



Unravelling the dynamics of access to farmland in Tigray, Ethiopia: The ‘emerging land market’ revisited[☆]

Kaatje Segers^{a,*}, Joost Dessein^{b,c}, Sten Hagberg^d, Yikunoamlak Teklebirhan^e,
Mitiku Haile^f, Jozef Deckers^a

^a Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Celestijnenlaan 200E Box 2411, B-3001 Heverlee, Belgium

^b Social Sciences Unit, Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research, Burg. Van Gansberghelaan 115 Box 2, B-9820 Merelbeke, Belgium

^c Department of Agricultural Economics, Ghent University, Coupure Links, 653, B-9000 Gent, Belgium

^d Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, P.O. Box 631, SE-75126 Uppsala, Sweden

^e Department of Dryland Crop and Horticultural Science, Mekelle University, P.O. Box 231, Mekelle, Ethiopia

^f Department of Land Resources Management and Environmental Protection, Mekelle University, P.O. Box 231, Mekelle, Ethiopia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 April 2009

Received in revised form 15 January 2010

Accepted 17 January 2010

Keywords:

Rural Ethiopia

Ethnography

Land use rights

Land redistribution

Informal land transfer

Land rental market

ABSTRACT

This article uses ethnographic evidence from Tigray to revisit the debate on informal rural land markets in present-day Ethiopia. It explores informal farmland rental from a historico-anthropological, micro-analytical perspective in relation to the formal allocation of land use rights and to other informal land transfer practices. It shows how different rationales for land rental give rise to different socially embedded tenancy configurations. On the basis of this empirical evidence, the paper questions the appropriateness of the common idea that in Ethiopia ‘the land rental market is expanding’. It argues that research and policy thinking on land in Ethiopia could gain analytical power and relevance by adopting a less monolithic and abstract view on people’s informal land transfer practices.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Based on ethnographic research in Tigray, this article aims to revisit and broaden the scientific and policy debates on informal rural land markets in present-day Ethiopia. A major resource for the country’s agriculture-based economy and affected by recent radical tenure changes, land has become one of the most widely discussed and politically sensitive issues in the Ethiopian development debate. Throughout the imperial period, land inequality was high, until land was nationalized and land use rights were redistributed by the socialist Derg regime in 1975. Having carried out its own land reform programmes, the current Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) government enshrined smallholder farmers’ land use rights in its 1994 constitution. Although restrictions on land transfer remain in place, the EPRDF

lifted the 1975 ban on land lease in 1991, after which land rental market activity was found to increase all over the country (see, among others, Rahmato, 2004; Belay and Manig, 2004; Teklu, 2004; Teklu and Lemi, 2004; Benin et al., 2005; Tesfay, 2006).

Economists have set themselves the task to assess the performance of the emerging land rental market in terms of allocative efficiency and productivity as well as redistributive effects. Yet, empirical evidence on several aspects of the functioning of the land rental market remains inconclusive. A first issue is that some authors find that informal rural land markets¹ decrease land inequality (Teklu, 2004; Teklu and Lemi, 2004; Pender and Fafchamps, 2006), whereas others conclude the opposite (Deininger et al., 2008b, 2009). Second, there is no consensus on the efficiency of agricultural production on rented land versus owner-operated² land. Indeed, there is mixed evidence of higher (Croppenstedt and Demeke, 1997; Benin et al., 2005; Emanu et al., 2006; Kassie and Holden, 2007), similar (Beyene, 2003; Tesfay,

[☆] Note: Names of Ethiopian authors are conventionally cited in full on first name.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +32 16 32 97 34; fax: +32 16 32 97 60.

E-mail addresses: kaatje.segers@ees.kuleuven.be, kaatjesegers@scarlet.be (Kaatje Segers), joost.dessein@ilvo.vlaanderen.be (Joost Dessein), sten.hagberg@antrop.uu.se (Sten Hagberg), zameda14@yahoo.com (Yikunoamlak Teklebirhan), gualmitiku@yahoo.com (Mitiku Haile), seppedeckers@ees.kuleuven.be (Jozef Deckers).

¹ As Ethiopian law forbids farmland sale, the terms ‘land rental market’ and ‘land market’ are used interchangeably.

² Strictly speaking, Ethiopian farmers are not land owners but holders of land use rights. We use the two terms interchangeably.

2006) and lower (Gavian and Ehui, 1999; Ahmed et al., 2002a; Deininger et al., 2008b) input use and productivity on rented than on owned land.³ Although these divergent findings may be due in part to differences in research area and methodology,⁴ authors tend not to include research design characteristics as explanatory factors.⁵ In addition, uncertainty may preclude conclusive results even within a single study (see, among others, Pender and Fafchamps, 2006).⁶ With regard to policy, it is argued that land registration could stimulate land rental markets by enhancing tenure security (Negatu, 2001; Rahmato, 2004; Benin, 2006). However, empirical research has failed to provide convincing evidence that the government's recent large-scale registration programmes are effective in this respect.⁷

While some questions have remained unanswered, others have been left unasked. First, the large majority of land rental transactions in Ethiopia are between relatives, neighbours or friends (Belay and Manig, 2004; Deininger et al., 2008b, 2009). While the efficiency of contracts between kin and non-kin partners has been compared (Holden and Ghebru, 2005; Kassie and Holden, 2007, 2009), the meaning, causes and wider consequences of land rental's social embeddedness have been little studied. Second, several authors report considerable discrepancies, of a factor of five and more, between the total areas of farmland rented-out and rented-in by all households in a survey sample (among others Belay and Manig, 2004; Teklu and Lemi, 2004; Holden et al., 2007). While a non-zero sum game is theoretically possible if the sample selection is biased against either lessor or lessee households, the authors do not question or explain these disproportions. More generally, it could be argued that existing research tends to de-contextualise and de-historicise Ethiopian land tenure and transfer practices. Questions of lessors' and lessees' asset portfolio composition have primacy over motivational issues while the relations between land rental and other informal land transfer institutions receive little attention. Time horizons usually do not extend beyond the last land reform while research on continuities with pre-reform situations is in its infancy (Kebede, 2008).

This paper seeks to fill some of these gaps by exploring land rental in Tigray from a historico-anthropological, micro-analytical perspective. This approach starts from 'real practices, current as well as past, on every parcel of land and from the social interactions surrounding these practices to explain the conditions of access to land' (Colin, 2004, own translation, p. 64). Elsewhere, anthropologists have demonstrated the relevance of such a processual, comprehensive approach to explain changing issues of land tenure and informal transfer. Chauveau (2006) analyses how the evolution of the *tutorat*, the institution that regulates the transfer of land rights from autochthones to migrant farmers in Côte d'Ivoire, has paralleled changes in the social relations between

these two groups and in intra-household land relationships among the former. Colin (2005) shows that sharecropping in Mexico is polymorphous and multifunctional, thereby challenging common economic interpretations of the institution. Also, there is ample evidence that commercial land transfers in West Africa are firmly embedded in social relations, which challenges existing ideas of land commoditization and land market development in the region (Lavigne Delville et al., 2002; Chauveau et al., 2006; Colin and Ayouz, 2006; Hagberg, 2006; Lentz, 2006, 2007). Finally, different authors argue that land registration in Africa not only involves recognition but also transformation of existing land rights (Shipton and Goheen, 1992; Le Meur, 2006).

It is in this spirit the present study empirically investigates people's access to farmland in one locality in Tigray. After a description of the research area and methodology, we outline the successive land tenure regimes and explore the main land rental institution in the period before the last land reform two decades ago. We then discuss this reform and the current formal distribution of land use rights, the latter being the outcome of the former and of the time that has passed since then. In the next section, we examine how people superimpose land exchange and loans upon this formal land use rights pattern. Next, we show how land rental transactions add a third 'layer of rights' (Lentz, 2006, p. 10; Lentz, 2007, p. 41).⁸ In the study area, four broad categories of rationales for sharecropping and a niche role for fixed fee rental can be distinguished, each giving rise to a specific tenancy configuration. To conclude, we confront this empirical evidence with the received idea of an expanding Ethiopian land rental market and a number of the unresolved issues discussed above. We argue that land rental questions are most effectively addressed by disaggregating them and by including ethnographic insights into the various actors' differential social logics.

2. Research area and methodology

Our research area is the Degua Temben *wereda* or district, west of the regional capital Mekelle in the Tigray highlands. Tigray is Ethiopia's third poorest region and poverty is demonstrably associated with small land sizes (Jayne et al., 2003; World Bank, 2005). Average arable land size estimates for Tigray, ranging from 0.5 to 1 ha per household, are indeed below estimates for the country as a whole (Jayne et al., 2003; World Bank, 2005; Deininger and Jin, 2006; Kebede, 2008; Deininger et al., 2008a). With an average household landholding of 0.9 ha⁹ Degua Temben is within this range. The regional land Gini coefficient is around 0.45 (Mersha and wa Githinji, 2005; World Bank, 2005; Nega, 2008). Although there is variation across villages (Holden and Ghebru, 2005), recent research finds around half of the Tigrayan households (Emana et al., 2006; Tesfay, 2006; Holden et al., 2007; Ghebru and Holden, 2009) participate in land rental,¹⁰ which is in line with our estimates for the research area.¹¹ Over 90% of the district population are subsistence farmers whose main economic activity is integrated rainfed annual crop and livestock production. Pulses and cereals are the major crops. Oxen provide draught power for ploughing, which is an exclusively male activity. In the centre of the district, the town of Hagere Selam is rapidly developing.

³ Gavian and Ehui (1999) find that tenants apply inputs more intensively than owners, but are comparatively less productive due to the lower quality of inputs or input application.

⁴ Studies differ on the level of the sampling design, the input measures recorded and the method of data analysis, among other things. Some of the studies mentioned here were performed on the same dataset.

⁵ A recent exception is Holden et al. (2009).

⁶ The authors do not consider their results powerful enough to reject the possibility of moderate Marshallian inefficiency, despite the finding that input use and yield differences between sharecropped and owner-operated land are insignificant.

⁷ Holden et al.'s (2007) claim that land registration in Tigray has increased land rental market participation needs further investigation. The authors find that, for a sample of around 300 households, the ratio of rented-out to rented-in land changes from 8.5 in 1997 (before registration) to 0.8 in 2000 (after registration), but they do not explain this sudden shift. If correct, households not included in the sample must have experienced a reverse shift and processes other than land certification are likely to have played a role.

⁸ Similarly, Shipton and Goheen (1992, p. 311) talk about 'overlapping rights' and Juul and Lund (2002, p. 5) about 'multiple tenures'.

⁹ Own calculation based on Degua Temben district administration data.

¹⁰ Estimates for neighbouring Amhara region are in the same order of magnitude (see, among others, Omiti et al., 1999; Sharp et al., 2003; Deininger et al., 2008b).

¹¹ Also, 56% of the households in Ghebru and Holden's (2009) sample in another sub-district of Degua Temben participate in land rental.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/93460>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/93460>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)