

## **The Role of Local Customs in Sustainable Use of Forest Resources in Andode Dicho Area, Western Ethiopia: an Ethnographic Account**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to explore and describe the role of customary institutions in forest management among the Andode Dicho area Oromos before its dismantlement as a result of stiff competitions with spontaneous settlers in the area. The research was conducted by using qualitative research method. It employed focus group discussion in-depth interview and observation to collect primary data. A total of 15 focus groups were organized and 25 different individuals were interviewed as key informants. Before the permanent movement of Oromos from nearby highland areas and arrival of Amhara self motivated settlers to Andode Dicho area, the nearby Oromo society was managing Andode Dicho forest resources by using different customary institutions. They were also using the forest as sources of different economic and social purposes like forest honey, edible plants and animals, medicinal plants, pepper and cotton productions. But the 1980s permanent settlement of the Oromo and 1990s migration of self-motivated Amaharas to the area instigated high competition on the forest resource which gradually dismantled the local institutions that used to manage forest. Customary institutions did play some role in managing forest resources in the study area. But due to unplanned and/or self motivated migration both the forest resources and the governing customary institutions were destroyed.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Each and every society has its own ways of defining, using and managing resources. But mechanisms of doing these vary from society to society. Some societies give high value for sustaining of natural resources while others emphasis on economic benefit maximization by over exploitation of natural resources. Through their interaction (competition and conflict) different societies influence each other. This is what has been happening in Andode Dicho area where I did my research work.

Before the occurrence of stiff competition which was caused by self-motivated migration, the Oromo of this area were using their indigenous social institutions/customs to use forest resources in sustainable ways. But when Amhara settlers moved to the area, the Oromo begin breaking the previously functioning institutions and values and

enter in to competition of forest resources. As a result both the indigenous forest managing institutions and forests of AndodeDicho area have been destroyed.

GiddaKiramu (Figure 1) is one of the districts of East Wallaga Zone. It is bounded by regional, zonal and district boundaries. Accordingly, in the North by the Amahara National Regional state through West Gojjam which is found on the other side of Blue Nile (Abay) gorge, in the East by Horro Guduru Wallaga Zone, in the West by Ebantu district and in the south by Guto Gidda district. Gidda Kiramu district has a total size of 2,505km<sup>2</sup> and about 158,000 population size (Tesfaye, 2007, district administration office). Topography of the district is characterized by two ecologies; namely high lands and low lands which are mostly covered with forest (Tesfaye,

2007). The climate of the district is a combination of tropical, subtropical and temperate zones. Four zones of Amhara Regional national state are identified as the major producers of Amhara migrants to Gidda KIRAMU district by (Tsfaye 2007). These are South Gonder, South Wallo, East Gojjam and West Gojjam. Andodedicho is one of the lowland rural areas of Gidda KIRAMU district. It is located in the North East of Nekemte, on the road to Bure (Amhara region) at about 440km from Addis Ababa. The dominantly cultivated crop types in the area include maize, Sorghum, and finger millet. In the past the area was not favorable for livestock production. But currently due to availability and relatively easily accessible veterinary services livestock production is become part of their agricultural activities. Before permanently settling in the Andodee Dicho, the Oromo from the adjoining areas were frequently visiting and some of them were temporarily settling. Since the area was covered by forest, the nearby highland Oromo were using the forest as sources of honey production, big animal games, and traditional medicinal plants as part of their livelihood. Furthermore, cotton and pepper cultivation was part of their livelihood.

In this paper I will explain how the Oromo customs/institutions and culture defined, valued, managed and used forest resources before the arrival of spontaneous settlers to the area and later the ethnographic findings of the study area are presented.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In conducting this research qualitative research method was employed. Since the research problem is mostly related to myth, human behavior, decision making and actions, which requires the researcher to investigate the emic understandings of the community and the researcher's etic perspective, qualitative method is found more fitting than quantitative one. Different data collecting tools under qualitative method are employed. These tools include:

**Interview:** semi-structured interview is conducted with 25 purposively selected individuals both from the settlers, host community and concerned officials from district and kebele offices. The unstructured questions gave me the chances of learning from my informants by giving them opportunities of raising and explaining what they know about the issues under research. Accordingly, ten individuals from the host community, ten from the settlers and five from the district and kebele officials are selected and interviewed. Furthermore, deep and thorough in-

depth interview is carried out with carefully selected key informants both from host and spontaneously settled communities. Hence, four knowledgeable elders from the host community, four individuals from the settlers and two from the kebele office i.e. a total of ten informants are selected and in depth interview is conducted. Selection of the informants is purposive in that people with better information and knowledge about the area are selected from both the host and migrant settlers. Officials are also selected based on their professional experiences and exposure of their job in the area.

**Focus Group Discussions:** 12 different focus group discussions are carried out. Accordingly, 6 groups from the host community each group consisting of seven individuals; 5 groups from the settlers, each consisting of six to 8 persons and the third group is that of district environmental experts including the research site's Development Agent (D.A), former kebele chair person, current kebele chair person, district natural resource expert and district veterinary expert.

**Observation:** Observing the current status of forest resources of the research area, observing the settlement pattern of the migrants of the area, and emotional feelings of the informants during both interview and discussion with informants has played significant role in this research. Furthermore, to substantiate my findings by different literature different secondary sources are used. Accordingly, books, pamphlets, articles, magazines, and websites are consulted.

## Theoretical Summary on Culture and Environment

Questions of how people modify, symbolize and adapt to their immediate surroundings have intrigued anthropologists since the discipline's earliest days. Recognizing the importance of early 20<sup>th</sup> century work, I emphasize here with Julian Steward's work dating from the 1950s, because his ideas have had such an enduring effect on anthropological approaches to the environment in general and this specific study in particular. Particularly, Steward's idea of a "culture core," those cultural features which articulate most closely with a specific environment is paramount in anthropological study of culture and Environment (Nora Haenn and Richard R. Wilk, 2006). According to Steward in Nora Haenn and Richard R. Wil (2006) the concept of cultural core encompasses the collection of features which are most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements. It includes the social, political, and

religious patterns as are empirically determined to be closely connected with these arrangements. Innumerable other features may have great potential variability because they are less strongly tied to the core. These latter, or secondary features, are determined to a greater extent by purely cultural-historical factors by random innovations or by diffusion and they give the appearance of outward distinctiveness to cultures with similar cores. Cultural ecology pays primary attention to those features which empirical analysis shows to be most closely involved in the utilization of environment in culturally prescribed ways. Steward in his idea of culture core argue that Cultural ecology differs from human and social ecology in seeking to explain the origin of particular cultural features and patterns which characterize different areas rather than to derive general principles applicable to any cultural-environmental situation (Nora Haenn and Richard R. Wil (2006).

Since human being is a social animal, it has a capacity of living together in group seeking the provision of food, shelter and others. Human history reveals that so far people used pastures, wood lands, fisheries and other resources for millennia without degrading them. This was because they shared understandings of their rights, responsibilities, to guarantee that the resource would be available to them and to their children. But according to Moran (2006) this balance between common goods and human community is not a given. It is something that results from co evolution of systems of management tied to an understanding of the resilience or vulnerability of the resources being used and the need to conserve them in the face of the need to survive. From Moran's idea one can learn that people's common understanding, i.e. norms and value play great role not only in managing resource but also in using in sustainable ways. Rituals and other cultural practices play determinant role in creating common understanding among a given society. With this regard, Rappaport as cited by Moran (2006) explains that through rituals individuals in human communities become "as one" in common purpose and through ritual participation they were socialized in to the value of the common good, the value of sharing, and subordinated themselves to the forces embodied in rituals. Cultural rules are devised to define the rights and responsibilities of individual members. Coming up with common rules for managing resources in a community is easier if the members of the group are relatively homogenous in ethnicity, culture, and wealth (Moran 2006). The implication is that for heterogeneous

societies it is more difficult and challenging to have common and shared values that govern their behavior in general and their resource use behavior in particular. Moreover, the power of shared customs/values is usually challenged by the tendency of people to seek their narrow self-interest i.e. when self-interest turns in to greed. In other words, though historically human beings lived in philosophy of sharing resources, as control over land increased and became a source of wealth that could be inherited and controlled from generation to generation, and accumulation of wealth inspired, the struggle between community and individual grew. This struggle between narrow self interest and the common good has enormous consequences to the fate of our planet and to what happen to local resources in different places. If narrow self interest wins out we would have out comes such as Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' in which individuals who share a common resource seek their individual advantage even when they see evidence that the resource is collapsing. Moran (2006) conclude that it is from such conditions of maximizing individual interest and ever expanding differentiation in wealth that today we have a population with a great material wealth on the hands of fewer and fewer families, with very little sense of community and common purpose. Such groups of people do not respect the principle of common benefit which is central theme of customs/values.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-Economic Functions of Andode Dicho Forest

Before the destruction of forest following the permanent settlement to the area, the Oromo community of the area was using forest resources for different purposes. This is similar with what Clark C. Gibson (2000) explains as forests are associated with multiple products (example-wood for construction and fuel, wild life, water, leaves, fruits, fodders, seeds, straw shade, fertile soil and so on) and multiple user groups (defined by property rights, products, location, citizenship, religion, caste, ethnicity, technology, income and access). Andode Dicho forest was used by the local community in the following ways.

### Honey Production/Apiculture

Among the Oromo society there are two ways of honey production. One is through preparation of beehives (*Gaaguraa*) and the other is 'forest honey' (*dammaholqaa*) which exists on the hollow of stem of large trees like *qilxuu*,



Figure1: Study area.

*waddeessaa, odaa, harbuuqolaadii, butujjii* and *baddeessaa*. Honey is a very important product among Oromo society. Because in Oromo society inviting *dadhii* or *bookaa* (local alcoholic beverage which is made up of honey and *geeshoo* through fermentation), and *birzii* (local non-alcoholic beverage made from honey but not *geeshoo*) during any feast has high social values. These drinks symbolize the inviters as generous and highly respected ones. Individuals who provide invitation of *farsoo* (local beer) and *daadhii* (honey beer) or *birzii* have no equal respects in the community. Among Horro Guduru Oromo cultural foods and drinks like *comboo*, *caccabsaa*, raw meat, *cuckoo* milk, *daadhii* and *birzii* are very respected and honored. Particularly, GiddaKiramu district is well known for *cumboo* and *daadhii* because they are high productions of butter and honey which are ingredients of *cumboo* and *daadhii* respectively. Inviting of these honored foods and drinks during feasts bring appreciation for the inviters. These appreciations are usually expressed through their cultural song called *geersaa* as:

**Literal meaning**

- “*kutachiisaadirraa*      the one who invites dirraa(Redmeat)
- Unachiisaabookaa*    he one who provides *daadhii* (*booka*)
- Nyannisaacoomaa*    what he eats is *cooma* (fatty meat)
- Dhugaatinsabooka*”    and his drink is *booka* (honey beer).

Invitation among this society is common during holydays, ritual ceremonies, weddings and daboo

(labor organization). The basic honey source for the nearby highland Oromo was Andode Dichoarea; commonly not through preparation of beehives but forest honey (*holqaa*). As confirmed by both my Oromo group discussants and key informants, before the intensification of both Oromo and Amhara settlements to the area, forests in general and big trees like *waddeessaa, harbuu, baddeessaa, qilxuu, danbii* and *qolaadiin* particular were the dominantly available ones. These were sources of forest honey. The Oromo from highland usually move to lowland in search of honey. They move in group of two or three and stay there for two to five days based on the availability and accessibility of honey.

According to my informants, honey collection in general and that of forest honey in particular requires both skill and knowledge. Individuals who have these skills and knowledge are called ‘*sorobduu*’ in the area. They can literally be called “forest honey specialists”. *Sorobduu* is someone who has special skill and knowledge in searching of honey from hollow (*holqaa*) in the forest. Since honey of the hollow is “forest honey” its location is discovered by *Sorobduus*. Therefore, *sorobduu* is the actor, *sorobuu* is the act and *sorobinaa* is the process of the act. This shows that collecting honey from a forest is not a simple act that can be carried out by any common man. It needs “specialization” which is usually referred as “indigenous knowledge”. Let me discuss how the act of *sorobuu* takes place.

As explained by my Oromo key informants there is a kind of bird called “*mukee*”. The bird (*mukee*) gives unique sound and the *sorobduu* follows the direction of this bird. The bird flies and jumps from one tree to another until it finds a tree with hollow honey (*dammaholqaa*). When it finds the honey holding tree, it stays and begins knocking at the tree. Following and observing what the bird does, the *sorobduu* checks the honey from hollow (*holqaa*). So that he takes out the honey by using fire and axe. The bird has different sound and actions when it sees wild animals like lion, tiger and snake. When it sees one of these animals it changes the sound and comes down from the normal flight. At this time the *sorobduu* has to be careful and look at his area knowing that there is dangerous animal. He might be forced to change not only his direction but also location based on the type of wild animal and its potential danger. For instance, if the animal is a lion the *sorobduu* has immediately to change the location.

The importance of the knowledge and skill of the *sorobduu* can be understood in relation with ability of identifying the bird’s sound from other birds, following of the bird carefully when she flies and jumps from tree to tree in the forest, identifying the birds sound and flying style when she sees dangerous animals; the skill of using fire (smoke) to weaken but not to damage both the tree and the bees and, finally how to collect honey by using axes. Furthermore, the ability of climbing tree and identifying this bird from other birds are other important skills and knowledge of the *sorobduu*. For them, absence of this bird i.e. “*mukee*” is an indication of non-availability of hollow (*holqaa*) honey in the area. So they have to change their area and search for the availability of the bird. Nevertheless, the absence of the bird does not necessarily indicate the non - availability of forest honey. Rather it is difficult for the *sorobduu* to easily find honey in the absence of the bird. That is why they search the bird first.

The very important question that has to be raised at this juncture is that how one explains the role of this bird. This has both emic (from the point of view of the communities) and *etic*’ (from the researcher’s perspective) explanations. From the communities perspective the act of the bird is explained in terms of ‘nature-God’ (*Waaqaa*) relationship. *Waaqaa* (God) for Oromo is creator of all things. He has a power of do and undo everything. Since he controls and regulates all natural activities (Waqefata Bulletin, 2002), the Oromo of the research site believe, He gave this ability to the bird i.e. *mukee*. For the Oromo, *Waaqaa* expresses His will through provision of

*ayyanaa* (which is somehow equivalent to spirit) for each creature. As explained by Gemechu (Oromumma, 1992) *ayyanaa* is what systematizes the Oromo religion, philosophical thought and oral tradition. It is an expression of the will of God for Oromo.

Based on this philosophy, for the Oromo, every creature and each day has its own *ayyanaa*. Accordingly, there are 27 days that have their specific *ayyanaas*. These *ayyanaas* are related to days on which *Waaqaa* (God) has created all the creatures. According to Oromo tradition *waaqaa* has created all creatures with their respective *ayyanaas* in those 27 days, unlike the Christian belief in which it took God only six days to create all creatures. Based on this philosophical view of Oromo belief, this bird (*mukee*) has been given this special *ayyanaa* which enables her to find out honey on the tree.

Another justification of this view by the community is highly related with the function of honey in conducting religious ceremonies. Since honey is very sweet and highly preferred during religious rituals, its production is highly related with the will of *Waaqaa* (God).

In line with this belief, my Oromo informants told that let alone “forest honey” in which man has no role, in case of beehives honey production, care has to be taken to get the will of God. Accordingly, the of the research area (it needs further research to know whether this is true to other area Oromo or not) do not produce a whole numbers of beehives. That is to say beehives have always to be odd numbered in amount i.e. (1, 3, 5, 7, 9...99,101...); but not even numbered in amount (2, 4, 6, 8...). Their justification is that we pray to our *Waaqaa* (God) by saying. “*hir’uuttii nuufguuti*” which is literary to mean “ may you fill with what is not full”. So if they have even number which is an indication of *guutuu* (full) they do not have *hir’uu* (not full) to which to ask the will of God (*Waaqaa*). For the Oromo nothing is exercised without the consent and the will of *Waaqaa* (God). Therefore, in the work of honey production, both in the case of “forest honey” and beehives, the will and control of *Waaqaa* (God) is very important. That is why *waaqaa* provides the bird (*mukee*) with the *ayyanaa* of identifying “forest honey” and the *sorobduus* (forest honey “specialists”) with the *ayyanaa* of collecting “forest honey”.

I have tried to explain this fact from the *etic* (researcher’s) points of view. As already explained earlier, it is impossible currently to find and see the bird which is explained by the local

Oromo as “*mukee*” and described as a great role player in identification of forest honey. Because of loss of forests in the area, it is not possible to find forest honey in general and the bird in particular. However, based on the critical analysis of the information obtained from the informants, the bird eats the residual of the honey including the larva of the bees. Therefore, the fact that the availability of the bird is related with the existence of the hollow honey in the area may indicate that the bird hunts honey because it eats larva after a man has taken the honey. The bird considers both the wild animals and the man (*sorobduu*) as her competitors to eat larva from the honey. That might be the reason why she produces different sounds when she sees both man and wild animals. Similarly, the knowledge and skill of *sorobduus* is related with experience and informal skill training of the community. As explained by the group discussants, usually *sorobduus* are individuals who do not have much crop production and large land size in the high land areas. This gives them spare time to frequently visit the forest and spent their time in search of honey and hunting animals in the forest. This in turn enables them to have opportunity of learning the relationship between forest honey and the identified bird i.e. *mukee*. Besides, they share their experience in the community. This also allows them to acquire skill and knowledge from each other. This reality complies with Brent Berlin’s phrase (1992), as cited by Virginia (2006) “non-literates ‘know so much’ about nature.

This is how I have justified based on my findings; but I am not claiming that this is the only way of etical explanation. It is still open for “why” question.

#### **Sources of Big Game Animals (Hunting)**

Hunting has dual function among Oromo societies in general and Oromo of the study area in particular. These are economic as well as social functions. According to my Oromo group discussants before the permanent settlement to the area and the subsequent destruction of the forests, people from the neighboring highlands and even from relatively distant area were coming to hunt for both economic and social gains. Let me briefly discuss these functions.

**Economic Function of Hunting:** Before the degradation of the forest in the Andode-Dicho area Oromo from the surrounding highland areas used to visit the forest to hunt some edible animals. Those animals include *warabboo*, *Jeedala*, *Bosonuu*, *Quruphee*, *Fiigoo* and *Booyyee*. These animals were source of meat for the society during both holidays and food

shortage seasons. The economic importance of hunting to this society has to be understood in terms of the country’s economic reality. Obviously, Ethiopia has been known for her recurrent food shortage problems. One of the local mechanisms of alleviating the problem and ensuring self-sustenance during such problems is eating animals through hunting and some edible trees (fruit, root, leaves and stem) available in the forest. Both my Oromo key informants and group discussants explained that throughout generation, hunting and eating some animals were common when shortage of food occurs in the area due to different factors. Factors that cause shortage of food include crop failure, pesticide, catastrophe such as heavy rain and fluctuations of periods of rain. Furthermore, the relatively poor individuals with small land holding use this hunting as supplementary means of subsistence. These were effective in two different ways.

#### **Direct House Hold Consumption**

When the hunter brings meat in whatever its forms (fresh or dry) the house hold consumes either in short term or long term basis. The meat could be fresh or dry based on the duration of stay in the forest which in turn based on the availability of animals and size of the group who went for hunting. Hunting in this area was usually done by group. A principle of ‘sharing what one kills’ guides how to share meat. Of course, it is in rare cases that an animal dies with one shoot. Hence it needs others’ participation. There is pre-determined ways of sharing the parts of the animal based on their contribution to the death of that animal. Accordingly, the one who shoots first is called “*abbaamirgaa*” which literally means “holder of the right”. And he takes the skin and the right leg of the animal. Sometimes there could be confusion to determine who shoot first because everybody throws spear. At this time elders solve the dispute either through “lottery method” or through competing them to throw and shoot some identified stick. The one who gets the “lottery” items or who shoot the stick becomes “*abbaamirgaa*” and takes what he deserves. The second shooter of the animal takes the left side leg which is termed as *dutaa*. The one who first sees the animal where it is hidden takes the back (spinal) part of the animal. Other parts of the animal are open to everybody who first reach there and take the part he wants.

Therefore, if the size of the hunting group is small they share among themselves and they do not need to stay long there. So they come back with fresh meat. But if their group size is large

and availability of animal is rare, they stay long there in which they come back with dry meat. Of course, they use salt and smoke to dry the meat.

### Source of Reciprocity

As explained earlier most of the hunters in the area were people who do not have enough farming land to produce enough or extra crop to reciprocate with others. Reciprocity as explained by Marshal Salins (1972) is exchange among family group as a means of distributing goods and services in a society. Reciprocity in Oromo society in general and among GiddaKIRAMU Oromo in particular is very important. It is a tool for wining social capital, to organize labor for work, and to get social security during harsh time. Accordingly, the one who kills wild animal and brings that to the village either exchanges with crop immediately (balanced reciprocity) or gives to different people (usually elders) expecting the return one day in his life time or from his waaqaa (God) (general reciprocity) in the future. The direct exchange (balanced exchange) can be effective with anybody who wants to exchange provided that the desired crop is available. But the general reciprocity considers some social relations such as kin affiliations, or elders (to please their God), adults (expecting for the return in meat sometime in the future) and with *sorobduus* (forest honey collectors), expecting the return in honey (of course this could be direct exchange too). This reciprocity, in its different forms, enables a person (a hunter) to have many economic (through diversification) and social (through gift) advantage.

Social function of Hunting: Hunting among the Oromo society has strong social value in that it gives high social respect to the killer. Killing animals for search of meat and for social value are different things. Though in some cases the latter can serve for the formers' purpose, the vice versa is not the case. Even the types of animals to be killed are different for the two purposes. Animals which are categorized under social values are Buffalo (*gafarsaa*), Loin (*leenca*), Tiger (*qearamsa*), (*yeeyyii*) and Elephant (*arba*). For the Oromo someone who kills one of these animals is called with the title of *Ajjesaa* (killer). *Ajjesaa* (killer) in Oromo society is not a simple concept. It is rather a custom/ an institution in that it has its own specified rules and principles to be followed. It makes an individual killer (*Ajjesaa*) to be respected and have high social position. Even killing of the aforementioned wild animals, according to my Oromo group discussants, cannot provide equal status in the research area. Accordingly, the killer's (*ajjeesaa*) social status ranked corresponding to the types of animals one

kills as: 1<sup>st</sup> *Yeeyyii* (Wolf), 2<sup>nd</sup> *Gafarsa* (Buffalo), 3<sup>rd</sup> *Leenca* (Loin) and 4<sup>th</sup> *Qeeramsa* (Tiger). One of the occasions which indicate variability is the order of Oromo cultural song called *geearsaa*. During social festivals such as daboo (Organized labor) ceremony and weddings, people usually enjoy with *geearsaa*. *Geearsaa* (cultural song) in Oromo society is very influential song through which the society expresses its joy, anger, heroism, hardworking, fear, contempt and other feelings. During such occasions, in the presence of *ajjeesaa* (killer) no one sings the *geearsaa* before him. If there are two or more *ajjeesaas* on the occasion, their order of song (*geearsaa*) is in the order of the type of animals they killed which corresponds with the rank identified above. If there are individuals who killed similar animal type the sex of the animal killed matters i.e. those who killed male animals have a preceding order. Furthermore, if any overlapping occurs concerning to the sex of the killed the time of killing, then age of the killers (*ajjeesaa*) are considered. It is after all *ajjeesaas* (killers) sung that others can sing. It is a symbolic expression for heroism or patriotism.

The status of *Ajjesaa* (killer) can help as means of resource mobilization. Because in his return from forest after killing, the *ajjeesaa* organizes ceremony and the community provides him with different gifts including livestock. This enables him to have economic prosperities which help his family as a "take of" mechanism to break out vicious circle of poverty.

Females are not allowed to kill these animals. The assumption is that females do not go to the bush and stay for long period of time. If, in any way, female kills one of the above mentioned animals, it will not be considered as animals of *ajjeesaa*. Because killed by female means that animal is weak, therefore, it is no longer an indication of heroism. This is the direct indication for existence of male supremacy in relation to gender issues in the area. Even some times males who did not kill animals are insulted by those who killed as "atimoo dhiira? Kangaaf tokko illee gadii baateehinbeeknee". This is literally to mean "are you a male! You are someone who has not gone for hunting even for a day!"

Women usually encourage their husbands to go to a bush and kill big animals because being *ajjeesaa's* (killer's) wife provides them with different social privileges like respect in place of water fetching, fuel wood collection and other social gatherings. She will not wait to fetch water in water springs. If someone who goes to a bush to kill animals and fail to kill while his friends do, it

would be a point of insult during conflict with some other men. The insult is not only from other individuals but sometimes from his wife particularly in a situation of conflicts.

Although the informants identified the degradation of forest as the major cause for wiping out of both edible hunted animals, killing of animals for the sake of both economic and social advantages have also contributed for the reduction and wiping out of wild animals in the area.

### Sources of Traditional Medicines

In a society where “modern” health service is not so much available and accessible, the role played by traditional medicine is very determinant. Since the availability of health institutions in the research area is minimal and limited to the level of health clinics and even those are far from the community at large, the reliance on traditional health system is undeniable fact. These traditional medicines are obtained from nearby forest plants. Parts of medicinal plants which are identified by both key informants and group discussants include leaf, root, stem, and fruit. They identified some of these medicinal plants together with the diseases they cure. This is summarized in table 1.

### Sources of Cotton and Pepper Production

The other type of livelihood that the nearby highland Oromo were using at AndodeDicho area, based on temporary settlement and frequent visit, was cultivation of cotton and pepper. Since cultivation of cotton and pepper are feasible in the lowland area, people those who do not have large size of land went to the lowland and produce cotton and pepper. Due to high fertility of the soil, the cultivations were based on hoe digging. They used to produce cotton and pepper and took to the highlands either to sale with cash or to exchange with crop. This source of livelihood enabled the community to supplement the highland farming economy in general and to buy livestock in particular. One of my Oromo key informants, who explained this by saying:

*“Akaakayyuu fi abbooliinkeenyii isumaan horiihoratan (bitatan). Yeroosanamidhaa nnyaatafmaleegaragabaatihingeessamu. Jirbi fi filanjoogabattiguramuturan.”*

This can be translated literally as: Our grandfather and our fathers bought cattle by selling cotton and pepper. At that time crop was

produced only for household food consumption, no one took it to a market to sale. Rather they took Cotton and pepper, to the markets. This indicates that to what extent the life of the nearby highland Oromo’s life was depended on the Andode Dicho’s natural forest and land before their permanent settlement to the area.

### Abbaa Lagaa Institution

The very critical role of customary institutions is ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources by even improving its potential use for the next generation. For an Agency for International Development concept paper as cited by Robert Netting, sustainability is “the ability of an agricultural system to meet evolving human needs without destroying and, if possible, by improving the natural resource base on which it depends” (2006).

*Abbaalagaa* (which literally to mean the owner of the river) institution is an Oromo institution which regulates forest land use including how to take care of the forest itself. Though the literal meaning of “*lagaa*” in Oromo language is river, conceptually *lagaa* also indicates distant i.e. the forest land is far from the village. In the same way, *abbaa* also has a literal meaning of fatherhood and conceptual meaning of “ownership”. Therefore, the conceptual meaning of *abbaalagaa* is the “owner” of the forest land which is located far from the village. Here again ownership does not indicate the exclusive right of owning the resource rather the right of regulating the resource. *Abbaalagaa* institution consists of council of three individuals. These are one *abbaalagaa* (the manager) of the council and two other individuals who are called *sadee*. The manger has an overall responsibility to manage /coordinate/ the forest land. The two persons i.e. “*sadees*” have their own responsibilities. One who is called *abbaamoggaa* (literally to mean side/ periphery) has the responsibility of controlling and supervising of *moggaa* (side). The other individual who is called *abbaagommoo* (which literally to mean adjoining width periphery of the land) has the responsibility of controlling and supervising the *gommoo* (width) of the forest land.

The function of *abbaalagaa* institution is based on the assumption that forests and forest lands of the vicinity are “common property resources” of the local communities. As there are different compounds or villages *igandaas/* in Oromo settlement pattern, forests and forest land located near each village are the common resources (*qabeenyawalee*) of that village. These common resources are regulated by local institutions. This

**Table 1:** Medicinal plants and the diseases they claim to cure.

No	Name of the Plant	Part Used	Medicinal Uses
1	<i>Meexxii (rytigynaneglecta)</i>	Internal part of the stem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malaria</li> <li>• Appetizer</li> </ul>
2	<i>Sokottee</i>	Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rabies</li> <li>• Toothache</li> </ul>
3	<i>Bakkannisa (carton macrostachys)</i>	Leaf Root	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Hookworm</li> <li>• Gonorrhoea</li> </ul>
4	<i>Hadamii (Euphorbia candelabrum)</i>	Fluid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gonorrhoea</li> <li>• Hookworm</li> <li>• Rat</li> <li>• Roach killer</li> </ul>
5	<i>Waleensu (Erythrinaabssinica)</i>	Internal part of the stem	Veterinary medicine
6	<i>Haarbuu (ficussur)</i>	Fruit	Hookworm

is different from what Hardin (1968) as cited in Carenea (2000), describes as the “tragedy of commons”. It does not operate in the way what he assumes. Rather it has its own mode of operation on the basis of its own rules and regulation of resource distribution, control, labor mobilization and access rights. Accordingly, it has principles of land distribution or access to land. Each and every one, who has got access right to land, has to abide to the institution’s rules and regulations which are intended to maximize common benefit of the group, unlike Hardin’s claim that individuals do to maximize their own advantage which negatively affects the group’s interest.

According to my Oromo informants, *abbaalagaa* institution is responsible for forest land distribution. This forest land is locally called “*lagaciraa*” which is to mean land for slash and burn. Members of the council have to identify appropriate land for slashing. During land selection different factors are considered. Some of them are: whether the land is covered with dense forest and big trees, whether the land has had appropriate period of “rest” for recovery, whether the land is mountainous or not, whether it is accessible or not, whether very dangerous animals are inhabited there or not, and whether the forest land is a place of worship or not. All these factors have to be seriously investigated before the area is selected for slash and burn for the villagers.

Needless to say, due to availability of large land size and small population size, in the past shifting cultivation was common agricultural practices in the area. Though the basic thing during shifting cultivation to be considered as land recovery is soil fertility, tree and tree branches are additional conditions to be considered during ‘recovery

analysis’. That is to say, during slash and burning big trees are not uprooted but their branches are cut down. These branches use for different purposes such as house and fence constructions and fuel wood. Hence, branches of trees need time to grow up and mature. The local community claims that if branches are cut down before they mature, the whole tree may dry out. Thus, it is not only the loss of branches but also the loss of the whole tree. Therefore, fallowing was not only mechanism of increasing soil fertility but also sustainable use of trees.

After identifying forest land, which is favorable for cultivation, the *abbaalagaa* council distributes it for the villagers. They use *hiddaa* (rope like natural plant) to measure the land. They share the land equally except the two sides (*moggaas*) which is usually given to volunteers. Because these sides need more labor force than the other parts of the land, households with relatively larger family size, and relatively with small land size from highland takes these *moggaas* on voluntary basis. Therefore, the size is greater than the normal land size given to the other villagers. This is to compensate the location disadvantages of these *mogga* land plots.

Furthermore, fences of the two periphery sides (*mogga*) are constructed by all the groups mobilized by *abbaamogga* but not only by the holders. This is also another form of compensation for the *mogga* takers and to encourage individuals to do in the future too. The adjoining parts of the land are fenced by each holders of the land. This is not necessarily depending on the will of the holder but enforced by the *abbaalagaa* institution for the group’s interest. In other words, this side is supervised by *abbaagommoo*, because everybody has responsibility of fencing his side. The logical

assumption behind this action is that if one part of the forest land is not fenced or not protected, the danger is not only to that particular land but also to the whole land. Therefore, *abbaagommoo* of this institution has responsibility of supervising and checking for the protection of the group's property.

The *abbaalagaa* institution also regulates the time and the way of slash and burning the forest land. Everybody is advised to take care of the adjacent forest while preparing the land for cultivation. Untimely slashing is forbidden. Enforcing mechanisms are social sanctions which range from ostracizing, fining both in cash and kind to exclusion from the group so that he will no more be given the land. Someone who is excluded from one *abbaalagaa* will not get entrance to other villages (*abbaalagaa*) because, information about that person disseminate soon. This is how *abbaalagaa* institution was functioning in the study area.

## CONCLUSIONS

This specific research has identified how the Oromos being guided and regulated by the indigenous institutions managed and made sustainable use of forest and forest resources. Although there had been no planned settlement in Andode Dicho area, there are many Amhara settlers in the area. As explained during group discussions, until 1986/87 there were only twenty households of Oromo society in Andode Dicho area. The area was covered with forest and semi-forest savanna grasses. It was at about 1980s that the first permanent Oromo settlers moved to the Andode Dicho area from the nearby highlands and semi-highland areas. After 5-7 years (1987) Walloyes from AaroAdisalem and Gutin area (Mender 3) migrated to AndodeDicho area. Five years after the arrival of Wallyes,(1992)Gojjames came to settle in the area. This has created stiff competition and congestion on the land holdings among the Oromo, and Amharas (inter-ethnic). This competition has had negative impact on the sustainability of the forest resources. The conflict and the competition which is created as a result of high population resettlement in the area did create not only forest degradation but also dismantling of the local institutions that used to govern forest resources.

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