

Land Resource, Uses, and Ownership in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future

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Abstract – Land had been controlled by the elite (kings and their trusted group) in Ethiopia. Private ownership of land had never been known except for some historical incidents. The Ethiopian people had been struggling for centuries with the inequitable land holdings of the country and effectively removed the feudal system in 1975. The following regime (Derg) that came to power in 1975 under the slogan “Land to The Tiller” paradoxically dissatisfied the slogan and ended up in owning the land itself (state ownership?) rather than giving it to the people. The existing government, which controlled power in 1991, was expected to cure the age old land rights ills, among others by giving land to the people in tenure. Rather, it maintained the Derg’s state ownership of land and controls all urban and rural land as well as natural resources. Even though it is the state which controls land ownership, rural peasants and pastoralists are guaranteed with lifetime “holding” right that gives all rights except sale and mortgage. Although it is not mentioned in the constitution, urban residents are also provided with the right to get land for residence on a 99 years lease based agreement. The state ownership of land in contemporary Ethiopia is far from ideal since it restricts the different land rights of use, rent, lease, endowment, and inheritance for different reasons. Since redistribution of land is highly restricted, access to rural land is also almost nonexistent. The constitution is commended for its protection of land holdings against arbitrary state eviction by inserting a provision that gives “commensurate” amount of compensation during expropriation. However, successive implementing proclamations have violated this protection by denying market value (fair compensation) for loss of property. In short, the amount of compensation in the event of expropriation is insufficient. By creating more access to rural land, liberating the land holding rights, and by compensating fairly the loss of properties during expropriation, the current government could give more secure land rights compared to its predecessors.

Keywords – Land Resource, Land Use, Land Ownership, State Ownership, Private Ownership, Ethiopia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Land is the basic resource of human society. It provides the physical space in which we all live, work and play, and from which we obtain our material needs. Land can be viewed as a physical reality; economic value; legal and cultural entity. It is the foundation of all human activity and its proper management is the key to the creation and sustenance of civilized society. Land is exceptionally so important resource that the policy on land ownership affects all aspects of peasants lives: economic well being, land use decisions, efficiency in land use and social relations.

In Ethiopia land has been central by which the rural community has been implicitly or explicitly tied to the state. In other words, land related institutions have been mechanisms whereby political decisions have been channeled from the state to the peasant. Therefore, control over ownership of the land have been a political issue that has involved interest of the powerful actor, the state.

In pre 1974 Imperial Ethiopia, the most common types of land related institutions were *rist*, *gult*, *maderia* (*Yemengist*) land and *Semon* (church) land. Through the proclamation of March 1975, the *Derg* regime undertook a thorough and radical land reform that nationalized land and made it state property. When the current government came to power in 1991, two divergent views of land ownership were forwarded by different groups: private or

state ownership of land. However, despite its market economic policy, the ruling party made it clear that the policy on land was to continue more or less the same lines to that of the *Derg's* land policies. Land ownership vested in the state and this was enshrined in the 1995 constitution.

The current hot debate on the land issue focuses on private-state dichotomy. The government officials have been favoring and implementing state ownership policy of land in the name of protecting the poor from selling their land and become landless. Many scholars, opposition parties and other groups, however recommend private ownership of land justifying that the current land policy does not foster agricultural intensification, improved environmental management, capital formation and scaling up of agriculture.

In general, this paper tries to present clearly and precisely the resourcefulness of land and its uses, historical and political perspective of land tenure., the current debate on land ownership policies and the relative advantage of private ownership of land over that of state in Ethiopia.

1.1 Land as a Resource

Land is a basic natural resource. Over the span of human history, man has drawn most of his sustenance and much of his fuel, clothing and shelter from the land. Land has been man's inhabitant and living space; it has been a matter of life and death, of survival or starvation (Mather, 1986). Land is a resource in agricultural production, but is ultimately fixed in supply with in a nation and even

globally. The fixed nature of land supply makes it different from other factors of production. Land is physically the most immobile one, though it can be put to different uses and every plot of land is different from the other in its economic potential. Land is a stock of capital, a fixed asset or investment, and a measure of wealth. The value of land not only reflect the expected rate of return to land as a capital investment in agricultural production, but also the need to hold it as a livelihood security, as financial security, as a transfer of wealth across a generation, and a resource for consumption purposes. The price of land reflects all these demands, services and uses (Dejene and Teferi, 1994).

For the most of the poor in developing countries, land constitutes to remain the primary means for generating livelihood as well as the main vehicle to invest, accumulate wealth and transfer it between generations (TGE, 1992; cited by Deininger and Feder, 2002). Land and the interrelations among people with respect to land occupy a paramount role in most societies. While in modern market economy, land is sometimes described as just another commodity or asset, it has features that distinguish it from all others. Land is a highly prized asset and one for which individuals and peoples can form attachments that transcend rational economic calculations (Schweigert, 1989).

Land is a foundation of all human activity and its proper management is key to the creation and sustenance of civilized society. Land is a commodity to which value can be assigned and which can be traded through land markets. It is also a commodity that can be taxed to produce revenues that support good governance. Land may be viewed as a cultural entity. It has a cultural dimension that lies at the heart of any nation's people often have an emotional relationship with the land that they claim to own and the locality in which they live, which is why the proper administration of the land is necessary for stable society and social justice (ELTAP, 2006).

1.2 Land Resource and Uses in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the largest countries in Africa (1.106 million km²). But it is difficult to make authoritative statements with regard to its resource base in the absence of a comprehensive and adequate survey of its natural resources. With respect to agriculture, where the country's greatest potential would seem to lie, what can be stated without any fear of contradiction is that the resource base is characterized by great diversity and complexity, embracing the entire range from the very poor to the very good (IIRD, 1988).

The highland (45% of the total area) has very favorable climate with the major portion of the land (75%) having a growing period that exceeds 180 days. The lowlands in the east, south, northwest and northeast have arid and semi-arid climate with very low growing period and are mainly inhabited by pastoralists. The Land Use Planning and Regulatory Department (LUPRD) of the ministry of Agriculture (MoA) with the assistance of UNDP/FAO generated a vast quantity of data concerning land, agro-

climatic and other resources pertaining to agriculture. According to this study, the land resource is classified in to five management units based on growing periods, soil depth, surface stoniness and slope. The country has marginal and non-arable land which approximates 62% of the total land. The remaining 38% of the total area is potentially cultivable. Of this, the vertisol area has a special management requirements of good drainage facility while areas classified as steep land require intensive conservation measurement (Dejene and Mulat, 1995).

The first nationwide land use and land cover survey of Ethiopia, from the resource inventory tradition point of view, was conducted in the late 1970's and early 1980's (TGE, 1992; cited by Berhanu, 1989). Among the major classes of land use types identified, grazing and browsing land accounted for 51.2% of the area of the country. The other land use type comprised, utilized land (18.8%), cultivated land (14.7%), woody vegetation (forest and bush land (11.6%) and unproductive land (3.7%). It has also been suggested that 81% of the country's territory can be used for agricultural activities (TGE, 1992; cited by FAO, 1986).

According to EMA (1988), the distribution of land based on its use is given in the table below.

Table 1: Distribution of land based on its uses

Land use classes	% from the total area
Intensively cultivated land	10.3
Moderately cultivated land	12.6
Afro-alpine and sub-afro-alpine vegetation	0.2
High forest	4.2
Wood land	2.5
Riparian wood and shrubland	0.6
Bush and shrubland	21.4
Grass land	30.5
Water bodies	0.5
Others	17.5
Total	100

Source: EMA, 1988

Agricultural land use of the country is shown in the following table.

Table 2: Agricultural land use classes

Land use classes	% from the total area
Arable land (excluding vertisols)	27
Vertisols	6
Other arable land (step land)	5
Marginal land	13
Non arable land	49
Total	100

Source: TGE (1992:41)

Most of the underutilized land is found in the south and southwestern parts of the country while available land in the northern part is already intensively cultivated. Possibilities to expand land are influenced by environmental, social and economic factors (Dejene and Mulat, 1995).

III. DEFINITION AND CONCEPTS OF LAND TENURE

The term "land tenure" is derived from the Latin word *tenere*, meaning to hold. It refers to the possession rights associated with each parcel of land (ICRAF, 1985). Throughout history, land has been one of the most highly valued possessions of human society. The rules according to which members of the society share and use land have evolved overtime in accordance with changing economic and social relations. It is these rules and regulations about holdings and use of land in a society which constitute the land tenure system (Bahru, 1998).

2.1 Historical Development of Land Tenure in Ethiopia

2.1.1 Land Tenure During Pre-1975 Period

The land tenure system in pre 1975 Ethiopia was one of the most complex and intricate systems. It represented the issue of power and governance in Ethiopia, as land was the major source of income and livelihood in this predominately agrarian economy (ILRI, 2002). The complex nature of land tenure in Ethiopia existed until the land reform of 1975 after which they ceased; yet their impact continued to be relevant for contemporary environmental and development issues (Atakilte, 2003).

The land tenure system varied from region to region due to the diverse geographical and cultural settings and the different socio-political events that occurred in different parts of the country. The most common types of land related institutions in pre-1975 Ethiopia were *rist*, *gult*, *maderia* (*Yemengist*) land, and *Semon* (Church) land (ILRI, 2002).

Rist was a type of corporate ownership system that emphasizes descent. All descendants of an individual founder or occupiers were entitled to a share. *Rist* was hereditary, inalienable and inviolable. No users of any piece of land could sell, mortgage or bequeath his or her share outside the family (Atakilte, 2003).

Gult is a different kind of institution which seems to have emerged essentially together with the earliest process of state formation in northern Ethiopia. *Gult* is not a land use right, rather a right to tax the benefit from land. Thus, *gult* right, unlike *rist*, was not hereditary. It gave the holders the power to levy tributes from the local people. Individuals with *gult* right grants also had the rights to impose labor and other personal services like building house, providing fire wood, looking after livestock and even sometimes domestic chores (Bahru, 1998). *Gult* rights over land were given to the members of the ruling elite as a reward to loyal service to their lord and to religious institutions as endowments (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

Madaria or *Yemngist* lands were originally unoccupied lands that were declared state property, most of which were located in the south. When the imperial government conquered the south, South west and eastern parts of the country, all unsettled lands were declared state property and given to officials and loyalists of the crown. This constituted what was called the *gabar* system, which is a form of free hold tenure. As most of the lands were granted to the powerful officials and loyalists of the crown, the local population in these areas became landless and entered into tenancy relationships with land lords (ILRI, 2002).

Samon (church) lands were associated with Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The amount of land under this tenure was never known with a reasonable degree of precision. A good example is that church lands were estimated to constitute a mere 5 percent of all lands (ILRI, 2002).

2.1.2 Land Ownership Policy Under the Derg Regime

The landlord-tenant relationships and the *rist* system continued to be the dominant land tenure institutions in most parts of the country until the Derg regime took over power in 1974. The Derg launched a radical land reform program that covered all parts of the country (ILRI, 2002). On March 4, 1975 this socialist regime introduced the program which consisted of the following key elements:

1. All rural land was nationalized with "any person willing personally to cultivate land allotted sufficient land for his maintenance and that of his family", though not exceeding 10 hectares;
2. No person may be allowed to use hired labor, except a woman with no other means of livelihood;
3. No person shall sell, exchange, or transfer land acquired through the provision of proclamation; and
4. Any tenant or laborer shall have possessor rights over the land he presently tills (Atakilte, 2003).

The power of administering land was vested in the then Ministry of Land Reform and Administration (MLRA) through Peasant Associations at grass root levels. The law provides 10 hectares of land as a maximum size a family can possess. However, in practice it was often less than 3 hectares (IDR, 1994).

The only 'formal' way of obtaining access to land was through membership in peasant association and land was subjected to periodic redistribution among households based on family size and land quality (ILRI, 2002).

In the north, where the *rist* institution dominated, the initial distribution was already egalitarian before the revolution because differences in landholding and levels in tenancy were very low. In the southern part, where landlordism dominated, the reform had tremendous outcomes. Thus, the purpose of the reform was more relevant for the southern than the northern region (Atakilte, 2003).

There is a general consensus among many writers and observers that the land reform law was radical in its nature and content that it was an appropriate measure to take. For instance, Dejene and Yigremew (2002) stated that the reform abolished the exploitation of peasants by the

landed classes and redistributed land to the peasantry on a relatively equitable bases. The reform has also given rise to a uniformity of tenure throughout the country, thus doing away with the complexity of tenure arrangements that in the past made rural development difficult task and time consuming.

However, many shortcomings of the land reform are also mentioned by many authors. Burce, et al (1993) stated that the main short coming of the reform was that it forced peasants to engage in periodic redistribution of land to accommodate new land claimants with the net effect of leveling down and diminution of individual possessions; repeated redistribution gave rise to and exacerbated tenure insecurity which led to lose of incentives for land improvement. Thus, the extractive programs of the Derg impoverished peasant households and extended and depended rural poverty. Dejene and Yigremew (2002) also noted that tenure insecurity was not only a result of a continuous redistribution of land. There was eviction of peasants in many parts of the country in the name of villagization, resettlement, establishment of agricultural producers cooperatives and state farms. Although the government has succeeded in none of these polices, they had a tremendous impact on peasants' production and lives.

During the aftermath of the land reform, the demand for land by the rapidly growing farming population could not met through land redistribution. Although tenancy and use of hired labor were banned by law, farmers gradually started to lease out their land. A rural household survey conducted by the Addis Ababa University and the center for the study of African Economies indicates the existence of such 'informal' land markets during this period (ILRI, 2002).

During the eve of its downfall (1990), the Derg regime issued the so-called 'mixed economic program' that liberalized some of the highly centralized system of economic management. The reform conferred a transferable and lifelong lease to holders of rural lands. Within this reform the ban on temporary land lease was lifted and fanner to farmer land contracts became official. The government intervened only to formalize an ongoing processes. However, the reform did not establish legal procedures and institutional mechanisms to allow formal land markets. Nevertheless, more and more farmers started to engage in various kinds of 'informal' land markets.

2.1.3 Land Ownership Policy Under EPRDF

The 1991 change in the government has not changed the land tenure system. Land continued to be "public property" where land users are entitled to usufruct right, land marketing and permanent land transfers are prohibited. These rules were further consolidated in 1995 when they were incorporated in the constitution (supreme law of the land). Article 40(3) of the constitution states that;

The right of ownership of rural land and urban land as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the state and the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common

property of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of transfer (Atakilte, 2003).

The constitution allows temporary leases. It also guarantees the rights of peasants and pastoralists of free access to land and the right of individuals to claim compensation for improvements they make on land, including the right to bequeath and transfer. However, such right is removed when the right of using the land expires (ILRI, 2002). The Rural Land Administration proclamation No. 89/1997 vested the Regional Governments with the power of land administration defined as "the assignment of holding rights and the execution of distribution of holding". The law has also provisions on distribution of holdings as "a rural land allocation measure taken at intervals, upon decision of the community". Article 6(1) also provides that distribution of holding is the only way through which peasants lose their holdings (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

Based on the Rural Land Administration mentioned above, regional governments enact laws on land administration, land utilization, taxation and other tenure related polices. For instance, the Tigray Regional Government promulgated Rural Land Use Law in 1997. The law states that there will be no further redistribution of land except where major infrastructure investments necessitates redistribution. The user rights are lifelong and can be transferred through inheritance to children and to parents. It allows land rentals by holders with a maximum period of two years for 'traditional' farming and ten years for farming using nontraditional techniques. However, the policy fails to define what constitutes modem and traditional technology (Bruce et al, 1994).

Similarly, the Amhara Regional Government has passed two laws since 1996. One is about land redistribution (proclamation on the "Realotment of the Possession of Rural Land" No. 16, 1996 and the other is the law on "Rural Land Administration Use" provided in 2000. According to the 1996 Land Redistribution Policy, peasants were stratified into five social categories: "bureaucrats", "remnant feudal", rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants. All those so-called "bureaucrats" and "remnant feudals" were allowed to hold a maximum of 1 hectare of land regardless of their family size. The proclamation also prohibited land possession by peasants outside their residential kebele (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

The "Rural Land Administration and Use" provided in 2000 states that any person living in rural areas of the region whose age is 18 and above years is said to have access to agricultural land freely. Land can be transferred to family through inheritance or gift. The law does not rule out redistribution but provides conditions for it. It provides that land redistribution will not be carried out unless it is proved it will not hamper productivity, it is supported by the society, supported by study, and decided by law. Although land redistribution was undertaken once in Tigray and Twice in Amhara region since 1991, there has

been none in Oromia region although no official statements has been given for abandoning redistribution (ILRI, 2002).

III. THE CURRENT USER RIGHT DOCUMENTATION

The Ethiopian government has begun implementation of 'land certification program' hoping that it improves tenure security of peasants. Accordingly, the four regional states of Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and the Southern region are conducting land registration with different approaches and methodologies (ELTAP, 2006).

Some scholars, however, argue that even though the land registration program was a positive step, the effort was not sufficient to address the basic issues about lack of clarity regarding security and property ownership. While the regional governments are assuring there will be no land redistribution, the federal land policy is still remained stating that redistribution is the only way by which the peasants may lose their land. Therefore, user right documentation failed to assure security of tenure in the full sense of the world (Atakilte, 2003).

Despite new initiations of use right documentation, tenure insecurity still remained the overriding problems of land system in Ethiopia. For instance, a recent study made by Mitiku et al (2005) in Northern Ethiopia showed that the new land tenure rules are unclear and the peasants fear that they may be vulnerable to title changes. The study also revealed that a significant proportion of peasants come to value the registration functionally when it serves the purpose.

Finally, the literature on African land tenure suggests that for land registration and the issuance of title documents to be effective, cadastral surveys and modern system of record keeping are essential without which the program could lead to conflict and uncertainty. Therefore, new problems and new conflicts will arise in the future if modern technology is not employed (Desalegn, 2000).

IV. CURRENT DEBATE ON LAND OWNERSHIP ISSUES IN ETHIOPIA

Land policy has remained one of the sources of disagreement and focus of debate among politicians, academicians and other concerned parts in Ethiopia (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002). There have been two divergent approaches so far as land policy is concerned since EPRDF comes to power. International consultants, donor agencies and the World Bank recommended a tenure system allowing a free and active land market. Their main justification was that private ownership of land provides the most secure tenure and enables the development of market for land transactions, efficiency in the use of land resources and increase agriculture and forestry production (IDR, 2002).

The government officials on the other hand argued that private ownership of land will lead to concentration of land

in the hands of few, eviction of peasants and rural-urban migration. Thus, despite of a market economic policy of the new regime, land remained under state ownership and constitutionally resolved issues of land ownership continued to be a source of hot debate (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002). Atakilte (2003) also stated that besides the clear goals of 'protecting the poor and vulnerability from selling their land and becoming landless', the government has also hidden goals such as political interest, economic and social instability and state driven development agenda that relied on mobilization of rural people have also been a key issues in Ethiopian land tenure policy.

Although the constitutions has been adopted since 1991 has resolved some issues, it does not address some important points. For instance, the 1997 Rural Land Administration Proclamation, declare that periodic land redistribution remains the main measure by which land is transferred from one user to another (Desalegn, 2000). Atakilte (2003) also argued that in contemporary Ethiopia the government hopes to address distribution of user rights of the land through a range of political measures such as land distribution and restriction of land transfer.

Analyzing the implication of the policy (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002) argued that peasant plots will be reduced to uneconomic size in forcible future if redistribution is unchecked. Ethiopian agriculture since the last three decades is characterized by diminution of holdings (a shift from smallholder to a microagriculture) in which the peasants cannot feed even themselves and nonviable holdings. It is also important to note that an average farm size of about one hectare for a family with approximately five persons was badly adequate for feeding a household members (Desalegn, 1994). Land redistribution also leads to fragmentation of farms which creates difficulties to farmers in terms of travel time, taking care of the crop, transportation of equipment and harvest (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

The other impact of land redistribution program is that it has eroded the potentials for the development of farms as indivisible, heritable and inter generational family assets. Such policy have poorly considered the maintenance of land as a transcending individual users with obligation and motivation to properly maintain, improve and transfer the land to his/her fellow user (Atakilte, 2003).

The constitution has been adopted since 1991 also guarantees the rights of peasants and pastoralists a free access to land. However, given the scarcity of land, it is not clear how peasants' rights of free access to land can be assured in practice (ILRI, 2002).

V. IMPACTS OF CURRENT LAND TENURE POLICY IN ETHIOPIA

Insecurity: continuity and stability of land ownership is crucial condition for sustainable development. However, since the land reform of the 1970's peasants have been denied of secure rights to land, and current policy has not

improved the situation much. Insecurity affects the perception and decision of land management of the land users. People's perception on tenure security is a determinant factor in their land management preferences, perception of degradation risks and action in conservation (Atalkilte, 2003).

Dejene and Yigremew, (2002) also stated that when peasants are not sure of keeping the same plot for the coming years, they focus only on immediate returns. No farmer wants to take the risks of losing his plots before earning the maximum possible benefit. Moreover, insecurity has forced peasants to abandon indigenous land management practices such as fallowing, crop rotation, manuring and terracing of soils. It also led to loss of biodiversity through discouraging peasants from planting trees (Bruce et al, 1993).

Impact on land use technologies: the continual division and sub division of the land has precluded the widespread dissemination of improved technologies (Desalegn, 2000). A research made by Mulat et al (1998) cited in (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002) revealed that farm size is the most important factor affecting the application of fertilizer per hectare. It also indicated that tractors are uneconomical in fields less than two hectares and the main reason for peasants not accepting the improved plow was the small size of farm which can easily be handled under the traditional '*marasha*'. It is also important to note that a rough crude estimation of viable minimum economic holding size per household under low and moderate input levels of technologies is to range from 6.50 hectares to 5.37 hectares respectively (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

Demographic impact: the land system has discouraged the movement of the rural population out of agricultural activity since rights to land are dependent on the residence in the kebeles. Peasants absent from their kebeles for an extended length of time will lose their rights. Of course this may have changed in Oromia and Southern regions as their registration does not tie right to land with continued residence in rural areas (Desalegn, 2000). The 1996 'Realotment of the rural land' policy of the Amhara region states that peasants get land only in their residential kebeles. Such precondition also prohibits land based social unification. Given spatial variation of land qualities and uneven distribution of population, it is also not clear how such precondition is materialized.

Impact on credit services: because the ultimate owner of land is the state and the peasants have only user rights, the bank do not accept land as collateral. Thus, access to credit is not available to most peasants (Desalegn, 2000).

Inefficient land administration: now a days there is no specific government agency dealing with land. Technical issues of land administration are assigned to the administration and the political structure; land distribution is carried out by political cadres; assignment and protection of land rights is left to administrators and politicians; there is no land use plans and guidelines, etc. As a result, land administration has been done arbitrary

affecting both the rights of citizens and the country's development (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

Land related institutions have been mechanisms where by political decisions have been channeled from the state to the local level and political forces have appeared more determinant than economic or environmental ones in the discourse of land tenure (Atalkilte, 2003). For instance, according to the 1996 rural land policy of Amhara region mentioned earlier, peasants were stratified into five social categories. Social equity consideration of land redistribution was replaced by political criteria. Therefore, it has political objectives than social and economic ones. Its implementation was secretive and the whole processes was highly politicized (Dejene and Yigremew, 2002).

VI. RELATIVE ADVANTAGE OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF LAND OVER STATE OWNERSHIP

Private ownership provides full rights to individual holders and allows them to participate more fully in the market economy. It secures land against intrusion by government, the primary threat to security of tenure in Africa. It permits free alienability which helps to move land in to the hands of more efficient producers (Tefaye, 2003). Desalegn (2000) also strengthened that the land market offers the following benefits. First, it provides opportunities for the landless to get access to land. Second, it server to provide a source of income for poor households. Third, it enables entrepreneurial peasants to expand their farm operations, and finally, it makes the land system to move from those who are unable to use it productively to those who can.

A well defined full ownership rights of land policy implies:

1. Building local peoples' sense of place and sense of ownership;
2. Releasing local potentials to take care of the land; and
3. Entitlement of rural people to the land.

Such policy measures are crucial for transfer of land in a more efficient way. Such processes may gradually stimulate consolidation of farms and scaling up of agriculture which ultimately lead to improve farmers' capacity to manage risks, to adopt better technologies and thereby to improve agricultural productivity (Atalkilte, 2003).

The fear of the Ethiopian government with the privatization of the land could be that farmers may sell their land and face destitution. However, governments' justification with the land policy is based on unsubstantiated fears and there has been very little evidence to support them. For instance, recent study made by Ethiopian Economic Association found that peasants were not keen to sell their land if they were given the chance (Desalegn, 2000).

Dejene and Yigremew (2002) argued that the equity concerns of governments could be met through an appropriate policy instruments such as the specification of

farm size without inhibiting land market. Unnecessary restrictions may deny efficient farmer access to farmland and would contribute to the under utilization of available land. Atakilte (2003) also suggested that if governments' assumption of destitution of the poor in the privatization process of the land is the case, such risk is only perceived when the contemporary economic conditions are difficult and alternative employment opportunities are negligible. Another scholars Desalegn (2000) recommended the following to alleviate such land related problems. These are:

- Creating enabling environment for the private and public sector to generate employment opportunities on a large scale;
- Encouraging economic diversification;
- Investing on necessary infrastructure to encourage rapid growth in modern sector; and
- Rapid growth in urbanization and investment on urban services accommodated by increasing employment opportunities which will attract large number of rural migrants, which in turn decreases pressure on diminishing asset base, the land.

Finally, Atakilte (2003) also suggested that in light of the two competing issues, some sort of compromise should be devised where by policies on private ownership undertake on a more gradual process. For instance, policies could be frame in such a way that a land market or complete transfer of land is allowed to take among villagers to protect them from outside influences. Depending on the progress, the protective goal of the policies can be successfully relaxed from a region to national level and complete land transfer.

VI. CONCLUSION

Land is the foundation of all human material needs. It is the base for economic production, the creation of wealth and development. Therefore, its proper management is the key to the creation and sustenance of civilized society. Its full ownership signifies well being and sense of security among nations.

Land tenure and policies in Ethiopia has a complex historical development. In pre-1974 Imperial Ethiopia four major types of land related institutions were practiced in most parts of the country. These were *rist*, *gult*, *maderia* (*yemengist*) land and *semon* (church) land. From 1975 onwards the Derg regime undertook a radical and uniform program of land reform. All pre-existing forms of land ownership were extinguished and all land was declared to be "public property". However, in practice Derg continued to make himself the owner of all land transforming the country from semi first holder and semi tenant to a country of all tenants.

Since coming to power, the present government also moved slowly on land polices for political and other reasons. Land ownership vested under the state and continued more or less the same lines to that of the Derg. Therefore, the land tenure system under the two

governments have shown a substantial degree of continuity than change.

Currently the Ethiopian government has began user right documentation program might be hoping that it could improve tenure security of peasants. Although this is one step forward, However, unless the issue of land tenure is constitutionally and legally resolved, it seems that the registration has been done only for the sake of symbolism and it has no more use than paper value. Besides, there has been a strong fear that land registration may lead to unforeseen problems (leading to conflicts) if modern system of survey and record keeping is not employed.

Land policy has remained one of the issues of hot debate in contemporary Ethiopia on private versus state ownership of land. The government officials has been arguing for state ownership of land in the name of "protecting the poors' vulnerability form becoming landless". However, such fear is unsubstantiated and very little evidences available to support them. On the other hand, private ownership of land is strongly recommended because it fosters:

- Security of tenure;
- Environmental conservation;
- Sense of place and ownership;
- Scaling up of agriculture;
- Shift of land from inefficient user to efficient user;
- Release of local potentials to take care of the land;
- Incensement of agricultural and forest production and the like.

The well known impacts of the current land policy in Ethiopia includes:

- Insecurity;
- Impact on land use technology;
- Demographic impact;
- Impact on credit services, and
- In efficient and political led land administration.

Lastly, but not least, analyzing all the merit and demerit of the two divergent approaches of land tenure, It can be strongly recommend that the government needs to revisit its land policies if poverty and environmental problems needed to be alleviated in forceable near future.

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