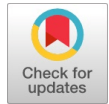


Rural Employment Problems in Ethiopia During the 1990s: A Critical Assessment

Kebede Kassa Tsegaye



Abstract: This paper is derived from the author's study on rural employment problems in Ethiopia. The research was conducted in 1998 in two rural districts of Ethiopia: Alemaya Woreda, eastern Hararghe and Shirka Woreda, Aresi zones. The study employed qualitative methods of data collection and qualitative techniques of analysis. This paper argues that unemployment and underemployment in Ethiopia, as elsewhere in Africa and least developed countries, are the major factors for the country's underdevelopment. Yet unemployment or underemployment rarely, if any, receives attention from policy/decision makers. The paper examines the root causes of unemployment and the resulting poverty and underdevelopment of the country. A combination of historical, cultural, and political forces kept Ethiopia, speaking economically, a backward country, even though it chose to embrace Western values and ideals since the turn of the 20th century. The introduction of modern money, the establishment of banks, schools, hospitals, communication and service facilities brought the traditional society into direct and indirect contact, albeit with a considerable degree of selectivity and re-interpretation, to Europe and America at the height of their industrial development. One hundred years or so later, however, the Ethiopian society is still overwhelmingly rural, and to use the more value-loaded term, traditional. Therefore, it is underlined that the project of modernity could but marginalize the Ethiopian populace, and directly or indirectly contributed to the problem of rural employment in the country. The paper then outlines the underlying macro and micro-level causes and consequences of rural employment constraints since employment is massively rural in Ethiopia. The problem of unemployment impinges upon the welfare of the nation. The final section summarizes the paper and forwards some key recommendations that are believed to alleviate rural poverty and generate rural employment. Although the paper focuses on the realities of the 1990s, the lessons reflected, and the recommendations suggested are believed to be relevant to the present and the future.

Keywords: Unemployment, Poverty, Policy, Development, Rural Ethiopia

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The centrality of employment issues

One of the major challenges facing many developed and developing nations alike is the problem of providing gainful employment to their capable citizens. Despite a sheer lack of consensus on what it means, employment has remained a central concern in the social organization of modern societies.

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In the modern sense, the term employment refers to paid work (Auster, 1996 [4]) where individuals receive remuneration for their labour power, time, and energy in some sort of money or its equivalents. Nevertheless, this notion has come under increasing attacks on the grounds that (a) the equation of employment with financial or otherwise rewards, alone narrows its analytical relevance to explain differing types of human activities, (b) the concept presupposes employers and employees whose interactions and transactions are mediated by money, while there are millions of individuals engaged in productive activities working both as employers and employees of their own labour power and resources (ICFP, 1999 [13]; UNDP, 1996 [35]); and (c) the use of the term in its modern sense reduces the more meaningful concept, work, to its material aspect, money or other media which intervene in the process of production and reproduction. However, "Sociologists ignore this ... essentially economic definition of employment ... in favor of the much more general notion of work, which has a different, wider meaning" (Marshall, 1994:150) [23]. This would allow research to analyze and interpret diverse types of human activities devoted to the production of goods and services to improve the conditions of life whether they are intended for use or surplus values (Paul, 1999) [31]. Taken out of its confines in the modern context, employment as a meaningful and socially required work satisfies the material, cultural, and psychological needs of citizens (Sen, 1975 [32]) not merely what has been notoriously over-emphasized "basic needs" (ILO, 1978 [14]) which is not only imprecise but whose meaning varies across socio-culturally and spatiotemporally different scenarios (see, for example, Streeten, 1986 [33]; and de Bernis, 1986 [5] for a detailed argument).

Work transcends the limits associated with paid employment. After all, as Paul (1991:38-39 [30]) argues, "Using money to motivate people to work is no longer sufficient from a viewpoint of socially required work as a process that secures conditions of human life for future generations. Money-motivated efforts, as secondary motivations, are a specific form of alienated and wasted work." Thus, while employment in the modern sense which is mediated by money, represents a partial view of work, rural or agricultural employment embodies the various aspects and meanings of work suggested by the preceding lines in that: (a) it is done for income in cash or kind though this is only one of its features, (b) it is a way of life, in a sense, a culture, (c) those in employment often control the means and products of their work, hence are not much alienated in the Marxist sense of the term, and (d) rural work gives a sense of social, psychological as well as emotional satisfaction, not merely the supply of the so-

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called "basic needs" which are not only hard to define but also tend to vary in space and time as well as across socio-cultural spectra [36]. Therefore, the concept of employment is used in the broader sense of the concept of work, and at times they are interchangeably used to refer to the same phenomenon [37].

The application of this broader aspect of work, rather than paid or money-mediated employment, proves more pertinent in predominantly subsistence societies like Ethiopia where wage employment constitutes only a small proportion (12-15 percent¹) of the labour force [38]. In this paper employment, therefore, is defined to refer to the engagement of capable family members in farming, cattle raising, and/or a multiplicity of other production and service rendering activities - the latter commonly conceived by others as non-farm and off-farm activities - essential for the satisfaction of the diverse needs of humans mentioned above as well as the development and continuity of societal values.

II. THEORY AND PRAXIS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

Even though more than 70 percent of the world and 85 percent of Ethiopia's population are employed in the rural, usually smallholder, agricultural sector, not much is known about the magnitude of the employment problem in the sector. Part of the difficulty lies in the lack of clear-cut definitions about rural employment which is often treated as a problem of underemployment rather than open unemployment whereas the other part lies in the increasing number of populations in the developing countries much faster than the opportunities for gainful employment.

Following the sociological paradigms of Talcott Parsons, modernization theorists of the 1950s and 1960s thought to transform employment patterns in the developing countries from one dominated by subsistence agriculture under abundant labour supply to industrial or service sectors, wherein the surplus labour reserve of these countries could be absorbed in the modern sector (Lewis, 1958 cited in Arnon, 1987) [3]. Unfortunately, neither the modern sector grew fast enough to accommodate the growing rural labour force, nor was the modern sector sustainable for lack of human capital, financial, and material (technological) resources [21]. The basic needs approach of ILO in the 1970s and 1980s, accompanied by less concerted public works programs in different developing countries was hoped to provide employment opportunities to rural, income-deficient households. While a few countries like India and China achieved some success in making public works programs useful for rural employment creation (Mukhoti, 1987 [24]; Kinsey, 1985) [19], others were less successful in this regard. As a result, a number of public works programs based on the philosophy of the basic needs approach could scarcely provide a desirable level of opportunities for gainful employment in many countries including Ethiopia, partly because of paternalistic assumptions, inadequate planning, unsustainable assets created in the process and emerging inequalities in access to employment opportunities

on account of differences in gender, age, educational or social background; and partly because most of the public works projects were targeted to relief rather than sustainable development programs, hence, temporary in nature. Moreover, the concept of "basic needs" remains controversial (Streeten, 1986 [33]; de Bernis, 1986 [5]; Emmerij [7], in Amin, 1984) [2].

Parallel to the modernization process in the industrial sector, the agricultural sector also experienced a transformation embedded in the Green Revolution (GR) which began about 1950 (Global 2000 revisited, 1999) [11]. This was supposed to resolve rural employment problems in the Third World. The idea behind GR was "the notion of a trickle-down effect" of growth in both the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. In fact, GR was successful in terms of productivity and food availability but judged a failure in its social dimensions. Most importantly the GR was capital-intensive, favoring the landed classes; hence a mechanism for inequality; heavily reliant on modern and costly inputs; and unemployment promoter (Hazell and Anderson, 1986:213) [12]. Many countries, including Ethiopia, imprisoned in the dilemma between increasing local production and environmental protection, are still trying to pursue this revolution through the application of conventional farm inputs, most of them being abandoned in the West in favor of the "healthy" and environment-friendly practice of organic farming. However, even under strong government commitment to intensify crop production with the help of modern inputs and externally induced agricultural practices, Ethiopia is not yet able to satisfy the food requirements of a fast-growing population let alone generate sufficient wealth from agriculture whose trickle-down effect could provide desirable employment opportunities for the unemployed rural labour force. Nevertheless, there appears to be still no other option than intensifying production and diversifying opportunities in the countryside. In this sense, the approach needs to be employment-oriented instead of one focusing on growth with inequality.

III. FACTORS INFLUENCING RURAL EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS IN ETHIOPIA

Unlike employment in the "modern" or non-agricultural sectors, rural employment is conditioned by a variety of interrelated factors some of which may or may not have any significant or, at least, no immediate impact on the former. This paper identifies four major dimensions of the employment problem in Ethiopia without a thorough analysis and understanding of which meaningful work can hardly be done to alleviate the problem. These include (a) individual or household determinants, (b) environmental or physical settings, influencing and influenced by individual as well as social actors, (c) the macro-level institutional framework; and (g) enabling or service-rendering capabilities of the state.

¹ The percentage of the labour force employed in the modern or semi-modern sector is estimated to be about 12 percent whereas the service sector employs 3 percent of the labour force.

A. Individual or Household Characteristics

In the study of rural employment, the individual and the household merge together. The latter, like the human elements in it, is often personified since it serves as an important unit of analysis in the study of the welfare of its occupants. The reason is that even though it is the individuals who are either employed or unemployed, the condition of their employment depends in part on the resources available to the household. The term economy itself originally derives from the Greek words *Oikos nomos*, i.e., the law of householding or the management and careful use of limited household resources. As rightly stated by FamTecBk, "In a traditional African family ... of around 6-10 people, sometimes more, everyone has a role to play for the survival, security, and well-being of the family. The individual roles are interlinked to sustain the family as a social unit. Age is often the decisive factor in determining one's role, rights, and duties within the family. The family depends largely on the productive efforts of its members to sustain itself. The main role of the family is in ensuring the survival, protection, and development of children and to support each other socially, morally, and economically" (FamTecBk, 1999) [7]. In other words, the family is not only an institution of socialization and personality formation (Parsons, 1951 [26]; Parsons and Smelser, 1956) [27] it is also an employing agency, and a safety-net, especially when the state fails to provide opportunities for either gainful employment or a mechanism for social security.

As regards the individual nexus household, this paper highlights the following characteristic features for having determining as well as contributory roles in the process of involving in productive and meaningful work. These include age, gender, health and physical conditions, family size, family ties, and social networks/ capital as well as material endowments such as livestock capital and ownership of farmland including access to farm inputs. An integral part, though somewhat external to the individual/household attributes, is its location of settlement which determines its proximity to or distance from social and economic centres. The main interest in the role of age in rural employment refers to its impact on access to the means of work and income generation. As a matter of fact, land and cattle serve as important means of income in rural areas, and by the same token, resources for employment. The study found that the distribution of these resources across different age groups reveals a growing discrepancy in access to them. With considerable exceptions, the younger generation suffers from limited access to land, lack of livestock or financial capital, and by extension lack of gainful employment, whereas those in the older age groups tend to be "relatively better", particularly in terms of land ownership. The existing pattern of inequality in terms of access to resources for employment conforms with that of the worldwide phenomenon of an increasing proportion of youth unemployment or underemployment in both developed and developing countries (ILO, 1998) [15].

Similarly, gender happens to be the next most important sociological variable influencing access to rural employment opportunities. In a patriarchal society, like Ethiopia, even under the prevailing level of poverty, women tend to be more impoverished and severely constrained from access to

resources. Even though they work for longer hours and under difficult circumstances, they usually remain disadvantaged, be it when they act as independent household heads or as members of a larger family network where they play culturally ascribed roles as daughters, spouses, mothers, home-managers, etc. It is interesting to note that though there are no legally sanctioned prohibitions, the study intimated that local norms and cultural practices favour the male members of the family in the transfer of land and other resources. This makes women vulnerable to problems of employment and income generation [8].

A further element of the household affecting rural employment is family size. By the time of the fieldwork for this paper, in 1998, the average family size for the case households was 6.8 for Alemaya and 6.2 for Shirka woredas, respectively: reflecting a higher population density in the areas. The available supply of labour for farm and non-farm activities varies from household to household but is found to be relatively high in relation to the amount of land per adult labourers. Each household possesses an average of 4.5 adult equivalent labour for Alemaya and 4 adult equivalent labour for Shirka villages, respectively. In this regard, despite the lack of consensus among scholars as regards the correlation between size and household well-being, the size of a family, which is a concrete manifestation of the size of the population in a given country, imposes a significant impact on household resources to be converted into products of labour, knowledge, and capital. Households with larger family size report considerable difficulties in access to resources and manage to survive only by sub-optimal resource and work-sharing arrangements.

Apart from what has been discussed so far, rural employment is found to be correlated with (a) the development of employability skills either through formal education and training or through a lifelong process of *enculturation and socialization*, (b) physical strength or ability to run farm and non-farm activities, and (c) location of settlement which influences a household's access to resources, markets, and institutions.

B. Institutional Framework

While micro-level realities embodied in actions and behaviors of individuals or groups in interactions influence employment in general and rural employment in particular, macro-level, in this case, formal institutions, play significant roles in both enhancing and constraining peoples' participation in meaningful work. Institutions, as noted elsewhere, are complex entities and exert differential influences on life in different settings. For this paper, the following institutional components deserve elaboration in relation to their effect on rural employment and development or underdevelopment.

C. Land Tenure Policies and Practices

As noted earlier, land is an important means of employment in predominantly agrarian societies, like Ethiopia. Several studies suggest that more than 65 percent of Ethiopia's landmass is suitable

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for production while only 13 to 15 percent of this is brought under cultivation (Markos, 1990) [22]. Despite this potential, the country's rural population suffers from scarcity of land, a great majority of whom subsist on less than 0.5 hectares which Dessalegn (1994) rightly calls "starvation plots [6]." This paradox of scarcity amidst plenty should be explained in the socio-political aspects of life manifested by the numerous and complex land tenure systems in different parts of the country (Pankhurst, 1965, [28] 1966) [29]. One of the causes of the 1974 revolution was the question of entitlement to land with the motto "Land to the tiller" followed by a radical land reform, instituted in 1975 whereby many poor families got some plots of land of their own. However, despite positive starts, the contribution of the reform to rural employment and food self-sufficiency was insignificant owing to political and ideological distortions characterized by (a) state intervention and monopoly in ownership of land; (b) ambitious agricultural development projects like big state farms; (c) obsession with co-operative agriculture; (d) resettlement and villagization programs seeking to forge "geographic communities"; (e) discouraging the market for rural commodities and labour through imposition of quota delivery of grains to government marketing agencies by farmers as well as restriction of labour movements from one locality to another (Kebede, 1998) [17].

Though many of these constraints were removed since 1989/1990, the land tenure problem still lingers: (a) land is still state property with dubious use-right to farmers; (b) land-related taxation has increased; (c) so has the cost of inputs even if the supply side has improved; (d) farmers still contribute to support the state; and (e) access to land is still a scarce privilege for millions of youngsters. Consequently, difficulties in access to land, tenure insecurities, and the operation of "the black market" for land, etc., have aggravated rural employment problems, especially among the youth and women groups for whom opportunities for work outside the family farm hardly exist (Dessalegn, 1994) [6]. Most of these policy distortions or misplaced emphasis on non-participatory undertakings could effectively undermine the development of the smallholder households who are being constantly pushed from the state of self-sufficiency or autarky to relative deprivation, then to absolute poverty moving, for instance, from 22.3 percent in 1989 to 44.2 and 48.0 in 1994 and 1995, respectively. Other estimates also indicate that the proportion of the population, which subsists on less than one dollar a day, a commonly accepted absolute poverty line, is estimated to be more than 60 percent of the total (Mulat, 1997:31) [25].

D. Unequal trade relations

Ethiopian peasants sell their produces at cheaper farm-gate prices, especially during harvest seasons when "... about 79% of their annual grain sales occur" (Gebremeskel, Jane, and Shaffer, 1998: iv) mainly to discharge financial obligations [9]. On the contrary, they buy urban goods at higher prices either due to scarcity or growing demands. Domestic rural-urban trade imbalances can in part be explained by limited infrastructure and inadequate market opportunities, entailing great differences between prices in remote localities and the center. Moreover, farmers and

merchants are constrained by lack of access to "high-quality market information upon which they base their marketing decisions. The information that farmers get does not assist them in deciding what crops to plant and how much. There is no market extension service in the present system that guides farmers in their production, storage, and marketing decisions. Information on the export market is also lacking" (Gebremeskel, Jane, and Shaffer, 1998: iv).

In addition, Ethiopia also suffers from unequal terms of trade with the rest of the world. The country's role in international trade has been one of exporting a handful of items of agricultural products such as coffee, hides and skins, oilseeds, and livestock while importing a large quantity and variety of goods and services ranging from raw materials to high-tech commodities as well as expertise. Consequently, Ethiopia's external trade is characterized by (a) very limited inter-state trade with African countries, except a few of them, such as Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan, (b) limited exports to a small number of Euro-American countries but extensive imports from almost all of them including from those where no recognizable export has been sent (e.g., Albania); (c) negative balance of trade with a number of sampled partner-countries of Africa and Europe, exceptions being Djibouti and Sudan where Ethiopia's exports exceed significantly that of its imports, for example for the period 1986, 1990 and 1993/4.

E. Regional and Spatial Patterns of Investment

Development and employment-oriented investments have been a rare luxury in Ethiopia. Moreover, the pattern of existing investment shows a strong spatial and regional bias favoring urban or well-integrated semi-urban areas while scarcely penetrating the countryside. For many decades and more particularly so since the early 1990s, the major centers of investment happened to be Addis Ababa, the capital, and other major urban centers such as Nazareth, Awassa, Dire Dawa, Bahir Dar, Kombolcha, and Mekele. For example, out of the 123 private export/ service enterprises in the country in the 1990s, 116 or 94.3 percent were located in Addis Ababa. In this connection, the available evidence suggests that (a) within the country as a whole, Addis Ababa remains the most preferred centre of investment and development; (b) among the regional states, Tigray has managed to attract a large number of projects with the highest volume of capital; (c) the volume of actual or potential employment opportunities appears to be low in all regions compared to the volume of investment capital; (d) most of the private investment projects being small-scale family businesses, their ability to provide access to employment for the rural labour force, thereby to alleviate rural poverty, proves to be still limited; (e) rural industrialization or ruralization of industries will take time to come in Ethiopia because of the obstacles in others sectors of the economy and ways of life; and (f) the skill or technical backlog, i.e., the *employability gap*, which characterises the rural labour force has not yet allowed this section of the population to benefit from emerging employment opportunities in the short-run, and the long-run is equally quite unpredictable.



F. Foreign Debt

With over 10 billion dollars (IMF, 1998 [16]) as of 1999, but excluding military-related and rouble credits (Addis Tribune, October 24, 1997) [1], Ethiopia is one of the third heavily indebted countries in Africa following Sudan and Ivory Coast with 16.3 and 15.6 billion US\$, respectively, (die Kleine Zeitung, 23 Juni. 1999) [20]... Ethiopia's "Total external debt as a percentage of Gross National Product (GNP) amounts to 159 (Unicef, 1999) [34], and the ratio of total debt services to exports is estimated at 18 percent in 1995 (Addis Tribune, Oct.24, 1997). The flow of scarce money into the Koffers of multi-lateral and bilateral lending institutions has meant no significant returns to exports and no significant inward flow of capital for domestic investment. Even if aid money drips in limited quantities, it is used primarily to tackle temporary problems such as disaster relief rather than contributing to development and opening employment opportunities be it in rural or urban areas. Of necessity, the country continues to borrow money from all sources and under all conditions.

G. The costs of Military Expansion

Conflicts and wars have been the major features of rural social life in Ethiopia throughout its history with greater intensity in the last three or so decades. This resulted in a large military buildup in the country during the same period. For example, between 1974 and 1991, the country had to raise one of the largest standing armies, with nearly half a million armed forces, on the continent (George, 1997) [10]. The cost of maintaining this large sector was immense, swallowing at times as high as 50 percent of the GDP. In general, excessive military spending meant that (a) precious resources, mainly hard currencies, had to be siphoned to buy sophisticated weapons and to train the expanding body of armed personnel; (b) the most productive and able-bodied labour force had to quit productive activities and fight protracted wars from either the government or the "other sides". The latter is even more significant in terms of numbers since not only those directly involved in the fight against the government but also their relatives, friends and/or sympathizers would be forced to abandon their productive employment, go either into exile (refugee camps which I would rather call *poverty camps*) or gradually and forcedly join the "enemy" sides having seen that their lives were endangered, their properties have been looted or destroyed, they have lost persons dearer to them, etc; (c) in areas where fighting takes place such socioeconomic facilities as bridges, power stations, communication infrastructures, public and private business institutions, arable lands, forests, waters and other important natural resources would be demolished, impairing present and future development activities, thereby sowing the seeds of poverty; and (d) in most areas, rural markets could be rendered inaccessible not only due to communication breakdown but also due to fears of being robbed by local bandits, government soldiers and anti-government forces where law and order hardly prevailed.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINANTS

Perhaps the environmental component of rural employment is what distinguishes it most from employment

in the modern sector (industry, commerce, and services) since rural activities are significantly influenced by changes in the social and ecological environment in which employment takes place. The greater challenge for rural employment, and one that has led millions to chronic poverty in Ethiopia is environmental degradation. Forests have gone to the smoke at a rate of 200,000 hectares each year. From about 40 percent of total forest cover three to four decades ago, the country is now left with only 2 or 3 percent of forest cover (Kinfe, 1994) [18]. Resource destruction costs both directly and indirectly. Directly, it affects agricultural productivity and reduces yield per hectare. Indirectly, regeneration of lost natural resources such as reforestation, soil and water conservation, etc, is believed to cost dearly in the economy "... the ecological and economic costs of land degradation and soil losses are tremendous. Degradation is estimated to cost Ethiopia over 15 billion Birr in the next 25 years, or about 600 million Birr per annum. This is equivalent to 14 percent of the contribution of agriculture to GDP in 1982/83. In terms of cereal production, the losses would amount to about 120,000 tons annually in the early 1980s (Kinfe, 1994:202-203).

In short, it is worthy to note that several micro and macro-level social, cultural, and political factors contribute to the proliferation of poverty, and worsening rural employment problems in Ethiopia. A clear understanding of the causes and consequences of these sources is important to look for possible remedies. Some of the variables discussed so far tend to be difficult to quantify. However, the proxy analysis as discussed elsewhere helps to comprehend both the internal and external sources of the problem of rural employment.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated above, the paper recognizes that rural employment problems affect individuals and households differently. Individuals or households with relatively better access to land, forests, and water sources tend to be relatively better off while those with limited access to the same suffer from mild to chronic poverty. In general, individuals or households with broader natural or physical capital, social capital, health and human resources as well as financial capital tend to be better off with a tendency to invest in rural farm and non-farm employment than their counterparts devoid of such resources. Both the micro and macro-level manifestations of rural employment problems can be summarized as follows:

First, the age of members of a household is found to have a significant impact on access to resources, different types of capital, and other employment opportunities. Especially, in terms of land acquisition as well as ownership of other assets, adult people between the ages of 24 and 50 appear to be relatively better off compared to the very young or very old age groups. Though not very pronounced, there exists a sort of generational gap in the study areas.

Second, the sex of the household head is also found to be important in that male household heads enjoy a relative advantage over female households. Women in



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marriage usually get land with the whole of the family. As independent household heads some of them may own land or other resources, but because of labour shortage, lack of farm power and know-how, etc., their benefits remain marginal since they either lease out their land to male sharecroppers or run them poorly, and unprofitably. Consequently, they remain impoverished and underemployed for most of their time. In addition, there are no special provisions to guarantee women equal access to resources, employment, and supportive incomes.

Third, possession of capital in the form of oxen, other livestock, and farm implements as well as technical skills such as smithing, knitting, weaving, carpentry, tailoring, and basketry play an important role in family employment and income generation. Farm households with a strong pair of oxen, an adequate supply of seeds and farm inputs as well as members with skills in addition to crop production or animal husbandry reported to have better access to land owned by those who do not have these, and as a result, could employ their household labour "efficiently" with rewarding incomes.

Fourth, farmers in areas where it is possible to grow commercial crops, such as Khat and pepper, have a relative advantage of being employed fully and can enjoy moderate to better incomes with efficient utilization of household labour and capital as well as skill requirements to operate their farm activities.

Fifth, proximity to or distance from infrastructural and service establishments such as market centers, development or research-oriented institutions, and/or undertakings play influencing roles in getting services, information, and technical know-how. For example, Alemayan farmers who could exploit the research and extension packages of Alemaya University of Agriculture, and have other institutional backup at their disposal, appear to be in relatively good economic position in spite of high population densities (304 persons per km²), compared to their counterparts in the second site of the study (Shirka with 104 persons per km²).

Sixth, as pointed out above landless peasants, the majority of whom are young adults and women household heads, suffer not only from the facts of landlessness, but from institutional discrimination. Consequently, in remote areas like Shirka where extra labour can find no exit off the farm, this leads to a considerable level of underemployment and unemployment.

Seventh, regarding macro-level social situations, unfavorable land tenure policies, exploitative rural-urban, center-periphery relations, foreign debt, and conflict-prone conditions not only undermine development efforts at the micro level but also drain rural resources into urban areas to support failing state projects.

Finally, having discussed the micro and macro level dynamics of rural employment, conceived to involve both farm and non-farm activities and which are not limited to monetary returns of work, but to the broader dimensions of meaningful work, as a means of satisfying the multiple needs: physical, social, cultural and psychological, the paper, by way of conclusion, would like to make the following recommendations.

It has been noted earlier that Ethiopia's poverty, which resulted from a serious problem of employment and lack of

encouraging conditions for productive work, is simply paradoxical in that it occurs in a country endowed with plenty of natural and human resources. Perhaps this paradox proves the argument that employment and development issues are determined not by the presence or absence of a given set of natural resources but rather by the way society is organized and the presence or absence of favorable conditions, such as peace and stability, encouraging economic and development policies, including those related to land tenure systems, and investment in human resources and health development. In this regard, the country needs to tap its potential by pooling local, national, and international energies, if the growing population is to escape a human disaster embodied in food and survival insecurity. Creating employment opportunities is one of the toughest but unavoidable challenges facing both the government and people of Ethiopia.

The most important areas for action in alleviating the growing problems of rural employment and poverty, therefore, lie in (a) targeting individuals and households rather than regions, areas or communities, whose definitions are vague and outcomes intangible; (b) balancing the distribution of investment and development projects and positioning them in the rural areas; (c) enhancing farm productivity through ensuring households' access to inputs and subsidizing weaker households until they produce enough income to cover their food requirements, input necessities and others; (d) providing all-rounded training in basic and employability skills so that the unemployed and underemployed youth could engage in self-employment activities; (e) accelerating the development of infrastructures and linking the rural areas with major economic, political and research centers; (f) promoting information flow to the rural areas at the micro level, and the country at a macro level. In a world characterized by "excess information consumption", the Ethiopian populace is, inter alia, suffering from *information famine* since communication networks are limited both in the urban and rural areas though the effect of this on the latter is immense; (g) building up rural financial, marketing and storage facilities; and (h) creating a separate agency (*maybe a Ministry?*) responsible for *rural employment* which can be justified on the ground that more than 85 percent of the Ethiopian population is employed in the rural sector. While there is a Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to deal with the 12 percent of the country's workforce, it won't be surprising if there is a body directly responding to the employment needs and problems of the overwhelming majority of the population.

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