



## Land and Food Security in Tigray Region

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### 1. Introduction

Increases in human population and per-capita consumption are putting enormous pressure on land resources. In spite of the fact that the global food production has doubled over the last three decades, about 1 in 9 people in the world is still undernourished. This poses the global challenge of ensuring food security and maintaining sustainable development, without causing serious environmental problems. While the issues of food security and environmental problems are of global relevance, they are considered as local in nature, since their effects are felt locally, and the actions on the land performed by local actors whose decisions are driven not only by global , but also by regional land local forces.

Access to land is among the vital factors of production that ensure inclusive economic growth, sustainable development and food security in an agrarian society like Ethiopia, where land is used for multiple purposes. Competing claims such as land for farming, construction, pasture etc. from the global to the household level need to be managed – to prevent conflict, to protect local rights and livelihoods, to stimulate inclusive economic development and eventually ensure food security. Effective land governance is central in managing land-based claims and the often accompanying processes of inclusion and exclusion (LANDac 2016). Food security comprises adequate food availability, access, utilization and stable supply over time (World Food Summit 1996). Small-scale farmers

face various multifaceted constraints that hinder the improvement of food security. Most of these constraints are said to be linked to access to land, land security and land tenure is the system of rights and institutions that governs access to and use of land and other resources.

Research on both topics (land and food security) has generally proceeded along separate but related tracks—the former focusing on the links between access to land, resource use, and income generation; the latter tracing links from income generation to food consumption and nutritional status. Recently, property rights (the “building blocks” of land tenure) have received increased attention as policy instruments that affect access to food. Yet, the links suggested by such instruments have been the subject of little investigation. In this paper attempt is done to try to bridge these two strands of literature and to assess how tenure security and land tenure reforms affect (and are affected) by household food security. Both these food security issues are at the heart of the livelihoods of poor rural households in northern Ethiopia, who live in a land-scarce semi-arid environment that has recently been exposed to land tenure reforms and government food security interventions. The environment is also affected by rural households, the former being both producers and consumers, that are facing imperfect markets and idiosyncratic as well as covariate shocks, and where the majority are net buyers of staple food and have limited off-farm employment opportunities.

## 2. Tenure security and food security

Various researches and policy initiatives have recently sought to understand the linkages between land and food security more clearly. They have shown that land is one of the most critical productive assets to the livelihood of farming households in developing countries. In Ethiopia, access to formal title to land is mandated to government. Rural households' access to land was met through regular government sponsored land redistribution and informal land transactions. Formal land sales have been prohibited during the last four decades or more. This is because land is declared the property of the state; it may not be sold or mortgaged. Peasants and pastoralists have only user rights. All land is owned by the state but individual households are given user rights, including the right to rent. The land issue has a strong bearing on a wide range of issues and policy concerns, including agricultural development, food security, natural resource management, poverty reduction and even human rights. Evidence shows, a reduction in or outright loss of access to land in an agrarian society leads directly to a reduction in income and access to food and vice versa. Research on land tenure suggests that increased security of tenure in productive resources enables more efficient and profitable agricultural production, and hence, greater access to food through both own production and trade. Besides, access to common property resources for livestock production and non-agricultural livelihoods, fire wood and other forest products, and wild food have substantial contribution to rural livelihoods.

Moreover, evidences reveal that enhancing access to land, security of tenure, or sustainability of land resource use will ultimately enhance welfare, including food security. Improved access to land or increased security of tenure leads to enhanced agricultural productivity. The implications of the positive linkage, that is, the extent to which increased access to land or tenure security will lead to increased access to food and increased food security. Land tenure consists of the social relations and institutions governing access to and ownership of land and natural resources. It is usually defined in terms of a "bundle of rights"—specific rights to do certain things with land or property

In brief, land tenure determines who can use what land? and how? Land tenure derives from both statutory and customary laws regarding, not only property rights and ownership, but also institutions of marriage, of power and control, and of inheritance. Tenure regimes, both customary and statutory, are rarely static. The evolution of customary tenure and the impact of land reform

constitute two major strands of land tenure research. Tenure research has tended to divide land into three categories: 1) the agricultural holdings of a household (including individually managed plots); 2) common land or common property resources; and 3) state-reserved land. Recent research has suggested a more complex view of overlapping rights both spatially and temporally.

## 3. Tenure security and land market in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, land belongs to the state and the people. Farmers access land through state-mandated peasant associations. Access is conditional on proof of permanent physical residence and ability to farm continuously. Qualified farmers are granted long-term usufruct rights to land. While farmers access land mainly through administrative-based land distribution, different rental contracts are informally arranged with varied land use and transfer rights and degree of enforcement. Now a day, transactions in rental markets such as sharecropping and cash rental arrangements are increasingly becoming a common practice. Evidence indicates that 15 to 30 percent of rural households transact in local rental land markets. Farmers choose these markets as a way to pool resources and mitigate possible risks, and balance factors of production at farm level (for example, land-to-labor or land-to-oxen). As non-land factor markets are missing or incomplete, farmers also use these land markets as a substitute for the missing or incomplete factor markets, such as credit, oxen and labor markets. By tying these transactions together, commonly in a share tenancy, these informal land markets provide a means to overcome the imbalances in factor proportions at farm level, and access to non-land factors such as labor, oxen and credit, and potentially improve efficiency of production. Research-based evidence on the determinants of trade orientation (population growth, development of physical infrastructure such as transport, irrigation and markets, improved profitability and commercialization of agriculture, and overall growth in rural economy) has shown that the determinants favor expansion of land markets in future. Development of physical infrastructure, product markets and commercialization, i.e., rental markets, tend to be more active as the local economy opens up to trade and when markets expand. On the demand side of these markets are largely land-constrained farmers whose main objective is to increase the area of operated land. In contrast, the "better-off" farmers, who have labor, oxen, seed, and

cash, are more into renting land since they rarely hire out their labor. But those who are short in land, oxen and cash, especially the young and newly formed households, either exchange their labor for land or hire out their labor. If the lessee has a reputation for being trustworthy and industrious, he is more likely to acquire land from non-parental sources in the form of rent.

Empirical evidence on performance of land rental markets shows mixed records. Transactions in rental markets provide an additional venue to access land, reduce disparity in the distribution of area of land operated, correct imbalances in factor proportions at farm level, and partly substitute for missing or incomplete factor markets. However, rights to rental land are restricted and poorly enforced, and markets are localized and thinly traded. While participation in rental markets is potentially welfare improving, conditions such as increasing scarcity of land and demands for higher rent, a fee for right to rent land, payment in cash, and factors: farming skills and experience, and availability of proof of no-default, are proving to be hurdles to access to land, particularly to the young poor farmers.

#### **4. Land reform and food security**

Land tenure institutions have long been the subject of agricultural and economic development policy measures. But the content of “land reform” has varied widely by region. In Africa, ‘land reform’ or, more properly, ‘land tenure reform’, typically refers to legal changes in the form of land tenure—nudging customary tenure systems in the direction of private property regimes—intended to enhance security of tenure and thereby improve productivity and encourage better land conservation practices.

Land reform has several impacts on food security, impacts such as on reductions in social polarity, increased investment, enhanced transparency of production incentives, poverty reduction, creation of employment, and insuring equity. In brief, research on land tenure has tended to emphasize whether it is evolutionary changes or institutional reforms that lead to either greater equity in access or greater productivity and better conservation practices. With regard to food security, the presumption is that greater equity, productivity, and other outcomes resulting from changes in tenure will have beneficial impacts, though the direct impacts have rarely been outlined in detail and even more rarely actually measured.

In many African countries, the concern with land tenure has intended to induce higher productivity and better land conservation practices. Under certain circumstances, conditions have been seen to change slowly and endogenously, resulting in the gradual individualization of land rights under tenure systems that were previously communal or in the increased ability of individuals to buy and sell land in a tenure system that previously prohibited land alienation. Increased population density, increased commercialization of agriculture, and changes in the production technology of agriculture has all led to changes in land rights.

#### **5. The land tenure process in Tigray**

Ethiopia underwent a radical land reform in 1975, making all land state land and giving individual households limited user rights based on egalitarian principles as constitutional rights to land for production of food to satisfy household needs. Frequent land redistribution programs were implemented to ensure an egalitarian land distribution and provide land to new households; however, this resulted in tenure insecurity when land increasingly had to be taken from other households to satisfy the growing demand for land as population size increased. With the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991, a more market-friendly rural development policy was introduced, although land remained state property and land sales remained illegal. However, short-term land rental was allowed as was hiring of labor, and land redistribution schemes were mostly abolished. The new national land proclamation of 1997 provided the basis for regional land proclamations, and Tigray Region was the first region to develop its own land proclamation in 1997, providing the basis for implementing land registration and certification in the region. The process of land registration in Tigray (and Ethiopia at large) has been a systematic rather than demand-driven process.

Overall, the land registration system in the region was a one-off process of issuing land use certificates to improve local perceptions of tenure security, that is, mainly to mark the end of land redistribution. No provisions were implemented to allow for regular updating, to reflect transactions in rights, or to allow for registration of secondary interests in land. Despite receiving praise for being a low-cost approach, the land registration system generated early skepticism about its potential outcomes, suggesting there may be a trade-off between accessibility and quality.

Despite these challenges, the Tigrai system has brought important achievements and is said to provide some basic principles for a pro-poor registration system. Earlier studies indicate that the low-cost land certification program in the region has had positive investment effects; allocative efficiency effects on rented land; welfare-enhancing effects, particularly for female-headed landlord households; and positive effects in land boundary disputes (Holden et al. 2011). The relative success of the land registration system in Tigrai (generally described as pro-poor) is, thus, partly explained as follows: the system builds on unique and strong local institutions that emerged in a particular sociopolitical and historical context. The land registration process in Tigrai has also been branded a best practice for its highly participatory and transparent approach.

## 6. Policy implications

In Ethiopia, while there is still policy debate on the choice of ownership type, there is a move in the policy realm to give rural land users a title of ‘ownership’, in short title, by issuing user certificates, to the land they received during the last land redistribution or through inheritance from close kinships. One such case is the process that unfolded in Tigray Regional National State, northern Ethiopia after 1997. The regional Government of Tigray undertook land inventory and registered all rural lands before issuing title certificates. This process continued later on in areas where land registration took place (e.g. in the recent resettlement

areas) and to other people who obtained land recently through partial community redistribution processes.

Titling through land registration is widely believed to improve efficiency of land use and agricultural production by increasing farmers’ incentives to adopt new technology, on-farm investment and soil conservation practices. The government of Ethiopia (GoE) aims to boost farmers’ sense of security, which, in turn, is expected to encourage investment on erosion-reducing and land quality enhancing technologies. It is also possible that the GoE’s policy measures might have triggered other outcomes, intended or otherwise. The expected changes associated with land registration could be the development of land and credit markets. Hence, it is believed that this case provides an important study for investment.

There is an on-going discussion about the differentiated effects that land registration/certification may have on tenure security and labor-intensive land conservation investment. The evidence so far is mixed. There are evidences from Asia and elsewhere that indicates that such government sponsored titling enhances tenure security. On the contrary, there are evidences, especially from Africa, that call against land registration and titling as the cost of land registration is quite high, and the effect of land registration is contrary to expectations. The impact of registration/titling on the functioning of land markets and their results revealed that the land reform contributed to increased land rental market participation. However, the impact of land security on food security is always a debatable issue.

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