

As I write this entry, [and](#) a U.N agency (FAO) reported a severe drought in progress in East Africa. According to the report, “In Ethiopia, millions more require emergency food assistance. What’s more, the lack of rain is blamed for the deaths of 220,000 cattle in the Borena Zone along the southern border with Kenya.”

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Another source (WFP) reports that presently 5.7 million Ethiopians are dependent on food aid. The government admits that inflation rate has reached 40% and puts the blame on international food crisis. International Monetary Fund (IMF), on the other hand, places the blame right at the doorsteps of the Ethiopian government- that the government has caused the inflation through borrowing and printing money for infrastructure projects. If the present reality is of any indication to the future, the Ethiopian society has very little to hope for.

Ethiopia is poor not because the land is barren. It is reported that Ethiopia has some 73 million hectare land very suitable for agriculture. Ethiopia is also known as the water-tower of East Africa. It is home for the longest river in the world, Abay (Blue Nile) and many others such as Awash, Tekeze, Wabe Shebele, Genale, Baro, etc.; and is also a land of many lakes. The problem is failure to harness and utilize these natural resources to meet the need of the nation. Ethiopia can feed itself because it has all the resources necessary to be self-sufficient: fertile land, abundant water, conducive weather, and even man power. This is not what the world thinks about Ethiopia. But it is true. As a matter of fact, if Ethiopia reforms its land policy and make the development of agriculture its priority, the global food crisis will have very little effect on its agriculture based economy.

Compounding the problems existing from the need to modernize agriculture is the recent corporate-driven land grab in Ethiopia. It is just beyond me to comprehend the rationale behind the deal that the government is making with foreign investors. Corporations from Saudi Arabia, China, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Europe, and North America, acquiring enormous amount of arable lands across the country (over 4 million acres) under a full century-long (ninety-nine years to be exact!) land leasing agreement. Crops produced on Ethiopian soil are then shipped to their respective countries or for export- (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFI6HUH6yKI>) to take advantage of the global food shortage. From Ethiopia? To understand the magnitude of the concern one can read further the recent cable release of Wikileaks - <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10ADDISABABA247.html>

If this is how the government of Ethiopia attracts foreign investors into the country, according to its Five Years Development and Transformation Plan, what I see is a squander of a most valuable resource and a major failure in the country's land policy. The government of Ethiopia has to come transparently clean how this arrangement with these foreign investors would benefit the future generation; and how this arrangement would protect the Ethiopian society from the inevitable future food crisis. Otherwise the arrangement between the government and these foreign investors is not any different from the old stereotypical colonial practice: “give the chief a bottle of Johnny Walker whisky and the land is yours” – sheer stupidity! Don't label this as political statement. Just explain it to me. We Ethiopians are poor, and the poor are always vulnerable- that I know. I also know from Ethiopian history that our forefathers did not let foreign aggressors and colonial powers to molest our soil and exploit our resources. Today, neo-colonialism seem to have entered Ethiopia through the backdoor! This time, however, not through violence but with legal paperwork in hand!