE must be conducted by the large agricultural investment projects before operation and the projects have to offer additional opportunities behind the job.

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