



Twenty Years to Nowhere: Property Rights, Land Management and Conservation in Ethiopia

Yeraswork Admassie, Yeraswork

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Preface

This study focuses on Ethiopia's attempt at introducing soil conservation and afforestation innovations aimed at reversing the process of degradation of its agricultural resource-base. It considers the tenure ambiguity, uncertainty, and insecurity stemming from the state ownership of land under which these innovations were attempted. It tells the story of how rural people responded to the project-induced adoption of measures to protect the land even though their holdings remained under a constant threat of reallocation. This story concerns issues arising from over-population, revolution, agrarian reform, population relocation, land reallocations, internationally financed projects, and not least, civil war.

Questions of soil conservation and afforestation, and land tenure are issues of fundamental importance to the millions of rural families in Ethiopia. In fact, in the long-run, they may be more important to the people of several Sahelian and Sub-Saharan African nations that have opted for state ownership of land. The study deals with the variety of ways in which institutional arrangements such as property rights regimes directly and indirectly influence the outcome of attempts at externally inducing innovations, and contribute in defeating the intentions of planners as well as their new strategies. In this study, I take exception to a good part of what the soil conservation and afforestation program in Ethiopia has done; but, in no way do I wish to question the personal motives of the overwhelming majority of the people that worked for it.

The present work is a cumulative product of my involvement with the study of the social aspects of environmental degradation and conservation issues spanning over the past 12 years. In the course of this period, I have been involved in a number of studies looking at different socio-economic aspects of soil conservation and afforestation in Ethiopia and, to a small extent, also in Kenya (see references).

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