

# “Nature Intact: Indigenous Common Grazing Land Management in Waraza Lasho Kebele of Sodo Zuria Woreda, Wolaita Zone, South Ethiopia”

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## Abstract

This study deals with the Wolaita people’s indigenous knowledge and its implication in the practices of natural resources management, with the focus on the preservation of common grazing land. The Wolaita is known for huge grazing land that has been serving as main source of green fodder for cattle in the region where cattle play pivotal roles in securing livelihoods. The grazing land has been kept intact until very recently but its size has considerably shrank with the building of hydro-electric substation in the area. The study has employed qualitative research methods. Data has been gathered through data collection instruments such as interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation, case study, and secondary data analysis. Both primary and secondary data sources were used to compile the data for the study. Accordingly, the traditional or indigenous common grazing land management in Waraza Lasho kebele, Wolaita zone is analyzed in this paper by applying the analytical frame work. Hence, the factors behind the protection of the common grazing land are thoroughly and systematically analyzed. The paper, therefore mainly deals with three central issues. These are: factors responsible for preservation of the common grazing land, incentives for different classes of actors and the outcome obtained following the incentives with the benefits it brings. The first section of the paper begins with discussing factors that backed the continued existence of the common grazing land in the community despite the ever increasing urban expansion. These includes attributes of the common grazing land, attributes of the community, and attributes of the rules and institutions constituting the traditional management of the common grazing lands. Following this, the incentives which are created for different classes of actors were assessed and then followed by the outcomes that come along with the incentives. The study has depicted that the time tested traditional rules, attributes of the community and the grazing land as well as the incentives has contributed to conservation of the common grazing land.

**Keywords:** Common grazing land, Indigenous methods of conservation, Environment

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## Introduction

Environment, society and culture are inextricably interlinked entities. Understanding the dynamics and static of their interactions is essential for any meaningful national, regional or local socioeconomic development activities (Zerihun, 2005: 3). The indigenous methods of natural resource conservation is nowadays at most interest of the public and policy firms for it plays pivotal role unfolding the key attributes that keep resources intact in the light of ever growing natural resource depletion of all types.

Indigenous knowledge are those knowledge which are considered as the social capital of the poor. It is their main asset to invest in the struggle for survival, to produce food, to provide for shelter and to achieve control of their own lives (Senanayake, 2006). This time-tested indigenous knowledge has helped a lot the community in adapting their environment and best harvesting it. The knowledge is deep rooted in the community’s value toward the environment, that have passed through generations. It is through this knowledge, shared beliefs and assumptions that a community maintains its cohesiveness and ensures the well-being of its members as well as its surrounding environment including common grazing lands.

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 23% of the world’s poor, the majority of who depend on livestock for some part of their livelihoods (Thornton et al.,2002). This is also true to Ethiopia, a predominantly agrarian country where agriculture is mainstay of majority of the population. Crop cultivation and cattle rearing still remains to be main source of livelihood to majority of the country’s population. Therefore, the traditional ways of preserving common grazing land has huge implications for the well-being of these cattle that are integral part of rural people’s livelihood.

As enhancement of agricultural productivity is thus an important condition for alleviating rural poverty, and due to it increases household income and stimulating the growth of non-farm activities among rural households (Beyan *et al*, 2018), preserving common grazing land has many implications in this regard. As the country’s non-mechanized agriculture is mainly dependent on oxen, preserving rangeland has got paramount importance. In addition to that, livestock population has got economic and social value among the rural people and preserving grazing land for them mean a lot as far as this is considered. This study, therefore, tries to elucidate

how indigenous ways of preserving grazing lands helps to keep nature intact in the light of ever shrinking size of the resource across the globe.

### Materials and Methods

Cresswell (1994) defines Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. This study has employed qualitative research methods. Data has been gathered through data collection instruments such as interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation, and secondary data analysis. Both primary and secondary data sources were used to compile the data for the study. Semi-structured questions have been developed so as to collect the data from the research subjects. In-depth interviews were held with key informants selected on purposive base by the researcher based on their prior knowledge in relation with the objective of this study.

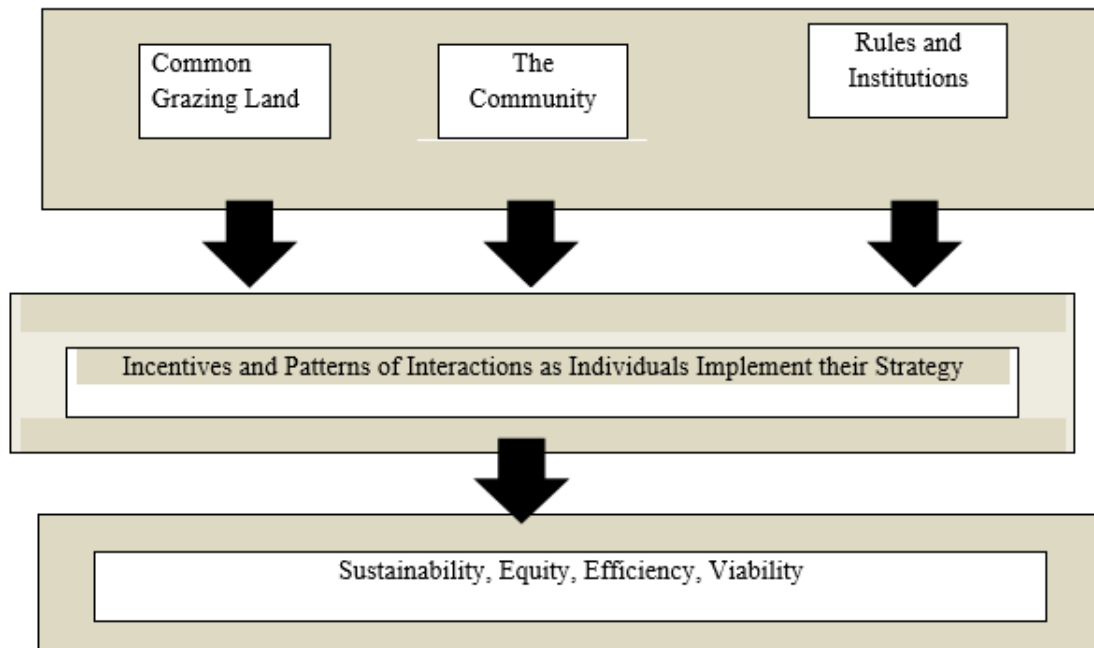
### Findings

#### Factors behind the preservation of the Communal Grazing Land

Factors that contributed to the preservation of communal grazing land in Waraza Laho kebele are attributed to the traditional management of the grazing land as common a goods which was made possible by three groups of interdependent factors. These factors are:-

- Attributes of the grazing land and grazing fodders themselves
- Attributes of the community that manage the grazing lands, and
- Attributes of the rules constituting the traditional management

Fig. 1.1 The Analytical Model



#### Attributes of the grazing land and grazing fodders

The preservation of the common grazing land and their management as common property was made possible primarily owing to the characters of the common grazing land itself. That is, due to attributes of the land this is covered by the grazing fodders, on one hand and, the attributes of the grazing fodders themselves on the other.

As it was replied by kebele administrator, the land on which the grazing fodders exist is located on 'chefe' (muddy soil) which makes crop cultivation difficult. Though the area is covered with various types of grasses, the soil has been found unsuitable for farming. No doubt that this poses problem in cultivation activities there by contributing to sustained life of the grazing land. This is due to the fact that if the land where the grazing pasture found was suitable for crop cultivation, the people could have cultivated it since majority of them depends on agriculture as means of earning their livelihood.

One of the interviewee has discussed the issue as the following:

*Though many of the farmers in the locality are suffering from fragmented farm land that has resulted in low production, the grazing land couldn't be used for agricultural purpose for it appears to be muddy. If the land was suitable for farming purpose, I affirm you that it has long been used and you wouldn't see any grazing fodders here.*

The cattle have got a paramount importance for farmers of the locality. They are fundamental means in carrying out cultivation thereby ensuring farming as primary means of earning livelihood. Since agriculture is the mainstay of the population of the *kebele* and since it is possible only using oxen, the green fodder remains to be vital in order to perform the cultivation. Ninety one percent of the total population derives its livelihood from agriculture. Due to this crucial importance, the community pledges all possible sacrifice and effective means so as to preserve the grazing land.

In addition to this, farming system in the Waraza Lasho kebele is mixed farming, compromising both cropping and livestock rearing. They rear cattle, sheep, goats, horses, asses and mules. For the purpose of the rearing activity, the community using their indigenous knowledge, designed effective ways, though traditional, so as to conserve the communal grazing lands. Therefore, the economic value of the grazing lands is one of the attributes which enabled the protection of communal grazing lands from overgrazing and depletion. A 50 years old women who is head of her household has expressed how important the grazing land for their cattle:

*The 'chariya' (grazing land) has been very crucial in providing our cattle with green fodders which is very good in quality and for which we don't pay anything. We would have suffered a lot if we did not have the grazing land since nowadays it is tough to get green fodders even by buying it. Whenever I see my cattle returning to home with their full stomach, I feel very thankful to have 'chariya' near our locality.*

### **Attributes of the Community**

The attributes of the community itself has made such a vital contributions to the enforcement and maintenance of the rules constituting the management of the common grazing lands thereby contributing to sustained life of common grazing land. Among the primary attribute of the the community that lays conducive ground to the protection of the common grazing land is the cohesiveness of the community.

As social cohesion is a key to survival of rural people, it is also true to the Waraza Lasho community. In the social life of the communities in the Wolaita, particularly Waraza Lasho people enjoy pleasure and share grievance together. They have strong social capital and the cohesiveness of the community is the main input to enforce the rules of traditional administration. Decisions are arrived at by consensus of elders. People of each community help each other. They share in common at times of pleasure: wedding, traditional festival and collective works; again during difficulties: they care for sick; reconstruct houses burnt and so many philanthropic activities for their members.

One of the FGD discussant has forwarded the following idea regarding the social solidarity and cohesiveness of the community:

*I feel very close and attached to the people in my locality. They have been always there whenever I needed help. Whether it is happiness or grief, we totally involve in it, we share it. I can't imagine my life without them. I feel that they are a good asset whom I shall love and trust.*

In addition to the above case, members of the community used to believe in common ancestry; identify themselves with hereditary spiritual leaders called 'Eeka' who are also considered as lord of certain type of natural resources: forest patches, grazing areas, hills or even wild life and others. The Eeka transcends over generations and believed to have the power to kill people who don't comply with the rules and customs of the community. This local belief system, though now has is being replaced by Christian and other modern religious beliefs, is actually one of the attributes of the community playing crucial role in protecting the grazing lands. The collective consciousness allowed these people to develop the sense of "we-ness", to abide the community members to the norms and mores of the community and to out-cast the deviant ones.

Exhibiting the essential features of society with mechanical solidarity, the community is known for its homogeneity in-terms occupation, belief systems, customs, wealth and other characters. This has a lot to do with protecting the grazing land area. For instance, in terms of occupation, since almost all of them are engaged in either crop cultivation or cattle rearing, they know well how important is preserving the grazing land to obtain green fodders for their cattle. Therefore, they stand together any external force that threatens the common grazing land. This idea has been stressed by one of the FGD participants:

*We as community are well committed to preserve the common grazing land for it is not only a source of green fodders for our cattle, but it is place to celebrate festivals, a place where our children use as play grounds and has got many more benefits. So we don't tolerate any one encroaching the grazing land for his personal interests. But we have almost lost every part of it with the construction hydroelectric station in many part of the grazing land.*

In addition to these, one of the key aspect of social structure held by the people is the notion of gome (bad fortune) as traditional belief system, which is instrumental in creating pattern of human life and thought. There are different norms judged in the belief of the society as unlawfully; any action against traditionally established norms is said to be gome, which can be followed by misfortunes to the community as a whole or individuals. It is believed in the traditional faith that committing a 'gome' leads individuals to lead miserable life, to lose their

beloved children or even cause death to them. For instance, encroaching communal grazing lands could be 'gone' and may cause muddle to their life. This traditional belief system is also one of key factors in saving the communal grazing lands from depletion.

### **Attributes of the Rules Constituting the Traditional Management**

As it was mentioned by Yeraswork (2000), the rule which govern the natural resource of a given community need to be clear and unambiguous so that all community members can understand it easily, can be enforced effectively. Accordingly, the rules or institutions in the Waraza Lasho community which governs the grazing lands are clear and not complicated so that every member of the community can well understand it and abide by the rules. It clearly states the access to use the resource and possible ways of exclusion from using the resources. This idea has been elaborated by one of the FGD discussant as the following:

*We have clearly set how to use the common grazing land. Any member of the community can use the grazing land as green pasture for their cattle but other activities like farming or building houses are forbidden. Everyone is expected to protect the grazing land from any form of harms.*

People of the community highlands have traditional institutional, structure, which have made traditional laws alive. There are rules of resource use and protected the fragile environment of highland from degradation that could have faced heavy pressure from human population. These rules are relatively fair and treat the members of the community equally. Accordingly, the area under communal grazing land is used by its community or users in three different ways. A certain part of this is allocated for annual grazing without enclosure in the rainy season. The second part adjacent to settlements and about half of the area is assigned to enclosure for rainy season and used for open grazing for the rest of the year. The third type includes two patches reserved for the whole year for cutting fodder only and a certain part of this division is assigned for collective traditional fattening on which every year not less than oxen seven allowed for free grazing. All community members are expected to make the use of the resources as per these ways.

The management system of the grazing land is very effective because the rule provides resource a demarcated boundary and also organized by group jurisdiction. A group that is entitled to use the resource is an entity that existed having interaction with the environment as one cohesive community for long time. The people set aside the area as common and control its illegal appropriations through sanctions. By doing so, the rule that constitutes the traditional common grazing land management avoided the potential conflict that could occur among the community members and it was efficient in enabling them preserve their common property resource, which is common grazing land.

The other attribute of the rules that contributed to the protection of communal grazing land is that the rules as well as their enforcement were locally and traditionally evolved practices which allowed them to be perceived as legitimate regulations. As it was reported by the study informants, the operational rules are easily enforceable by members themselves, as they sustained through generations. Therefore, they are obeyed by members in the same way as other norms of the community. This in turn made the preservation of the communal grazing land possible. One interviewee has reported the following regarding the issue:

*It has been long since the rules have been working in conserving the grazing land. Everyone knows details regarding what to do and what not to do. The time-tested rules are well-understood by every member of the community and they been passing through different generations.*

### **Incentives**

There are various incentives for members of the community created by attributes of the common grazing land, attributes of the community and attributes of the working rules and institutions.

### **Attributes of the Common Grazing Land as source of Incentives**

Being a common property resource for the community, the common grazing land has various economic and social benefits for Waraza Lasho community which acted as incentives to preserve the source. Among the benefits, the first one is that the common grazing land plays a key role in ensuring earning of livelihood for the people. Since majority of the community members lead their life by cultivating crops and the cultivation is using oxen, obtaining green fodders is crucial issue for the community. Therefore, the community badly needs the common grazing land which serves as source of green fodders for the community.

In addition to crop cultivation, the people of the community engage in rearing cattle to supplement their subsistence. The cattle serves source of milk, cheese, and butter for the people. They also fatten oxen and either sell for market value or use for home consumptions, particularly when there is public festival or rituals. These are crucial factors that acted as incentives for the community to preserve the common grazing lands.

### **Attributes of the Community as source of Incentive**

The Waraza Lasho community is known for having common values, mores, standards, religious beliefs and

practices, traditions. These are factors served as bond in integrating the community members altogether. The collective consciousness held by the community about their social and economic life and about interaction with the surrounding environment enabled them to stand together in protecting their common property resources. This sameness of the community is therefore a key factor as source of incentives to act in preserving the common grazing land.

### **Working Rules and Institutions as source of Incentives**

The very nature of the rules, that is their stability and durability therefore source of sense of security and trust, triggered the community members to take action in conserving their grazing lands. In addition to this, relative fairness of the rules motivate to members of the community to be abided by the rules. These rules are acting as guard in protecting the common grazing land which is very closely related with the community's livelihood. Therefore, the benefit which it yields served as source of incentives for members of community in taking actions.

### **Outcomes**

Incentives emerged from the attributes that are discussed above; yield various benefits to the community in general and to each member in particular. This can be vied in terms of sustainability, equity, efficiency, and viability. The common grazing land management, first of all, ensured the sustainable environmental protection as well as earning subsistence. The protection of common grazing lands minimized the threat of loss of pastures for their cattle at the same time protecting their environment from degradation in sustainable way.

The traditional conservation of the common grazing land along with the incentives created by the resource and community, and rules which it constitutes, is efficient in enabling the community to lead a decent life and to protect their environment. It also ensured equity via its rules which clearly spells out access to the resource or exclusion from using it and means through this is enforceable.

### **Conclusion**

As to the findings of the study, the local people perceive that the communal usage under the indigenous management system has helped for sustainability of resources. But the interest of local people has not been recognized by formal institutions. Because of extension interventions and other external pressures traditional resource usage has been threatened. In addition to this, with increasing expansion of towns and other intended governmental projects, the size of common grazing land is diminishing overtime.

With increasing pressure from the population growth, the demand for farming land and fuels in the community is increasing from time to time. This in turn became a trigger factor in leading people to encroach the grazing areas for crop cultivation. This is the challenge to the indigenous management system of common grazing land in the community. Though the land covered by the pasture is rugged and not suitable for cultivation, increasing diminish of cultivable land is leading people to invade into grazing lands.

In addition to this, as the people are entering the grazing land areas and converting them to farming lands, the diminished size of the grazing land became susceptible to the problem of overgrazing and land degradation. The problem then calls for close and due attention of concerned bodies before it is worsen.

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