

## VILLAGIZATION - A KEY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL ENVIRONMENT IN AFRICA : A CASE STUDY OF ETHIOPIA

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**ABSTRACT:** For the development of countryside in Africa various measures have been taken by different governments but the scattered settlement pattern has been one of the problems hindering the ongoing endeavours to transform the rural environment. Hence, changing the pattern of settlements is inevitable to facilitate the provision of appropriate socio-economic infrastructural facilities to its inhabitants.

Villagization may be defined as a process of creating consciously permanent settlements whose inhabitants are farmers primarily associated with agriculture and rurality. The present paper is an attempt to examine this process which may lay the basis for modernization and developments of the rural environment.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM :

Even though various measures have been taken by different governments for the development of countryside in Africa, the scattered settlement patterns have proved to be one of the problems hindering the on going endeavours for transformation of the rural environment. Hence changing the locational pattern of settlements is necessary, particularly to lay the ground that could facilitate the provision of appropriate socio-economic infrastructural facilities to its inhabitants.

### VILLAGE AND VILLAGIZATION IN AFRICA

The term village does not refer merely to streets or group of buildings as in England of today. It includes both the cluster of houses and the surrounding cultivated land. Such a group has always a local name and known limits. It encompasses all types of permanent settle-

ments whose inhabitants are primarily engaged in agriculture in addition to its natural geographic characteristics and socio-economic and cultural life style of the people. Thus, considering its general characteristics, a village is a basic agricultural unit comprising the life-style of its inhabitants, their homestead and environment.

A number of countries in Africa, such as Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, Swaziland, Mozambique and Ethiopia have started villagization as a part of their strategy to transform the socio-economic conditions of their society in general and that of rural people in particular. The village formation in Kenya can be recognized as an activity by which people were settled in villages and were provided land for cultivation. The objective of village formation in Ghana was to settle the people displaced by the lake formed by Volta dam.<sup>2</sup> In Tanzania, Villagization as part of the rural

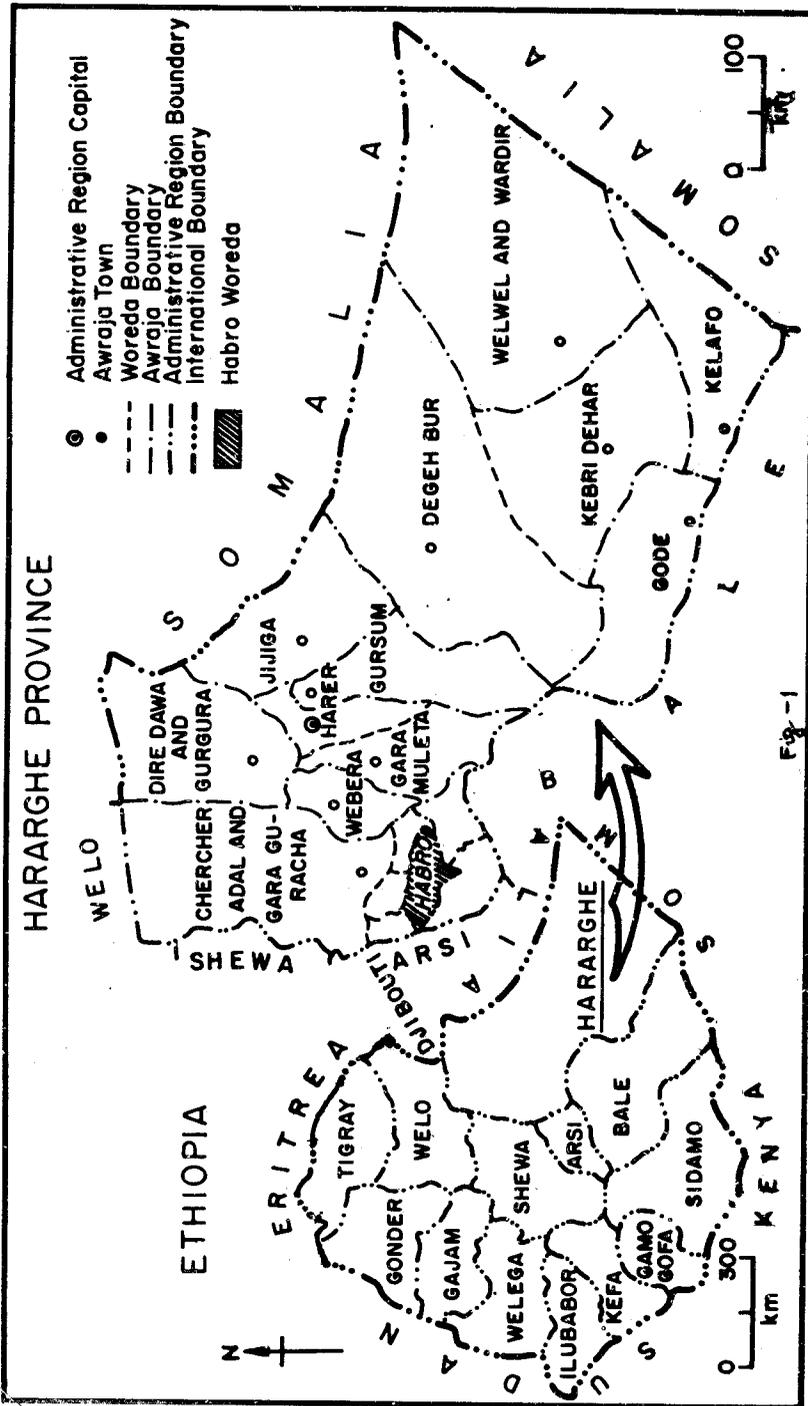


Fig. No. - 1

development strategy began as early as in 1960 with three-fold objectives: first, to prevent the further growth of rural class formation and to move away from the incentives and ethics of capitalist system. Secondly, to raise rural living standard and, thirdly, to enable the Central Government to provide social and other productive services to the rural areas more cheaply and more conveniently than is possible when peasant settlements are small and dispersed.<sup>3</sup> For its implementation, the rural development policy of Tanzania related to Ujamaa Villages followed the self-help or self-reliance approach. In this approach, planning effort is geared to support the people themselves in the determination of transformation of rural scenario of the country. No doubt, due to lack of skill of the local participants, it faced some problems. In Ethiopia, there is sharp regional variation in natural conditions and social structure which make it a very diverse and complex country. Failure to recognise this fact had distorted the understanding of the problems of the rural scenario and its development. The scattered and haphazard dwellings of peasants and their continuing way of life before villagization was not able to cope even with bare necessities of human beings. Really, it was a difficult task to provide a school, a health centre, water supply, electricity or to set up a market place or to build a road leading to the dwelling of each peasant. To meet such challenges and to transform the scenario of the countryside, the Government of Ethiopia launched the villagization programme in December, 1985.

#### THE AIM OF VILLAGIZATION :

Villagization is a complicated process, as its definition varies with the local situation in which the programme is underway. Very precisely, it may be defined as a process of creating consciously permanent settlement

whose inhabitants are farmers primarily associated with agriculture and rurality. The objectives of the programme are : (1) to enhance extension services aimed at increasing agricultural productivity; (2) to promote more rational land use patterns and conserve natural resources; (3) to facilitate access of rural people to schools, clinics, water supplies and service cooperatives, and (4) to strengthen security and self defence.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it aimed to move people into villages for providing them basic essential services such as extension facilities, clean water, roads, health and education, etc. To achieve such objectives, villagization committees at national, regional (province), awraja (district), Woreda (tahsil) and peasants association levels (consisting of 3-5 villages) were established. The villagized village size varies considerably from 100 to 400 houses. the present paper is an attempt to examine the relevance of above programme with the main emphasis on checking the process of scattered settling of the rural population and creating a concentrated and permanent settlement which may lay the basis for modernization and development of the rural environment.

#### THE STUDY AREA

The study area, i.e. Wodiety Peasant Association is situated near Gelemso town in Habro Woreda of same name Awaraja of Hararghe Province of Ethiopia (fig.1). Here the topography is characterised by plain lands. The majority of the population lives in huts (tukuls), locally known as MENA SHITA, and is engaged in agriculture. There is no provision of separate kitchen in these houses and food is cooked in the living rooms with a feeling that unhygienic insects and pests may be killed through kitchen smoke. The peasants are culturally adopted to chew chat, a green leaf causing some intoxication after chewing, hence

in few cases the very purpose of these compounds was defeated as these were being used for cattle breeding instead of gradening activity.

### EFFECTS OF VILLAGIZATION

In fact, no one could tell better the good or bad effects of villagization, than the villagers themselves. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to provide various social facilities to communities that are scattered here and there in isolated areas, but Villagization has provided the way for solving this problem. In this regard, Wodiety Peasants Association villages are established at 20 minutes walking distance from Gelemso town, and so pumped water supply, access to road and education are available there. Here, it is logical to conduct educational activity in a group rather than in a scattered community. further more, it has brought the peasants together and they feel a social belongingness and share the same history and culture. Thhis in turn helps the peasants to enhance their social relation among various clans of Villagized Ormo people. Certainly, ithas given quite a beautiful appearance to villages, particularly 'Megalla Fekatea', a local expression given to this arrangement of houses.

Even though Villagization programme is considered as a viable strategy in transforming the rural scenario and continues to gain momentum in achieving its objectives, there are some short comings which have been repeatedly mentioned by the villagers, such as

the problems related to health hazards, sanitation, long distance travel between home and far-fields, shortage of fuel supply and prblem of cattle feeding etc. It is pertinent to note here that for construction of new houses, fences and cattle pens, there is additional requirement of wood which results in cutting of trees, and thus disrupting the ecological balance of the area. Because of this and other related problems, the author opines that the baisc social services, such as water suply, health, sanitation and care of protecting vegetional cover should be given top priority for the desired and real success of the Villagization programme in the study area.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Obviously, Villagization has invited some negative environmental effects associated with heavy concentration of population and livestock e.g. pollution, increased pressure on land, overgrazing and forest depletion in and around villages. But it is encouraging that the inhabitants and the government have recognized these problems and have started acting accordingly. By and large, Villagization in a meaningful way has changed the rural scenario of the country by way of bringing education, health roads and milling services closer to rural populace. Thus, it can broadly be concluded that with the help of government and people's participation Villagization has acted as a key to the development of rural environment of the country.

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