Collective action and Informal Institutions: The case of Agropastoralists of Eastern Ethiopia

Fekadu Beyene
Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany
Introduction

- Poverty (3.11 TLU/hh, and 0.42 TLU/Capita)
- Resource scarcity (water) and conflicts
- Marginalization and little government attention due to low level of awareness
- Therefore, information needs on local institutional and resource management practices
- CA for water harvesting (state initiated) and water-well management (traditional)
Aim of the paper

To identify collective action institutions and challenges in water harvesting and water well maintenance among Mieso agropastoralists of Eastern Ethiopia.
Concepts

Determinants of CA (initiation and continuity)

- Group size,
- Homogeneity ,
- Action resources
- Others’ success or failure
- Knowledge of technology
- Leaders’ influence
- Security of rights to benefit from outcome
Framework for Analysis

Action Arena
- Collective action
- Property rights

Initial asset condition and External factors
- Pattern of Interaction

Outcome (vulnerability, security, well-being)
- Collective Evaluation Criteria (Improvement criteria)

Rules
The Study Site
Methods

- Variety of methods
  - observation,
  - discussions,
  - Household interviews.

- Data Collected on
  - Dynamics or variability of institutions
  - disparity in institutional incentives

- Analysis (narrative-qualitative)
## Sources of collective action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Internal (WW)</th>
<th>External (WH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Coordinators</td>
<td>Clan leaders and elders</td>
<td>Village chief and extension agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Origin of institutions</td>
<td>Cultural norms and religion</td>
<td>Regional or district administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sustainability of action</td>
<td>Relatively sustainable</td>
<td>May change when policy or regime changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sanctioning</td>
<td>Group influence</td>
<td>Continuous Monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Enforcement</td>
<td>Temporary exclusion from access</td>
<td>Self-enforcing or use of fines and jails</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sources of collective action...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Water Well</th>
<th>Water Harvesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Production</td>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Communal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Appropriation</td>
<td>Jointly</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Institutions</td>
<td>Highly inconsistent</td>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Variation in Benefits</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Individual management capacity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation, membership and incentives

Water harvesting

- Disparity in incentives does not limit involvement of asset poor members

- In another instance, when members contribution of asset reduces the number of poor each year, the number of non-member poor households joining the group is increasing.

- Therefore, there is substitution of physical asset by social capital to maintain participation of the poor
Participation, membership and incentives…

Incentives for water harvesting:
- expectation of benefits (99%),
- fear of fines (21%)
- members’ encouragement (76%)
- intimacy (88%).

Impediments:
- Poor techniques, and inadequate extension service,
- random grouping of members,
- insufficient rainfall
- conflict threats,
Resource size and Unstable Membership

**Water well**

Management of large wells deteriorate due to:
- poor cooperation of members
- loss of herd during drought shocks
- lack of fairness in the exploitation rules

Groups managing small wells:
- management activities need less labor
- access rules vary based on nature of participation and wealth

**Challenges**
- Identifying free-riders due to lack of strict monitoring
- Establishing exclusion mechanism and high policing cost
- Falling water table reduces the incentive to manage
Conclusion

- Sources of collective action is less important than other variables such as resource size, membership structure and rule enforcement strategy.

- Differences in asset possession, which is theoretically presumed to constrain involvement, do not affect poor households’ participation in collective action.
Conclusion…

- substitutability of social capital for physical asset is possible only for certain collective activities such as water harvesting

- Those intervening agency facilitating collective action needs to identify group action for which substitutability of one asset for the other will encourage and maintain involvement of poor community members