

Land enclosures for changing livelihoods: An adaptive strategy for environmental and institutional changes among the Hamar

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Place of fieldwork: Hamar district, South Omo Zone, Southwest Ethiopia

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Research background, purpose, and aim

I conducted ethnographic field research in the South Omo Zone of Southwest Ethiopia among the Hamar people in the dry lowlands of the district.

The focus of my research was rangeland resource management and farming-related development activities. My other objectives included monitoring and documenting changes in communally managed enclosures, identifying grazing-based conflicts and their respective resolutions, and following up on new village establishments and schooling activities.

Results and achievements of my fieldwork

In order to fulfill the objectives mentioned above, I undertook an internship during the course of my research that focused on natural resource governance (particularly grazing land), interviewed key informants, and held focus group discussions while regularly noting changes to my previous observations. My communications and observations indicated that communally managed enclosures whose initiative originated from the local people turned out to be successful in rehabilitating degraded lands, providing grasses for livestock, and creating income-generating opportunities for the people involved.

Even in the presence of external pushes from government law-enforcement officers in the district that resulted in damage to the communally enclosed land and sowed mistrust among the people, I witnessed the people's commitment to recovering from both a broken deal and a broken spirit and continuing their efforts.

Implications and impacts on future research

The impact of this research will be to provide a showcase proving that pastoralists who manage communal rangeland systems can create beneficial outputs that rehabilitate their degraded ecology and enable them to generate income to support their livelihoods, despite the long-lived notion that associates the commons with tragedy. This research will segue into new realms of analysis, where these success stories will be the subject of future academic research and debate. It is my intent to carry out such future research.