A Blue Print or a Mirage: An Anthropological Study of agricultural and institutional practices, engagements and development discourse in Ethiopia

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An Anthropological Study of agricultural and institutional practices, engagements and development discourse in Ethiopia.

UPPSALA UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
AND ETHNOLOGY

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**Acronyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DPRP</td>
<td>Development and Poverty Reduction Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASDEP</td>
<td>Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSP</td>
<td>Food Security Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Growth and Transformation Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADLI</td>
<td>Agricultural development led industrialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRDF</td>
<td>Ethiopian people's Republic Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARD</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORDA</td>
<td>Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Peasant Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPR</td>
<td>Business Processing Reengineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Development Agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTC</td>
<td>Farmer Training Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSN</td>
<td>Productive Safety Net Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFSP</td>
<td>Other Food Security Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woreda</td>
<td>An administrative unit equal to district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kebelle</td>
<td>An administrative unite equal to village</td>
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Executive Summary

This thesis is an exploration of the institutional engagement between farmers and government, as well as a discourse about the development process in Ethiopia. The discussions are based on the fieldwork conducted from January 2012 to March 2012 in the eastern Ahmara region of the Dewa Chefa district (woreda). The ethnographic material will show how the public’s opinion is altered by the government and national media in terms of the discourse on development, economic growth and change of a farmer’s life. The discourses portray an unrealistic view of real, existing practices and engagements among the farmers and the agricultural bureau in the woreda.

The main argument of the thesis is to show how the government's development discourses have multiple purposes that are not only attributed to the development practices and engagements, but also to the political realities and relations which exist between the government and the rural agricultural people. The thesis will explain how engagements, practices and discourses are strategized by the government and its institutions to assert power and to ensure farmers’ compliance. Also, it will explain the farmers’ engagements and practices, and their strategies to deal with the development process and the government's strategies to assert power.

The theoretical framework is based on the deconstructive, or anthropological development critique. It will argue that understanding development as governmentality and discourses will be vital in discussing development as a power relationship and way of controlling others and extending government's power over its subjects. In such a view of development as nation state construction, the thesis will explain how development knowledge and discourse are reworked, reformulated and multiplied as new forms of knowledge and discourses to serve the purpose of the government in power within the nation.

Key words: Discourses, Development, Practices, Ethiopia Engagements, Governmentality, Power.
Prologue

The First Phase

In the early periods of the 1990s, the former prime minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, pledged to make food insecurity and even poverty history, a genuine wish everybody has for a country and its people who have been stricken by devastating drought and famine for long periods of time. It was a vision to usher in an era of development after a long period of war, famine and drought. For the farmers affected, there arose a new hope of coming out of such a devastating life. For a leader and a party fighting for the political economy agenda of the rural masses, coming to political power was conceived of as the beginning of a new era of peace, security and development.¹

The process started in the early 1990s. In the next two decades, different strategies, projects, plans and policies were designed to be implemented. During the first decade, the development process was under the global perspective or paradigm. Many stakeholders from international and national organizations were active participants in the development process and economic growth effort other than the ruling party or the government.²

During the first period, agriculture strategized to take the leading role in industrialization.³ Agriculture was set as an engine of growth. Strategies were designed, such as the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program, the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) in 2005, the Food

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¹ EPRDF with its leader Meles Zenawi was fighting with the military regime from 1974 to 1991 (see also, Zewde, Bahru 2001).

² African nations' development is primarily assisted by the international development community, where the developed world assists developing countries with their development effort. African nations are also expected to make some adjustment to be in line with development assistance bureaucracies. One example is the structural adjustment for economic growth in Africa.

³ ADLI: a strategy designed in 1991 that sees agriculture as the engine of growth. Its objectives are to: (i) improve agricultural extension services; (ii) promote better use of land and water resources; (iii) enhance access to financial services; (iv) improve access to domestic and export markets; and (v) provide rural infrastructure.
Security Program (FSP), and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) in 2010.\textsuperscript{4} The strategies were targeted not only to ensure food security for the smallholder farmers but also to graduate them into commercialized farmers. The government started to state its achieved goals and successes. The economy reached a double digit growth rate.\textsuperscript{5}

**The Second Phase**

However, the process failed to continue in the same manner. Following the 2005 election crisis, the ruling party (EPRDF) focused on revising the political and development approaches it had implemented.\textsuperscript{6} Development discourses and rhetoric have changed into something that dictates that the development process is a process that will be disrupted without the ruling party’s existence in power. Development is depicted as something that cannot continue with a different political environment or political parties; the ruling party asserts that it is only to be achieved with political will and the party’s ideology. After this period, development became the core of the argument and of the political debate to win the masses’ votes for periodic elections.\textsuperscript{7}

The ruling party depicted itself as a political party that stood before the wishes and needs of everybody to see a developed and prosperous country. In 2010, the ruling party won the election. After winning, the party and its leader, Meles Zenawi, stated that addressing the people’s needs, which was development/economic growth, was the only possible way to get the peoples’ vote during the periodic election that assured the

\textsuperscript{4} PASDEP, FSP and GTP are successive strategies designed to strengthen the economic growth and development of the agriculture sector designed or planned by the government or the ruling party.

\textsuperscript{5} Based on the government reports, the annual growth rate of the country reached 11\% of GDP to the highest in 2010. The agricultural contribution is immense

\textsuperscript{6} EPRDF- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

\textsuperscript{7} Development strategies designed as five years strategic plan that are parallel with every five years periodic election. The achievements and continuity of development strategies depend on the existence of the political body that started them. The 2005 election is an example in this regard. See also, European Union Election Observer Mission (2005).
political power.\textsuperscript{8} It was because of this that to arouse higher expectations among the people, the new Growth and Transformation Plan was designed by the party.\textsuperscript{9}

**The Third Phase**

In August 2012, the Prime Minister Zenawi died. Following his death, the political friction was reinvigorated. This situation had changed the hold of the ruling parties and government's discourses and rhetoric on the development process. His death was regarded as an obstacle or a hindrance that would weaken the development process. Zenawi’s leadership was not only concentrated on the political sphere, but was also important since he was the sole architect of the consecutive development of policies and strategies. The discourses and rhetoric after his death focused on showing the party's firm stance to ensure the continuation of his legacy and to realize his vision of building a democratic developmental state (Zenawi, 2006). The ruling party (EPRDF) vowed to make sure the development process continued to meet the final target under the party's leadership. One way to do this was to make sure the GTP was implemented as planned.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{8} Meles Zenawi’s speech in addressing the masses on the day of official announcement of the result of the election in 2010.

\textsuperscript{9} In 2010 the government introduced a new plan called the growth and transformation plan. See also, GTP document 2010.

\textsuperscript{10} In a very recent(2013) political meetings in evaluating the progress of the three years progress of GTP, the report showed that the planned target to be achieved in the agricultural harvest was much lower than expected.
Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis explores the current development process in Ethiopia based on two months of fieldwork among the farmers in the north eastern Amhara region in the Dewa Chefa district (woreda). The focus is on farmers' engagements and practices in agricultural activities using small scale modern irrigation schemes administered by the District Rural and Agricultural Bureau.

Based on the two months of fieldwork and ethnographic materials gained, the thesis will try to show the realities and the positions of the government as well as of the local people (the farmers) in the development process. It explains engagements and practices with reference to those of the farmers and the government. It will discuss the way power is situated in the development process; it will show for whom development is targeted, and it will explain the strategic positions of the government and the farmers’ engagements and practices as informed by the government’s positions.

As I will discuss in detail in chapter two, the fieldwork was important to see the realities on the ground, the role of the government’s institutions and the way practices and engagements are rationalized by both the farmers and the bureaucrats from the agricultural bureau. The theoretical framework and anthropological discussions are based on the fieldwork, the ethnographic material and the anthropological literature on development.

The anthropological literature on development debates the relationship of anthropology and development. The debates are majorly divided into development anthropology and anthropology of development. The main arguments in the divisions are, on one side, the focus on making anthropological theories and methods to use in development practices and, on the other side, a focus on making anthropological works to

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11 Woreda is an administrative unit equivalent to a district in Ethiopia.

12 See pages 21 and 22 for map.
view development from a critical perspective (for detailed discussions on this issue see Escobar, 1995; Escobar, 1997; Esteva, 1992; Sachs, 1992; Fergusson, 1990; Johnson, 2009, Li, 2007; Gow, 1995; Hagberg and Widmark, 2009; Nolan, 2002; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Mosse 2003; Lewis, 2005). However, in recent trends, some anthropologists such as Gardner and Lewis suggest how anthropologists can fill the gaps between the anthropological discursive critique and the use of anthropological knowledge (or namely, anthropology of development and development anthropology) for concrete planning and policy practices among developing nations (Lewis and Gardner, 1996, 2006; see also Hagberg and Widmark, 2009).

As I will discuss in detail in the theoretical part, the central themes of theoretical discussion for this paper take on discursive critiques or deconstructive approaches. The reason for this is because the discursive critiques or deconstructive discussions focus on discussing development as discourse(s), power relationships and as an art of governmentality following the works of Michel Foucault (see Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Li, 1999, 2007).

The discussion on discourses and on governmentality in this thesis following the trend of deconstructive approach shows how discourses and asserting power are central parts of the development process in Ethiopia. Discussing development as discourses and as strategic position for the government to govern will be significant to show the existing practices and engagements of the government, and also to explain its ultimate goals in the development process. Such discussion is also a way to show the farmers’ engagements and practices in the development process, and how discourses and powers are affecting these practices and engagements. In this regard, understanding the reasons for different actors’ engagements and practices in the development process and the roles they have will be important.

\[13\] The references do not necessarily represent the stand of each anthropologists in the two categories. Escobar and Fergusson argue for the anthropology of development. Lewis and Mosse, Hagberg and Widmark, and Nolan take the compromiser positions and argue on how anthropological knowledge can help the development practices.
Policy makers, development planners and the people expect development processes to ultimately be successful and bring changes. The failure of this expectation and its impact on the local people are cause of criticisms of development. My original ambition was to search for changes in agricultural productions and observe local people’s engagements in the changes. However, the fieldwork was an observation of a complexity of engagements and practices and understanding the reasons behind them.

Listening to the government’s perspectives on development in everyday rhetoric creates an expectation to observe the rhetoric in practice. However, the fieldwork provides insight that the engagements and practices of different actors (in this thesis the emphasis is on the farmers, the government and its institution) are minor or invisible in comparison to the development process portrayed in the government’s rhetoric. This leads to the need to gain an understanding of why the farmers do what they are doing, why the agricultural bureau does what it is doing and also why the government is engaged in its development discourses.

The aim of this thesis is to argue that the role of different actors and their engagements and practices in the development process can be clearly scrutinized when the anthropologist is able to understand the everyday development languages, the political economy settings and the cultural and social attributes a society has. This thesis emphasizes that explaining a development process requires incorporating the local people’s socio-cultural settings, the general political economy and also the discourses or rhetoric generated about it. I argue that combining these aspects is essential for a better clarification of the development process and to provide alternatives as a partner of the local people.

During the fieldwork, observing the everyday dealings of the farmers, the activities of the agricultural bureau and listening to their conversations, and also following the national discourses or rhetoric in the particular development process helped me to reformulate my questions as well as to clarify how engagements and practices should be discussed in this thesis. I emphasize engagements and practices in this thesis as the normal, everyday activities of the farmers, the agricultural bureau and the government. This means that the farmers engage in their farming activities; the agricultural bureau
implements its mandate as authorized by the government and the government engages in its development rhetoric.

Farmers’ engagements in their own cultivations increase with the introduction of the irrigation schemes in their locality. The new irrigation practice needs more engagements when compared to their previous rain fed agriculture. However, as much as the new practices and increased engagements emphasize farmers’ personal benefits, they are also enforced to be a commitment in fulfilling the development process and achieving its goals. The same is true for the agricultural bureau: their engagements and practices in assisting the farmers through their technical abilities are enforced by the political mandate they possess as the government organ which has to make the development process reach its desired goals.

The government is important here. The prologue\textsuperscript{14} of this thesis shows the sort of situations that the development process structures and the development rhetoric integrated among the society. The fieldwork was a process of learning how the local farmers deal with this rhetoric in their everyday interactions, particularly with the agricultural bureau and local government officials. “You cannot be an obstacle for the government’s development plan and effort” is a strong phrase used by the officials from the district (\\textit{woreda}) administration and the bureaucrats from the agricultural bureau to put the farmers under pressure. The phrase means that you cannot defect from what you opt for; or that development is a necessity and the government is doing its best, hence the people should do the same.\textsuperscript{15} Agricultural bureau officials are using this phrase to enforce farmers to do activities that are important to the bureau, or to warn the farmers if they become resistant to the bureau’s demands.

The engagement is there, the practice is there, but side by side the failure is also visible. The reservoir and canals for the irrigation did not function during my study periods. It was only the farmers’ efforts that made sure the water continued to flow to their farms. The agricultural bureau was not in the position to solve many of the problems

\textsuperscript{14} See pages 7-10.

\textsuperscript{15} This phrase is mostly used by agricultural bureau staffs to force the farmers to accomplish their activities.
that the farmers have. The failure was visible in the everyday arguments between the farmers and the agricultural bureau.\textsuperscript{16} A failure is not only ascribed to just one of the actors or the socio-cultural practices that affect the development process. The setting of the political economy is important as well, and the understanding of the power is critical to explain the development process.\textsuperscript{17} The focus, then, will be on the reasons that enforce the actors to do what they are doing.

My observations during the fieldwork and what the informants stated showed that the farmers’ were dealing with the power structure that enforced and affected their normal engagements and practices on their farms. As I will detail in the ethnography chapter, the observations I made and my informants’ statements were important for learning about the everyday tensions or struggles between the farmers and the agricultural bureaucrats and experts. The tension includes pointing at one another for the failures on both sides.

The anthropological works on development serve as a guideline in writing this thesis. As I have discussed above, the theoretical framework is developed based on the anthropologist critique on development. The deconstructive discussions explain development as a power structure or relationship between those with power and those without power. Development is also explained as governmentality which is “a form of power that seeks to govern or regulate the conditions under which people live their lives,” as Fergusson (1990) discusses it (for summarized discussions, see Li, 1999, p. 296; see also, Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Li, 2007). These explanations of the deconstructive approach will be the main themes in this thesis’ theoretical discussion.

The thesis will discuss how the development process is used for extending government’s power and control over the local people, where the political interest of the government over the local people is depoliticized through development agendas and development is politicized as a way to extend government’s power and control. The work of Fergusson (1990) is important in relation to this idea of extending power using

\textsuperscript{16} I will discuss the failures in detail in later chapters.

\textsuperscript{17} The anthropological literatures like that of Tania Li and others are important bases to develop the ideas of looking at a development process from many dimensions.
development as a principal technique or in relation to how development projects are used to extend the state and development agency’s power (see also Tania Li, 1999, 2007; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997 for discussions of Fergusson’s argument).

Development process is a linkage that connects different actors with different interests and power structures. The interest for practices and engagements, and the power exerted relies on the existing socio-cultural and political economy settings in a particular society. An understanding and analysis of the connections with the existing socio-cultural and political economy settings will be important to understand the development process in its practices and engagements, and also as discourse. The range of interests and the power relationships in the development process will be important to understand the failures and successes of development (see Escobar, 1997; Mosse, 2003; and Lewis, 2005).

The basis for choosing this theoretical framework is the ethnographic materials. The fieldwork was a learning process of a wide range of ideas or perspectives under the development issue. The fieldwork was important to show how the practices and engagements of the development process were shaped by the everyday dealings and struggles between the farmers and the local institutions (particularly the agricultural bureau). Farmers explained their realities, practices, engagements and the overall social and cultural life with reference to the contestations or struggles they have with the agricultural bureau. Failures or successes for the farmers and the general agricultural sector were ascribed to those contestations or struggles the farmers have with the government’s institutions.18

Questions of social life, cultural attributes and farming activities can be interpreted in various way which have a political meaning. Sometimes, “Why you asked me?” was a question posed by my informants. I had to ask and try to understand how and why some of my questions correlated with political issues and aroused doubt in my informants. I had discussed with my informants and had been attributed different identities. All of this was part of the learning process which was needed to gain an understanding of the

18 In this regard, chapter three will show in detail how farmers were affected by different government systems.
different perspectives that exist in the woreda or district. I was able to understand, as farmers opened up, why they considered me, at times, a government delegator or a cadre from the ruling party, investor representative and new bureaucrat from the agricultural bureau.\(^\text{19}\)

Infrastructural problems, organizational problems, weak institutional capacity, political enforcement, land insecurity, agricultural production and market failures, access to land for the younger population and so many other issues were described and explained by my informants. These problems are huge and can be a topic of discussion on their own. That is why I chose to condense all the ideas and issues under the umbrella of the political economy (power relation) setting of development, which will incorporate the historical, social and cultural aspects in one form of argument.

The thesis is structured in different chapters which include the process of the fieldwork, the historical background, the government’s development strategies, the politics of international and national government(s) in aid relationships, the ethnographic chapter and the analysis. Chapter two is about the process of the fieldwork, from its start up to conducting the fieldwork. Robben and Sluka (2007) discussions of how changes faced on the ground may alter an anthropologist’s original research idea will be the focus of the discussion. This second chapter will show how the fieldwork was performed, and will explain the fieldwork setting within the farmland. It will also describe the methodologies used in gaining the ethnographic materials. Chapter three, following the same trend as chapter two, centers on informants’ discussions and a comparison of the past and the present. It will discuss core historical issues in the process of developing the agricultural sector and the agrarian society. The impacts of drought, famine, war and political ideology on the process of development will be discussed. In chapter four, I will discuss in detail the theoretical framework.

In chapter five, the government’s strategies of development approach will be discussed in general and some comparison will be made with countries like China and other developmental states. It will also include the government and nongovernmental

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\(^{19}\) See chapter two.
organizations’ engagements and practices, and also their relations and interactions in the development process in relation to aid or sources of money for development projects. Chapter six presents the ethnography chapter. The ethnography is a composition of development practices and discourses and the reality on the ground among the rural farmers. It will depict the reality of how the failures and successes of development are rationalized among the different actors. It will show the everyday dealings of local farmers with the agriculture rural bureau. The ethnography will show local people’s realities, experiences, hopes, aspirations and anticipations in their own voices. Chapter seven will show the positions of the government and nongovernmental organizations’ perspectives based on the fieldwork material. The last chapter, chapter eight, will include an analysis of the ethnography in relation to the engagements and practices of the farmers and of the bureaucrats of the agricultural bureau, and some concluding remarks.
CHAPTER TWO

Conducting the Fieldwork

The research tradition in anthropology making a long period of ethnographic fieldwork using the participant observation method to understand a particular society is fascinating for any student of the discipline. Robben and Sluka (2007, p.1) state that fieldwork is “…a major transformation, a student of culture becomes an anthropologist” (see also Bernard, 2006, pp.342-343). In this intriguing process, I have learned to conduct numerous activities to develop an anthropological fieldwork, such as writing the proposal, searching for contacts who could make the actual research and fieldwork possible and successful, and searching for funding.20

I was interested in development issues from the beginning. The anthropological critiques on development led me to focus more on evolving the research idea on development. The relationship between anthropology and development as it is discussed in many pieces of literature was also interesting me (see also David Gow, 1995; Escobar, 1995; Fergusson, 1990; Tania,2007; Gow, 1995; Hagberg and Widmark, 2009; Nolan,2002; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Mosse 2003; Escobar, 1997; Lewis, 2005).21 In this regard, the ‘Anthropology in Practice’ course was one way to understand the dilemma we – anthropologists – face immersing ourselves in this big ocean of development and becoming good contributors in the process of changes attributed through development for the local people in different localities.

This particular research is for me an exploration of the voices and everyday dealings of people at the local level targeted for some kind of development projects (See Nolan

20 Bernard (2006) pp.69-73; stated that a research process needs an exciting workable idea. Also, it needs a clear identification of the resources for conducting the research: time and money.

21 Nolan, R. (2002), p.26; stated “For the question that does anthropology really matter for development work; anthropology provides essential context based insight concerning how and why the differences in culture affects the success or failure of development”.

19
It was an ambition of mine to observe the whole process of everyday dealings of farmers, their interactions’ among each other and with development officers; as well as to observe their cultural values, social structures, functions and organizations, and the overall interactions with development agents. Another objective was to state my position on development as an anthropologist. Also, by addressing such an important issue, I hope to have made a contribution to the academia and to the people I studied.

The Field Site

In Ethiopia, 80 percent of the population consists of agriculturalists (Ministry of Agriculture, 2010). Studying these populations could lead anywhere in the country where the farmers live. Choosing a field site depends on the researcher’s desire of where and how to do it. However, sometimes the research process leads to selecting a field site. This is what happened during the fieldwork process. During the process of making the fieldwork possible, my contact from ORDA suggested many different possible project sites that would be good for my study. However, many of the sites needed private or field cars to access. I was looking for a nearby site with good potential for the fieldwork which was also appropriate for the time and money I had. I followed anthropologists’ advice to choose an accessible and easy field site (Bernard, R., 2006, P. 356)

The eastern Amahra region is home not only to agriculturalists but also pastoralists. The people living there are both Amharic and Oromifa language speakers. The administrative working language for government bureaus is Oromifa. I traveled to a town called Kemisse, which is about 300 km from the capital city of Addis Ababa. It is a four hour drive by public transportation. The small town is the administrative center for the zone and woreda or district offices. The woreda is called Dewa Chefa.

22 The course (Anthropology in Practice) and its literature was a profound ground to understand the connections of anthropology and development.

23 What Nolan (2002, p. 26) emphasizes as the role of anthropologists is “to understand, how a culture is patterned, why changes in one part of the pattern may resonate elsewhere, and how norms and values affects plans, policies and prescriptions”.
N.B. Map of Ethiopia.

N.B. This map of Ethiopia shows the administrative regions and zones
N.B. This is the map of Ethiopia and the Amhara regional state. The arrow on the regional map indicates the place where the fieldwork was done.

Tuesdays and Saturdays are market days. People all across the area come together in the market place. On market days the interactions are colorful. The asphalt road of the town is the only main road available. All the other roads are gravel roads. Aside from the very few cars belonging to the government bureaus, the main methods of transportation are bicycle and the three-wheeled motor bike called Bajaj. Bajaj are the main transportation service providers to the people. On market days, the gravel roads are crowded with people and their cattle, camels and donkeys, and also cars and Bajaj.

The market is one of the main activities in the area. From this administrative small town to other rural centers called “towns”, there are four marketplaces that accommodate people from the rural areas. People sell and buy things in their nearest marketplaces based on their choices or to get what they need. As a Muslim area, the trade for Khat is also popular, like in many other regions in the country which are also used for religious activities such as the Dua.
The agricultural bureau and the project office for ORDA, a nongovernmental organization that works on different development projects, provide their services from the town to the rural villages or what is locally called “kebelle gebere mahber,” which means literally a village association for rural farmers. The rural village in which I conducted my fieldwork is called Bedeno kebelle gebre mahber. Two irrigation schemes are located in this village. The first one is called the Fintiftu irrigation scheme and the other is known as Serte. From the administrative town Kemisse to the Bedeno rural village, it took 30 minutes to drive. This rural village and the irrigation schemes are the nearest compared to other rural villages.

N.B Map of Bedeno kebelle gebere mahaber (Bedeno rural village). Source: from the village farmer training center.

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<th>Administrative divisions in Ethiopia</th>
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<td><strong>Terminologies in Amharic</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Village administration</strong></td>
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<td>Kebelle Astedader</td>
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N.B This table shows the Amharic terminologies for administrations that are equivalent to village or district administration levels.

Walking long distances was an interesting experience during the fieldwork. Farmers have more experience walking long distances compared to the agricultural bureau officers. When I asked the farmers which way to go or how far away something was,
their response was positive. They said, “It is near, just take this route and you will get there.” The officers from the bureau said, “We learn to walk long distances because of this job, but for you probably it will be impossible.” In the process, I have learned how to walk long distances. The farmers accompanied me and showed me different sites, helping to enrich the observation.

The farmers in the Serte irrigation site comprise about 38 households. The topography of the area and the level of the water make very few irrigable lands. In the Fintiftu irrigation site, the number of farmers able to irrigate their farmlands is about 80 households. This site is a plain area that allows the water to cover many farmlands. The water from the rivers is used for many household activities other than irrigation purposes. It is a common property where people come to wash their clothes, get drinking water for their cattle and also to fetch water for their household activities.

On the Field

The nongovernmental organization I contacted for this research is called Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA). On the first day of the fieldwork, I went to the liaison office of ORDA to get an approval letter and begin. It took several days to finally obtain the letter. Having a written document, as Bernard (2006) advises, is important to settle legality or acceptance for doing fieldwork. In the first few days of the fieldwork process, I learned that it is good to know the way things are conducted. This allowed me to sketch how the fieldwork would be.

After traveling to the field site, the local project officer of ORDA in the woreda told me they did not have particular irrigation projects in their plans for the nearby areas and advised me to focus on the farmers and irrigation sites in the nearby rural kebelle (villages) that are administered under the Woreda agricultural bureau. This took me to the final contact person working in the irrigation section of the agricultural bureau.

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24 This organization is working the Amahara region. It was established and started delivering its service following the great famine in the region in 1985.

25 In this regard, I followed the advices provided by Bernard concerning the rules one should follow or the temporal and financial considerations one should make when preparing to enter a field. See Bernard (2006), pp.356-357.
The Farmland as Ethnographic Field

My field site was remote from the town in which I chose to stay. The Amharic word “Ketema,” which means “a town,” is somehow misleading in its usage in rural areas, since they call every village center a ketema. I was told the names of many small towns that were nearby. Town in rural areas, other than the one major town, accommodate some of the main services. Other places are called “towns” just because they have a few shops or small cafeterias, electric access, a few built up houses with corrugated iron sheet metal, and also a local village (or kebelle) administrative center and a police station along the sides of the main road. These areas called “towns” are centers for the rural kebelle. The rural people reside in most cases far from these centers, living in cottages or huts, and have scattered settlements.

When I was told about the “towns” by my contacts, I was hoping maybe I could stay in a nearby “town” so that I would have easy access to the farmers and their farmlands. However, I chose as a base the main town called Kemisse, which is an administrative town for the district (woreda). All the government and other nongovernmental offices are situated in this town. I chose the main town, so that I could access the necessary facilities. I used a public transportation service from the main town to the field sites where I could observe the farmers and their activities on their farmlands.

For the first three days, I waited for my contact person to take me to the first site. Finally, I was able to meet him to take me to the field. It was not easy to get a transport, since minibus drivers do not like to give service for passengers who get off in the middle of the journey, unless they receive an extra payment. I let my contact person handle the situation, since he had a better understanding of how it works. We ended up walking a long distance to reach the field site because we were requested to get off before our final destination.

That was a lesson: the fieldwork would rather be a great adventure than a mere data taking process. I readied myself to learn how to live in such a place and also how to deal

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26 Following Bernard's advice for a researcher entering into the field, I depended on my contact to help me to enter into the field site, and to introduce me to the development agents and farmers. See also Bernard (2006), p. 357.
with everyday challenges from every direction. The fieldwork allowed me to grow as an anthropologist, to experience a new way of life, to meet new people, to understand new situations, to learn new behaviors and to understand the everyday process of dealings and interactions that will have a great impact in my ethnographic proficiency and will make the difference when performing anthropological research.27

From day one until the last day, it was a new experience, as new encounters, new interactions and new information were generated as the fieldwork progressed. It was a field site where I had to move from one farmland to the next, walking long distances, introducing myself, explaining my purpose, differentiating my identity from the extension workers and developing trust, but becoming a stranger again when I moved to another farm.28

The farmland was the main site to approach most of the informants. The farmland is a work place, a field of production for the farmers. It is also a place for farmers to rest when they get tired. I was there every day to meet them, to talk to them and to learn from them. The farmland has no age restriction to work on; children, young adults, old people are working in their own particular farmlands. The farmers work all day long. Early in the morning, farmers wake up and walk long distances to be in their farmlands. Then they begin plowing the land, planting the seed, fetching or directing the running water to the land and shepherding their animals from place to place to feed them. Other than those activities, on market days they engage in selling and buying necessary items such as grains, khat, oil, salt, clothes, gas and other items for their households.

The fieldwork was a learning process of all those everyday activities. It was also a process of understanding how the farmers perceive their engagements, new encounters, collective and personal experiences, ways of production and so many other things. For a

27 Robben and Sluka (2007) stated that “anthropological research entails a deep immersion into the life of a people. Instead of studying larger samples of people, the anthropologist enters as fully as possible in to the everyday life of a community, neighborhood, or a group….one learns by participant observation, by living as well as viewing the new patterns of life” (p. 8).

28 It was a process like any other anthropological fieldwork. Exactly as in what Robben and Sluka called “involvement and detachment”. (p.1); it is passing different stages of a participant observation and developing the skills the participant observer should have. Bernard (2006), p. 368.
stranger who went to the farmlands for the first time, the farmlands seemed very scattered and large, with a few people doing their own work on their own plots and rarely talking to each other. However, once one entered the farmlands, the entire meaning was different.

The particular farmland is of course, set for one farmer or his family, but the combined farmlands create a huge interaction place like one big organization, where the farmers not only do their farming activities, but also share information, debate their differences, settle their arguments, get advice for their problems, help each other and protect one another's property. It is an open field, but each individual farmland is left with trust to other farmers to be kept safe, showing a mutual trust. The farmland has no boundary for private space. It is normal to stop by another farmer's plot and to talk for a moment. When a farmer is talking with a stranger, other farmers join the discussion in order to know what is going on.29

As a stranger in that big place of production, I had to learn the unwritten local rules of the farmland or the farmers, the individual and collective identities in my everyday encounters. The anthropologist’s challenge of developing rapport or gaining trust was also a main issue to deal with during the fieldwork. A stranger in the farmland in my particular field site was seen as either a new agricultural officer or a government agent with a hidden purpose, and was considered highly suspicious by the farmers.30 For the farmers, who have had many interactions with agricultural bureau officers, a new person with one of the officers was simply understood to be a new officer working for the bureau. This was the challenge during the first meetings with the farmers, and a concern when I moved from one farmer’s plot to a new one.

29 It was an everyday encounter that when I conducted an interview or observation a group of people would come and check what was going on.

30 Building trust or gaining rapport is important to learning more about the people. And it is an important skill a researcher should have (Bernard (2006) p. 368). Sluka also stated that “the success of ethnographic fieldwork is in large measure determined by the ability to establish good rapport and develop meaningful relations with research participants” (p. 121). Concerning a field identity, Robben stated that “the ethnographer’s multiple social identities and his or her dynamic self may be liabilities but also researchers asset” (p. 63).
I tended to differentiate myself as I started to go to the farmlands alone. I tried to use farmers who I already knew or met to take me to the new informant. As an anthropologist, I followed my key informant to get access and contact with other informants. I was able to interview and talk to farmers from young to old. Since the farmland is a work place for a whole family, it was easy to observe how the family members work together, and to talk with them. Because of this particularity of the field, the field site was a place to get information from all categories of farmers, in terms of age and gender.

After the first week of fieldwork, I started to go alone to the field sites. During the fieldwork, the development agents from Farmers Training Center and the farmers in the kebelle were engaged in mass campaigns for some natural resource rehabilitation activities to protect the terrain and mountains from erosion. It was a good chance to participate in the campaign, one that enabled me to create contacts with many farmers. However, getting acceptance and becoming familiar to the farmers required time, as the farmers had to settle their suspicions about me.

The rural-urban interaction in recent years is getting stronger, increasing the extent of farmers’ interactions with different interest groups. Government, nongovernment and private organizations’ interventions are highly increasing. Farmers meet new people every day. The risk of losing one’s land for some kind of investment and the information related to this issue is a serious and great concern for the farmers. For this reason, farmers track information about a new person coming to their kebelle or their farmland. Until they become sure about a person’s identity, it is hard for them to put aside their suspicions about the person’s motive.

In most cases, I was considered a stranger in the field sites; as I learned with time, it was because of the local people's perception of the existing political reality. In most cases, they were fearing that I was gathering information for some investor’s interest or
that I was a cadre from a political party. In a few cases, the suspicion was that I was from a new religious sect or group.\textsuperscript{31}

As a researcher who is interested in their farming and irrigation activities, I was welcomed and the farmers answered my questions voluntarily, thinking that I could provide some kinds of solutions for the enormous problems they have with their cultivation processes. Telling them that I was not the person who has the power to solve their problems or explaining that creating administrative solutions was not my primary objective made them question again why I was there and what exactly I was doing. So developing good relations and trust was an everyday encounter and challenge. On the other hand, talking to the officers from the agricultural bureau that is responsible for the agricultural activities was not a complicated matter. They were comfortable in telling me the important information I wanted to know.

There, the most important aspect was the language I planned to use. I chose to describe myself and explain my purpose in a simple language. I checked my words, careful not to use academic or professional words which would cause people to not understand why I was there. With both the farmers and the agricultural bureau officers, I tried to use a simple language, which made the communication flow much easier.\textsuperscript{32}

**Methodology**

The methodologies followed during the fieldwork were interview and participant observation. These, not only lead to understand the local reality of development but also to understand the general and wider development context of development in the country. What the farmers were saying and doing were reflections of what is going on in the general context of development rhetoric in the country. The very particular focus of the

\textsuperscript{31}My informants are Muslims. Islam is a main religion in the village or the *kebelle*. Recently, there is a Muslim religious problem with the government in the country. During the fieldwork, an informant told me that there were some confrontations between different sects. Even more recently, the problems escalated to the national level.

\textsuperscript{32}I tried to learn the words that the farmers used to explain things in our daily conversations. I tried to explain myself using those words, which let them to understand me easily. It is something similar to what Bernard (2006) stated in learning the language of the people under study, “the most important thing you can do to stop being a freak is to speak the language of the people you are studying” (p. 360).
research - what are the changes in respect of the national rhetoric - led to see what really are understood as development's engagement and practices at the national level. These ideas which were brought up during the fieldwork led the thesis to be written in such a way.

Choosing the right approach to gain more trust and more informants was the main strategy that I used to establish myself in the field site. I used participant observation and interviews to draw my data during the fieldwork. The nature of my field and the need to walk from one farmland to another allowed me to walk with a farmer while he shepherded his herds, sharing his/her break time for an interview, or simply to observe while the farmer or the whole family did their farming activity, or sometimes to participating in the plough or planting activities, which required much more trust and good relations.

Interview formats developed from simple conversations that led to semi-structured and sometimes unstructured interviews. But sometimes the farmlands were not a good place to have a one-on-one interview. In the community, where farmlands were considered to have no boundaries, other nearby farmers or others simply passing by had an urge to know why their friend was talking with a stranger. The community in most areas is a very open society where the farmers have a great deal of information about each other. One important aspect in their interaction was to give time to have some conversations to share information, which is normal while they are working or herding their cattle.

I tried to limit the presence of others while I conducted one-on-one interviews. I explained the reason for the one-on-one interview. The boundary between private issue and public issue sometimes seems to overlap. This situation compelled others to interfere while I conducted my interview with one farmer, or to try to quietly listen to what we were talking about. Sometimes farmers tried to correct what the informant said. For the issues that are common to all, changing the one-on-one interviews into group interviews
helped me to get more ideas about how people conceived different perspectives on a common issue.\textsuperscript{33}

The changes from individual interview to group interview also made me realize what sort of issues are created by the modification of interview formats. I was able to get much more information about common issues like rituals, problems faced during their productions, perceptions of political realities and others. I was able to learn to what sort of level the farmers agreed and disagreed on common issues. Switching the interview format – from individual to group discussion – resulted in wider perspectives about individual lives and experiences. It was also a benefit and a short cut to get an understanding and to learn about common issues among the farmers or the agricultural officers.

I used these changes to my own benefit to generate data. For example, sometimes I had to wait for a long time to get a free space with my informants to conduct the interview - since farmers had things to do in their farmlands. So, during the interviews, when the format changed from formal to informal, unstructured to group discussions, I caught the opportunity to generate as many ideas as possible.

Taking notes was the activity that differentiated me from other personnel from the agricultural bureau. These representatives came with writing pads to take notes, but they never sat for a long time with the farmers. They never tried to have a one-on-one discussion or conversation with them. Most often, two or three of them came with field cars. So, as I tried independent immersion in the farmers’ communities and as they got an idea of my purpose, they started to accept me and to avoid their initial doubts. They also understood that my purpose was different from what they perceived initially or from the one of the agricultural officers. My effort to build a good rapport let me immerse myself and walk freely along the farmlands. This was important considering the short period of the study. The trust which was developed also led me to understand their fear of strangers

\textsuperscript{33} Bernard (2006) stated that “Sometimes, you just find yourself in an interview situation with a lot of people. You are interviewing someone and other people just come up and insert themselves in to the conversation. …. better to take advantage of the situation and just let the information and just let the information flow” (p. 232).
because of land rights issues associated with investors or the government’s need of the land for other purposes.

Interviewing and the whole process of generating data were challenging for several reasons. First, I had to deal with different perceived identities – since people considered me a stranger on the farmland. Second, in some cases, when my planned interviews changed into group interviews, I had to find a way to exploit the new situation to generate information.

I had to depend on taking notes since, even after explaining and receiving their permission, using the recorder put my informants at a great discomfort to talk. On some occasions, when other people interrupted the interview, seeing me with a recorder made them assume I was a journalist from government’s media, interviewing people about their work. Farmers who have responsibilities in the irrigation committees requested help for the problems they had with the irrigation schemes that the *woreda* agricultural bureau could not solve. In some cases, I even had to show my identity cards to settle suspicions.

However, those challenges made the interview process successful. That is to say that the challenges became good prospects to generate data, not only in my preplanned way, but also as the field permitted – and required of me – each day. Each day, walking from one farmer’s land to another’s, my routine consisted in meeting a new farmer one after another, developing contact and then rapport. This process helped me to connect with key informants with whom I conducted the interviews. Interviews developed from very informal to formal and paved the way for in-depth interviews, semi-structured and sometimes unstructured formats.

It was my ambition to make the field a home like anthropologists do, to experience the everyday life of the people. When I thought that I was a bit far from the main field site and had to travel to the site every day, I felt and desired to remain there, in the field. However, to learn about the rural urban dealings of the farmers became advantageous. As the farmers’ activities on the farmlands were affected by the agricultural bureau situated in the main town Kemisse, farmers usually came there to solve or state their problems. Being in two fields, the rural setting of the farmlands and the urban setting, helped me to
observe what farmers dealt with or engaged in to make their farming activities successful. From this point of view, it was advantageous to widen the focus than to just remain in the rural setting. The small town Kemisse was also important for the research. It was a field site in its form of bureaucratic functions as it is a center for all administrative bureaus, including the agricultural bureau.

The daytime was for experiencing the rural life and the night for the urban life. The farmlands are of course for daytime interaction and a production site. On those extended farmlands, walking from plots to plots, meeting farmers, talking with them, staying on one’s plot for some time and doing what they are doing in their plots, such as ploughing or planting, allowed me to immerse myself in their life experiences and in everyday dealings on farmlands. Doing those activities became the best way to learn, to feel and understand how the farmers conceive their own reality and everyday dealings. It helped me also to become more familiar with their way of life.

I had to use the daytime effectively for the rural life observation and shift to the urban way of life during the night. When I looked back on the long way which I traveled and on those farmlands, it felt strange. Only one who walks deep inside the farmlands could know that there is huge life out there with many activities and interactions, and many farmers engaging on their farm plots. Otherwise it felt like a barren land with few people, few activities and no interactions.

Through time and much rapport the farmers understood that my task was not just for a day, but a continuous engagement that made me be with them and on their farmland every day. It was a task that differentiated me from others, such as the woreda agricultural bureau officers, those who took information without revealing their real purpose, or journalists and other government officials and nongovernmental officers, who made field visits and pledged to solve their problems.

But this was not all the fieldwork was about and the focus to generate data. I also planned to collect data, to interview people and to observe their activities and

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34 I will discuss these issues later on in the ethnography part.
interactions, in the zones and woreda administrative bureau. The urban-rural interactions during the market day were also one sort of attraction for observation. The purpose was to generated data from different angles. It was an observation between two different but interfaced places and peoples that have an impact one on another.

**Bridging the Ethnography**

The fieldwork was a success in gaining ethnographic materials within a short period of time. It helped reveal the everyday contestations or struggles between the farmers and the agricultural bureau, and how engagements and practices were negotiated. As I will discuss in detail in the Ethnographic Chapter (page 74) and Analysis Chapter (page 101), I was able to observe the process of helping farmers in their production, making them engage in the irrigation schemes, the effort of the agricultural bureau officers to implement their activities, and how they enforced the farmers to participate in mass campaigns in local meetings and also in solving disputes.

It was also important to gain insight into the link between the development rhetoric and the practice at hand. It was important to see how development discourses reinforced the practices and to what goals. The fieldwork was important to get firsthand observation of how the limited practices and engagements are exaggerated or portrayed in unrealistic ways through the discourses generated, such as growth of agricultural harvest, change in farmers and rural way of life and achieving food security. It was also important to understand that the discourses by the government are targeted to emphasize the role of the government and its policies in the development process.35

The government’s rhetoric or discourses cover a wide range of changes compared to the past. The current period is referred to by the government as an era of development. The ruling party’s rhetoric in state media depicts farmers as a development army, who sides with the government to fight poverty. The rhetoric states that farmers are a reorganized society in a new system of political identity. A political identity defines them as a group and makes them an ally of the government and the ruling party. The farmers became allies of the government because of the political will it has on the development

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35 See Ethnographic chapter; starting from p. 74 and Analysis chapter; starting from p. 101.
process. Farmers who are included in these sorts of organizations have some success in their production, and adopt modern and commercialized farming are described as farmers who are following the development process and allies of the ruling party and its development will.\textsuperscript{36}

To understand the current government’s rhetoric, it is important to see its relationship with the past and how the past has shaped the current reality. It is important to understand the historical relationships between the farmers and the governments. In addition, it is important to see how farmers are affected by the higher political economy in different periods. The changes in the political and economic climates have a great impact on the farmers in Ethiopia (see Ethnographic chapter, p. 65 and Analysis chapter, p. 97). The next chapter will discuss these historical relationships between the farmers and the governments in power in different periods.

\textsuperscript{36} EPRDF manifesto, 2010; State media news.
CHAPTER THREE

Some Historical Perspectives and Analysis

Informants are not only good information providers but also they provide guidance about what to include in the final writings. My question regarded how associations and organizations are structured and organized. The farmers who answered this question compared their current experiences with the past. My informants stated: “In the beginning we resisted because we thought it could be similar to the previous practices we had suffered.” This led me to raise other questions, such as what major historical processes affected the farmers and also what government practices were in the past and are in the present. I also wanted to understand the differences and similarities. This chapter will tackle those questions and show how the farmers were historically vulnerable to the governments' practices.

The Ethiopian culture of politics can be described and explained as a centralized form of administration where the state and government (mengest) control all the people and the resources in the country. This form of administration, which some claim started from the Aksumite period, continued throughout the political history of the country and was the main feature of the imperial regime and then the socialist government, as well as for the current government or ruling party (Marcus, 2002; see also, Zewde, 2001).

“When the people of a nation starve they will eat their government.” This is the saying in Ethiopia. For those past governments, the reason for being overthrown from their powers was similar: the serious famines which occurred just before their downfall. The 1973 famine was the major devastation for the imperial regime, while the 1984 famine resulted in the consequent overthrowing of the Dreg regime. Both were criticized for the agricultural strategies and policies they followed (Marcus, 2002; see also, Zegeye, Pausewang and Siegfried, 1994; de Waal, 1991; Finn, 1990).

37 Aksumite, the first kingdom that ruled the country, started from the first century AD. The Solomonic dynast that ruled that country until 1974 claims the Aksumite period as its initial form.
In his detailed book *A History of Ethiopia*, Marcus provides a great deal of analysis about the situations which existed in different periods of ruling. During the imperial period, he states that

Little attention was given to agriculture beyond providing extension agents; it was assumed that Ethiopia’s farmers would rapidly adopt the schemes that agents of development would recommend. The cultivators’ labor and productivity would provide the capital to finance industrial, not rural, development in Ethiopia. The towns would be the stage for modernity, whereas the countryside would remain socially traditional. (Marcus, 2002, p.160)

However, private farming was engaging in exporting business that was supported by the ministry of agriculture, which was targeted by the royal oligarchy to develop the urban economy and the capital city. The famine in 1973, however, vividly showed the lack of concern the imperial court possessed for farming and farmers. The famine was sparked by the ecological disaster in northern Ethiopia (Marcus, 2002, pp.181-182). As Marcus states

By 1973, the peasants had exhausted their reserves, sold off their goods to purchase food, even eaten seed grain. Desperate and starving, hundreds of thousands left their homesteads and made for the towns, where they hoped the government would provide relief. (Marcus, 2002, pp.181-182)

However, provincial officials hid the situation and the government denied the existence of a famine. Marcus states that the government went to the extent of banning all the news about the calamity. Other than the denial, a lack of relief mechanism aggravated the famine, making it much worse (Marcus, pp.181-182, 2002).

Later, the government established an emergency committee. The committee struggled to contain the crisis by mobilizing internal resources. However, the imperial regime was much more focused on its effort of developing the capital city. After its downfall, the imperial regime was criticized for being more interested in worshipping the emperor than focusing on real development (Marcus, 2002). As Marcus states

The infrastructure of modern life in Ethiopia existed in the capital and in a few provincial centers. Elsewhere, modernity was limited to paying taxes and to purchasing a
small range of imported goods. Many peasants were drawn into the market sector, but others were forced off their lands and pasturage and transformed into a rural proletariat by the establishment of large-scale plantations. (Marcus, 2002, p.164)

In 1974, the revolution started. The old imperial system was replaced by the Marxist Leninist ideology. The new government was fully organized from the military which was called the Derge\textsuperscript{38}. Marcus states

In the interim, the army was being infused with fully developed Marxist-Leninist ideas by homegrown ideologies or by returnees from self-imposed European and American exile. Very few of the soldiers questioned how appropriate Marxism was for Ethiopia’s pre-industrial economy; rather the ideas were swallowed whole by the more militant and socially conscious officers and men. (Marcus, 2002, p.186)

With the declaration of socialism, the old imperial structure changed in to a one party state. Privately owned main sectors of the economy changed to public ownership. Individual farming activities changed to collective agriculture. The main motto during the revolution, “Land to the tiller,” was implemented to show that the revolution was successful, which ultimately changed the old imperial system of land distribution (Marcus, 2002, p.192; Zewde, 2001; HaileKebret, 1998; Woube, 1986; Pausewang, 1983, 1991; Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008, pp. 7-12). Marcus states

On 4 march 1975, the derg issued proclamation no 31, which nationalized all rural land, permitted farming households usufruct over as many as ten hectares, and established the Peasant Association (PA) as a new mass organization and as an organ of government. Each PA would be allocated an eight hundred hectare area, and its membership of farmers meeting in a general assembly would elect its own leadership. With wide local powers, PA replaced the old regime’s sub district administrations; they were given their authority over internal security and economic life and were also made responsible for the equitable redistribution of land within their jurisdictions. (Marcus, 2002, p.192)

After its establishment, the Peasant Association replaced the former local governments. According to Marcus, the peasant association was able to organize up to 23,506 farmers associations (p.204). However, the Peasant Association's power did not

\textsuperscript{38} DERG was a name given to the newly formed group from the lower rank of the military that overthrew the imperial regime and later controlled the power.
continue for long; it was halted after the central government reorganized itself (see also Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008). Marcus states

Compromises, however, were not in the regime’s political vocabulary. Working from a Marxist-Leninist text, the government sought to transform Ethiopia into a command state inhabited by a disciplined people.... Mengestu wanted a disciplined and loyal organization to repair the disorder and individualism that he and his ideological advisers believed had retarded Ethiopia’s development. (Marcus, 2002, p.203)

However, the government followed strategies that had a consequence on farmer’s poor production and starvation. Though the land reform was welcomed by many, subsequent redistribution led farmers to have smaller plots. This in turn created problems of over-cultivation and land degradation that resulted in declining yields (Marcus, 2002). Farmers were forced to sell their products under the market price to the government’s Agricultural Marketing Corporation that regulated the domestic food trade by establishing quotas and setting prices. Marcus states

Instead of investing in fertilizer, high yield seeds, labor, expertise, and tractors to increase production among the peasants, the government throughout the 1980s devoted 60 percent of these scarce resources to state farms and collectivized producers’ Cooperatives, hoping to make the latter an attractive possibility for peasants. (Marcus, 2002, pp. 204 - 205)

However the whole process negatively affected the country's economy. Marcus states

The net effect was to fragment the national economy and to reduce the peasants’ incentive to produce. There was consequent drop in crop yields, forcing the government to rely on the state farms’ relatively high cost grain to feed the city. For the rest of the country little surplus remained to sort against an emergency, and the Agricultural Marketing Corporation policies impeded the delivery of grain into needy areas. The disaster of the new regime’s agricultural policies was soon revealed. (Marcus, 2002, p. 205)

While the government told its success stories in its political rhetoric, the failure of rain led to a great disaster that extended over large areas among the rural farmers. The situation was much worse in the war-affected areas. However, the government tended to hide the news until it finished its ceremony for its tenth anniversary in power and for the
formation of a new party called the Workers’ Party of Ethiopia. As a result, the famine reached its critical point (Marcus, 2002; Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008). Marcus states

In the meeting of ten years plan, Mengestu replied that drought and famine were temporary setbacks along the road to economic success laid out in the proposed economic blueprint…..The government was unwilling to divert resources, money, and attention away from the tenth anniversary celebration; and it was not going to admit the existence of a famine worse than the one that had shattered Hailasel’s reign. (Marcus, p.206)

Later, with the intervention of the international community, the famine came under control before many more died. However, the problems that farmers were facing continued as the government continued affecting the lives of the farmers through the strategies it took to combat further famine. Among others, the major actions taken by the government following the famine were resettlement and villagization. These two strategies were criticized for their later negative consequence on the settlers and inhibitors (Marcus, 2002; Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008; Aredo, 1999; Rahmato, 1994; Jemma, 2001).

In addition to the failure or the negative impact of the strategies and policies followed by the military government, the highly concentrated famine in the war affected areas in northern Ethiopia gave momentum for a large rural peasant mobilization in support of the cause of the rebel group the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front and also led to the subsequent downfall of the military regime. The end of the socialist government era and the coming of the new government power gave renewed hope to the rural farmers as a new opportunity to engage in their farming with a better future. Marcus states

The Ethiopian economy had begun to prosper in the 1960s and early 1970, thanks to a vigorous capitalist agriculture. The growth caused considerable social unrest as peasant farmers were thrown off their land or forced to sell out as proprietors put together parcels

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39 EPRDF was a coalition of different ethnic-based rebel groups which are ethnic based who were fighting for ethnic political and economic rights during the socialist military period. The front runner of the coalition and largely dominated the military struggle was Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF).

40 The rural peasants were the base for the success of the rebels group. They supported and even joined the rebel group, which was becoming devastating for the military government when they were defeated finally.
of land to create plantations or large truck farms. The military regime regarded that consolation as inequitable and exploitative, and its land reform brought economic development to an abrupt halt. Moreover the government assumed broad responsibility for the economy and, through a variety of parastatal organizations, sought also to become purchasing agent, jobber, wholesaler, and transporter. (Marcus, 2002, p.219)

In 1991, the new government introduced a new economic policy. However, rather than changing the former policy on land, the economic police continued the old system against the hopes many other and western development partners had of changing the land tenure system. Marcus states

The new transitional government continued the previous regime’s policy of state landownership. Melse’s government argued paternalistically that with freehold tenure, the peasants would sell their plots and flood into the cities without any way to support themselves and their families. (Marcus, 2002, p.236)

The government argued that placing land under the control of the state was essential since it assured farmers that they would have equal access to farmlands. However, others argued that this only gave farmers usufruct rights, and that farmers could not sell any land under their possessions (Marcus, 2002; see also Nega; Adenew and Gebre Sellasie, 2003). In 2005, the proclamation was revised. However, the new Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation did not make major changes except increasing the subjective tenure security of individual rights holders. It emphasized only issues such as the land measurement, registration and certification of those holding leasing and inheritance rights. The government also encouraged farmers to form peasant associations, as they could be vital for tilling and managing their farmlands (Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008).

The expectation by those international organizations such as the World Bank to see a new form of economy or free market in the country and the hope they had of implementing structural adjustment programs like that of other African countries remained unrealized. The government chose the reverse. According to Marcus, most of the promises on the document were not fulfilled either by the Transitional Government or by the Federal Democratic Republic Government. As Marcus states, what the government did show for the international organization and investors was that it was not
serious about economic change and modernization, but more cautious of anything that could disrupt the political economy it had built (Marcus, p.237).

The main task of EPRDF during the first period of the political process and after that was ensuring its political stability. Marcus states that during the first election, the government used its power of ownership of the land and provider of agricultural inputs to rural farmers as a way of gaining support from the farmers (Marcus, 2002).

The above discussions are important to show the political relationships between the state and the rural farmers in different periods, and how the state controls the people and their resources for its own advantages rather than for the benefits of the people. The historical facts show how the government’s strategies, policies and even relief works during famines were and are used for the purpose of state control over its subjects, and how the states were and are trying to create societies in their own ideologies and political principles (Marcus, 2002; Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008; Aredo, 1999; Rahmato, 1994; Jemma, 2001).

The historical discussions show the concepts behind the relations of the state and the people in the political formations of the country and, as a result, how the state becomes a unitary powerful entity that controls everything. Land as main sources of the economy remains the main issue in the agrarian reforms and controlling the rural people by the state, and as the main guideline for the proposed and designed policies for economic growth or development policies. It is also at the center of political struggle of different political functions before and until the present.

In general in the above discussions, I tried to demonstrate how the governments in different periods affected the lives of the farmers through their practiced policies and engagements as well as their differences and similarities. Land tenure remains the main debatable issue. In showing this case, Nega, Adenew and Gebre Sellasie (2003) state

The land-holding system in most developing countries is not simply an economic affair. It is very much intertwined with the people's culture and identity. This partly explains why land-related issues usually generate intense emotional reactions. (p. 103)
From 2005 to present

Post-2005 political developments changed the tone of the debate on development strategies in the country. The political and ideological strategies and its development strategies of the government are criticized by other political groups who present other alternatives. Agricultural development strategies and land tenure are the main issues of debates. Nega, Adene and Gebre Sellasie (2003)

Despite the constitutional provision that securely vested the ownership of land to the state, rural land policy in Ethiopia has remained one source of disagreement and focus of debate among politicians, academics and other stakeholders. An assessment of the land policy debate in present-day Ethiopia shows that there is an unfortunate focus on ownership issues and a dichotomy of views on state versus private ownership. The government and the ruling party advocate state ownership of land whereas experts and scholars in the field, Western economic advisors, international organizations such as the World Bank and opposition political parties favor private ownership. (Nega, Adenew and Gebre Sellasie, 2003, p.110)

However, it is hard to say for sure which one is good for the farmers in Ethiopia, taking into account the non practice of the private ownership as state policy except as a theoretical explanation of its importance (Nega, Adenew and Gebre Sellasie, 2003; Barrows and Roth, 1989; Gebru, 1988; Dessalegn, 1992, 1994; Yigremew, 2001). Other than this, the traditional forms of land use by the farmers added different sorts of using rights on the land (Crewett, Bogale, and Korf, 2008).

What makes the debates on land issues and development strategies important is that the issues become hot and much more debatable during election periods. This leads to seeing how such different stances and debates shape the development process and the strategies followed by the government, and in consequence affect the life of the farmers. This could be one stance of how development politicizes and development policies are used as a political machine in asserting obedience among rural farmers during election periods (see also Crewett, Bogale and Korf, 2008, p.19).41

41 Fekade Azeze 2002, Yigremew Adal 1997 stated that ownership, and especially the power to redistribute land plots in agrarian societies, makes rural peasants vulnerable to arbitrary actions of local bureaucrats who decide about which individual is granted access to land as well as to political punishments for alleged
The post-2005 election\textsuperscript{42} period was significant in two ways (European Union Election Observer Mission, Brussels, 2005; Clapham, 2005; Arriola, 2008). First, development became a main agenda and a public discourse, and second, the government became successful in consolidating its power of rule over its subjects. The main evidence for this is the ruling party's success in winning the 2010 election\textsuperscript{43} (see also National Election Board, 2010; Human Rights Watch Report, 2011). Its winning followed with more pledges of development projects. Development projects were claimed as a source of people's support for the party’s political success. One example was initiating a new Growth and Transformation Plan right after the 2010 election (Growth and Transformation Plan, 2010).

The ruling party in its political document argues,

\begin{quote}
Economic growth and development are not just a mere economic necessity but are the center of national security and for this agriculture is the main focus in the development process. In addition the democracy process is equally important and the development process is depending on it. And the success of the party on development and democratization is depended on the party’s partnership to the people and revolutionary democracy it advocate. (EPRDF Program, 2012)
\end{quote}

The ruling party asserted that it is a party for the rural peasant population that works for their interests and benefits, and the party's revolutionary democracy motto is based on communal collective participation of the people through its leadership. In their book \textit{Culture of Power in Contemporary Ethiopia}, Sarah Vaughan and Kjetil Tronvollin state

\begin{quote}
EPRDF has long understood the great political potential of coincidence of interest between peasant populations benefiting from socio economic development, and political opposition). Ege 2002, for example, observed patterns of discrimination against certain political groups, those who were suspected of having supported the Derg regime, in the 1997 land redistribution process in Amhara Region. Aspen (2002) noted that coercive actions of state organs against local peasants at the dawn of the 2000 elections whereby peasants were threatened that their land would be taken away if they voted for opposition parties.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{42} The 2005 election was controversial and followed with violence and imprisonment of opposition party members’ and supporters. Some ascribed it as a retreat from a democratic system in the country.

\textsuperscript{43} The 2010 election was an election that showed a total difference form the 2005 election. It was completed by the landslide winning of the ruling party.
party/government winning support being seen as responsible for such benefit. In other words, in the political reform process the party rather than voting for pluralism atmosphere of political competitors, the party tries to show itself as a sole provider and guarantee for the base populations’ benefits in return that will guarantee its power holding in the periodic election. (Vaughan and Tronvollin, 2003, p.15)

Vaughan and Tronvollin asked from their observation of the political and development processes “whether the coming periods will demonstrate that the ruling party has been able to reconsolidate the stability and cohesion it seeks, and whether this will be put to serve plural and inclusive, or authoritarian and exclusive ends” (2003, p.22). The post-2005 periods probably gave them the answer to which direction the party was heading, as recent pieces of literature criticize the party for shifting to an authoritarian developmental state (for more discussion, see chapter five).

As I have tried to show, development became a sort of contract that the government used to govern the people. The relationship defined what one can give to the other. Development is not only a process but also a package delivered by the government, and the rural farmers must maintain their loyalty and comply with the interests of the government. The fieldwork was important to observing and understanding how exactly the development process is implemented on the ground. The realities on the ground provided explanations of how development is politicized, how the political economy settings affect the development process and how development discourses are targeted to serve the purpose of the government.
CHAPTER FOUR

Theoretical Approaches

The relationship between anthropology and development as it has been discussed by many anthropologists is a bit problematic. On one side, anthropological discussions focus on how to make theories and methods suited for development practices, while the other side focuses on making anthropological critiques of development and its practices. However, other anthropologists, such as Lewis and Mosse, argued for the benefit of merging the two ideas to fill the gaps and create better anthropological discussion on development (see Escobar, 1995; Escobar, 1997; Esteva, 1992; Sachs, 1992; Fergusson, 1990 for the discussion of anthropology of development. Johnson, 2009; Tania Li, 2007; David Gow, 1995; Hagberg and Widmark, 2009; Nolan, R. 2002; Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Mosse 2003; Lewis, 2005; Lewis and Gardner, 1996; Lewis, 2005 for discussion on compromising the debate). From my field experience, an anthropologist's point of view depends on the existing fieldwork and the data used in academic writing.

This thesis attempts to state, describe and explain the practices and engagements of the government through its institution and of the farmers in the development process. It tries to give a reflective insight into how the national political, economic and administrative practices by the state apparatus, the particular socio-cultural settings of the local people, as well as the interactions of the bureaucrats with the farmers define the engagements and practices in the development process.

Coming to the central theoretical focus of the thesis, as I stated above, based on the fieldwork and the ethnographic materials gained, I tend to focus on the deconstructive approach (Sardan, 2009). The deconstructive approach, or the critique on development, became important following the works of Escobar (1995) and Fergusson (1990). These authors deconstructed development as discourse and power relationships. Later works of anthropologists such as Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Tania Li, 1999, 2007; and Johnson 2009 are important to show that the deconstructionist anthropologists’ discussions are based on the works of Foucault on discourse and power, as well as governmentality.
The deconstructionist approach analyzes development as discourse, a system of knowledge, practices, technologies and power relationships. It focuses on development’s routines, practices and subjectivities (Escobar, 1997; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997). Discussing these concepts of discourse, power and governmentality as they are taken from Foucault’s discussions will be important here.

Let me start with governmentality. I will borrow from Thomas Lemke's discussion of Foucault's work on governmentality. His discussions raise three main ideas. The first idea is the importance of knowledge and political discourses in the composition of the state; the second is government’s strategies or mechanisms of controlling its people or subjects through institutions Foucault called “technologies”; and the third is the state as an instrument and the effects of political strategies that define the relations between the state and the people, and how they define the internal structure of political institutions and state apparatuses.

These analyses of Foucault, as Lemke states, explain the problematic nature of government and provide a way of understanding government vis-à-vis its engagements and practices. Lemke states that government is defined as a “discursive field in which exercising power is ‘rationalized’ and in such a way government makes it possible to address a problem and offers certain strategies for managing or solving the problem.” Government is also defined by its interconnection with the formed institutions and the people (Lemke, 2000, p.2 [Foucault 2004: p.4; Foucault, 1991a: 88]).

As Lemke states, the concept of technology includes not only material but also symbolic devices. It follows discourses, narratives and performative practices. Such practices are used as procedures, instruments or mechanisms to guide and shape the conduct and decisions of others in order to achieve specific objectives (Lemke, 2000, p.8)

Foucault's explanation of the state puts it as an effect and instrument of political strategies and social relations of power. This means it is the result of complex, conflicting and contradictory governmental practices. In other words, it is an integral part of a regime of practices that specifies the objectives of governmental action and is regulated by continuous reflection (Lemke, 2000, p.8; see also [Foucault 2004: 4]). But this does not
mean state comes second to government; rather, it holds strategic positions where all power relations fall under state control. Again the state is also an instrument and a site of strategic action. As an instrument of strategies it serves to establish, as Lemke states, “a frontier regime that is defined by the distinction between inside and outside, state and non-state. This borderline does not simply separate two external and independent realms, but operates as an internal division providing resources of power” (ibid., 11). Lemke states that political knowledge is important since the state is constituted by discourses, narratives, world-views and styles of thought that allow political actors to develop strategies and realize their goals.

In general, the ideas of governmentality are important, since they let us know the political rationality for forms of power, that government includes governing others and governing self, and make it possible to conceptualize power as acting more cleverly through the production of subjectivity within individuals (Lemke, 2000).

Another idea included in the concept of governmentality is the state project. Jessop argues,

When a single state project becomes so hegemonic that all state managers will simply follow universal rules to define their duties and interests as members of a distinct governing class. Whether, how and to what extent one can talk in definite terms about the state actually depends on the contingent and provisional outcome of the struggles to realize more or less specific state projects. (Jessop 1990, p. 9)

What makes the above discussions useful is in any development process the role of government is important in shaping the practices and engagements of the local people in its own way. The need for governing others and governing self or sorts of dominations, and making others a subject in the development process, is explained through the aims the government has to instigate development as a state project and the struggle to realize it. The emphasis on this thesis is to have a look at the government’s sides of rhetoric and its institutions, practices and engagements based on the will for development, and also to see the reverse practices and engagements of the farmers. These two approaches make the discussion on governmentality important.
The idea of governmentality is also useful in relation to transnational or global governmentality (James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, 2009), a way of understanding development as international order against national governmentality within the nation. Development of governmentality is important, as Watts (2003) states, because it provides a basis for “a form of positive power that wins legitimacy and empowers action” (Watts, 2003, p.12). Unlike discussing development and its process in some other nations as a result of a singular development discourse generated and knowledge constructed for intervention, treating development as governmentality enables us to see the ways or the processes that a state or a government makes to win legitimacy of power over its subjects. This results from the ideological contestations or struggles that the nation has against the global development order (see Escobar, 1995).

As I have stated and will elaborate in the next chapters, the ruling party or government models the development process on its own ideology and argues how that benefits the people. The ruling party's efforts of winning legitimacy explain not only the contestation with other competitors, but also with the global order of development (see the next chapter). The way to do this is by harmonizing the development process with the ideology of the party and making the party a protector of the peoples' interests and aspirations. Development from the perspective of governmentality is important to see the productive dimensions of power, how it is structured in positive ways and how governments use it as a calculated means to govern and direct peoples' conduct.

The process also requires reworking development's knowledge. Fergusson (1990) states that interventions are organized on the basis of knowledge created about a nation and the people targeted for intervention. National government needs to rework this formed knowledge for intervention and create a new form of knowledge that gives legitimacy to extend its power and empowers its actions on its subjects. Hence it constructs a new form of development discourses that fit in its national development paradigm.

Now I move to the discussion of discourses. Escobar (1995) explains development as discursive forms of one singular knowledge. He emphasizes that discourse helps to analyze the theoretical and practical context in which development is associated
Anthropological discussion of development as discourse, as Grillo and Stirrat state, “inevitably leads us towards questions about the nature of politics, power, ideology and rhetoric, and the relationship between discourse and institutional practices in the development field” (1997, P.VII). This aspect is important since development is, as they state, a “fact of everyday life for most peoples of the world as the other kind of overarching frameworks of assumption and action” (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997, p.1). Similar to this fact, Pigg in his discussion states that “exposure to development discourses is a fact of everyday life” (1992, pp. 235-236).

Taking Seidel’s phrase “discourse is a site of struggle” (Seidel, 1985), it can be said that most of the writers like Escobar try to show those struggles through their discursive analysis of development. Escobar tries to show domination of the developing world through the constructed discourse about it (Escobar, 1995; see also Grillo and Stirrat, 1997, pp.14-15). Referring to Fergusson’s work, Johnson notes the need for the researchers to address the injustice and create awareness about the discursive power of development in their researches (Johnson, C., 2009, p.85; see also Fergusson, 1990; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997, pp.16-17). Johnson points out that it may be useful to define development as discourse as a “political and philosophical orientation that employs elements of discourse analysis to question the dominant aims and assumptions of development” (Johnson, 2009, p.86).

However, the discussion on discourse here is not without the awareness of its limitations. Grillo and Stirrat, and also Johnson, state that development discourse has limitations to explaining everything in a development process. Johnson states that “discourse blurs the distinction between things whose value is real or universal and ones whose value is socially constructed” (Johnson, 2009, p.80). Like the view of Escobar (1995), Grillo and Stirrat also state that discourse will make us view development as a monolithic power structure imposed over the local people or those supposed to be developed (Grillo and Stirrat, 1997, pp.19-21). From this view, Grillo and Stirrat state that it is important to see “several co-existent discourses of development” (ibid. p.21). They argue that development discourses are “institutionally extensive and compromise a
stock of ideas that informs the praxis of many groups; and are disposed to particular political projects” (ibid., p.22).

As I mentioned above, discourses analysis is the way to see how development as knowledge and practice is constructed in every day of the socio-cultural lives of a society. It demonstrates how development is interpreted in everyday social relations between the planners and implementers, and the people who are supposed to benefit from those plans. The anthropological discussions of development discourses are important, as are many literatures discussed, to show development power structures between those who have the power and the powerless, or in other words, those aspire to develop and those who are targeted to be developed.

Looking at the development discourses that are narrated by the government and the local farmers is important to getting an idea of how the development process is structured, how it is designed and reworked, and defining the relationship between the government’s institutions and the farmers in Ethiopia.

The deconstructive approach as framework for this thesis is useful in explaining the government’s development discourses and forms of governing its people. Discourses and governmentality are important to show how development discourses are constructed and reconstructed, knowledge of the intervention created, practices organized and most importantly the power structured, developed and situated in maintaining the relationship between the government and the local farmers. The need for following the deconstructive approach is obvious; it enables us to see the different parts of the development process from the general political economy it has been structured in as discourses, knowledge, power and practices. In doing so, it helps us to understand the practices and engagements of the government on one side and also the farmers’ practices and engagements on the other side.

To re-emphasizing the discussion on development as governmentality and discourses, let us see Tania Li’s discussions. Centering on Foucault’s work, Tania Li discusses that government is situated in the field of power; this is defined as “conduct of conduct.” This explains the government’s attempts to shape human conduct by calculated means (Tania
Li 2007. p.5). She adds that to improve populations requires the exercise of what Foucault termed as distinct, governmental rationality (right manner of disposing things) for achieving different goals and objectives through multiform tactics (p.6).

Tania Li states that the will to improve is a result of a combination of forms of “practical knowledge, with modes of perceptions, practices of calculations, vocabularies, types of authority, forms of judgment and others” (Tania Li 2007, p.6). The most key practice Tania states is that of translating the will to improve into explicit programs. This is problematization of the deficiencies or the needs to be addressed and “rendering technical” or the practice itself (ibid. p.7).

The main issue discussed by Tania Li is that since the identification of the problem is intimately linked with the availability of the solutions, what the government does is deliver some solutions that are available. Tania Li states that the practice of rendering technical confirms expertise and constitutes the boundary between those who are positioned as trustees providing the solutions and those subject to the expert direction. She stresses that “it is a boundary that has to be maintained and that can be challenged” (Tania, Li 2007 p.7). Other than providing solutions, rendering technical justifies political questions as technical problems that be solved through the technical development intervention (ibid. p.8). However, Tania Li argues that every problem cannot be diminished into technical faults and handled by technical expertise solutions (ibid. p.11).

Tania Li points out that government has limitations to govern since it lacks a sovereign power. This shows sovereignty is a “prerequisite” for government that enables it to govern and conduct itself effectively since it is backed by punishments (Tania, Li p.12). Tania Li mentions government’s limitations as population, forms of knowledge and technique. She argues that, from the various needs of people and the limited capacity of experts, total control is not possible, and such limitation of governments will not make their plan successful (ibid., p.18)

Another point emphasized in Tania Li’s discussion is the position of subjects and how power shapes the conditions in which they live. Tania Li states that, based on Foucault’s explanation, subjects are informed by practices of which they might be unaware, and to
which their consent is neither given nor withheld, while in Gramsci's view, people either consent to the exercise of power or they resist it (Tania Li 2007, p.25). What is interesting for Tania Li from these two points is the multiplicity of power, “the many ways that practices positions people, the various modes playing across one another, produce gap and contradictions” (ibid., p. 26).

**Summarized Discussion**

In the above discussions, I tried to show that the anthropological critique or deconstructing approach focusing on the discussion of development as governmentality and discourses, and on the concepts within the framework governmentality and discourses such as power, system of knowledge, ideology, institutional practices and power relationships, are important in understanding how development works within a certain society or a nation.

Development's practices and engagements are targeted based on the knowledge at hand about a particular local people and then integrated as part of the local people’s engagements and practices as they are enforced by government's institutions. In this process, power relationship is very important as it is used as an instrument of legitimatizing the development process among the local people. Development processes can be used as instruments for government’s political will of governing its subjects, maintaining conduct and controlling its subjects. Deconstructing the development process in this thesis based on the field materials or ethnography will be important in understanding government’s roles, practices and engagements.

Development processes as instruments of political will of governing the people make what should be done politically into something nonpolitical, as Fergusson argues, that entrenches bureaucratic power of the state and changes the political into the technical. Development discourses are vital in this process. They change what is political into nonpolitical. Government’s bureaucratic structures and its institutions do what they do as part of the development process. They are there to solve the development problems through technical deliveries. Organizing and reorganizing local peoples is just for the sake of the development process to change local people’s life (see, Tania, Li 2007; Fergusson, 1990).
The government position is important here because the development process is used to strengthen political power. The ethnographic materials for this research describe this power relationship between the government and the people (farmers). The national government is important because the government’s development discourses are stated as alternative development perspectives that result from the contestation with the international development model. In regard to development models, Croll and Woost mention development approaches like top down, state control and in the other side that advocate participatory models of development (see Croll, 1993; Woost, 1997).

This ethnography elaborates development and its discourses within the national government perspectives and its effects on the local people. As I said earlier, such discourses result from the contestation that national governments have with the global development perspectives (for such arguments, see Escobar, 1995). Such approaches will be more helpful than showing the existence of many discourses (other ways of development or multiplicity of voices and knowledge) that try to deviate from the main stream of development discourse (this refers to the western perspective of development approach; see also Escobar, 1995) to show how development discourses are adopted, reworked and used in respect to the political economy and political strategy held by national government and multiplied among locals by its institutions.

It will also be interesting to discuss how reworking strategies to win the contestation are used by the national government and reproduced through its channels as the voice of the local people, rather than discussing the international development community and national government contestations and how this affected local peoples. In his discussion of discourses, Gardner states that the choice of words reflects different ideological positions and different goals (Gardner, 1997, p. 23), which in its part emphasizes the argument I am stating here.

This thesis focuses on the contestations between the international and the national, and also the national over its “subjects,” and how these contestations define the process of development as discourses and practices within a nation. Fergusson's idea demonstrates development intervention or projects formulated based on the knowledge structured through generated discourses around a particular society or their means of livelihood.
What creates the contestations are the interventions that are organized based on created knowledge of the particular country and the interventions as consequence affecting the power of the government that wants to maintain control (Fergusson, 1990). In other words, a contestation in between “transnational governments” (see Ferguson and Gupta, 2008) and nation state have an effect on the country's power structure and further on development projects. As Fergusson (1990) states, “the effects include the expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power” (Fergusson, 1990, p. xv).

The focus here is the nation state form of development. Reworked and reformed development discourses and knowledge are integrated as development practices and engagements of the government and its subjects (the people). Development is a main task of government, a way of governing others and assuring legitimacy of power.

The above discussions on governmentality and discourses are central in respect to understanding development as an activity of the government. Once again Tania Li's discussion is very important in explaining my central focus here. Tania Li states “the rationale for development as an activity of nation state draws on the more general logic of governmentality” (Tania Li 1999, p. 296). By governmentality, as stated above, we refer to “power that seeks to govern and regulate the conditions under which people live their lives; the rationality that renders the activity of the government thinkable to its practitioners and those on whom it is practiced” (Tania Li 1999, p. 296; [Foucault, 1982, 1991; Gordon, 1991]).

Development, as Tania Li emphasizes, “condenses claims by and about the state and provides a discursive framework for conceptualizing and managing the relationship between the state and the citizens. It asserts a separation between state (which does the developing) and the populace (which is the object and recipient of development)” (Tania Li, 1999, p. 297).

Like Tania Li's focus on how relations are framed through the discourses and practices of development within the nation, the discussions of the ethnography and later in the analysis will demonstrate how the power relations between the agricultural bureau bureaucrats and the farmers are similar. In doing so, in the same way Tania Li discusses
it, I will try to show how the encounters between bureaucrats and those they would constitute as clients are explained, how relations of rule are reworked and reassessed, and failure of plans considered as a confirmation for better plans.

Tania Li states that these sorts of relations involve some complex cultural work at the interface between the development process and those they target. She states that the relation of power depends on compromise, conscious knowledge and an understanding of what is being gained and given up. It is an act of compliance, a willingness to incorporate and participate in the established order. Tania Li states, “…up there state, or state project, would be even more vulnerable to exposure without the everyday compromise that characterizes the relationship between state functionaries and citizens. Critique is muted by an intimate, sometimes cynical knowledge of the limits of the state’s capacity to deliver on promises and the recognition that government officials must also live lies and adapt if they are to get this done. It is this intimate knowledge, rather than ignorance or false consciousness, that facilitates rule and draws people in to compromising positions and relationships” (Tania Li, 1999, p. 316).

This is perfectly stated in the situation in my field as I explain the relationship between the bureaucrats from the agricultural office and the farmers. Like Tania Li’s view, my field is also no less exempt from the compromising relationship for rule of power to continue and the state and the government to have its controls and confirm its governing positions over the people.

In general, following the deconstructive approach is an ambition to search for a good, constructive idea to integrate in the development process. This was and is the ambition of anthropologists. It is an ambition to make anthropology useful in its methodological tools and theoretical concepts for social change or practical engagement for the people at a certain locality. In the book Ethnographic Practice and Public Aid, edited by Hagberg and Widmark (2009), the issue is discussed in detail by different anthropologists. For example, Brandstrom states that the concern of the move to see the practicality of anthropology for social change was also raised by Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard (Brandstrom, 2009).
As Hagberg and Widmark (2009) discuss, despite the narrow space for anthropology in the development cooperation, anthropological knowledge and perspectives continue to be critical for improved development practices. They state:

“It is central in the production of anthropological knowledge top take specific context into account and to analyses the social relations shaping this context, and then also to apprehend the situations in which the context and the social relations determine the discourse and practice of social actors. Such anthropological perspectives are pertinent to policy, because to make sense, policy must address the contexts, relations and situations in which people living in poverty are located.” (Hagberg and Widmark, 2009, p. 11)

But, in actual policy, this is difficult to implement. Re-emphasizing Tobisson's ideas in the same volume, Hagberg and Widmark mentioned that government interventions are organized through “generalized assumptions rather than informed understanding of what matters to the poor people” (Hagberg and Widmark, 2009, p.12).

The problematic nature of anthropology was also a personal experience during the fieldwork. The anthropologist and the anthropological study are limited in the development process. The anthropological field study I conducted was for some of my informants from the government institutions difficult to accept, in particular its relation to what they are doing. For them it is a simple technical matter which is not for anthropology.

The important aspects that I have mentioned in this chapter are discourse and governmentality. As discussed, they are inclusive concepts that incorporate how a development process is structured based on a power relationship through formed knowledge and existing political economy and socio-cultural settings of a particular people or nation. Development process may be based on the international development paradigm that is influenced by international governance or a different mode of development paradigm which results from the contestation which exists between the international and the national forms of governmentality. Development as discourses, as power relationship, as constructed knowledge, as a calculated means of governing people, as a way of changing what is political into nonpolitical technical matters, as an ideology,
and as a way of entrenching political power over the local people are important ideas which will be discussed further with examples in the next chapters.
CHAPTER FIVE

Government’s Development Strategy

This chapter discusses the clear line of the government’s development strategies and presents arguments pertaining to the necessity of developing the rural people and the agriculture sector. It will also provide specific examples of the concepts discussed in the theoretical parts explained through government’s position in its development strategies.

Here, my focus is to show how power is arranged and organized in a top-down structure and strategically operated through its bureaucratic institutions as a tool to enforce the state power among the local people. It is a look at the everyday institutional bureaucratic practices as a vertical encompassment, demonstrating how development discourses are recreated as an image of the national discourses and ratified as the only possible way of development for the rural people or the agriculturalist population. Hence, this chapter tries to show the ideological and political structures and strategies the national government adopts in the development process.44

As I mentioned earlier, such strategies are a result of the contestations with the “transnational government” (see Ferguson and Gupta, 2008). It is true that, as a third world country, the effects of global development projects have their own impact on the country’s adopted strategies for development. To discuss this effect, I will focus on the internal processes that define the power relationship of those who are in power and the people. This will be important to look at the contemporary shift towards development strategies that focus on a developmental state approach.

The proponents of the system of knowledge approach argue that development has relied exclusively on one knowledge system, namely the modern or western one, which foresees a modern way of production of material and cultural values with rapid economic

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44 In this thesis, the writer has an idea that discourse covers a wider context of meaning. However, discourse in this text is mainly used to explain the rhetoric produced at the national level by the government in general and also the other followed opinions and perceptions by the local peoples in reaction to the major rhetoric.
development for those underdeveloped nations and peoples (see Escobar, 1995). Fergusson also refers to this idea, stating that interventions are then organized on the basis of knowledge that form through a discourse generated by the international development communities that construct a particular object of knowledge and create a structure of knowledge around that object (Fergusson, 1990).

Though development constructs from dominant singular knowledge, Escobar argues that “the need for it” (Escobar, 1995, p.5) with no doubt, leads those who want to escape from the dominant knowledge to seek alternative ways.

The case I present here is a clear description of how the expansion of international governance through development using a conceptual constructed knowledge of a nation is deterred through other forms of knowledge, creating an independent governmentality system that also aspires development, economic growth and modernity, in the sense of what Ferguson calls alternative ways of “modernities or developments” (Ferguson, 2006). One example of this is former Prime Minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi’s thesis “African Development: A Dead End and New Beginning,” which discusses the country’s development (Meles, 2006).

Other examples are different scholars’ arguments on the development strategies of the ruling party versus other alternatives they propose against those development strategies. These arguments stress the importance of the ruling party’s (EPRDF) revolutionary democracy ideological principles for effective political and economic administration of countries like Ethiopia, and the standard collective social way of life and also the level of the economy. These ideological principles also function as a gatekeeper for the country from the total domination of liberal motives dominating the economic and political sphere (Adal Isaw, 2010). On the other side, the importance of the revolutionary democracy is discussed as a strategy to strengthen the ruling party's power in the name of group rights and also controlling important resources like land where its administration lacks transparency (Kifleyesus, 2010).

The literature discussing the political and economic process of the country concludes that, though the post-2005 periods and more the post-2010 periods are ones in which
immense development projects were planned and to some extent implemented, the political space narrowed tightly and the regimes changed into authoritarianism (Kifleyesus, 2010; Abbink, 2006; Lefort, 2010). Although the positive achievements are celebrated, the grassroots have still obtained many problems in their everyday lives.

It will be important to look at development as a state project. Development as a concept is integrated into every aspect of communication between development officers and the local people. It is the main integral part of the daily news on the nation state television and radio. It is the main business of the government and other stakeholders up to the national level. It is a project designed by the government and should be implemented by the people and development partners as the government states. Development as a state project is a policy and strategy that is planned with anticipation of its implementation and success. It is also an activity that the ruling party promises to the people in times before and following elections. Such understanding only positions the current state or government development project as a medium to rationalize the state versus people relationship.

In Ethiopia, the political culture is criticized in its hierarchical structure; power is seen as a God-given authority in many rural areas. The political elites to the local authorities are seen as one and obedience to their orders is expected, or to follow orders from above. As the people said themselves, “We are people to be ordered” (Lefort, 2010; Aspen, 1995). The changes of the political scenario to give one party total control of an authoritarian state define the local realities in relation to the big issue of development as a state project.

The government as planner and provider of the development packages claims to be the only government that opts for the economic growth of the people, the ultimate end of poverty in the country, and the creation of a middle class by comparing itself to the past and even “future” governments. But yet again the locals are expected to implement the development packages designed for fast facilitations of these achievements. The local authorities are the ones who make sure of the implementation and success of the central plans. The development strata have the same hierarchical system like that of the political,
where farmers are not only expected to achieve the development goals for their own benefits, but also for the government to meet its development plans.

As stated above, development as the state project is not only an economic issue but a political one. From the current political scenario the economic development issues not only concern transforming the country's economic development and people’s living standard, but also provide a means of keeping the political power in every periodic election. As a state project, development is taken as a medium between the ruling party and the people. In a similar pattern of the power relationship, the economic development projects are also established hierarchically from the top-down. It is also a contract that defines the power relationship between the powerful and the powerless, and that systematically rationalizes the acceptance of the ruling party and its ideology not only from the political stance but also the economic aspect. It is not only targeted to get acceptance at the national level but also at the international level, where international development communities and donor partners fall in line with the government’s political and economic ideologies based on the success or achievements of the development process.

**Developmentalism as Development Strategy**

The developmentalism paradigm has recently been anticipated by many governments in Africa. The reason for this is related to the general historical development process in the continent. The structural adjustment was one of the development paradigms taken for the African countries, which was dominant in the period of the mid-'70s to '80s. It was a move to realize development, specifically capitalist development. During those periods, as it is argued that the ownership of African developmental ideals were not in the hands of Africans, but rather in the corridors and boardrooms of western financial institutions, donor agencies and countries (Engberg-Pedersen et al, 1996; Toye, 1994).

Most African countries were forced to bow down to the political pressures and conditions of the “development partners”. Thus, they were required to abandon their mission of ensuring socio-economic development through their intervention rather by facilitating the presence of a free-market oriented economic system. The state was considered incapable of ensuring fair resource allocation and realizing the required state
of socio-economic development. Rather, the market was sanctified as a sole institution for achieving the aspired development in Africa. It was based on this principle that most African countries were forced to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programs financed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (ibid.)

The developmental quagmire that most African countries were facing forced them to become dependent on external actors or the international development community, mainly to secure financial assistance for their development projects. The strict preconditions to be fulfilled in such assistance were more pleasing to the interest of the international development community actors than to the African states or their citizens. Hence, the periods of structural adjustment were merely periods of losing the grip in determining the developmental course that Africa aspires to take.

In a recent annual report (2012) from the Nordic African Institute titled “Development Dilemma,” Terje Oestigaard states that the structural adjustment program largely failed to achieve its goals and rather caused a negative consequence in many African countries. He states, “[I]n particular, the market failure in agriculture stressed… small scale farming is most suitable for providing and maximizing the options of and opportunities for the majority of farmers and targeted as their main policy for fund by IFM and World Bank’’ (Oestigaard, 2012, pp. 4-6).

After the mid-1990s, the development paradigm shifted to neoliberalism and developmental state. The inclusion of the principles of good governance and human rights to the discourse of development, ensuring a free market system in the political and economic policies and strategies, and reformulation of the role of the state as a facilitator for the private sector rather than as a leading actor in the economic sector are some of the basic ideas that remained dominant. These principles become more incorporated into the political economic philosophies of African leaders than being externally imposed (Pederson et al, 1996; Aina, 2004; Adesina, 2002; Adesina et al, 2006). However, in recent periods, the notion of development highly changed into a developmental state (see also Report of 2011 by UNECA).
A developmental state is defined as a “state that puts development as its top priority of policy and is able to design effective instruments to promote such a goal” (Hameso, 2001 [Bagchi, 2000, p.398]; see also Tesfu, 2011; Zenawi, 2006; de Waal, 2012; Teshome, 2012). These instruments as stated by Hameso should include “the forging of new formal institutions, the weaving of formal and informal networks of collaboration and the utilization of new opportunities for trade and profitable production” (Hameso, 2001, p.119).

A developmental state is thus understood as an interventionist state that identifies priorities, develops strategies, sets targets, facilitates coordination among various sectors and stakeholders, monitors achievement of goals, establishes clear economic and social objectives, and influences the pace and direction of development. Based on these main facts of what a developmental state is and what it should comprise, the argument or debate is going on regarding the adoption of such a paradigm of the developmental state model in Ethiopia (see Hameso, 2001; Tesfu, 2011; Zenawi, 2006; de Waal, 2012; Teshome, 2012; Routley, 2012).

The proposition on developmental state paradigm is argued in two folds. Melse Zenawi argues that the liberal development paradigm is the dead end for Africans, so looking for the Asian trend of developmentalism is the best way to achieve African success in development and economic growth that needs a strong state intervention and control to run the economy and development schemes (see Zenawi, 2006). Hence, he argues for minimizing the global pressure from big institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and creating a formidable internal stability for the party running the state in principle of a democratic developmental state (Zenawi, 2006; de Waal, 2012; Teshome, 2012; Kebede, 2012; Edigheji, 2005).

It is a move to create a state and a government that puts development and economic growth as its top priority of implementation and policy that will have total benefits for all societies. Such economic benefits, growth and gaining wealth will put the people in alliance with the government and the state (Zenawi, 2006; de Waal, 2012; Teshome, 2012; Edigheji, 2005).
Omano Edigheji explains a developmental state as

One whose ideological underpinnings are developmental and one that seriously attempts to construct and deploy its administrative and political resources to the task of economic development. In other words, the democratic developmental state is defined by its objectives and its institutional characteristics. The key organizational features of importance are ‘autonomy’ of state institutions, which enables it to define and promote its strategic developmental goals, and its ‘embeddedness’, which is the state forming alliances with key social groups in society that helps it to achieve its developmental goals. In this perspective, autonomy implies the presence of high degrees of coherent state agencies that are able to formulate and implement coherent developmental goals. Put differently, autonomy means the ability of the state to behave as a coherent collective actor that is able to identify and implement developmental goals. (Edigheji, 2005, p.10)

Such an alliance compels a political party that aspires to form a developmental state to have mass support, when the party is formed by the core society that aspires and needs economic development and getting out of poverty (Edigheji, 2005).

Zenawi asserts that in developing countries like Ethiopia, creating a developmental state requires a stable ground, where the mass agrarian population, or a sort of middle class, forms a political party that opts for development and a coalition with its core society that excludes the private sector. The need for a mass-based political party that has an alliance with its base society is necessary for the continuity of developmental policy through the holding of political power by the party in power through periodic elections. With the idea of combining developmental state and democracy, Meles asserts that a developmental state in a developing country, in its initial period, should be based on the agrarian society and agriculture should be the engine for the accelerated growth (Meles, 2006). He further states,

We have argued that widespread and relatively equitable ownership of assets is a requirement for accelerated development of agriculture. It is clear accelerated agricultural development will have to include commercialization; it cannot be based on sustaining subsistence farming. We have also argued that various local voluntary organizations to support marketing and improvement in productivity have to be established. Finally we have shown that resource transfers from agriculture must be such as to maintain the incentives for farmers to continue to increase production. All of the above are fully
consistent with the interests of the farmers. One can even claim, that it is very difficult to envisage any other package that would be more in tune with the interests of the farmers. The rural population can therefore be the solid base for a stable developmental coalition in a developing country. The steps that have to be taken to accelerate agricultural development are also the steps that are needed to bring about the changes in the social structure of the peasant to transform him/her into a force for democracy. The activities of a developmental state will thus not only be consistent with the interests of the peasants but also with their social transformation into a force of democracy. (Meles, 2006)

Such an argument is a rationalization of the development process and the party’s pro-developmental state for the sake of the agrarian society, meeting its development goals and winning the periodic election through its alliance with the mass agricultural population. In such a case, forming a democratic developmental state is possible, at least in Ethiopia’s case. The changes after the 2010 election are good examples.

The move to developmental state, however, presents a new way of political and economic power enforcement by the government over its people, which puts the people in the dilemma of choosing economic growth and moving out of poverty in favor of democratic rights (de Waal, 2012; Teshome, 2012; Kebede, 2012; Edigheji, 2005). The reverse of the 2005 election for some other scholars is an example to show that the developmental state approach is not a developmental goal, but rather the forming of an authoritarian state or a one-party dominance formation which is undemocratic in the name of becoming a democratic developmental state where the election is not a true democratic process for the people to choose their representatives, mentioning as an example the failure of the 2005 election (see Alemayehu, 2009; Dowden, 2012). A shift in developmental paths is also criticized as a political endeavor that centers on who is benefiting rather than checking whether or not the path is right or wrong.

As stated above, my goal here is not to emphasize the debate between pro liberal development orientation and what the ruling party asserts as a viable development path, but rather to show the political economic ground of the country where I did my ethnography. In depicting the lives of the farmers in the next chapters, it is also a leading way for the analysis of the realities of the farmers, how they are influenced by the existing political economy structure. The current development discourse is a shift from
the former broader, global economic and political influence to an internal power struggle
that aims at systematic power control. The discourse is also strategized to keep the
balance with the international development partners for development aids, whilst trying
to maintain its sovereignty of power and authority in its political and economic stance.

**Comparing Developmental strategy with the Asian trends**

Most arguments on such debate that also try to assess the process of developmental
states in Asia argue that there are basic differences in the Ethiopian reality compared to
the Asian counterparts. The critique argues that a developmental state approach is a way
to authoritarianism or totalitarianism of a one-party rule through coercion, and such a
model is not a democratic developmentalist in nature, but rather it follows other practices
in countries like China, where to the real aim is disguised by blending ideas from
liberalism and socialism (Hayet, 2011).

For example, in his article “A Few Points on Democracy Versus Development,”
Wondemhunegn Ezezew states that China’s economic success is a result of gradual
erosion of the government’s role in directing the national economy and the subsequent
rise of private capital and responsibility, not the other way around. Thus, it is incorrect to
attribute China’s success in economic growth to the authoritarian features of the
Communist Party of China (CCP); rather, it is the result of continuous reform, opening of
the economy to foreign capital and expertise, gradual decentralization in the organization
of production, and with it the increasing shrinkage of government presence in the
economic scene (Ezezew, 2011; see also Hayet, 2011).

Another critical view is that the ruling party needs to redefine its ideology, which is
revolutionary democracy, to build a developmental state. This critique is based on the
ideological principle of revolutionary democracy that combines democracy with
revolution, and the historical process of forming such ideology that incorporate ideas
from a derivative of Leninism, Marxism, Maoism, Stalinist authoritarianism and
liberalism. It is argued that the success of a developmental state requires changes of
ideological stands to become effective like those of Japan and Thailand (Hayet, 2011).
Detailed notes about China’s governmentality system, in “Chinese Governmentalities: Government, Governance and the Socialist Market Economy” by Gary Sigley, discuss how the reform takes place in changing the socialist market economy that blends together liberal and socialist ideas where the government consolidates its developmental thinking. He states,

China’s transition from ‘plan’ to ‘market’ has been accompanied by significant shifts in how the practice and objects of government are understood, calculated and acted upon. We have witnessed during this process the emergence of a hybrid socialist-neoliberal (or perhaps ‘neo-Leninist’) form of political rationality that is at once authoritarian in a familiar political and technocratic sense yet, at the same time, seeks to govern certain subjects, but not all, through their own autonomy. (Sigley, 2007)

Sigley states that what was unique for China was the continued high status of technoscientific and administrative reasoning amongst officials and scholars and an accompanying belief in the strong necessity for the party-state to remain the primary driving force behind national development. Of course in the reform period, this gives way to new calculations and strategies which call for governing through autonomy, whether through market mechanisms or the autonomous conduct of individuals (Sigley, 2007; see also Pei, 2006).

Other than the internal model of Chinese development, China as a development partner for African nations has become a concern of recent literature questioning the motives of China on African nations’ development (see Alden, 2007 and Pere, 2007). The main question of the literature is to understand China as development partner in Africa, which actually redefines or changes the outlook for the concept of development partner in African nations like Ethiopia. Alden states that, as a development partner, China’s involvement in Africa is part of a long term strategic commitment to the continent, one that is driven by its own economic needs, a commitment to transmit its development experience to the continent and a desire to build effective cooperative partnerships across the developing world. (Alden, 2007, p. 5)

From this issue, what is important is how African nations like Ethiopia are using the development experience and also gaining development partners not only form the west,
that were historically considered development partners, but also from the new, emerging powers like China and other nations like Brazil.

Development partners of the west, with their preconditions for development and also ideological impositions, are nowadays somehow not necessarily a matter as one sees some African countries shift in development partner negotiations. For example, in Ethiopia, there is a shift from integrating democratic processes like fair elections to a major party system, which others refer to as authoritarianism. Development partners’ alliances for aid and other assistance and integrating them in the implementation of some development projects are also important for the government that tries to build a developmental state and for the locals to be addressed by the development efforts.

**Strategies for Aid**

Gaining development partners is a complex process and has its own dilemma on development, as Tisch and Wallace (1994) argue. They state that there may be two aims of providing aid for developing nations. In realism perspectives, aid is provided to achieve some political objective, while idealism argues that an altruistic moral basis is the cause for providing aid for humanitarian ends (Tisch and Wallace, 1994).

Development is a complex process that involves “capital resources, administrative capacity, individual and societal attitude. People’s participation” as Tisch and Wallace state (ibid. p.5). Development assistance in its complexity and the decisions made by planners and leaders on both sides of governments (donors and recipient) are important. Development assistance then has its own dilemmas that involve the economic, political and individual, where choice of development assistance on a particular economic sector and also particular country makes it a complex economic and political process. In addition, the involvement of individuals in implementation is also a critical matter in the development process (ibid.).

In the book *The Politics of Aid: African Strategies for Dealing with Donors*, Furtado and Smith state Ethiopia’s experience. In their discussion they try to show that Ethiopia’s donor relation is different from other African nations. They state that, when Ethiopia started its donor relations in the 1950s, “it did as a sovereign state” where donor relations
were seen as a “meeting of equals”. Furtado and Smith state “government is therefore more assured of its own directions, of its entitlement to set the development agenda” (Furtado and Smith, 2009, p.131).

However, the donor relation was minimal for a long time until recently, following the revolution of 1974. Furtado and Smith state that there are three reasons the donor relation is different: having the federal system establish that regional states have autonomy on the most basic donor focus issue of developments like health and education, a “culture of discipline and performance pervades government and civil servant” that is seen as an important factor for implementation of policies, and the consistent receiving of food aid, as they state, “involve little discretionary power on the part of government to influence donor behavior, and given the fixed aid budgets of donors, almost certainly come at the expense of greater development-focused aid to Ethiopia” (Furtado and Smith, 2009, p. 132).

The Ethiopian aid story is characterized by an “on-again/off-again” nature of government relations in different periods. The donor relation made a slow return after the year 2000 and was getting higher until the 2005 election. The civil unrest following the 2005 election made the aid slower. As aid matters to the development process with the on and off relation, the government uses different strategies to get its aid. According to Furtado and Smith, the government uses strategies like:

Seeking support from nontraditional donors, such as China, who the government hopes will provide financing with fewer conditions related to domestic policies and politics than current donors. Second it is appealing for the scaling up of aid from traditional donors on the ground of achieving MGDs and absolute need, plus a track record of good management… (p.137)

It is good to look at the internal government structure in relation to the political structure. Even though decentralization is pursued, the ruling party “EPRDF maintains a highly centralized decision making structure and control over policy formulation” (p.139). Furtado and Smith state,
In order to truly understand the policymaking process, one must account for those institutions within the executive and the EPRDF that play central roles in setting national policy, such as the prime minister office and the EPRDF central committee. (p.139)

They go on to state,

Simultaneous tendencies towards centralization and decentralization have helped the federal government retain control over its core policy agenda in areas such as food security, agriculture, liberalization, and the role of private sector, while holding sub-national governments responsible for the implementation of important social sector policies. (p. 138)

This mainly relates to the historical development of EPRDF itself. As I mentioned earlier, it was a guerrilla movement that was supported by the peasants. This resulted in focusing on rural economy and population after gaining the power. The main policy also advanced agricultural development focusing on small scale agriculture as leading for industrialization. This strategy also emphasized the responsibility of government for delivering services in all sectors and main agents of development and economic growth (Furtado and Smith, 2009).

In government donor relations, the government’s approaches to agriculture, economic management, the pace of liberalization and improving basic social services in rural areas are highly owned policy agendas by the government (Furtado and Smith, 2009, pp.140-143). In examining the aid assistance, apart from the formal government-donor aid apparatus (World Bank and IMF), there are three types of gaining assistance which took the higher share. These are bilateral aid, new sources of off-budget aid and aid from nontraditional donors such as China (ibid., p.144).

In general, the aid case in Ethiopia is a government control and ownership over its policy agenda while donors more easily embed themselves in government structures. A centralized decision making system, balancing the sources of finance in between traditional and nontraditional, gives the government control over its donor relation. In addition, the need for aid in the country is also one of the motivations for donors to provide aid in spite of their reservations in some political and even ideological issues with the government (Furtado and Smith, 2009).
Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to show the overall setting of development in its political economy setting. As a developing nation and nation in Africa, Ethiopia’s development process has so many interplays. The government’s strategy is focusing on developmentalism to bring development or economic growth, and also stretching state power as the dominant development interventionist in every locality. It is a strategy by the government to win the contestations from all sides.

Keeping sovereignty and maintaining development and economic growth in relation to development aids explains the different scenarios the “transactional governmentality” effects on the development process and the meaning of “development partners” in Ethiopia’s case. As I will discuss later on, the engagement of international organization or development partners in my case is somehow minimal other than providing financial and technical support.

The smallholder farmers and their agriculture are at the center of intervention for the development process strategized, economic growths aspired to, and poverty alleviation goals targeted. The overall development policies and ideological stances are also, as stated and argued many times, held as a strong faith to place the poor farmers and their poor production in a better condition. Which alternatives can be a question, but the focus in this paper is on how the government alternative in practice is implemented among the poor farmers and how its engagement is changing or affecting the lives of the poor farmers. This is also important because the overall debates on the alternatives overlook the local facts and exactly how local people are affected by the development and political processes.

The next chapters will show the local realities form the ethnographic materials gained from the field. The direct influence of the central policy, the interaction of the institutions that are in effect to implement the government policies and the development strategies, the involvement of the NGOs, and most importantly, the social and cultural structures of the local people have their own effects on the overall development process interplay in different localities. There may be differences from one locality to another in the development process considering the factors mentioned above in the interactions. The
ethnography chapter will show the realities of my field area and the development process in contrast to the pictures depicted through the general discourses. The practice of development and the engagement of multiple actors including anthropologists as researchers are important to see how development discourse and its practice interplay with one another.

As I discussed in the introduction, the ethnography in the next chapter details the practices and engagements of the government’s institution (the agricultural bureau) and the farmers in the development process, and the discussion tries to explain the reasons for their practices and engagements. The political economy settings discussed in the above chapters are important in shaping the practices and engagements of the governments and the farmers. The ethnography not only describes again the political economy setting discussed above through the daily lives of the farmers and the bureaucrats in the agricultural bureau, but it will also be a description of the socio-cultural settings of the local farmers. I will emphasize the socio-cultural aspects in the analysis chapter more following the ethnography.
CHAPTER SIX

Ethnographical Discussions

The Serte and Fintiftu irrigation sites

Serte and Fintiftu are the names of the rivers in the irrigation sites where I based my fieldwork. The two small scale irrigation sites are built up, or modern irrigations. They were built more than a decade ago; the Serte irrigation dam was built in 2003 and the Fintiftu irrigation dam was built in 2005. Initially the irrigation schemes were built by World Vision, a nongovernmental organization that works in the woreda. There are quite a few nongovernmental organizations in the woreda, including the NGO, that I contacted for the fieldwork.

The irrigation sites are under the administration of the woreda agricultural bureau. The farmers are organized in associations to make effective use of the irrigation schemes. About 100 to 130 farmers can be covered by both irrigation schemes at full capacity. However, the numbers of farmers engaged in the irrigation activities varies due to the amount of rainfall gained during the rainy season. The construction of the irrigation schemes divides the farmers in the area as farmers with dry farmlands (farmers able to cultivate their land during the rainy season) and those with wet farmlands (farmers that use the irrigation).

The Irrigation Sites During the Study Period

The irrigation water reservoirs and canals were not properly functioning or almost not functioning at the time of my study. The farmers were using the rivers by diverting them into the irrigation canals. Some of the canals also did not function properly, as they were blocked by some residues. It is the farmers’ task to make sure water gets to their plots. The first field visits involved learning what the farmers considered the major issue affecting their cultivations in their plots. The farmers were so frustrated that some of them asked for solutions through my agency. Their words, “We are tired of asking the agriculture bureau; if you may bring some solution or can take the case to the higher office and could help us” presented one challenge for me in the first period of the
fieldwork until I could assert to them that I was unable to bring any immediate solution, but what I do (my anthropological research) will may also contribute to finding a solution for their problems.

The *woreda* (district) is the higher administration center that holds different offices for political, economic and social activities. The district (*dewa chefa*) is one of the 166 *woredas* in the region. Under the *woreda* administration, there are 19 rural villages. According to the *woreda* document, by focusing on good governance, the *woreda* diligently works based on the national policies and strategies, and the growth and transformation plan designed by the central government.

Likewise, this principle equally works for all the bureaus under the *woreda* administration. The *woreda* agricultural and rural development bureau is responsible for the agricultural activities in all the *woreda* and *kebelle*. The particular rural *kebelle* where I did my fieldwork has one police station and one Farmers Training Center (FTC). The center has three Development Agents who are trained professionals in animal science, plant science and also natural resource management.

The farmers in the *kebelle* are organized by the FTC in different organizational forms. The households divided into small units called *Gote*. The *kebelle* has 10 *Gotes*, each holding a number of households. Then there is an organizational level called development groups. There are 37 development groups. Each group contains about 20 to 30 farmers.

Other than those forms of organizations, the farmers are ordered in the new form of organization, which is actually a nationwide form of politically arranged strategy called “one to five”. In this way, a selected leader has five other farmers under his supervision. This system is not only for the farmers, it is also for all the staffs in the agricultural bureau. At the time of the study, when I was in the agricultural bureau, the staffs were in hot debate and discussions regarding how to organize. Actually, a selection for the leader was done by higher officers in a rank and ruling party’s polity approval.

In a “one to five” organization, there are criteria that are set to select farmers as leaders of a group. According to my informant, the basic criterion is “the person’s
support for the government (which means the ruling party) and its policies”. Other than that, his social relations with his neighbors and his influence in his community are vital to being successful in his agricultural production and engaged in modern agricultural production like using technologies such as irrigations and other like fertilizers and seeds. Through this “one to five” organizing system, the total population in the kebelle is organized into 149 units where each unit has 6 members.

The associations for the two irrigation sites are also under the FTC in the kebelle. The associations organized themselves through forming groups that fit accordingly with the numbers of farmers using the irrigation schemes for one term. Because of the level of the water, the farmers are divided into two major groups to produce in two terms. So the first group who use in the first term cannot use in the second term. For example, in the Fintiftu irrigation site, the farmers divide into two major groups. From these two groups, the first group can use the water in the first term. For the management and efficient usage of the water, the first group will have six small groups to facilitate water accessibility based on the need for water and priority to be given. The small groups are important for managing the water distribution among the farmers.

Such arrangement also determines the cycle of production for the farmers. There must be communications and arrangements to use the water considering the stage of cultivation. Farmers need more water during planting the seeds and for the following weeks after planting the seed. However, this does not mean the group system and management work like they are supposed to. Farmers engage in disputes over the use of water and the need of it based on their cultivation stages. For example, even if a farmer needs the water more than the one whose turn it is, sometimes it is the case that the second farmer will not let the first farmer to use it. In such a way, in Fintiftu irrigation site, from the total 88 people only 40 farmers can use the irrigation at the first term.

The associations have a chairman and other selected members to handle the finance administration, documentation and monitoring activities and also to collect monthly payments from the farmers. However, these irrigation associations are limited in their capacity to perform their tasks, because the farmers in the associations are less interested in more active participation and instead want to focus more on their private farming
activities. Mutual trust among each other, the need for the association and its benefit and illiteracy problems are important factors for their lack of interest. The shared values and perceptions among each other, their capacity and engagement and the tendency towards hard work in their farming activities are also important factors that determine their interactions in their association meetings.

The associations are also limited in their anticipated goals to make the farmers reach the market and sell their harvest at a good price. This is also attributed, according to my informants, to the poor support of the woreda agricultural bureau. According to the district’s strategy, different associations should come together and form a union, which has a benefit to strengthen their capacity in human and financial resources. To form a union, at least 25 associations should come together. The Fintiftu and Serte irrigation associations are members of the union, which has objectives to strengthen the capacity of the associations, to reach for a market and to tackle other problems faced by the association and then by the individual farmers.

Despite this plan, the practice is not the same as what is strategized to make the farmers more productive and reach to the market, and empower them on market value decisions. The association, as we will see later in detail, is one with no function, where its members actually try to produce and sell their goods and solve their problems through their own individual efforts.

**Internal Structure of the Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau**

The woreda’s agricultural and rural development bureau has different sections for operating its daily activities based on the national, regional and also the zonal and woreda strategies and plans. The irrigation section is one of the sections in the bureau. During my observation, most of the sections or departments were barely functioning. The bureau is staffed with professionals with technical abilities who are graduates from different colleges and universities. In most cases other than the office tasks, they are also responsible for practical engagement in demonstrating modern ways of agricultural productions for the farmers and assisting them for better production. The different departments in the bureau should also make their annual and semiannual plans. Such plans are part of bureau tasks. For example, the irrigation section will make its own plan
that will set a goal for extension of irrigable lands or increasing productivity of the farmers. However, such plans are rarely implemented other than to fulfill the office task requirement that accordingly sets the new established system for all government institutions. The system is called Business Processing Reengineering (BPR), and most of the time the monitoring and monthly reports are filled with the problems faced for not achieving the goals targeted.

Farmers are reached out to by professionals and administrators from the bureau through the following structure and organization. It is a top-down approach wherein experts in the office and higher officials send technical service providers for supervision, and where the supervisors contact the development agents (DA) at the Farmer Training Centers. The direct contact with the farmers is mostly done by the development agents, where they collect data and other problems faced by the farmers. The DAs then report back to the supervisors.

The supervisors from the agricultural bureau contact the farmers when there will be major problems that need to be addressed or, sometimes, when there will be major disputes that could affect the development process. As I have observed, the officers are accompanied by polices when they go to the farmers to settle down disputes. This is done to assure their power over the farmers and to enforce the farmers to comply, even if they do not like what is to be done along their farm plots. Most activities are done based on the consensus asserted in the power structure of the bureau officer over the farmers that forces the farmers to accept that everything is implemented as part of the major development process and to the ultimate benefit of the farmers themselves. The enforcement is important, since it makes farmers check that their acts are not against the interest of the development process that is implemented by the government. One farmer stated that, “Even if what is to be done may affect us, as far as it is come from the government, we will accept it. They may know better what can benefit us.” This, however, denies the chance for the farmers to forward better alternatives that could also accommodate their interests.

As I have observed, the agricultural bureau is far removed from the everyday needs of the farmers. Supervisors and extension workers in most cases have to take public
transports to do their activities. The transportation problem makes the farmers and also the bureau staff not interact as needed. The experts then remain in their offices to implement their office duties. However, the officers do not have many tasks to do in their offices, which results in a question of motivations as some of the officers explained.

During the time of my study, the most important thing to observe was the process of organizing the agricultural bureau staffs in the “one to five” organizing system, which was implemented by the government as a political decision. This was debated and argued by the staffs. The officer, who will be chosen as a leader of the other five coworkers under him or her, will have additional responsibilities other than his or her professional task. These responsibilities include following, controlling and motivating the other staffs under in his or her group. This structure or the arrangement of the work environment, since it is political and instructed by the polity bureau of the ruling party, is questioned by many staff members, who do not want to be in political command, other than their professional jobs.

The other problem is since those professionals come from different areas with different backgrounds, their differences in professional level, political outlook, salary and other aspects create a competitive nature and less cooperation not only to work together through such an organizational system, but also in their own professional tasks. From their informal discussions, my observation and also informal interviews I learned that it creates a lack of trust among coworkers. Some have said that it is a challenge to be under supervision of a leader in this arrangement other than the higher officer in their own departments.

**Rendering technical or political**

For the concerned officers form the agricultural and rural development bureau, tasks include both political and technical service. Implementing the national agenda of increasing agricultural productivity and assuring food security in the country are huge tasks to be carried out with the coalition of the farmers. Enforcing the farmers to mobilize to this end requires good strategies. In its discourses of development, the government stated that engaging the farmers in a participatory development strategy, which means mobilizing the farmers by creating initiatives from below or from the farmers themselves
for their own benefits and supporting them with the necessary technical supports, was ideal. To fulfill this plan, experts at the bureau are hired to provide those services for the farmers.

The bureau, however, is not only established to deliver technical support for the farmers, but it is also a management institution as part of the government organ which has legal status on the land, water and all other resources the farmers possess and use. The legal status also gives the bureau the right to accordingly take measures. The agricultural bureau is also a power entity that informs the farmers when development strategies change or new forms of organizational structures need to be implemented by the government. For example, the agricultural bureau instructed the farmers to participate in mass campaigns of rehabilitation of degraded lands in the kebelle as it was ordered by regional or federal government.

The bureaucrats up to the development agents have their own authority or exercise some power over the farmers that emanates from the institutional power they represent (i.e. the agricultural bureau). This structure, as I have observed, creates a top-down relationship, where in most cases power is used by the bureaucrats to enforce farmer compliance and participation in collaborative activities that need mass engagement. When farmers become resistant to participate in some activities, for example when they try to hinder the activity that affects their benefits, the members of the agriculture bureau effectively use their power to make the farmers comply with their activities.

As I mentioned earlier, power exercising strategy reminds the farmers of the dominant phrases associated with national development plans when there is resistance. To be labeled as “anti-development,” which suggests opposition to government’s plans, is a dominant phrase that will be used for anyone who shows a kind of resistant behavior. Farmers as well as the agricultural bureau officers are conscious to avoid such labeling. Institutional power is used by the bureaucrats to enforce important activities such as mass campaigns and also to complete reports that should be delivered to higher regional or federal offices.
Some of the Cases During my Fieldwork

I had a chance to accompany the agricultural bureau officers on their field visit. The field visit was to solve the disputes on the ongoing construction of irrigation canal build by the woreda agricultural bureau. Some farmers interrupted the construction of the canal, since it affected their farming activities as the canal passed through their farm plots.

The head of the agricultural bureau, other officers responsible for the canal construction, the irrigation officer, and some policemen attempted to deal with the farmers demands. The farmers were so eager to present their case and how they were affected by the project going on in the area. One farmer was very resistant and demanding of his interests. After some period of discussion, the problems were solved as farmers complied with the agriculture bureau officers’ ultimatum. Such a dispute-solving procedure was important for the bureau to make the farmers believe and understand the activities in their areas are more in terms of the bureau's plan to benefit them than to give other alternatives in respect to their demands. However, if farmers become persistent in their resistance, the bureau can get help to use legal force from the policemen. Such a field visit, as the head of the bureau stated, “is an action to make the farmers feel heard about their problems and also to show that they cannot interrupt any kind of development activities.” This is similar to the phrase “It is part of the government’s development plan and you cannot be against it.”

The second case is the Fintiftu irrigation association meeting. The meeting was arranged by the leaders of the association and the responsible officers for organizational activities from the agricultural bureau. The meeting was held to select one person for administrating the finance activities of the association among the members.

It took a while until members of the association gathered in the meeting place and the meeting started. Such behavior from the farmers showed their reluctance in such engagements. The first phase of the meeting was interesting, since there were arguments among the farmers. The farmer who was selected for the position strongly objected the nomination and tried to present his reasons. He stated his inability to write and read, which the job required. The main emphasis he gave in his argument was his lack of trust
on the point of the selection by his neighbors. He argued with the officers that his neighbors selected him not to benefit him or because he was able to do the job, but because they wanted him to be in debt like the former person who was in the position, who wanted to resign because of this.

However, there was no other farmer who was able to be selected for the position. The committees of the association stated that it was the duty of all the farmers to take some responsibility for one another. The first phase of the meeting was occupied by the farmers’ argument, until it was interrupted by the officer who led the meeting. It was a striking point how conduct was maintained by the farmers. The officer did not go to produce other alternatives or new ideas but rather to directly use the ultimate power he has that emanates from his institution or the woreda agricultural bureau. Such power is used to produce conduct among the local farmers. He stated,

“It is a people’s choice, the people choose you to work for them, not to put you in debt, but because they believe that you can do the job. As a member of this association all of you should have to work together. You (to mean all the farmers) get this chance to use government’s land and to produce using the irrigation more than other farmers, who did not get this opportunity. You have to work together for the people and the government, and for the country’s development. If you do not work properly together as an association using the government property, you can be out of the system. You know how it works.”

The main words in any development discourse are people (hezeb), used to represent the general public; government (mengest), which is confusing but by most people’s understanding includes the administration and the state; country (hager), which represents the whole territory; and development (lemat), which includes any kind of activity under the national rhetoric of development (for example, an individual farmer, who works in his own plots of land, is put under the wider development meaning).

The combination of such words as I mentioned above are a part of everyday life interactions between farmers and the agricultural bureau officers just considering the particular field site; but it is the major public discourse in all walks of life in the country
and my fieldwork is not different. So, such words put a difference in the power structure other than a normal conversation, as no one wants to be out of the main circle of the discourse or be anti-development. However, as I observed the rural people, even though their ideas were sanctioned in such discourses, they tended to express their ideas and reasons to show their resistance on the issues they did not agree with, and in such expressions they used strong words and proverbs.

The meeting I attended was interesting for depicting how the social relations were built up among the farmers themselves, and also between those who assume power on different levels. It was a chance to see the self-image of a farmer against his community, and also those who assumed power within the community, like the association leaders, and officers from the agricultural bureau who exercise the institutional power they represent. For example, there is a power difference in lobbying and exercising accepted duties among the farmers between those who work as supervisors or experts directly assisting the farmers and those officers who exercise the institutional power of the bureau.

In the third case, during the time of my fieldwork, there was a nationwide campaign in every rural woreda for the rehabilitation of degraded areas. The woreda and the particular kebelle were implementing the national campaign ordered by the ministry of agriculture. Such engagements, as the rhetoric states, are implemented based on a participatory development model that claims to initiate the locals’ engagements in such mass campaigns with their own initiatives to protect their own resources. The mass campaign was led by the development agents from the farmer training center (FTC) to be effective within its targeted period. The farmers would work five days a week for the campaign.

I joined the masses to see the activities and the interactions. It mainly consisted of putting trenches along the terrains to protect from soil erosion. Every household sent one or two members to the campaign. Those farmers who did not meet the obligation to send one of the family members would pay some amount of money instead. Because the activity was obligatory, the masses included children, young people, old people, men and women. Showing participation is one criterion to be exempted from the fine.
The DAs are responsible for mobilizing the people and leading the activities. In such campaigns the organizational arrangement implemented by the district’s agricultural and rural development bureau is important. For such engagements the different organizational arrangements like the “one to five” are important because they are mechanisms to enforce farmer engagement in mass campaigns, since it is easy to check farmers who do not want to participate and make them to pay fine.

During the campaign, even though joining with the DAs helped introduce me to many farmers and talk with them, I was seen as a stranger as some farmers doubted me and asked me many questions to clarify for them. I present here one of the interviews I did with a farmer.

The informant asked me, “Why you are here?”

I replied, “I was there for a research, which is part of my study.”

While the conversation continued, and I was asking about the campaign, the farmers’ lives and other issues, he said, “Here, you are a stranger (tisegure lewete—this means a person different from the local people, which literally translates as a person with different hair). It is not easy to talk every stranger with detail. However, since you came with the DAs, we are talking to you.”

He continued, “We do not know your background, but you are here and if we talk something out of ordinary it will not be good.”

I encouraged him to talk and to tell me why. He replied, “During the previous election (that is the 2005 election), many things get out of order. The farmers start to say, I am the one who administer my own farmland. There were problems between those supports the oppositions and the ruling party. People misunderstood the process, because of that farmers faced many problems. So, we check not to make mistakes again like the previous and to be in trouble.”

He continued, “Since I became a member (he is a member of the ruling party), I am able to realize the benefit of becoming a member. And also the opportunities created for the farmers to cultivate more. We have been only told to work hard, to sell our production
for markets and to be good and hardworking farmers, nothing else. Since we started to understand the benefits, we stand with the side of our government and for the development process.”

The campaign was a very important task for the *woreda*, since it had media coverage. The DAs must work hard to make the *woreda* administrators arrange for the media to cover the progress of the masses campaign in the *woreda* and *kebelle*.

The DAs' main task was mobilizing and organizing the farmers, documenting data, and also distributing inputs for the farmers. One of my informants from the DA stated,

“Our main task here was to provide technical skills for the farmers, but we are not doing that yet; rather we are working on organizing and mobilizing the farmers. There is no well-prepared land for demonstration to provide our primary service to the farmers. If all of us work in our expertise supporting the farmers in their cultivations, animal husbandries and irrigation activities, the farmers could produce more better; but as you are observed, the farmers mostly cultivate by their own, and they do it with little efforts.”

The above stories tell that the practices and engagements on the ground are different from the development discourses engaged in by the government. From my observation, for the farmers, cultivating the land without the support of the expertise is a must-do activity for having some sort of production. It is the same for the officers to do what is prioritized by the bureau rather than what they should be doing as experts in helping the farmers. The interactions between the farmers and the bureau staffs have multiple approaches that are affected by various orders and plans set by the administrators and planners for different political and development goals. So the interaction is not as such as one expects just professional, but rather multiple and situated on the power the bureau possesses over the farmers.

**Learning From the Farmers’ Everyday Life**

The *kebelle* is the home for 6,319 people. The rural setting is characterized by its total calmness except on the market day. The farmers create their own workspace in their farmland. For any observer who enters the farmers’ way of life, he or she learns that the farmers’ life work is dependent on huge interaction, communication and social solidarity.
One keeps another farmer’s cultivation safe from any damage. The farmland is a place of huge cooperation, where one works for another on the basis of mutual benefits through traditional arrangements of contract. It is an economic sphere where farmers depend on each other for good harvests and better production.

The farmland is a space for making a decision for the farmer about his or her production and managing of income. Farmers also face similar vulnerabilities on their productions. Climate vulnerability is a major one. As I mentioned earlier, they have also been vulnerable in the same manner from the sociopolitical effects faced in different periods that have had a tremendous effect on their lives.

The rural people are not bound within their local living space. They are not secluded people that are tied to their land and farming activities. Their interaction is not limited to only government bureaucrats, development agents and nongovernmental organizations. More specifically, the younger generation in the farmers' community has not confined itself with the land for economic sustenance; they are thinking beyond their living space to make a living as a non-farmer. For some, education is a way out. But many in that rural kebelle opt for searching and dreaming to make a living somewhere other than their established living space. It is not only the wishes of sons and daughters but, as I learnt, it is also the desire of families to send their children to a different world in search of better lives. This is the part of the country’s great migration problem to the Arab world, which has lot of pushing factors.

Some Stories

Aliyemer is a 20-year-old boy. Every early morning he is on his farm plot. On the day I met him he was plowing. He guided the pairs of oxen from one side to the other side of the land to make sure he adequately plowed the farm to improve production. By the time I reached his farm plot, he had done a quarter of it. He was working hard to get some harvest in the coming months, so that he could get some money after selling the harvest and to cover some of his expenses. For Aliymer or for other youngsters his age, farming could be a difficult job that needed great labor and dedication, as they explained it.
Aliymer said, “Sir (gashe), who really needs to till the land all his life time? It needs hard labor. But the fruit you get is not worth it compared to the labor and effort you put in to it. That is why most of us, the young here, are in search of other opportunities.”

Aliyemer and many of the youngsters in that area have the same story. Many of them are returnees from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. They left their locality and went a long way to reach Saudi Arabia. They have to pay a lot of money to illegal traffickers to reach their destinations. Their dream was to make good money in a short period of time and to support their families. The temptation is high as Aliymer explained to me.

He said, “It was an ambition to be successful; here there is no other alternative than farming. I and many of my friends were not successful in our education. We heard stories about those who went to Saudi Arabia and got success and changed their life and also their families, so we chose to go there. I was a shepherd of camel in the rural part of the country after crossing Yemen for some time. It was long and hard travel to reach Saudi Arabia. After a while, I wanted to enter the city and try to find a new job. And on the way to the town, I was captured by the police and got in to prison for some time, and when they got enough people to send back by plane, they sent us back to Ethiopia. We traveled out by walk and back by airplane. It’s just been a month since we came back and now got back to my farming job.”

It was striking to hear this story, and later I learned that many of the youngsters I met in the kebelle have similar stories. Some of them still want to go back again, which is also true for Aliymer himself, as he stated his interest to return. Most of my informants’ ideas were similar. It is a search for a good life and more money. What they can get from farming when comparing to the labor and the effort one puts into it is less, and then there is covering the costs of all the resources (seeds, fertilizers and pesticide) they used to cultivate and get a good harvest.

Most of the youth in the kebelle cultivate on the land that belongs to other farmers who cannot work because of old age, sickness or other problems. The rural communities have their own system of leasing land from another person. It is based on equal share of
the production or the money gained after selling the harvest for the use of the land. Most youngsters in the area do not have their own farmland. Even if they have land, it may not be in the irrigation sites. The topography of the area is limited to the irrigable and cultivable land in the kebelle. Apart from that, the irrigation canals do not function properly at their full potential, which makes farmers use the irrigation schemes in a rotation according to the groups they formed.

Aliymer said, “The good part of farming is wherever you go, as far as you are able to keep the land, you can return back to it.” As he already sold his oxen to pay for the traffickers, his main desire was to get some money and to buy oxen for himself, which are expensive. He will opt to go back if he gets another chance, but until then he depends on farming to make a living. It is all the same, as I interviewed the youngsters who were farming on their plots. They work on their land even though they will not get the better life they want through farming. That is why they said if they got another chance they would try again to go to those Arab countries to find success.

Their families are not against with such ideas. They want their children to be successful either through the hard work of farming or in any alternatives, including sending them to Arab countries. One of my informants, who is in his old age, told me the same story: that his son came back after he was captured by the police in Saudi Arabia. He stated, “Allah did not permit for him, I should accept.” Many families sent their daughters to the Arab countries so they could generate money for the family. Their children’s temptations and desires are high when they see some success among their neighbors.

One of my informants was a father who sent his daughter to Saudi Arabia a day before I met him for the interview. He sold his paired oxen, which are necessary to till his farmland, to cover the cost of his daughter’s trip. When I met him on his farm plot, he was tilling his farmland with a hoe. He told me that, “I am with full hope that everything will be good, the future will be good.” He continued, “I heard that she just arrived there safely, thanks to Allah, the future will be good with Allah. For now, I will plow my farmland with a hoe and work hard day and night to get good harvest, and to sell for good
price. Then, I could buy an ox and if I accomplish that I will work hard again to get another one in the next harvest.”

Hard work and dedication are the only ways to get a good harvest; otherwise, the crops could be lost before any harvest is gained and a farmer could lose everything. The farmers in the irrigation area use a different strategy to get a good harvest. The water distribution arrangement is the basic strategy, which needs cooperation and understanding among the farmers, and protecting one's crops on the farm from any kind of damage, such as protecting the harvest from cattle and keeping it from being flooded by running water when another farmer uses the water to irrigate his farm.

Sied is one of my informants, working hard in his farmland. His age is not yet a matter for him. He works diligently on his farm. His sons are not interested in farming, even though he wants them to engage in it. Most farmers' land size is only half a quarter of a hectare (*ande temad*). Land size is fragmented as many generations in one family have divided and shared the land they possessed. Land right is defined as possession right or user right. Farmers possess land that passes from family members. However, as their children grown up and form their own family, they will share the farm the family has, which further fragments the land size a farmer possesses to till each time. Most farmers plow additional farmlands through the traditional land leasing or tenure system they developed through time. A farmer who is able to farm somewhere other than his own plot makes a contract with another farmer who could not cultivate his or her own farmland. In such a way, farmers increase the farmland size they can cultivate for one irrigation period up from less than a quarter to as much as one hectare (*soset timad*), which is important for more harvesting.

Sied is one of the farmers who cultivates almost a hectare of land in the area by taking a contract from those who cannot farm their own land. Such contracts are agreed on between farmers to share equally from the harvest or from the money after the harvest is sold. Sied cultivates different crops in each farm plot. This is a strategy the farmers use to compensate for the price of failure from one harvest to another.
He said, “Farming is a difficult work, it needs your presence all the time, and I stay here sometimes the whole day. To use the water sometimes, I will come in the middle of the night to channel the water to my farmlands. I did this because this is a time no one uses the water. Farming needs the farmer’s everyday engagement until he gets the harvest. It is not a one time job. It is a process. If the farmer wants more, he should also be ready for the next harvest. If the farmer is a hard worker he can use the land three times using the irrigation schemes.”

Every story of the farmer’s tells a deep meaning of life about every farmer and the community as a whole. Their experience as a rural community, social group, cultural group and religious group has a deep importance in their way of life. The political economy of the country in the historical line has its own effect and impact in shaping their everyday lives. It is all those experiences that define the farmers’ reality with their own locality. It is not only having the land to till that makes farming possible; it also needs a pair of oxen to plow. Still, farming would not be possible without the availability of water. All these combinations are just the basic necessities for farming. When a farmer wants to cultivate more farmland, the labor also needs to increase. And then the whole family should work. Children have to work on the farm when their parents have something else to do. A family is important for good cultivation, which is why children are very important in the rural area.

**Farmers’ Lives along Historical Lines**

Historically, farmers’ lives changed dramatically with the change of the political economy, as one government and its administration system were changed by the new one. I asked the farmers about the main differences among the different governments they experienced and how that has affected their livelihood, and they explained great differences.

During the imperial period, the landlords were the ones who plowed their farmlands before the common farmers. So the commoners would have to wait until the landlords' farmlands were tilled or plowed. According to my informant, this practice was called *telmi*. It was considered a sign of respect and blessing, and if an ordinary farmer plowed his farmland before the lords a bad harvest was considered to be the consequence.
Such practices were stopped when the imperial regime was changed by the military regime that followed into a socialist way of economy. The change was followed by new land policy dictating the ways land is distributed to the tenants. The cooperatives’ way of farming administered by the Farmer Association was a bad system that yielded a poor harvest and caused the farmers’ food security to deteriorate. Moreover, recurrent drought and famine and the war during the period were upsetting the farmers’ production. The period also upset the normal production, since farmers were forced to fight as soldiers. One of my informants told me that he started farming on his land after the end of the war.

The last twenty years were better by far, as I learned from them, because the farmers work on their own farms. The cooperatives and associations are not like the previous ones. They are just a means for us to bring our harvest on market for good price. My informants stated, “During the current government, we have more opportunities to work and to benefit more. The government (mengest) said work and gets the benefit. So we are happy.” A farmer is an individual that belongs to his land. Tilling his land is the main way to get his subsistence foods, to support his household with the necessary goods, to generate some money to send his children to school and to fulfill his social obligations with his neighbors.

For the farmers in that area, like so many other farmers in the country, fulfilling these basic things is the main satisfaction achieved in everyday life. Unlike the former period, the current one enables them to fulfill these important needs. As they expressed, “Now what is needed from us is to work as far as we have the land and the weather is good. Having these irrigation schemes is also a good thing for us to get more by cultivating more. We got changed, we sell more and we sell for good prices. Our life changed. Some farmers are able to have corrugated houses, they changed their hut. People who did not have cattle are also able to buy. It is better than before. Especially for the farmers who work hard.”

Many of my informants shared with me that they feel this way about their current reality. The change of the political economy somehow played a positive role in their cultivation and change of life. The change is also part of the support of the nongovernmental organizations through their intervention in assisting the farmers. For
my informants, government (*mengest*) is an inclusive entity that controls everything with all power. With this concept of government they derive the concept of a good and a bad government (*tiru and metfo mengest*).

**The Farmers as Social and Cultural Groups**

Social bonds, cooperation and helping one another are the main characteristics of the farmers. My informants explained that how these qualities were more strongly exhibited during poor harvests in the past than at present. One of informants stated, “In the old times, the love among us was strong. Everyone was kind hearted people. A farmer with good harvest will give to the one who did not get good harvest. He then will pay back in the next harvest. We used to do all activities together. Allah was also near to us, he heard our prayers; the climate was also not that bad. We used to get good harvests.” The farmers complained that all the bonds and cooperation have deteriorated during present periods. My informant stated, “At the present a farmer is only concerned about himself and his family. The cooperation was not like before. Now, it is considered that one can get support from government if he did not get good harvest or lost his land.” This refers to safety net programs run by the government and nongovernmental organizations in vulnerable areas to help poor farmers.

He continued, “The love for one another that we used to have does not exist anymore, it is all mistrust. There is also jealousy. If you work hard some others may hate that. Some others are still satisfied in their once per year cultivation. The difference between farmers who have only dry farmland and those who use the irrigation is also a problem. Farming needs cooperation, as Muslims we used to make the ritual (*dua*) together to thank Allah when we have good production and to beg his mercy when there is bad rainfall. All the cooperation nowadays has deteriorated.”

**Muslim Rituals**

_Dua_ is the most central part of Muslim rituals. As my informants stated, _Dua_ is important to demonstrate thanks for their everyday blessings. _Dua_ is also important in their farming production. When they have a good harvest they make _Dua_ to thank Allah. In times of draught or shortage of rainfall, they make _Dua_ to beg their God (Allah) to give them rain. _Dua_ is a collective ritual during which the farmers gather in one house
and practice a ritual activity until they get enough rain to enable them to farm. Everyone who gathers for the rituals brings what they can for the ceremony. *Khat* (the green leaf plant) is important in this ritual. The Sheiks, who serve in the mosque, lead the ritual activity. They chant and pray to Allah to make the rain. When their prayers are heard and the rain falls, they make scarifies (a cattle or sheep is slaughtered) and they make a feast to celebrate it together. This ritual is most important to my informants in the area. However, one informant was sad to tell me that such a tradition has now deteriorated among the young and some of newly formed Islam sects.

**The Check and Balance**

The lives of farmers are encircled by a check and balance system. In previous periods, rural communities used this system to maintain their social coexistence in their farming productions. Checking each other’s daily life is a normal process. Farmers’ cattle with their number and colors may be known by another farmer in a different neighborhood. If someone’s cattle enter into another farmer’s plot (*masa*), it is easily identified.

The check and balance system maintains the farmers’ social uniformity. This makes it hard for a stranger like me, who wants to know about the social strata or who is rich or poor, to identify it easily. Even though the social strata are clearly well-defined among themselves, it is not practiced, as those who are better off maintain the social status quo that creates social uniformity, which also makes any strangers feel that everybody in the area lives in the same status. The system is also a way of mutual bond, cooperation that is tightened through marriage and also helps one another in times of death. Those who are in old age, have lost their sight or are widowed with no children also get their harvest from this cooperation. The equal sharing system is a benefit to the one who needs to cultivate more and at the same time help those who cannot plow their land. Such social relations and values are the most important part of the sociocultural tradition of these rural communities.

The check and balance system is not only used for what I stated above, it is also used in checking farmers’ views and outlooks, as farmers fear to express what they want to say. During my interview, some of my informants were even conscious about an issue that can be considered as public or known by all the farmers in the area. “It is just
between you and me,” they expressed to caution me to keep information to myself. It was not always my strangeness that made the farmers unwilling to talk, but the fear that “what I have said could be heard by others.”

For the farmers, a stranger could be anyone, but if he or she is not from the agricultural bureau or NGOs, then he or she is associated with the threat they have in mind of losing their land for investment activities. All the farmers have the information about the possible investment plan in the area. However, I was not aware of the issue. I did not hear investment related information from the agriculture bureau. The farmers were also not explicit on this issue until they developed a trust about the business that brought me there. The farmers rather chose to follow and spy on me, to check me out before telling me their fears. My stranger identity made them consider, “He could be one of those guys, who may take our land.” This was also one of the reasons that my one-to-one conversations were interrupted by the urge of finding out who was being spoken to and what the farmer was telling him.

A farmer has lot of information about the whole locality, which makes an individual farmer talking to a stranger be seen as telling information all about others. This check and balance is also enforced by local administrators, as I observed and learned that talking about issue-related politics and even religion was viewed as bringing a treat to oneself. One informant said to me, “What if you say let's go and talk more,” meaning 'what if you have a hidden identity other than what you have told me and after I told you what I have in mind, you take me to a police station?’ The reorganization of the farmers in a one to five arrangement also has an effect on information gathering.

**Farming and Its Commercializing Process in the Woreda**

Other than increasing harvest for farmers and increasing food security as a main strategy for decreasing poverty among smallholder farmers, irrigation also connects the farmers with commercialized cultivation that lets them concentrate on production of crops that are market oriented rather than crops for subsistence.

For the farmers in the woreda, the collaborative work of World Vision to build the irrigation schemes was one step in the realization of farmers’ engagements in more
production and commercial farming. It is very hard to say from my observation that the farmers are not ready for more production and more market-oriented cultivations. All my informants explained the value of money and what they can do with it; unlike the assumption held by the agricultural bureau that farmers have no motivation for more production.

Though the working ability and motivation may not be equal as it is expected among farmers, they are more aware of the benefits of more production. They are seeking more opportunities to cultivate more. Farmers are now using different methods, like buying a machine to pump the water to their farmlands. The technical rendering gap of the agricultural bureau, with its lack of institutional capacity to perform its mandate, is a question with no answer for farmers. That is why the relation between the bureau and the farmer is described as a huge gap.

The irrigation canals and reservoirs do not work to their full capacity in both field sites, which makes the farmers unable to use it properly. The farmers direct the water from the main river to flow into their farm plots. Both reservoirs in the two sites are empty and dried up. For the farmers in both sites, the problem should be tacked by the woreda agricultural bureau as it has been an unsolved problem for a long time. There was just one effort by the bureau to repair the reservoir and the canals, but the attempt failed since the contractor left before finishing repairs to the dams and canals, which caused even more damage on the canals according to my informants.

**Antagonistic Views between the Farmers and the Agricultural Bureau Officers**

The relation between the farmers and the agricultural bureau is described as antagonistic. The farmers, in the eyes of the agricultural bureau officers, lack work ethics or are lazy, do not like to work hard, are satisfied with limited production that enables them to sustain only their annual household food consumption, and resist technologies and better ways of farming systems strategized by the government and implemented by the agricultural bureau. The agricultural bureau officers explained these farmers’ behaviors as reasons that hindered their engagements in delivering their technical assistance to the farmers.
On the farmers’ side, the agriculture bureau staff members (extension workers, supervisors, irrigation officers) are not helping them. One informant stated,

“We understand the agricultural bureau and its staff as institution and professionals who should help the farmer. And like the farmers who stay day and night in his or her farm, we expect the bureau professionals to be with us on the farm and help and show us better ways of production, and motivate us to cultivate more. But all those people from the bureau are not doing like that; nowadays they are just people who sit in their office. They are like other office clerks.”

He continued and said, with stress, “Look around you,” pointing to the whole farmland space. “Do you see any one from the office today?” He replied, “No!! They are in the office. They come to our farmland to give us orders and to take some data.”

Such different views affect the normal relationship the farmers and the bureau officers should have. For the agricultural bureau officers, the farmers are lazy or less hard workers, who depend on limited production. Farmers’ lack of competence to follow their guidance creates obstacles in rendering technical and professional support which could allow the farmers to produce more. Some farmers share this view, as there are some farmers who want to depend only on once-per-year production. But this does not apply to all farmers as implied by the bureau representatives.

The woreda agricultural and rural development bureau implemented the national policies and strategies that are set to increase agricultural performance and rural livelihood: irrigation, agricultural extension, safety nets, saving and credit, land registration, organizing farmers in different organizational forms and implementing other strategies, programs and activities planned at the national and regional levels. Such a general strategy of the agricultural bureau expects every farmer in different localities to be engaged in these activities and to produce equivalent progress everywhere in the country. So, when such realization fails, the critics point at the farmers. As I observed, it was a mess and rush for the agricultural bureau officers to prepare a monthly report during a meeting with higher officials from other zones and regions, who expected a report detailing great achievements.
The Agricultural Bureau as Institution

The agricultural and rural development bureau of the woreda is one part of the woreda administration departments. It is the main part of government bureaucracy that dictates the farmers' living situations. In its power, it provides services like land registration certificates, improved seed and fertilizers, organizing farmers in associations and unions and other tasks. In its technical part, agricultural extension and irrigation sections are important for improving the cultivation of the farmers. Such tasks are also implemented by trained staff members.

The agricultural bureau plans its activities in line with the national strategies. However, activities planned are not fully implemented as stated above. Farmers' resistance to culture is explained as a reason for lack of achieving what is planned by the bureau. Obstacles considered by the bureau include being dependent on stable foods that produce once a year, religious values that discourage gaining interest rates in the case of saving and credits programs, being reluctant to follow professionals’ instructions for more production and other reasons.

The organizational structure of the bureau itself, however, appears very poor to any observer. Sometimes offices are empty or the staff members are sitting in the office without tangible activities simply to fulfill their office hours. Their plans and activities are dependent on office work rather than field tasks. Supporting farmers’ performance in their cultivation is their main institutional mandate, though it is not as effective as it should be. The main correlation between the farmers and the bureau highly rests on the institutional power as implementer of the national developmental and political strategies of the government.

The Rich Powerless and the Poor Powerful

The farmers and the bureau staff’s relations were also explained as ‘the rich powerless and the poor powerful.’ For the farmers, the extension workers or irrigation officers are persons who come to their farmland wearing neat clothes and leather shoes and instructing what should and should not be done. As one farmer stated, “I am the one who deals with my farmland for a long time, I know better what it needs and how it gives me more production. These people (the bureau professionals) come and they say you should
produce four times in a year. The farmland needs to rest, otherwise it will lose its productivity. They are telling us theory not real practice. I am more aware of my land.”

For the bureau experts with scientific knowledge, this view is creating resentment and hopelessness. In the bureau’s communication with the farms, “It is for your own benefits not for mine,” is a phrase that is used by the extension workers and irrigation officers. The bureau staff complains about the farmers’ economic benefits when compared to their own monthly salary, and sometimes expect a strict adherence to the plan by the farmers, which the farmers actually resist.

Farmers’ strategies are based on their experiences of success and failure. Information is important to them when considering what to cultivate that could be worth more on the market than what they are instructed to do. Their successes depend on the market value. The vegetables they cultivate using irrigation, such as onion, tomato and other market-oriented products, need to be sold as quickly as possible, since they can spoil quickly. For the farmers, profit is determined by the immediate price that exists at the time of their harvest. That is why farmers listen more to local information than other advice from agricultural supervisors.

Associations and unions are the strategies set by the agricultural bureau to create market access and a capacity to determine prices for the farmer. They are also a strategy to create for farmers common storage buildings for their harvests. However, the success of the strategy goes further as far as organizing the association and forming the union.

On the other side, the farmers are people who wear worn out clothes and stay in the mud and on their farm plot, compared to the bureau representatives with neat clothes. They use different strategies to accomplish their activities and meet their goals. “The poor bureaucrats and rich farmers” compares what a farmer could get from their harvest considering the agricultural prices and the low-paid agricultural bureau officers. The low salary and also other structural problems in the agricultural bureau are factors of low motivation for the employees. During the politically-arranged reorganization of the staff members in one to five arrangements, there were several arguments among workers questioning the tightened working environment.
The workers are not made powerful by their own technical or professional abilities; in fact, they do not put these skills into practice. They are representatives of the institutional power that the agricultural bureau possesses. But farmers know exactly who has the institutional power to affect their lives. The social relation created with the bureau officers by the farmers is considered in this situation. Farmers develop informal and formal relations with the bureau officers selectively. The farmers have a saying when expressing some of their resentments towards the agricultural bureau officers: “Because, they are from the agricultural bureau, they think they know more than us.” Such resentment is mostly related to “the do and not to do” orders from the agricultural officers. Farmers’ acceptance of those orders is based on understanding the consequences that may follow.

For example, a farmer who opposes canal construction along his farm, for those supervisors at the field, will be flexible when a higher officer goes there along with a police force. Farmers are expected to buy inputs which are allocated by the agricultural bureau or their association. Farmers opposed this form of selling inputs for their harvest considering its ineffectiveness for their timely cultivation and the obstacle it created to buying from any other places they like, even though the planners target this strategy to strength their association’s financial capacity.

They also strategically fit themselves for the benefit they can get from any kind of political arrangement, like my informant who is a member of the ruling party and who stated the benefits he got compared to those who are not members. Government’s annual prizing ceremony of successful farmers (who are able to sell up to millions and change their lives) is also one strategy which connects farmers’ production with the government development strategy. Farmers are selected by their woredas’ agricultural bureau which in effect also needs not only being success, but also some sort of alignment between farmers and the agricultural bureaucracy. In explaining this situation, one informant stated, “Last year my aunt got the prize, as she was selected by the woreda as a successful farmer, but I do not see a major difference in harvest from other farmers. But I think her participation in some affairs led her to be chosen.”
Summary

As I tried to show in the ethnographic discussions, the basic part of the agricultural developing mechanism rendered technical by the experts from the agricultural bureau to the farmers was not as it was expected or targeted to be. The relations between the agricultural bureau officers and the farmers are more complicated than normal engagements of agricultural experts in assisting the farmers for more production.

The institutional mandate of the agricultural bureau is being both developmental and political in respect to implementing the national agricultural policies and strategies like (GTP), local sociocultural and also topographic and environmental factors are neglected and farmers expected to be equal development partners everywhere in the country.

From a political stance, the strategy of agricultural development that rural areas take is a top-down approach that only targets the activities’ implementation rather than the feasibility of the activities for implementation considering the farmers’ realities. That is why everyday relations between farmers and experts and officers with political power became antagonistic, with each full of different strategies to achieve their own goals. What matters for the agricultural bureau is more importantly writing a good performance report at the time of monitoring and evaluation, while it is up to the farmers securing their lands and their cultivation to sustain and provide their households.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Ethnographical Discussions on the Government and Nongovernmental Organizations’ Positions

For the ministry offices of agriculture and the ministry offices of water and energy, irrigation projects are a technical and, even more, an engineering issue: how to build and construct them. It is confusing for them, what anthropological questions or the involvement of culture and other social issues affect the irrigation process. Such issues can be addressed through need or impact assessments. Irrigation dams are built to the best benefits of the farmers based on the national strategies to develop agriculture.

The ministry of water and energy’s main concern was building large irrigation dams, while the ministry of agriculture is majorly responsible for small scale irrigations for smallholders’ farmers. The agricultural transformation and growth agency (an agency that was established following the growth and transformation plan) is less concerned with sociocultural issues. What is most important for all the offices is the process of implementing the irrigation construction projects.

In one of the offices, an informant asked me, “Yes we have some economists and sociologists who are responsible for social surveys; but what is anthropology and what are you going to study? What is the connection of anthropology?” The socio-cultural effects in the process of modernizing and developing agriculture are getting little attention. This shows how the development process is a top-down approach where the farmers’ socio-cultural positions are put aside. It is a strategy that assumes that constructing modern systems like irrigation schemes and providing modern inputs enhance farmers’ productivity and integrating farmers in the process is an easy task, even without a tangible understanding of the socio-cultural situations they live in. Such assumptions also explain how major development programs and strategies are designed in the country, since at the ministry level integration of socio-cultural aspects is minimal, or even the works of anthropologists are not known by officials.
For example, the growth and transformation plan is a huge proposal that expects agricultural production progress and a sustainable harvest each year to make sure there is food security in the country. However, such a big project was not scoring as it was targeted. There are many reasons; to mention one, lack of implementing capacities of the government’s institutions.

Documents like GTP were also deigned to follow the agenda of political parties, which also had a strategic goal not only for enhancing the development process in the country but also to maintain political gains for having mass support for a goal targeted to be achieved within election periods. Such politically-motivated strategies of development need to form structured organizational layers from the top down and also institutions and personnel that forward both the political and developmental implementations to the masses.

Redirecting the initial study idea from the nongovernmental project-based development activities to the government engagements of development widens the view of development for this research. It helped me grasp the issue of development not only as a practice but as a national discourse. The word “development” itself now becomes a part of everyday language that is defined accordingly from top to bottom of society. For some, development contains a meaning that is synonymous with government. My informants stated, “The current government is all about development and change. When one thinks about development, what comes to mind is the government.” For others, development is changing one’s economic conditions and household economy to a better situation or level. For some of my informants again, development is implementing government projects. For others, it is a period for development that makes all activities synonymous with development.

Those who criticized the conjunction of the development process and discourse with the total image of the government have a different view of how development as a daily language is integrated in all activities. One commenter on this issue said,

“A note from a friend about the ideology of developmentalism: This water has surged over the coastal defense of private sphere and has thoroughly flooded the nooks and
crannies of our lives. You can't nowadays even discuss football without conjuring up some developmental spectacle. The unity of culture and ideology that Meles Zenawi promised to achieve is truly realized."

Media, big posters and other sources of communication are tools for stretching the national development rhetoric. In the rural areas, big posters are painted to show a modernized way of farming and huge harvests combined with the leadership of the government, and the party is the main communication means with the masses in every locality. The rural woreda administrations and agricultural bureaus provide information of their development plans and achieved goals to the woreda information and media section. This section makes development news out of those plans and reports are delivered that are used for the national, regional and woreda's media news on development.

Mass campaigns, such as resource rehabilitation activities, are recorded to show the participatory development approach. Documentary programs on the lives of groups of farmers who are successful, or about the effects of projects that help to change the lives of farmers are televised regularly. An annual award ceremony of model and successful farmers at the national level is designed and broadcast live to initiate other farmers and assert government dedication to the development process among the farmers. During my field study periods, one of my field activities was also watching the hourly news of the national television when I got the chance. The news program has 10 to 15 minutes of development news that report on implemented and planned projects. Those strategies are important in integrating the everyday rhetoric deep in to the society. The national discourse is on the success of the agricultural sector and the change of the smallholder farmers’ lives, and its main target is to show the success of government policies.

**The Nongovernmental Organizations’ Perspective**

Nongovernmental organizations and other international development organizations like the World Bank in the development process are situated as development partners of

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45 This is a note on social media forum that debates the development process and the political situations in the country.
the government. The partnership is based on the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Based on the Paris Declaration, donors, bilateral or multilateral agencies and NGOs, are working to strengthen partner countries’ national development strategies and associated operational frameworks, and helping to strengthen their capacities (Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, 2005).

The new Proclamation of Charities and Societies issued by the Ethiopia government in 2009 enforces a new form of working regulations for national and international NGOs. It defines and specifies sectors that can be engaged by international and national NGOs, and also sources of money and budget regulations (Proclamation of Charities and Societies, 2009).

The nongovernmental organizations and donors agencies’ roles are immense in their partnership of government’s development activities. As the agricultural sector is the leading sector in the development process, government agricultural policies and strategies seek the assistance of the development partners. The involvement of the nongovernmental organizations includes providing advice on the policy and strategy, like the Growth and Transformation Plan, building institutional capacities and implementing different projects. As one of the main strategies of developing the agricultural sector, irrigation is given priority in the process.

Small scale irrigations and smallholder farmers are the focus of this priority, especially in the new Growth and Transformation Plan, and the role of the nongovernmental organizations is critical. One of my informants from the World Bank country office stated that the factors to which the existing problems in the development process are attributed are lack of institutional capacity and detailed strategy, which also includes the marginalization of the locals from the participation in the planning process.

To show one example, small scale and small holders have been the emphasis; there has not been a detailed strategy of document for small scale irrigation in the country. The small scale irrigation activities in all rural woreda, including the woreda for this fieldwork, are implemented without any national strategy. At the time of this research, the strategy document for small scale irrigation was prepared only as a first draft. This
draft was prepared with the partnership of bilateral organizations and international NGOs. The strategic document is titled “Small Scale Irrigation Capacity Building Strategy for Ethiopia.” Its objective states:

The overall objective of the small scale irrigation (SSI) capacity building strategy is to undertake infrastructural, institutional and human resource capacity building which helps the country to optimize the efficient use of water, resources with improved land management of smallholder irrigated agriculture development and contribute to improving food security and alleviating poverty. (FDREMA 2011, p.5)

The strategy is planned for ten years with a scope of creating a conducive policy environment and regulatory framework and also focusing on building capacity up to community level with a rationale of community participation and involvement in sharing responsibilities for efficient management of irrigation schemes (ibid.).

My informant in the World Bank explained how the agricultural development process problematized from all the three perspectives. He stated:

“The farmers at the bottom do not have long periods of experiences in using irrigation which is new to most of smallholders’ farmers. At their level, social organizations to administer, to set legal procedures are lacking. There are competitions between farmers in the upper and lower streams. These and other factors make farmers not cooperate for new systems. The government as implementer has a lot of problems. Capacity problems in administrating implementation are its main problems. They have a problem of planning and designing projects effectively. Finance is also a main problem. And the government is trying to implement projects while facing all these problems. Donors’ activities are defined by their relationship with the government. Donors also have their own policies that put challenges on the government policies and political will. They do not have good knowledge about the local people desires. They only review their supports based on their guidelines and government policies.”

His discussions were important, since my field experiences told similar observations. Though the perspectives from World Bank and other funding agencies depend on the environment to ensure their engagement, his ideas were not one-sided, which makes them important here. As stated in the above chapters, in the roles of international, bilateral,
funding agencies and project implementing NGOs, government and nongovernmental organizations work together through harmonizing their interests and more under the government line, especially after 2010, when government decided to take the central role in development process.

The assertion of dominance in the form of “transactional governmentality” (Ferguson and Gupt), now changes its form into seeking cooperation that changed the former perspectives of dominant ideological impositions into multiple forms of engagements in the national government's development agenda. This, however depends on the liability of national governments to search for finance and technical support. This in effect makes the local people in those rural areas much more encircled by the national development voices than the previous multiple development voices.

The partnership of the local or national and nongovernmental organizations in the development process is also important in the implementation of different projects that target specific groups. The nongovernmental organization ORDA, in its regional-based development objectives, implemented different projects that could help the rural agricultural people. The organization runs different projects in the region, including building small scale dams. One of their projects that includes the woreda where I conducted the fieldwork (Dewa Chefa) is called “Harvest,” a project supported by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency). It is focused on farmers under national productive safety net programs (PSNP) and other food security programs (OFSP). Its objective is that smallholder irrigators produce and supply high value crops to the market on a continuous and sustainable basis through the improved water management by introducing new technology of ground water utilization for irrigation (ORDA project document, 2011). Such projects are a part of the effort of maintaining food security in the country.

Nongovernmental organizations are part of the development process, the activities of which are checked by their donors and the government under its new regulations of 2009. My informant in ORDA explained budget optimization under the rule of 70/30, where 70 percent of the budget is for project implementations which are critical in achieving the goal of a project. ORDA has a historic background for its establishments in its regional
interest of development. It is part of the political struggle during the fight to topple the military regime in the country. Following the major famine in the country during the war period, ORDA was established to support those people affected by the famine in the area under the control of the former rebel groups, the current ruling party in the war free zone areas in the Amahra region. Such history, according to my informant, creates a great tie and affiliation with the government policies and development process unlike other nongovernmental organizations.

Summary

This section shows the development process from the government and nongovernment sides. The role of government in the development process is emphasized through the public rhetoric where the problems in practice are overshadowed by the discourses formulated and that define government the same as development.

Government is winning the contestations. Though the influence of international development communities in their aid and technical support is still enforced by their traditional pre-conditions, the government is able to gain the financial and technical support it needs while keeping its sovereignty and the power to maneuver the development process to its ideological and political will.

However, the importance of international nongovernmental organizations is still very critical in the government's effort for developing the agricultural sector and the rural livelihoods through supporting the government in its inefficient institutional capacity to implement its overwhelming projects. The engagement of local NGOs like ORDA and World Vision are important in filling those gaps of the government.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Analysis and Conclusion

The main aim of the discussions in this paper is to understand and explain how agricultural and institutional engagements and practices inform the development process. The discussions on the roles, engagements and practices of government, nongovernmental organizations and the local people show the reasons behind how and why those actors are situated in such ways. It is also an effort to show how the engagements and practices of the government, development collaborators and most importantly the farmers are understood and rationalized by each of the groups.

The title of this thesis, 'A blue print or a mirage,' suggests how the targeted goals to be achieved to change the lives of the rural people are not really on the ground. For any observer, like the writer of this thesis during his fieldwork, the development process is full of discrepancies and tensions. As I will show in the following paragraphs, the whole effect of the development process is shown in the everyday engagements and practices of the farmers and the agricultural bureau workers.

With showing the farmers and the everyday agricultural struggle and tension, the conclusion remarks emphasize the consequences of the way the government's use of development process only create a mere survival strategy among the farmer and the agricultural bureau workers that are doing what is necessary to live their everyday lives; which results in development engagements and practices not being as they should be.

As I tried to show in the discussions, the government’s engagements and practices on the development process weigh much more on the side of generating discourses about the development process. The focus on the discourses is rationalized as a process of asserting development motives, aims and goals to the public, and through them mobilizing or engaging the local people (farmers) in one direction of the development process and its practices. However, on the other side, the goal is to emphasize or depict the role of government (the ruling party) in the development process and to stress the economic growth and change of life gained among the local peoples (farmers) as a result of its role.
The focus on the discourses is designed to make an assertion of political power through development in favor of the government (ruling party). As I argued in the discussions, the government's engagements and practices in the development process are not only what was exerted from its mandate or task to implement what its people should have as their right, but also from the aim to use development as a calculated means of governing and controlling and also maintaining “conduct of conduct” among its subjects.46

The government’s engagements and practices on development through its institutions (the agricultural bureau and overall the other woreda administrations), as presented in the ethnography, tangled with delivering the expertise necessary for developing the agricultural production for the farmers and restructuring and reorganizing the farmers. The aims in such tasks were to make the local people part of the development process and, second, to make the local people an easy target for political control.

The government uses its engagements and practices on the development process as calculated tactics to maintain political controls. The ethnography discussion showed how the government uses its institution for achieving its objectives, which are bringing improvements and gaining authority. However, unless one starts scrutinizing the government's engagements and practices through its institutions among the local people, the need for politicizing development appears to be integrated as part of a benevolent wish for economic growth and improvement of life for the rural farmers’ community.

However, the government’s institutional inefficiency in their capacity to deliver the necessary expertise and technical support for the farmers showed that its engagements and practices are not supposed to be the fullest in comparison to the efforts made in organizing the farmers in different sorts of organizations. The institution’s ineffectiveness is also a reason behind the government’s policies and projects to be less in practice. This confines the national plan for development and its political will to the discourse and national rhetoric rather than on the practice where it should be. The institutional capacity problems and their inefficiency in delivering and implementing the overwhelming

46 See page 53.
projects and plans, however, are shadowed by the importance of the institutions for the government's political role. As a result, the failure of development practice is blamed on farmers who are referred to as resistant to change.

The task of the institution, functioning as part of the government organ, is enforced by what is political rather than what is needed by the people. The farmers’ needs for expertise are denied due to assumptions that the locals are incompetent and lazy; people who could not be in line with experts’ direction. Practices are concentrated on mass mobilization, organization and restructuring the local community. However, these activities are not the institution’s plans, but rather a central plan from the federal government that is prioritized over other plans of the woreda agricultural bureau. Those who should render the technical and their expertise are rendering the political. Farmers’ confusion regarding the agricultural office’s tasks is a result of sort of service they were getting from the experts of the agricultural bureau.

However, the officers, supervisors and development agents of the agricultural bureau as individuals and community, and as part of the larger development discourse, put themselves in dilemmas whether to implement what they are trained for or commence what is suggested by the agricultural bureau or other higher administrations offices. Their dilemmas are again overshadowed by their institutional identity, the power they exert and exercise over the farmers. They are one level above being blamed for the failures. It is clear that they lack enforcement and motivation, and work in an unorganized institution. However, such conditions are seemingly not an issue, as the institution is instrumental for the political control of the local people through the development activities.

The above discussions make relevant that the minimal practices and engagements in the development process call for the need for wider discourse of development as an alternative way of covering the minimal practices existing in the rural areas like my field. As Seidel describes it, “discourse is a site of struggle,” (Seidel, 1985) and more than the practices and engagements should be in place for those farmers; the discourses at the national and at the local level are ways of achieving the government’s goals which in effect brings the local people under its authority.
The discourses are powerful in a way targeted to win the multisided struggles. Winning and gaining the support of locals (rural farmers) is highly critical as they are the basis for the ideological struggles of the government. The agricultural bureau as an institution is a main instrument in covering all the political aims and goals as developmental aims and goals. However, for the officers and experts of the agricultural bureau, the political process is also their everyday challenge. For them, it is a mandate that should be done as part of their main task, which is providing their expert advice and support to the farmers as professionals, though they have to also represent the political task. The political task as mandate is also associated with the attachment and membership one has within the ruling party that decides the position of officers in delivering the political and technical services. Hence, the practices in both the political and rendering the technical are dilemmas for the agricultural bureau employees that are enforced through the hierarchical structure of the institution. Therefore, their engagements and practices become a sustaining mechanism for those experts to make a living based on their needs and targeted development goals as professionals in the institution or the agricultural bureau rather than addressing the needs of the local farmers.

Engagements and practices from the farmers’ side

Farming is the way of life and livelihood of the farmers. Their traditional ways of farming and modes of production that depend on rainfall are still major practices. The engagements and practices for more production using irrigation schemes are more recent phenomena among those rural farmers. Irrigation schemes were integrated in the farming production system of the rural farmers with the involvement of nongovernmental organizations, constructing small scale irrigation dams and canals that enable farmers to deliver river water to their farmlands.

As more awareness develops, farmers’ interests to engage in irrigation farming are increasing. Farmers who do not have access to build up irrigation but want to access some water bodies along their farmlands are trying to use pumper machines to drain the water to their farmland for more production. Such engagements are individually motivated. As I stated previously, farmers’ engagements in their farmlands are more of an individual effort. The farming process became more bureaucratic and complex for
those farmers who are using the built up irrigation schemes administered by the *woreda* agricultural bureau. Their everyday engagement is scrutinized by the associations they are members of and bureaucratic maneuvering and expertise advice from the agricultural bureau.

The working environment on the irrigation sites for the farmers is not only enforced by their will for more production but also by the plans, expert advice, political tasks like meetings, and national obligations like mass campaigns from the agricultural bureau. In addition to this, water management problems in production, needs for selected seeds, fertilizers and others aspects have their own effects on engagements and practices.

Furthermore, the agricultural bureau’s reluctance to solve their problems, like the need for reconstructing the dam, is also the major obstacle for the practices and engagements of the farmers; though, ironically, the bureau criticizes the farmers as failures or being resistant as reasons for not becoming partners or fully engaged in achieving its plans. As Tania Li states, “The expertise is delivered for all those problems that the solution is already known” (Tania Li, 2007 p. 7). Of course, the agricultural bureau advises farmers to use irrigation and provides inputs as solutions for more production and commercialization. However, the availability of the water for more production is critical, which has not yet been solved by the agricultural bureau. Land security problems are also major setbacks for the farmers, even though land possession certificates started being provided as a solution by the agricultural bureau. The farmers’ perception that they may lose their land for investment is upsetting the long plan they want to make to cultivate and use their lands properly.

The practices and engagements of farmers are also affected as farmers try to keep up with the changes brought now and then. A shifting political landscape and new policies or plans, economic crises (price inflations), the expansion of semi urbanization that farmers anticipate to build new houses along the main road sides and other changes are forcing farmers to alert their thoughts enormously to cope with changes in their localities. To keep up with the changes and enormous problems they face, farmers do not only want to depend on their farming. The problems in relation to farmland size, which prohibits them from producing more than a sufficient harvest for their large households, have led
them to look for other alternatives as engagements. The young people in the rural community are motivated to look for other means of making a living and changing their lives, which is part of the problems the farmers face.

Farmers’ practices and engagements are affected by internal and external situations, and social relations are interrupted, as explained by my informants as, “It was not like before and people are becoming less cooperative.” The social values that are important in their social life are abandoned; as it is described in the ethnography, some important traditions and rituals that used to be practiced are weakened among the rural community.

The importance of values, as Harrison and Huntington argue, is also important to see how the values which exist among the local farmers or generally in the woreda are attributed to the changes that led to more engagements and practices for the farmers. Harrison and Huntington explain important factors, which I want to use here to explain the engagements and practices of farmers in the woreda.

Harrison and Huntington state that the cultural values in a certain society can be attributed to economic development and social change. Cultural values are also important to describe a certain society basing their practices on whether they allow or resist development and changes in their own localities. Some of these cultural factors include religion, trust in individuals, concept of wealth, views of competition, the value of work, rationality, authority and democracy (Harrison and Huntington, p.53). Understanding the values practiced and used by the farmers in everyday life will let us see how those values make farmers resistant or aspire to more production or modern practices and changes. However, being resistant or aspiring for more production is not dependent only on those cultural values. Professionals, bureaucrats and strangers (people like investors and higher officials) have a strong effect. The settings of the political economy and the ongoing development discourses also have their own effects.

Though they are dominantly Muslims, the Islam tradition of the rural people in the woreda has no effect in their traditional or modern ways of agricultural production. Their belief by itself is not a factor for decreasing production or becoming resistant. Rather, as stated in the ethnography, the rituals they practice are a means of demanding better
production, and their engagements on the irrigation practices show the thought behind more production. Their trading habits and having so many marketplaces are also examples of the needs for exchanging goods and agricultural products. For those who engage in irrigation activities, producing marketable products increases their trading practices.

The concept of wealth is a very central point of engagement in their different activities. The lack of resources and opportunities does not block the youngsters in the area; their aspirations for change also lead them to search for other alternatives. Those who work on their agricultural productions and especially on the irrigation, engagements and practices are defined based on the hopes they have for more wealth and for having properties and a way of living that can support their agricultural activities. Some farmers choose alternative practices to have something different from the agricultural engagement, such as establishing a mill house or buying a minibus to strengthen their agricultural business.

Competition is fair in the rural areas. The check and balance strategy, however, may hide the existing competitions among each other. Based on my informants’ explanations, competition in the rural areas is the farmers’ aspiration to capture opportunities that could benefit them or to do the same things or receive benefits that their neighbors got. For example, sending their children to foreign countries is one sort of trend in which one household follows the other. However, this trend makes them lose their wealth, as families have to sell their cattle and other belongings to raise money to send their children to those countries.

Farming is hard work, as the people in the area repeatedly stated. However, people are trained to farm from childhood along with their fathers and mothers. Such childhood training becomes an experience for preparing oneself for the hard job. The value of work is very important among the people in the area. “It is hard labor only that makes higher fruits,” as my informant stated. The farmers in the area have different reasons for farming their land, and use irrigation schemes with a final goal of gaining a good harvest and making a good sale in the market, and with such a target they must work day and night in their farmlands. The argument presented by the agricultural bureau officers that the
farmers in the area have less value for hard work can only be explained through the failures of the bureau’s plans to be integrated into farmer’s engagements as they wanted. However, such resistances are the farmers’ strategies based on the ideas they have of what is good for more production in their cultivations.

The thin line of connection between the farmers and the agricultural bureau professionals and bureaucrats is explained through the different strategies employed for their engagement and practices to achieve the goals they intended. Practicing modern ways of production systems, implementing the national and regional plans with the authority they have over the farmers are the bureau’s strategies for enforcing their practice over the people.

Authority is exercised by the bureaucrats based on the knowledge they have that considers the locals as people who perceive authority or power in its absoluteness, which makes the government a powerful entity and gives its institutions an absolute power to control and check their resources and practices. It is only when it comes to professional advice that technical advisors are challenged as per their realistic advantages for the farmers. The main thing to remember here is that technical rendering as practice is about explaining better ways rather than showing practical experiments to educate the farmers.

The institutional mandate is more weighted on implementing government’s programs and projects that place priority and focus on establishing the political setting and local peoples’ engagements based on the political ideology of the ruling party. Development activities based on a mass participatory approach is an attempt to create a mechanism that lets the local people engage in their own development activities. However, agricultural practices and engagements of farmers are individual efforts and struggles to keep up with different changes and to sustain their livelihoods, and also an attempt to meet their obligations as ordered by the agricultural bureau or other government institutions.

Farmers' practices and engagements are the results of long experiences on their farmland where new trends, including the irrigation scheme, have little importance in advancing their practices. Their engagements in agricultural activities, while strengthened through the changes, come in economic spheres that also create anticipation for more
production by the farmers; the structural problems they have with the agricultural bureau make the farmers reluctant, as the bureau, rather than focusing on addressing their problems, concentrates on its authoritative power.

The farmers' engagements and practices in their farming activities and in the development process exist because farming is a living and a way of sustenance that ensures their continued survival not only as farmers but also as a community in their locality. They aspire to keep up with the changes brought there, like in the economy, and also to access and gain the opportunities around them. However, the anticipated changes are not yet realized. The changes are minimal. Farmers must seek other off-farm alternatives to meet their demands and keep up with the increased costs of living. One alternative is sending their boys or girls to work in other countries.

The harvest and the money gained after hard work will be used for paying the debts for the inputs they bought from the government's institutions. The huge expenses they have result in less profit. Sometimes they might lose their cultivations before any harvest. Some farmers sell their oxen, which are necessary for plowing. Selling their cattle shows the level of poverty and the poor economy many farmers live in.

The actual everyday lives of the farmers explain why their engagement in farming and their everyday activities on their farmlands have a loose tie with the development plan of the government and its rhetoric about the progress of the development plan on the farmers' lives. One can see that the rhetoric is the cover for the little practice of the institutions in supporting farmers’ agricultural activity. Farmers’ engagement and practice are not enforced to huge success, as their agricultural production does not change their lives from the sustained poverty as much as they wish or hope. Their sustained poverty demands the farmers' persistent engagement in surviving as a farmer with the resources they have and the level of achievement they can reach to run their household and provide for the basic needs of their whole families.
Illustrations

Farmers in their farmlands
The irrigation site
The irrigation schemes
Some try to use the pumps to suck the water their farmland. Solving disputes by the *woreda* agriculture office.

Farmers’ participating the mass campaign. Fetching water along the river bed

Irrigation association meetings along with *woreda* officials
Field engagements
Billboard and poster that show the anticipations and commitment of the ruling party
General features of rural life
One of the offices in the agricultural bureau.

The *kebelle* map in the DA office

The DA in his office.

Riding the camel.
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