



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Women trafficking in Ethiopia and its mitigation; The case of Arsi Zone, Oromiya

Wako, L.M.

Citation

Wako, L. M. (2020, December 8). *Women trafficking in Ethiopia and its mitigation; The case of Arsi Zone, Oromiya*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138636>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138636>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/138636> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Wako, L.M.

Title: Women trafficking in Ethiopia and its mitigation; The case of Arsi Zone, Oromiya

Issue Date: 2020-12-08

Chapter 2

The Setting

This chapter introduces the overall political economy situation which gave rise to human trafficking, in general and women trafficking, in particular. It proceeds to describe and explain the environmental and socio-economic conditions under which human trafficking and particularly the trafficking of women from Arsi Administrative Zones (Arsi West and Arsi) takes place. It argues that human trafficking is not only a matter of law and order that involves victims and traffickers and therefore falls within the conceptual underpinning of anti-human trafficking within the remit of freedom and emancipation. Its root causes and the factors which propel it are social and economic as well as a result of environmental shocks which contribute to the vulnerability of the victims of human trafficking and undermines their ability to eke a living from an impoverished environment. In situations of impaired livelihood conditions, traffickers find an easy prey in the victims and in some cases their families.

2.1. Prelude

With about 109 million people (2018), Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria, and the fastest growing economy in the region. However, it is also one of the poorest, with a per capita income of \$790.¹⁸ Agriculture is the mainstay of the Ethiopian economy. It employs 80% of the total population and generates about 90% of export earnings. Ethiopia's industrialization plans are heavily dependent on agriculture.. Most food and cash crops are cultivated in rain-fed subsistence farms, operated by small-scale farmers, who work on ca. 96% of the cultivated land. It does not come as a surprise that Ethiopia's accelerated economic growth has been fueled by agriculture and services -driven in the framework of the Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) initiative, perceived as the main contributor to growth and poverty reduction, coupled with infrastructure development. The effort was guided by two consecutive Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP1 and GTP2). Ethiopia has indeed witnessed phenomenal economic (GDP) growth relative to its humble beginning in 1991 after the change of regime. The broad-based growth averaged 9.9% a year

¹⁸ World Bank 2020.

from 2007/08 to 2017/18, compared to an African average of 5.4%. But it's real GDP growth decelerated to 7.7% in 2017/18, with a per capita income of \$790.¹⁹

However, despite the Ethiopian government's investment in the social sector (health, education and safety net programmes), which are reflected in its MDGs achievements²⁰, the country remains one of the least developed in the world. The share of the population living below the national poverty line did decrease from 30% in 2011 to 24% in 2016. However, during the last two years, several factors, like political disruptions associated with social unrest, decline of exports, lower foreign direct investment, and high debt service, have had a negative impact on overall growth. There are signs that the gains made in poverty reduction may gradually erode due to a stagnation, or some say even the shrinking, of the economy, which will aggravate due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, that reached Ethiopia in the second half of 2020. According to a World Bank report (April 2020), sustained rapid economic growth in Ethiopia in the 2000s translated into strong poverty reduction in urban areas, with the poverty rate tumbling by 11 percentage points, from 26% in 2010/11 to 15% in 2015/16 (the date of the most recent survey on poverty and living standards). In rural areas of Ethiopia, the reduction in poverty was relatively slow with the poverty rate decreasing by four percentage points from 30% in 2010/11 to 26 percent in 2015/16.

Economic inequality reflected in consumption and urban and rural areas has increased. Households in urban areas, that were already better-off in 2011, experienced strong consumption growth between 2011 and 2016, while households in rural areas experienced fairly weak consumption growth. As a result, the "between-share" of inequality -the part of inequality that is due to differences in average welfare levels between urban and rural areas- increased from 15 percent in 2011 to 29 percent in 2016 (World Bank 2020: 47).

Ethiopia's impressive economic growth has been described as "jobless", meaning that economic growth has not created sufficient employment opportunities, particularly for youth. According to Duguma and Tolcha (2019: 319):

The problem is more severe in urban than in rural area. According to Ethiopian labour force survey report, the unemployment rate of urban youth at country level was 22.9 while it was only 3.1% in rural areas. It is special concern for Ethiopians and has a wider implication for the youth in addition to leading their life as expected to help parents and extended families. According to a survey in 55 urban areas, unemployment was estimated

¹⁹ Lie et al 2018 and Bekele 2017.

²⁰ UNECA 2014, Assefa *et al.* 2017.

at 41.3% and the incidence of youth unemployment was 45.5% and 35.7% for females and males respectively”.

The high incidence of women and youth unemployment and recent increases in poverty should be treated as among the factors which contributed to the relatively high level of migrant and trafficked women from Ethiopia.

Political unrest and conflicts involving youth and contending ethnic groups have created a large number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) is estimated at approximately 3.1, making it the country with the highest number of IDPs in the world. The ongoing conflicts in West and Central Gondar, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, West Wellega and West Guji zones of Oromia, the Gedeo, Amaro and Basketo zones in SNNPR, and continued violence in the Afar-Somali border area contributed to the total of the mentioned numbers of IDPs.²¹ These conflicts have destabilizing effects of farmers ability to cultivate their farms and eke living.

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that in Ethiopia traditions or ‘cultures’ of migration exist. Across its history, Ethiopia has seen frequent population movements, due to religious reasons (missions), armed conquest, new land settlement, labour shortages and climatic or epidemic events (see Bausi 2014; Gascon, *et al.* 2010). One example of the later 19th century was the Gurage people’s exodus to the growing capital Addis Ababa: a foreboding of larger processes of labour migration induced by economic problems (cf. Baker 1992). Recent work by Schewel (2018: 346) and Grabska *et al.* (2019) refer to such ‘cultures of migration’ as they exist today (e.g., also in Sudan and Eritrea).

Put together, the prevailing economic and political situation in Ethiopia is conducive to migration and human trafficking both within Ethiopia and internationally, but alone it cannot explain the complexity of the internal factors specific to each region and zonal administration. The following sections of this chapter explore those factors in respect to Arsi Zone, the focus of this study.

2.2 State-Society-Land Relations

In order to understand the setting in which human trafficking takes place, it is important to understand the relationship between people and land (land tenure or ownership) in a brief historical background most of the inhabitants of Arsi are subsistence farmers, practice agriculture and livestock husbandry which comprise the main sources of livelihood. Generally,

²¹ IFRC 2019: 1.

it is acceptable to divide the history of land tenure into at least four major phases. Any discourse on land tenure in today's Ethiopia should take into consideration at least three historical periods since the mid-19th century with profound consequences for land tenure in Southern Ethiopia, responsible of the current state-Oromo-land relations. First, the epoch of Menelik II, emperor of Ethiopia (r. 1889-1913), who forcefully integrated the people and territories of the South. During this phase, the southern territories were appropriated and all so-called communal land was converted into state property (cf. Abbas 2014). It should also be considered the first era of mass appropriation and dispossession of communal land. This system largely continued under emperor Haile Sellassie's rule (from 1930 to 1974), where land privatization, expanded mechanized farming and wildlife parks were initiated, often at the expense of local people's rights and access to the land.²²

Following the revolution of 1974, the Land Reform Proclamation of 1975, implemented by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (known as the *Derg*), nationalized and transformed all land to public property, owned by the state.²³ It prohibited land transfers, restored nominal collective land ownership rights and land management authority to the peoples of the South. One major feature of the *Derg* regime's land reform was the resettlement of large numbers of people from other (famine-stricken) provinces in lands that originally belonged to the Oromo and other southern peoples (see for example Dessalegn 1985). Some of the current land conflicts and displacement can be attributed to these policies.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government (in power from May 1991 to November 2019²⁴) enshrined the state and public land tenure policy and allowed Regional States to legislate land policies.²⁵ In the case of Oromiya, a Rural Land Use and Land Administration Proclamation was enacted in 2000.²⁶ However, the Federal Government has taken by the left hand what it has given by the right hand, particularly in the area of foreign direct investment and private agricultural development deemed necessary for national economic growth. In retrospect, the government has given sway to the allocation of vast stretches of lands in Oromiya and elsewhere for development purposes to the private sector

²² Cohen and Weintraub 1975, Pausewang 1983, and Crummey 2000.

²³ Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, entitled 'Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation'.

²⁴ When it was reorganized into the 'Prosperity Party' (although one of the core parties of EPRDF, the TPLF, did not join).

²⁵ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. 1997. *Rural Land Administration Proclamation of the Federal Government of Ethiopia*. Proclamation No. 89/1997. Addis Ababa: Federal Negarit Gazet'a.

²⁶ Regional Government of Oromia. 2002. *Oromia Rural Land Use and Land Administration Proclamation*. Proclamation No. 56/2002. Addis Ababa/Finfinne: Regional Government of Oromia.

- national and especially foreign -. These new land policies reignited the land question, which became a major source of conflict between state and society.

Although these social, economic and environmental conditions are local and specific to Arsi, like other parts of rural Southern Ethiopia, they are connected to Ethiopian history and to the development of the state, from the imperial regime (to 1974) to the Marxist-Leninist (1974-1991) and the EPRDF government (after 1991). Each state system left its mark on state-society-land relations, and despite their ideological and political differences, they kept land and land-based resources firmly under the control of the state. Small and fragmented land holdings are now expected to sustain the livelihood of a rapidly growing population in the rural and urban areas, provide employment, and supply the raw materials necessary for agro-business and industry simultaneously. Arsi and other rural areas also found themselves under increasing pressure from the expansion of private agriculture for the production of export crops, and due to their numbers increasing while their land holdings are shrinking. The following section shows the centrality of land for sustenance and sketch the socio-economic conditions and demographic pressure that is mounting on people. They impel people, particularly the youth, to look for alternative employment opportunities, including migration to the urban centers or abroad, often via human traffickers.

2.3 People and Geography

According to the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) 2015 report, Arsi Negelle has a total population of 303,223 of which 150,245 are male and 152,978 are females.²⁷ Its Administrative Zones are located in the central part of the Oromiya State, between 60 45' N to 80 58' N and 380 32' E to 400 50' E. It borders the Regional State of Nations, Nationalities and People of Southern Ethiopia (NNPSE), East Shewa, Bale and West Hararghe Zones. Asella, the capital and administrative hub of Arsi.²⁸ The total area of Arsi land mass is 23881 km² and accounts for about 7 percent of the total area of the Regional State of Oromiya (284,538 km²).

For most of Arsi, the rainy season starts in March and extends to October, with the highest concentration in June, July and August. The number of rainy days varies from 145 to 200 in the highland zone and this number slightly decreases as one goes down to the south. Based on the climatological data available, the mean annual rainfall varies from 633.7 to 1059.3 mms which shows that Arsi Zone receives sufficient and well-distributed rainfall both

²⁷ For longitudinal comparative insights, see the CSA reports of 2007 and 2012.

²⁸ See Regional State of Oromiya 2011: 2.

in amount and seasonal distribution, which makes it conducive for agricultural and livestock production.

A land survey conducted for the Oromiya Regional State (2011) showed that that 41.65% of the land is arable, 16.78% covered with water bodies and only 5.76% forest. Grazing lands, essential for livestock raising, cover 35.81% of the land mass. Among the major food crops produced in the Arsi Zone are cereals, pulses, and oil seeds. Among cereals, t'eff, barley and wheat are the pre-dominant, and among pulses horse beans and field peas are grown widely. Other crops include vegetables, fruits, root crops and the stimulant *khat* are also grown. The area under cereals covers the largest part of the total area of the Zone.²⁹ A number of modern, mostly foreign-owned, flower and horticultural farms have expanded throughout Arsi zone during the last 20 years.

Favorable rain and soil conditions in Arsi should not be mistaken for prosperity and high per capita land size. Bedada *et al.* (2018: 6) found that the mean family size of Arsi farmers is 7.3 persons., The overall average farmland size 1.99 hectares., which is above the national average land holding of 1.02 hectare.³⁰ A difference of 0.97 hectares more than the mean national land holding per household would seem to imply that Arsi farmers are better off, but not the extent that they lead a more prosperous life than the average Ethiopia farming household.

With reference to women's ownership of land, official land policy and the Constitution grant women equal rights to men in land tenure,³¹ but in reality, legal provisions and policy frameworks are not fully implemented. Jemma (2010: 66) observed that for traditional reasons, only husbands were recognized as head of the family and were allowed to join the PAs and receive land on behalf of households. Hence, only widows and a few of the polygamous women (usually the older ones) whose husbands sought more land joined the Peasant Associations and obtained land. Furthermore, divorced women among the Arsi Oromo, as in Arsi Negele and Hetossa, were not encouraged culturally to receive their 'share' of the family land. Jemma (2010) is not alone in making this observation, others too have provided qualified data (see Dessalegn 2004; Dejene 1999 and Tadesse and Amare 2000) to show that women are disadvantaged in respect to land ownership and property rights.

²⁹ Regional State of Oromiya 2015.

³⁰ The range was between 0.75 to 7 hectares.

³¹ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995 and the Rural Land Administration Proclamation of the Federal Government of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 89/1997.

Uglla *et al.* (2018: 163) found that girls “... receive less education, which may reflect the higher risks and lower returns of female education. By sending girls to school, families may miss out on their domestic labour within the household; and there is a greater risk of premarital sex and abduction, which can negatively affect a girl's marriage prospects”. Such practices clearly disadvantage girls, which is reflected in the national education statistics suggesting that there are more girl drop-outs from primary schools than boys. The long-term implication is that with lower education and no skills to enter the job market, girls from poor families tend to join either sex work, low-paying jobs in situations of semi-servitude or be victims of human trafficking. This state of affairs leaves women to be disadvantaged and their livelihood security jeopardized in household conflict situations or divorce, as well as not having land which could be used as a collateral, and this undermines their chance to borrow capital and expand assets.

Arsi zone is ranked high in livestock population, having 2.5 million cattle, 1.66 million sheep, 0.74 million goats, 0.24 million horses, 0.02 million mules, 0.4 million donkeys, 0.03 million camels, 1.88 million poultry birds and 0.12 million beehives which shows that there is huge potential in the sector. In general, when considering the composition of cattle herds, each household has on average of 1.2 cattle per household.³² However, there are great variations in livestock ownership per household and from *woreda* to *woreda*.

The livestock population is also subject to considerable pressure and cyclical reduction in numbers, due to occasional droughts or disease. Drinking water shortages for animals occur during the dry season and the decline of grasses and pasture affect livestock health and can lead to massive death. Gebiso (2018: 244), argues that: “In most cases, the (animal) feed during dry seasons is insufficient and the farmers/livestock keepers feed their animals only for survival. Because of this, the animals do not provide the intended milk output and the female ones do not conceive due to poor bodily condition. Drinking water for livestock is a serious production constraint in all farming systems of Arsi region”.³³

2.4 Vulnerability to Climate Change

Climate change aggravates farmers and livestock keepers' problems, increases vulnerability due to crop reduction or failure and contributes to the decimation of livestock, two of the main

³² Central Statistics Agency 2015 (Table 3).

³³ The five farming systems refer to here are: lowland agro-pastoral, coffee & khat tree based, irrigation based, highland barley-root crop based, maize-sorghum based, mechanized wheat belt farm type, and non-mechanized wheat belt.

sources of livelihood in Arsi.³⁴ During the last two years, research has shown that also Oromiya Regional State has been plagued by recurrent erratic precipitation and drought, as well as by sudden unseasonal floods or heavy rains outside the farming season. For example, Zenebe *et al.* (2017), who analyzed climatic changes in Arsi Zone, showed that there was a high variability of rainfall for June-July-August (JJA) – the Ethiopian rainy (‘summer’) season – and for March-April-May (MAM) – the Ethiopian spring season - during the period 1983/84 to 2014/15. During this same period, rainfall declined by 2.198 mm, 4.541 mm, 1.814 mm and 1.608 mm per annum for JJA, MAM, September-October-November (SON) the Ethiopian autumn season - and December-January-February (DJF) - the Ethiopian ‘winter’ season - respectively. They concluded that the total rainfall declined by 10.16 mm per annum (*ibid.* 2017: 6).

Other researchers³⁵ also found that climatic uncertainty, severe weather extremes and the incidence of floods and drought have become more frequent in the Arsi Zone, affecting crop and livestock production and inducing food insecurity (see Belay 1999). Floods damaging houses and property close to major water courses and foothills also occur more regularly. Drought conditions which affected only small pockets of Arsi Zone in 2000 (OCHA 2003) developed into a widespread phenomenon during the 2015 drought.

Arsi is now in a similar category as other drought-prone regions in a special country report on Ethiopia (FEWSNet 2015). we read that poor crop conditions or crop failures are evident in Jijiga zone (Somali region), parts of East and West Hararghe, Arsi, Arsi West, and North Shewa (Oromiya region), North Wollo, South Wollo, and North Shewa (Amhara Region), and in four of the five zones of Tigray. Sorghum, wheat, beans, and barley production declined, exhibiting a similar pattern of crop conditions (*ibid.*).

Increasing incidences of climate change combined with relatively small landholdings and unregulated population growth are conducive to livelihood vulnerability and to the search for coping mechanisms within Arsi and Ethiopia, and to a search for better living conditions. Decline in livestock and livestock production due to climate change and its association with

³⁴ This situation is similar to what described in Kenya and elsewhere, pertaining to the fact that, “In places where the local population engages in livelihoods that heavily rely on weather patterns, with little available alternatives, the effects of drought are likely to be profound and hence lead to increased vulnerability to human trafficking. This could be because the affected population will be forced to engage in negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, child labor or commercial sex work for survival purposes. While it is possible that criminal organizations see a chance to exploit the vulnerability of the affected population and recruit them into exploitative situations, trafficking in this context is likely to occur in a local vacuum” (Malinowski and Schulze 2017:37).

³⁵ Biazen 2014, Mekonen 2017, Bikila 2013, Funk *et al.* 2016 and Belay *et al.* 2013.

changes in occupational patterns and/or migration, including vulnerability to human trafficking, cannot be treated as unrelated events.³⁶

2.5 Poverty and Unemployment

Most data on rural poverty is aggregated for the whole of Ethiopia or at the National Regional States' level, such as the case of Oromiya. Using the Ethiopian Rural Household Survey (ERHS) panel data, a multi-topic national representative survey on rural households conducted, Goshu (2013) undertook a study on rural poverty covering the four major regional states (Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray, and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State or SNNPRS) for the period 1989-2009. He found that with the exception of Oromiya Regional State, the regional mean household real consumption per capita exhibited deteriorating trends in all regions (*ibid.* 2013: 12). The decline was more severe in Tigray and Amhara regional states. This is evidence of regional differences and this is relevant to capture the spatial distribution of poverty dynamics. The differences are considerably dependent on the regions' resource endowments or livelihoods (physical, natural, social, and even human and financial capital) in the base year. Despite the fact that the incidence of poverty³⁷ was reduced from 88.9% in 2004 to 39.2% in 2009, and further to c. 24% in 2016, rural Ethiopia in general is still relatively poor (Goshu 2013, consistent with FDRE 2012 and UNDP 2016, World Bank 2020).³⁸ In a 2019 report by the World Bank it was reported that especially the bottom 40% of households in the population still have very low monetary standards, and that the rural areas fare much less well than the urban areas.³⁹

In the specific case of Arsi, Geleto *et al.* (2014) studied 'education poverty' among rural households in Arsi zone, and they found that 82% of the households had at least one member dropped out of school permanently. They also found that the household literacy rate decreased with the age of the household head, but increased with livestock asset size, which is a proxy of wealth. In a nutshell, considering the positive correlation between school dropout rates and the incidence of poverty, the large number of the pupils dropped out from school is indicative of intra-generational poverty.

³⁶ For a study on this emerging link, see the case study on Kenya (Malinowski & Schulze 2017).

³⁷ According to the 2001 World Bank measures, 'poverty' refers to people living on or less than \$2 a day, and 'extreme poverty' to those living on or less than US \$1 a day.

³⁸ Extreme poverty (see previous note) went down from 3.6% to 0.7%.

³⁹ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/05/16/ethiopia-new-world-bank-report-shows-mixed-outlook-as-growth-leads-to-overall-poverty-reduction> (Accessed 15 January 2020).

Unemployment is observed by Van Blerk (2007) as one of the circumstances that can result in teenage girls engaging in sex work. She explores the ways in which poverty and migration can form the context for girls' transition to adulthood as they move into the city from rural areas in search of employment. First, there is a lack of available employment for girls with low levels of education (generally a by-product of growing up in poverty), resulting in options such as domestic service, petty trading or shop work. The attractiveness of securing a job in the city has resulted in girls being enticed to urban areas by images of glamorous lifestyles or stories of employment, particularly in cafés and restaurants. Migration represents moving away or moving independently from their families, particularly in the context of sex workers in Ethiopia. Only by moving away from the family home they are able to engage in this type of work. Migration within or outside Ethiopia, as the case studies will illustrate, becomes the first step in the human trafficking chain.

Similarly, escaping poverty and unemployment are motivating factors for youths in general to migrate to the urban centers, including to the regional capitals or the national capital Addis Ababa in search of work opportunities. No traveler familiar with the towns along the road from Addis Ababa and other regional capitals or in Arsi can forget the hundreds of unemployed young men waiting by the road side for contractors to commission them for jobs in the agricultural and construction sectors or for any other employment opportunities, including human trafficking. For many young men, poverty and unemployment are certainly contributing factors to migration as a first step towards becoming victims of human trafficking.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I attempted to explain some of the material and social factors which work as a push factor in the case of human trafficking generally, and women trafficking in particular. These factors are related to the overall national economic challenges facing Ethiopia such as relative high levels of poverty and unemployment, coupled with vulnerability to climate change and environmental shocks such as drought and floods. There are social and cultural factors that impact women more than men relating to Arsi societal preference for the education of the boy child at the expense of the girl child and early marriages. These factors increase women vulnerability unemployment and poverty, hence their susceptibility to human trafficking.

The Setting gives credence to an alternative conceptualization of an anti-human trafficking approach. It recognizes the necessity of combining the dominant conventional freedom and emancipation approach with an approach that equally addresses the structural or

material conditions. To be sure, the chapter addresses people and history, environment, demography, education, employment and poverty to explore some of the structural factors that contributed to the prevalence of trafficking in humans in the Arsi region.