

Pastoralism, Institutions and Social Interaction

Institutional Change in Agriculture and Natural Resources
Institutioneller Wandel der Landwirtschaft und Ressourcennutzung

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Pastoralism, Institutions and Social Interaction

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in Pastoral Afar, Ethiopia

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Aim and Scope of the Series

„Nothing endures but change“. Heraclitus the Ephesian (ca. 535–475 BC)

Institutions, defined as “the rules of the game”, are a key factor to the sustainable development of societies. They structure not only the multitude of human-human interactions of modern societies, but also most of the human-nature interactions. Poverty, famine, civil war, degradation of natural resources and even the collapse of ecosystems and societies often have institutional causes, likewise social and economic prosperity, sustainable use of resources and the resilience of socio-ecological systems. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries are those human activities where the interdependencies between human-human and human-nature interactions are perhaps most pronounced, and diverse institutions have been developed in history to govern them.

Social and ecological conditions are, however, ever changing, which continuously challenge the existing institutional structure at a given point in time. Those changes may be long-term, like population growth or climate change, medium-term, such as new technologies or changing price relations, or short-term, like floods or bankruptcies, but all of them pose the question whether the rules of the game need to be adapted. Failures to adapt timely and effectively may come at a high social cost. Institutional change, however, face a principal dilemma: on the one hand, institutions need to be stable to structure expectations and effectively influence human behaviors; on the other hand, they need to be adaptive to respond to the ever changing circumstance mentioned above. Understanding stability and change as well as developing adaptive institutions and effective, efficient and fair mechanisms of change are, therefore, of central importance for societies and an ongoing research challenge for social scientists.

If we want to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and adaptability of institutions, it stands to reason that we have to develop a good understanding of the causes, effects, processes and mechanism of stability and change. This is the aim of the series “Institutional Change in Agriculture and Natural Resources,” which attempts to answer the questions “How do processes and mechanism of institutional change actually work? What and who are the main determinants and actors driving, governing and influencing these processes? What are the economic, political, social and ecological consequences? How can adaptive institutions be designed and developed, and what governance structures are required to make them effective?” These are the questions at the heart of the series. The works published in this series seek to provide answers to these questions in different economic, social, political and historical contexts.

Volker Beckmann and Konrad Hagedorn
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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Acknowledgements | vii |
| Table of Contents..... | ix |
| List of Figures | xv |
| List of Tables..... | xvii |
| Abbreviations..... | xix |
| 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 What Pastoralism Means..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Features of Pastoralism | 1 |
| 1.2.1 Dependence on Livestock for Subsistence | 2 |
| 1.2.2 Mobility..... | 3 |
| 1.2.3 Communal Ownership of Pastoral Resources | 4 |
| 1.3 Pastoralism in East Africa..... | 5 |
| 1.3.1 Contributions of Pastoralism..... | 5 |
| 1.3.2 Overview of Policies vis-à-vis Pastoralism | 8 |
| 1.3.2.1 Pro-farming Policies | 8 |
| 1.3.2.2 Pro-conservation Policies..... | 9 |
| 1.3.2.3 Pro-modernization Policies | 10 |
| 1.4 The Predicaments of Ethiopian Pastoralists..... | 11 |
| 1.5 Objectives of the Study and Research Questions | 16 |
| 1.6 Organization of the Book | 17 |
| 2 Institutions, the New Institutionalism and the Conceptual Framework | 19 |
| 2.1 Institutions..... | 19 |
| 2.1.1 Features of Institutions..... | 19 |
| 2.1.2 Types and Emergence of Institutions..... | 21 |
| 2.1.3 Functions of Institutions | 23 |
| 2.1.3.1 The Restrictive Function..... | 23 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 2.1.3.2 The Cognitive Function | 24 |
| 2.1.4 Outcomes of Institutions | 24 |
| 2.2 The New Institutionalism: Peculiar Features | 26 |
| 2.2.1 More Concerns for Institutions | 26 |
| 2.2.2 Less Concerns for Rationality | 28 |
| 2.2.3 Interdisciplinary Perspectives | 29 |
| 2.3 Zooming-in Property Rights and Social Capital | 32 |
| 2.3.1 Property Rights | 32 |
| 2.3.1.1 Concepts of Property Rights | 33 |
| 2.3.1.2 Property Rights Regimes | 35 |
| 2.3.1.3 Changes of Property Rights | 37 |
| 2.3.2 Social Capital | 40 |
| 2.3.2.1 The “Social” Features of Social Capital | 41 |
| 2.3.2.2 The “Capital” Features of Social Capital | 43 |
| 2.3.2.3 Classifications of Social Capital | 45 |
| 2.4 The Conceptual Framework | 48 |
| 3 Methodology | 53 |
| 3.1 Overview of the Afar Region | 53 |
| 3.2 Overview of the Study Districts | 55 |
| 3.2.1 Amibara District | 55 |
| 3.2.2 Awash-Fentale District | 56 |
| 3.2.3 Semu-Robi-Gele’alo District | 57 |
| 3.3 Data Types and Sources | 59 |
| 3.4 Sampling Procedure | 60 |
| 3.4.1 Selection of the Study Areas | 60 |
| 3.4.2 Selection of Pastoral Households | 61 |
| 3.5 Data Analysis | 61 |
| 3.5.1 Quantitative Methods | 61 |
| 3.5.1.1 Measuring Variables | 62 |
| 3.5.1.2 Descriptive Analysis | 67 |
| 3.5.1.3 Regression Analysis | 68 |
| 3.5.2 Qualitative Methods | 70 |

| | | |
|----------|---|------------|
| 3.6 | Methodological Limitations | 71 |
| 4 | Property Rights: Traditional Rights and Contemporary Changes | 73 |
| 4.1 | Introduction | 73 |
| 4.2 | Conceptualizing Changes of Property Rights | 74 |
| 4.3 | Traditional Property Rights..... | 79 |
| 4.4 | Changes of Property Rights | 80 |
| 4.4.1 | State as a Driving Force | 80 |
| 4.4.2 | Other Driving Forces | 89 |
| 4.4.3 | Effects of the Changes on the Livelihoods of Pastoralists | 90 |
| 4.5 | Conclusion..... | 94 |
| 5 | The “Institutions of Violence” | 97 |
| 5.1 | Introduction | 97 |
| 5.2 | Conceptualizing the “Institutions of Violence” | 98 |
| 5.3 | The “Institutions of Violence” in Afar..... | 101 |
| 5.4 | Explaining Conflict in Afar..... | 103 |
| 5.4.1 | Cases of Conflicts | 104 |
| 5.4.1.1 | Conflicts with Issa-Somali (Amibara)..... | 104 |
| 5.4.1.2 | Conflicts with Karrayyu-Oromo (Awash-Fentale)..... | 106 |
| 5.4.1.3 | Conflicts with Amhara and Wello-Oromo (Semu-Robi) | 108 |
| 5.4.1.4 | Conflicts among Afar Clans..... | 109 |
| 5.4.2 | Comparative Analysis | 110 |
| 5.4.3 | Institutional Aspects..... | 114 |
| 5.4.3.1 | The Role of Informal Institutions | 115 |
| 5.4.3.2 | The Role of Formal Institutions..... | 117 |
| 5.5 | Effects of Conflicts on Livelihoods of Pastoralists | 120 |
| 5.6 | Conclusion..... | 122 |
| 6 | Cooperation to Sustain Pastoralism and to “Import” Farming..... | 125 |
| 6.1 | Introduction | 125 |
| 6.2 | Conceptualizing Cooperation..... | 125 |
| 6.2.1 | Natural Environment and Cooperation | 128 |
| 6.2.2 | Social Ties and Cooperation | 130 |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------|
| 6.3 | Cooperation to Sustain Pastoralism | 131 |
| 6.3.1 | Social Ties..... | 132 |
| 6.3.2 | Cooperation..... | 135 |
| 6.4 | Cooperation to “Import” Farming..... | 138 |
| 6.4.1 | Triggers and Motivations for Farming..... | 138 |
| 6.4.2 | Types of Cooperation and Application of Sanctions | 140 |
| 6.4.3 | Determinants of Cooperation | 142 |
| 6.4.3.1 | The Model and the Variables | 142 |
| 6.4.3.2 | Results and Discussion | 144 |
| 6.5 | Conclusion..... | 149 |
| 7 | Mutual-Help Arrangements | 151 |
| 7.1 | Introduction..... | 151 |
| 7.2 | Conceptualizing Mutual-Help Arrangements..... | 152 |
| 7.3 | General Situation of Pastoral Livelihoods | 155 |
| 7.4 | Norms of Mutual-help and Actual Resource Transfers | 158 |
| 7.4.1 | Norms of Mutual-help..... | 158 |
| 7.4.2 | Actual Resource Transfers..... | 159 |
| 7.5 | Factors that Count in Mutual-help Arrangements | 161 |
| 7.5.1 | The Role of Social Ties..... | 161 |
| 7.5.2 | The Role of Poverty | 163 |
| 7.5.3 | Regression Results and Discussion..... | 166 |
| 7.6 | Conclusion..... | 174 |
| 8 | Summary, Conclusions and the Way Forward..... | 177 |
| 8.1 | Summary and Conclusions..... | 177 |
| 8.1.1 | State-Pastoralist Interactions..... | 177 |
| 8.1.2 | Inter-Group Interactions..... | 179 |
| 8.1.3 | Intra-Group and Inter-Household Interactions | 180 |
| 8.2 | The Way Forward | 181 |
| 8.2.1 | Building Pastoral Capacity and Managing Evictions | 181 |
| 8.2.2 | Conflict Management..... | 182 |
| 8.2.3 | Development Interventions | 186 |

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| References | 189 |
| Appendix | 209 |