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**The Role of Indigenous Social Institutions on Pastoral and
Agro-pastoral Household's Access to and Control over
Livelihood Assets; Evidences from Somali Region,
Ethiopia**

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Abstract

In both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities there is almost always strong inter-dependence and co-operation among households based on indigenous social institutions. However, those lucrative indigenous institutions are not known to the outsiders and this study filled this knowledge gap in literatures. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select study participants. Data were gathered from households using FGD, interview, key informant interview and case study to attain the objectives of the study. The study revealed that, mutual support is important in terms of each household's survival in a challenging and risky environment conditions. Households recover and rehabilitated from social, economic, and environmental predicament of drought likewise develop resiliency heavily through assistance from within the group to help them survive and recover. This spirit of mutual cooperation and assistance operates in both bad and 'normal' years. Mutual cooperation welfare schemes including tacsu based, guus, alabari, duco, mareeg-caydheed are of the most important intuitions being practiced in the study area to sustain livelihoods of the community.

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There is growing empirical evidence that social capital contributes significantly to sustainable development of pastoralist and agro-pastoral community. These indigenous welfare schemes should be integrated with formal guidelines and directives of intervention for sustainable development of the community.

Keywords: pastoral; agro-pastoral; resilience; mutual support; drought; livelihood strategy.

1. Introduction

Pastoralists are mobile people and their livelihoods depend on their intimate knowledge of the surrounding ecosystem and on the well-being of their livestock. Pastoral systems take many forms and are adapted to particular natural, social, political and economic environments. In pastoral communities there is almost always strong inter-dependence and co-operation between households. One of the reasons for this is that pastoralism is labour intensive. Each type of animal has different requirements in terms of fodder and water. The requirements of keeping the herd together, managing regular movements between grazing and water as well as twice daily milking means that keeping animals requires a pooling of labour resources between households to manage the different types of stock effectively [1].

Pastoralism accounts for the livelihood of 50 to 100 million people in developing countries, of which 60% of this population lives in more than 21 African countries [2]. Large livestock holdings including sheep, goats, cattle, and camels comprise the bulk of their limited wealth and are an integral part of their socio-cultural life.

Social capital is a key asset of the pastoral peoples. The vulnerability of the pastoral livelihood system means they must fall back on indigenous mechanisms and social insurance schemes in times of severe stresses and shocks. The Borana busa gonofa indigenous welfare schemes are a good example of such robust local schemes which neither local reciprocity nor membership in an association seems to exhaustively explain [3].

Social capital plays a very important role in many pastoral livelihoods and, although it may appear intangible to outsiders, accumulating this capital is often one of the over-riding pastoral livelihood goals. It may seem hard to rationalise social capital in strict financial terms, since the network of debts and obligations in pastoral societies is not usually quantifiable in terms of money, and the “currency” can be solidarity, gifts of livestock or milk, and even cultural belonging. This should not trivialize social capital, since it has long been the bedrock of sustainable pastoralism. It is important for development actors to spend time understanding the “livelihood goals” of pastoralists, since this can help draw attention to non-material aspirations and cultural values that outsiders may not relate to or fully respect. The key to enabling pastoralists to maintain and invest in their social capital is to pursue a strongly empowering approach to development. Such approaches put decision making power firmly in the hands of pastoralists, which enables them to determine their development goals and priorities.

Nevertheless, the role of indigenous welfare and social insurance schemes has not been adequately explored in pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of Somali regional state, Ethiopia. Therefore, it is important to understand the real essence of social capital among this population group. This research explored social capital, the set of rules that allow access to resources and how it can and is being used in livestock, resources

management under fragmentation and managing vulnerability. Thus, this study was initiated to bridge this knowledge gap on the role of social capital on household access to control over livelihood assets in Ethiopia Somali Regional State.

2. Materials and Methods

Pertaining to the research design, the study relied on cross-sectional research design; the data were collected only once from respondents between March and May 2016. Three stages of sampling procedures were carried out. First, out of nine zones of the region; Fafen zone is selected due to its home for both agro-pastoral and pastoral livelihood zone. Second, the study is intended to address the livelihood system of both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, two districts (Awbare and Kebribeyah, pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood zones respectively, were purposively selected. Third, in discussion with district administrator, kebeles that are accessible in terms of security and transportation were sampled for the study. Based on this, 5 kebeles were selected from each district and a total of 10 rural kebeles were covered by the study.

Pertaining to sample size, for this particular study, a sample of 160 respondents selected purposively, in which data saturation considered as justification for maximum threshold sample.

The study utilized qualitative research approaches and data collection instruments such as interviews, case studies of selected households, focus group discussion, and observation (artifacts, photographing of the observed relevant issue to strength data from other sources) were applied. In general, under this method, the most important issues that were addressed include informal institutions; in every society, there exist different informal social intuitions that foster or hinder access to and control on livelihood assets. Through this approach, the research identified informal social institutions enable individuals' access to relevant livelihood assets support them recover from the aftermaths of hazards. The data that are of high importance in attaining the objectives of this research were obtained from both secondary and primary sources.

2.1. Data Sources

The data that are of high importance in attaining the objectives of this research were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were used to get data related to social capital and its role in maintaining livelihood assets. The data were directly collected from pastoral and agro-pastoral communities residing in the study area. Secondary data were also collected from articles, journals, photographs, CSA reports, federal and regional government reports

2.2. Key informant interview

More detail information on the issues under study was captured via key informant method of data collection. Informants, who assumed to have rich information about the general trend and the role of indigenous social institutions in sustaining livelihood of the study community, were purposively selected and interviewed.

2.3. Case study

Besides the above method of data collection, case study of selected households also was carried out. Households were purposively selected and studied in a minute detail.

2.4. Focus group discussion

In this study, focus group discussion with selected individuals was also carried out. From each sample kebeles of the two districts, 1 focus group discussion and a total of 5 (constituting of 7-8 members) were carried out on selected issues of the study.

Sustainable livelihood challenges (extent of factors and level), impacts of various intermediary factors influencing livelihood conditions of the community, challenges the community are facing in pursuing their livelihood and the role of social capital in curbing aforementioned problems are some of the issues that were thoroughly addressed.

2.5. Data processing and analysis

Data obtained through interview, focus group discussion and case studies were sorted and interpreted based on research objectives. Content analysis was used as a prime method of data analysis in this study. The qualitative data were classified and grouped into research themes and presented using descriptive or narrative method based on thematic analysis.

3. Description of the study area

3.1. Awubere Woreda

Awubere, also known as Teferi Ber, is a town in eastern Ethiopia. The town is located in the Fafan Zone of the Somali Region, near the Somali border on the main trade route between Jigjiga and the sea. It is the administrative center of Awubere woreda.

Based on figures from the Central Statistical Agency in 2010, Awubere of 339,503 inhabitants 187,090 were men and 152,413 women.

The two largest ethnic groups reported in this town were the Somali (64.72%), and foreigners from Somalia (34.83%); all other ethnic groups made up the remaining 0.45% of the residents [4].

3.2. Kebri beyah Woreda

The district (kebribeyah) of Fafen zone selected for the purpose of conducting this study is on the nearest radius of the zonal province which is 60km far from Jigjiga town. Life style of Peoples of kebribeyah woreda is; 30% are depending on crop production and the remaining 70% depend on animal rearing for sustaining livelihood. The 2010 census reported this woreda had a total of 165,518 populations of whom 89,703 were men and 75,815 women. Types of food mostly used are prepared from sorghum and maize in the form of bread and porage.

The most dominant animals and crop in the area are cattle, camel, small ruminant's, sorghum, barley and maize

respectively [5].

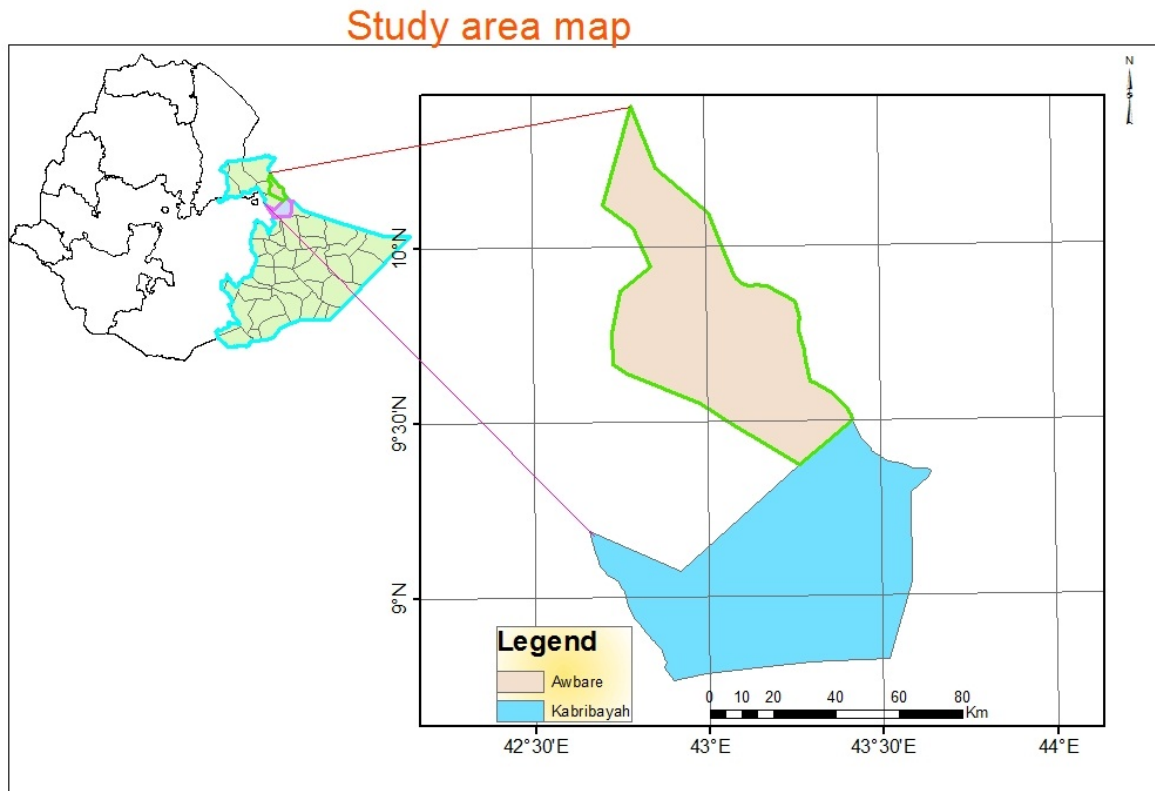


Figure 1: Map of the study area

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. The role of Indigenous Social Institutions for Sustainable Livelihood

One of the prime objectives of this study was to examine the role of the existing indigenous social intuitions in enabling individuals to have access to productive livelihood capital and vice versa in pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the study sites. A number of indigenous social institutions being practiced and playing indispensable role in building individuals' and communities' livelihood assets in both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the study area were identified. The specific name, goal/objective, and procedures followed, executed in the practice of each informal social institutions are clearly delineated below.

4.1.1. The Tacsi based institution

'*Tacsi*' is informal transfer system amongst pastoral community which designed and being practiced as community based safety net. It is lucrative informal transfer system come into existence following death of family heads as to potentially prevent impoverishments. Thus, it is a social network through which transfer of livestock basically small ruminants and money transfer among relatives, clan members, and residents of same village takes place through facilitating role of elderly social group of people. The FGD conducted with selected households indicated that the '*tacsi*' is identified as one of the institutions that serve as both safety valve and

pathway for individual to have access to livelihood assets. The members of FGD narrated that 'tacsi' institution entails the collection and provision of sheep, goat, and money from the household of the same village/community to individuals or families whose father is deceased. The number or size of sheep, goat, and money collected for 'tacsi' is not limited. The collected property will be delivered to youngsters and all children below age of 14 are eligible to benefit from 'tacsi'. To receive 'tacsi', an individual/family is not expected to be member of specific clan, i.e., being resident/member of a village sufficient to either contribute 'tacsi' or receive it. At the time of data collection, the team has retrieved a household who received 'tacsi' recently and used the case to substantiate issues related to the institution. The details is given in using the below mentioned case example.

Box 1: Case study on tacsi institution

Mr. Mohamed Muhumed Usman a pseudonym was 40 years old with a reference year of 2016, who born and grown up in Worabachiro kebele. He indicated his case in this way; my father was died a month ago. In his life time, he has got about 15 children including me (8 females and 7 boys). He just departed us for life long after all, but most of the children are dependent and have no means of generating livelihood resources for their future life. However, thanks to 'tacsi', now they are almost in the right trap of building their resources. So far (within one month only), a total of 34 sheep and goats and 20,000 Ethiopian birr was collected from the households residing in this kebele and divided to children who are below age of 14 years. Really this institution is very crucial and lucrative in brightening the future of individuals who have no option for asset generation in life making process. Look, at the expense of seasonality and trends; it will take 3-4 years for an individual to produce such huge size of livestock in 'normal' climatic condition.

4.1.2. The 'Guus' institution

Apart from the former this one exclusively designed to generate man power for labor intensive activities, based on mutual cooperation. In both mode of livelihood; pastoral and agro-pastoral, 'guus' institution appears to be the major source of labor. Key informants from both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities delineated that communities living in a very close proximity practice a culture of working together based on mutual cooperation, especially during crop production and harvesting which demands large number of working man power and large land size. According to information alleged by the informants, the intent of this institution is to increase production and productivity per unit of area by augmenting labor force and then intensifying farmland. When viewed along with sustainable livelihood framework, this is an indicator of intensification of agriculture in the context of erratic rainfall. This is similar with collective actions in the form of labor sharing among agriculturalists and horticulturalist by different nomenclature such as 'Debo' in Afan Oromo and 'Eyuwa' in Gumuz [6].

The main difference is that in the case of either 'Debo' or 'eyewa', the participants will be provided with plenty of food and local drinks such as 'tella' and 'borde'. However, in the case of 'guus' only hot drinks such as tea

prepared by women for the male crowd fully engaged in the physical activity. In case of gender composition, in 'Debo' and 'eyuwa' women can participate but 'guus' is unique as it only delimited to males' participation.

As disclosed by study informants, the number of 'guus' participants depends on both size of community living in the locality and farmland covered by crop. For instance, according to FGD participants of rural villages of Keberibeyah district, the minimum number of the crowd is 40 while the maximum ranges between 60-70 individuals per household's farmland.

4.1.3. 'Alabari' and 'duco' institutions

In addition to the above mentioned informal social institutions which are directly linked to livelihood security of individuals, the study also identified practices like '*alabari*' and '*duco*' that are prevailing in both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities' of the study areas. According to informants of the study in both districts of selected kebeles, these two institutions are closely linked to spiritual motivation and stimulation for various reasons. These aimed at boosting productivity of agriculture (crop production) and livestock. Specifically, '*alabari*' is practiced to pray for rain during severe draught season. As described by elders of the community, in case of this institution, community members (especially males) gathered under big tree having close proximity to water sources and strongly pray. If water source is not available, each participant expected come up from his home for the purpose of the practice.

On the other hand, '*duco*' institution practiced most of the time in the endeavored to increase productivity and maintain health of livestock as to increase or boosting livestock and crop productivity. On the occasion of this practice, the community is obliged to avail an animal. According to the informants, the type of animal (whether large or small) to be slaughtered depends on the financial capacity of the community. Similar studies have confirmed such practices in other communities in Ethiopia as well. Among this, the study conducted by [6] revealed that Gumuz communities practice such institution in well-organized way regularly by the name of Ewuya. According to Belay, the Gumuz communities of the study are benefiting from such practices in different ways getting back rain is being the major benefits of the institutions. Likewise, as of the sources of information from different sources of this study, pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the study area are relying on this institution in order to beg their supreme power for better rainfall and good fortune during hard times. Here, the point is that, according to FGD and key informants of the study, praying for agricultural production and rain generally support the community in two ways. First, through such practices, communities realize access to resources. Second, in the process, interaction and social solidarity more strengthened among communities.

4.1.4. The '*Mareeg-caydheed*' institution

When compared with the aforementioned social institutions, this one is relatively aligned to welfare scheme or welfare provision following serious natural and manmade disasters such as drought and other livelihood shocks. It is community based rescuing strategy, for the destitute households as to deduce the social, economic and other related predicament of disasters. As identified by the study, the practice is targeted by pastoral communities of

the sampled district to alleviate impoverishment. According to the study participants, this institution saves and rescuing the life of the destitute segment of society. Pertaining to this issue, one key informant stated as follows:

Since we are living in a harsh climate environment, someone might lose his/her livestock totally at any time in one's lifetime. The individual could be head of families when the extended family issue taken into consideration. Hence he/she and family members may be immersed in to misery. To support destitute families, our grandfathers had established the '*mareeg-caydheed*' institution. When any family loses totality of its livestock, each and every member of the village contributes a goat or sheep. The elderly of the village take responsibility of collecting the sheep and goats. They hand rope and contact each household in the village until they collect the expected number of sheep and goats. Only sheep and goats are contributed by household since living animals such as camel is expensive. Even though the maximum and minimum number of animals collected for such destitute is not limited, up to 20-30 sheep and goats possibly collected and delivered to a single family who lost its entire livestock. '*Mareeg-caydheed*' is one of the best institutions that our grandparents left for generation to build assist for the impoverished families.

The elders who participated on this study also confirmed the outperforming role of '*mareeg-caydheed*' institution during severe drought or animal epidemic disease out breaks that potentially destroy the entire livestock a family or an individual possesses. The informants added that the institution interrupted sometimes if the drought is very serious or consistent and devastate the total livestock of the entire community of the same village. The role of such informal transfer sometimes becomes only glimpse in the context of loading adversities.

Generally, during drought pastoralists affected by both direct and indirect impacts drought and other livelihood shocks which adversely affect their political, economic and social system. In such discourse of life the role of informal social institutions elaborated above is lucrative in alleviating the social, economic and other related predicaments of various livelihood shocks and vulnerability context influence sustainable livelihood strategy.

As cited in [7] for sustainable development, institutions, especially at local level, are important for mobilizing resources and regulating their use with a view to maintaining a long-term base for productive activity [8]. In terms of natural resource management, William (1995) cited in [7] adds that sustainable use is conditioned by the strength of local institutions to involve the user of that resource in its rational management. Rural communities live in well-organized set-ups that structure their activities and interactions with the environment in their quest to eke a living out of available resources. Households, kin groups, hamlets and villages are the main actors through which local communities are organized.

Such structures are the local institutions through which diverse community aspirations are fulfilled. They are highly path-dependent [7], dynamic and develop with society according to needs. They may last for a long time, accomplish their objectives, fade out, or transform to capitalize on emerging opportunities. Local institutions differ based on their functions and objectives. According to Donnelly-Roark and his colleagues (2001), as cited in [7] they encompass many different types of indigenous organizations and functions such as village-level governance, acceptable methods of community resource mobilization, security arrangements,

conflict resolution, asset management and lineage organization.

4.2. Indigenous Institutions as Livelihood Opportunity

The current study noted that pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the study site have institutionalized the informal transfer systems that have a fabulous role and lucrative in allowing households to have an access to land, pasture, and water. As data from FGD and key informant interviews revealed, in both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, some households, who don't possess land can have access to land for crop production and animal grazing.

Similarly, according to study conducted by [9] in agricultural and horticultural communities, informal social institutions (shared values and practices), play significant role in enabling households to have access and control over scarce but urgently important for means of making a living. This study portrayed that in the absence of such institutions, the lives of sizable number of households would have been in absolute misery.

Among scarce but valuable livelihood resources, the issue of land is very contentious in all forms of livelihood (agriculture, pastoral and agro-pastoral). In Ethiopia, land is the property of government (state-owned and cannot be sold, exchanged or mortgaged) and citizens have only use rights. All societies, certainly, individuals may become landless either for grazing or crop production due to different reasons which is beyond the scope of this study. The main question to be asked at this juncture is how these landless groups of people own land for means of survival. Studies showed that societies have designed different socially approved means but informal ways of having access to such crucial resource.

Indigenous social institutions which ultimately indicate, social capital is one of the prominent assets that pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the study area are endowed with. Such socially constructed and shared values of these communities are regarded in some literatures as a 'Healing Assets'. This is mainly due to the fact that most of these social institutions are practiced while a household lost its entire basic assets (basically livestock).

In Ethiopian context even, few studies have been conducted on the role of informal social institutions on some communities in relation to livelihood issues. To mention some of these, [9] identified some social institutions such as kire , sharecropping (ye-ekul), kaya, hirppa, and wedeja being practiced at Garbi and Erenssa communities, Oromiya Zone of Amhara national State. With this study, Degefa confirmed that these informal social institutions play significant role in facilitating individuals' access to basic livelihood assets. According to his research finding, some of these institutions also serve the community as safety valve when they face any kind of natural calamities that could hamper their livelihoods. [6] also conducted a study on the livelihood and food secretly nature of Gumuz communities of Dibate district of Benishangul-Gumuz Region and come up some social instructions such as "eyuwa", and sharecropping that have similar purposes.

5. Conclusion

In both pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood zone the communities are suffering from wide range of social,

economic, political, and natural impediments in sustainably securing their livelihood at household level. In managing and coping with varied vulnerability contexts, indigenous institutions take stake as to increase production and productivity. Informal transfer system among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of Somali region is solidly lucrative for resilience programming as alleviate the economic, social, environmental, etc predicaments of drought and other livelihood shocks. The role informal transfer system which is the blended version of social capital in both livelihood zones is not simply subjected to personal intuition, motive, stimulation etc. Rather it is highly embedded in their shared sentiments and practiced regularly during both 'normal' as well as 'abnormal' climatic conditions. Pastoral and agro-pastoral indigenous institutions are lucrative for increasing productivity of livestock and agriculture.

Generally, according result of the study, pastoral and agro-pastoral communities to some extent endowed with sizable amount of opportunities in sustaining their livelihood and bounce back from aftermaths of livelihood shocks. Some of these opportunities such as informal social institutions play a tremendous role in building livelihood assets in post era of natural catastrophe (for resilience). 'Tasci' based institution takes the leading role in this regard. Other major prospects include endowment with virgin and fertile land, possession of relatively better size of farmland on average per household, existence of local and international NGOs that extremely strive to facilitate the security of livelihoods of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, to some extent implementation of government pastoral policies in areas of expansion of basic social service, and so forth.

6. Recommendation

Pastoral and agro-pastoral communities to some extent endowed with sizable amount of opportunities in sustaining their livelihood and bounce back from aftermaths of livelihood shocks. Some of these opportunities such as informal social transfer system should be integrated with guidelines and directives of intervention programs by both non-governmental and government based organizations.

The role of social capital and the ultimate output in this regard, challenged by a serious livelihood shocks and its importance as a safety network for mobility sometimes ended up with conflict on pasture, water and other due to limited resources only. In such condition, the adverse effect may outweigh the positive one.

Rather than creating institutional disfranchisement for provision of services only through the pipelines of formal organizations it is better to utilize informal transfer system in the community for better achievements.

The system is highly embedded in the shared sentiments of the society or it is fresh implication of culture and may put individuals under challenging situation during livelihood shocks. As reduce pressure on such informal transfers other livelihood assets especially physical asset is destitute in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas and deserves improvement.

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