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Livelihood strategies in the context of population pressure: A case study in the Hararghe Highlands, Eastern Ethiopia

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis presented the results of an investigation into livelihood strategies of rural households in the Hararghe Highlands in the context of population pressure. The human welfare and resource outcomes of rural livelihood strategies were assessed, accounting for the 'mediating' factors. The study enriches the current policy debate on how to create an enabling environment to strengthen sustainable rural livelihoods and mitigate adverse welfare and resource consequences of unsustainable rural livelihood strategies.

The sustainable livelihood framework for analysing rural livelihoods in the context of population pressure was modified in the thesis to guide the analyses. Primary data was obtained from 197 randomly selected households from three representative sites in the Hararghe Highlands. Whilst verbal description, interpretation and appreciation of facts, and case studies were used for the qualitative data analysis, multivariate techniques and logistic regression were employed to analyse the quantitative data.

The study showed that subdivision and fragmentation of agricultural land and re-emergence of landlessness have accompanied the unprecedented population growth in the Hararghe Highlands. The pace of demographic change of the area is so fast that it has caused failure of indigenous countervailing and adaptations. Sufficient effective demand for sustainable intensification of smallholder farms has, however, not been created due to uncertain right to the land and inadequate market incentives. Furthermore, the technology generation and dissemination systems have failed to build the capacity of smallholder farmers to respond to the demographic pressure in a sustainable way. This has generally resulted in negative welfare and resource outcomes.

Nonetheless, rural households pursue heterogeneous livelihood strategies due to differential access to livelihood assets, and heterogeneous constraints and incentives. The nature and the extent of welfare and resource outcomes of rural livelihood strategies are different across sites and among different households. A livelihood strategy that integrates cash crop production with high external input-based staple crops production and trade was found to be more successful. Overall, the findings challenge the current untargeted and uniform intervention that implicitly assumes that only farming and the intensification of staple crop production for food self-sufficiency is important to all households. Furthermore, the findings challenge the over simplified generalisations regarding the human welfare and resource effects of rural population growth in Ethiopia as if the interactions between them were taking place in a political, an institutional and an agro-climatic vacuum and as if rural households in a district, a sub-district or a village were a 'homogeneous' group.

What is thus needed is decentralisation of rural development planning and building of the capacity of local institutions so that they may be able to understand rural livelihoods and design innovative and locally specific integrated interventions to support sustainable rural livelihoods. The specific recommendations include ensuring land tenure security, improving farmers' access to the market and appropriate technologies, creating conducive environment for commercialisation and livelihood diversification, institutionalised safety net, resettlement and family planning.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADLI	Agricultural Development Led Industrialisation
AMC	Agricultural Marketing Corporation
CSA	Central Statistical Authority
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EARO	Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organisation
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FAO	United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation
FFW	Food for Work
GDP	National Gross Domestic Product
GOs	Government Organisations
ha	Hectare
HHs	Hararghe Highlands
kca	kilo calories
kg	kilo grams
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
Mt	Metric tone
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ITK	Indigenous Technical Knowledge
NARS	National Agricultural Research Systems
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NRM	Natural Resource Management
OCFELE	Opportunities Cost of Female Labour Effect
OLS	Ordinary Least Square
PADETS	Participatory Demonstration and Training Extension System
PAs	Peasant Associations
SLF	Sustainable Livelihood Framework
RPNRE	Reduced Pressure on Natural Resource Effect
SAPS	Structural Adjustment Programmes

SCF/UK	Save the Children Fund/United Kingdom
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TLU	Tropical Livestock Units
US	United States of America

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