



# Multiple tournaments and sustained defection: Why do negotiations fail to secure resource access between pastoral and agropastoral groups in Ethiopia?

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## ABSTRACT

This article uses analytic narratives to explore the reasons why negotiations over rights to grazing resources repeatedly fail between neighboring pastoral and agropastoral communities. While many writers link resource scarcity, the resulting competition and state institutional failure as common drivers for conflict among multiple resource users in the semi-arid pastoral areas, the causes for violent conflict and the failure of local level negotiations between groups need to be explained in the framework of geopolitical context and the rent earned from perpetrating violence. This study reveals how economic incentives from livestock raids and the unrestricted access to conflict technology reinforce each other and jointly undermine the success of negotiations in producing favorable outcomes. The undesirable outcomes from negotiation failure can be expressed in terms of rent dissipation, rangeland resource degradation, increased instability and the potential for increased vulnerability and deterioration of agropastoral welfare.

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## 1. Introduction

Scarcity driven resource conflict is often seen as an outcome of intense competition on natural resources in the context of environmental stress (Huggins, 2003; Otim, 2002; Clover, 2005). Conflict on grazing land in pastoral and agropastoral areas forms a subset of such event where resource scarcity and the resulting competition could grow into communal land use conflicts in communities characterized by diverse and changing resource use patterns such as increasing cultivation (Yirbecho et al., 2004; Basset, 1988, 1993; Peters, 1994; Berry, 1993). In this circumstance, conflict is attributed to the weaknesses of institutions in defining property rights. Such institutions can be state law or customary institutions. But different points of view exist on the role of customary institutions in conflict management. Some indicate the failure of such institutions to prevent or end violence between ethnic groups with distinct social and cultural norms (Cousins, 1996; Vedeld, 1994, 1998). A response to this limitation would be to urge a state to play a role in supporting the establishment of institutional arrangements based on the principle of flexibility and territorial overlaps of rights, recognition of diverse interests and bridging the

customary systems and formal law. This is essential to address conflicts explicitly as conflicting interests are inevitable among diverse range of differentiated actors (Scoones, 1995).

The aim of this paper is to explain the reasons why negotiations expected to lead to peaceful access to communal grazing land do not lead to a favorable outcome. To realize this, the paper addresses the question: 'which factors explain the dynamics of the conflict?' Further useful questions in analyzing the situation are: Is the conflict between pastoral and agropastoral groups merely related to physical resource use? Is it influenced by mixed motives where conflict over grazing land is used as a strategic contest to achieve other more important goals? By providing fuller explanation of the conflict based on these questions, the findings provide deeper insights on how several interrelated factors have transformed the conflict. The paper contributes to the existing debate on the influence of power asymmetry in affecting post-conflict negotiations over access to the grazing commons at a very local level. It underlines how historical and structural factors determining the conflict increase the complexity of the negotiation process. In particular, it indicates the deterrence effect of power symmetry from violating negotiated agreement between parties in conflict when they have complete information about one another (Chassang and Miquel, 2012). As results indicate, dynamism in incentives embedded in historically established grievance has caused sustained defection despite the fact conflicting parties over grazing resources

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experience repeated negotiations, which is referred to here as ‘multiple tournaments’.

## 2. Background of the case and methodology

Mieso district has a total population of 53,665 (CSA, 2006)<sup>1</sup> and an area of 2573 km<sup>2</sup>. The amount of rainfall varies from 332 to 1385 mm with an average of 790 mm per annum. The altitude ranges from 1107 to 3106 m above sea level (ILRI/MoARD, 2005). Mieso, the district capital, forms central market to different groups, as it is located along the railway and main highway connecting the eastern region to Addis Ababa. It is 300 km far away from Addis and remains strategic livestock market to traders. With a population density of 20.85 p/km<sup>2</sup>, it is inhabited by two ethnic groups: the Oromo (Ala, Nole and Ittu clans) and the Somali (Issa and Hawiya clans). The Oromos in Mieso are mainly agropastoral whereas the Somalis are pastoral entirely relying on livestock.

Moreover, three important features explain the socio-economic condition of this district. First, there are different production systems in the same district. Second, these two production systems are competing for land use and the way it needs to be used. For instance, one ethnic group cultivates land even if it is to a smaller scale compared to sedentary farming system, whereas the other opposes this practice to secure free communal grazing land. Third, there has been a resulting interethnic conflict since long. While livestock is given priority, a decline in rangeland resources manifested through the reduction in livestock feed availability has remained a challenge to sustaining livelihoods of both groups. The overall perception, however, is conflict threat limits the use of grazing resources on the communal land to a greater degree. Among agropastoralists, there is a general trend in expansion of crop cultivation such as sorghum, maize and beans as a means to diversify livelihoods and to ensure food security due to limited opportunity to generate income from livestock production using the communal grazing land (ILRI/MoARD, 2005).

Results presented in this article are based on data collected from Mieso district in two separate phases: phase one between November 2004 and May 2005 and phase two in August/September 2006. To collect data, different techniques were employed: household survey and two consecutive focus group discussions. The survey focused on various themes: economic activities involving relations with neighboring clans, pattern of competition for grazing land, reasons for conflict, number of animals raided, involvement in violent conflict and participation in negotiation meetings. The focus group discussion (involving key informants) was organized before and parallel to the survey. Some of the issues addressed in the interview questions were recapped while discussing with key informants.

The discussion emphasized historical and current relations between Ittu and Issa, causes of violence, how negotiations are organized, cooperation of other clans with Ittu, tensions among Ittu clan members and reasons why Issa negotiates or attacks. The composition of the key informants varied in the two rounds. In the first round, mainly elders were involved, and in the second, formal leaders of the peasant association, district administrative officials and village leaders were contacted. This was done purposely to understand how far customary and formal procedures are integrated. To increase representativeness, data was collected from different categories of respondents of both clans. However, the challenge encountered during the fieldwork was obtaining data from the neighboring regions’ affairs office, which was actually involved in arranging negotiations as

mediators. This has happened due to greater sensitivity of the issue at hand. The researcher had to explain the purpose and fully secured cooperation from the office to learn the processes and related challenges in enhancing cooperation in sharing the grazing commons.

In this paper, narratives and game theory were used as analytical tools. Game theory helps structure actors’ interaction and provides a means to build systematic explanation (Bates et al., 1998). It focuses on certain key elements to specify how motivations and actions are interrelated whereby such seemingly simple models can help clarify complex situations (Morrow, 1994). Analytic narrative, that combines storylines and game theory, overcomes such limitation. It provides a basis for iteration, which is required to improve the validity of the explanation derived from the game theoretic model (Bates et al., 2000). Analysis involved two steps. The first was to give a description of the essential factors determining the negotiation processes in resolving the conflict. In this particular case, the narrative gave a basis for constructing game theoretic model. The second step was to refine the established game theoretic model based on the narrative.

## 3. The narratives

The conflict analyzed here represents the gradual transformation of communal grazing land into contested land. The contestation grew from processes that pushed agropastoralists to use the communal land for dual purposes. The land communally used for grazing is nowadays being used as private grazing land and for crop farming by agropastoralists, while the pastoralists have continued using it as communal grazing alone. This has induced property rights conflict. The conflict is not a simple dispute but it has continued to take a violent form. Forces that have shaped the conflict to take a violent form are not only linked to common pasture. There are also others including, possibility for interclan cooperation to mobilize resources for conflict when negotiations fail, a continued decline in the capacity of customary institutions to enforce negotiated agreements and the economic incentives associated with livestock raids.

The relationship among pastoral clans of different ethnic groups in eastern Ethiopia has increasingly become complex and dynamic in response to change in resource settings and land use (Gebre, 2001). For example, many among the Ittu clan members started cultivation while still livestock remaining the basic livelihood source. To the contrary, such event has become a source of conflict as Issa have increasingly resisted cultivation and its expansion. Expansion of farming has distributional implication as part of the grazing commons is fenced off and continued to generate private economic rents. The Issa have never been involved in crop farming activity. One mechanism of resistance to land use change was to organize attacks during planting and harvesting seasons. As the resistance from Issa increased through time via restricting access to communal grazing area to discourage crop farming from the other end of the vast grazing land, elders of Ittu started to negotiate for access to the land they once enjoyed as common property with Issa.

The basic problem does not seem to be the evolvement of co-users of the grazing commons into ‘disputants’ by virtue of pursuing different production systems. However, it is a lack of legal institutional framework through which claims for access can be negotiated, settled and sustained. The existing tenure policy of Ethiopia supports private use of land for cultivation, grazing and other activities as stipulated in the national land use and administration proclamation; surprisingly, nowhere does this proclamation entertain communal rural land use rights though it mentions the terms “semi-pastoral and pastoral” (FDRE, 2005). There is also a

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistical Authority in Addis Ababa.

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