

# **Institutional Factors shaping Coffee Forest Management in Ethiopia. The Case of Bonga Forest/Kaffa Zone.**

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## **Introduction**

Despite rapidly ongoing forest destruction in Kaffa Zone of South-western Ethiopia, primary moist forests are still the main natural production assets, since a great proportion of the population living close to forest patches depends on forests products. Particularly, non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as honey, 'wild' coffee, spices, fruits, and medicinal plants, are of high importance in this regard, both for home consumption and as a cash crop.

This paper focuses on institutional factors determining management of 'wild' coffee as a flagship NTFP. In order to avoid the loose and ideological term 'wild', in the following, the term 'forest coffee' is applied, which is understood to be simply 'coffee which is growing in the forest'. Kaffa is known as the place of origin of world wide *coffea arabica* gene-pool. To date, forests in Kaffa still accommodate patches of coffee in high genetic varieties, providing a valuable good, which recently gained increasing attention in domestic and international coffee business circles. Utilisation of forest coffee is predominantly undertaken in traditional management systems in which local peasants gather coffee cherries directly from naturally regenerating coffee populations in the forests. The intensity of human intervention reaches from

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simply annual harvesting, to clearing the undergrowth and pruning up to transplanting the seedlings.

Management of forest coffee, and forest resources in general, is not only determined by ecologic, economic, or demographic factors, but influenced by a heterogeneous set of institutional arrangements. They provide the “rules of the game” (North 1990) for human behaviour towards forests, both as enabling as well as constraining factors.

In this paper, institutions are grouped according to their genesis, whereupon traditional community-initiated institutions, governmental-initiated institutions and NGO-initiated institutions are distinguished. It is argued that traditional community-initiated and governmental-initiated institutions contradict and undermine each other, which results in a weakening of both. This local power vacuum promotes overuse of forest resource, and finally forest destruction. In order not to provide a sheer analysis of ‘what goes wrong’, subsequently, a NGO-driven ‘Participatory Forest Management’ project is briefly illustrated as an example of ‘what can be done’ to close the local power vacuum concerning forest resource use in Kaffa.

### **Feudalism, Revolution and Resettlement**

Prior 1974, a historically evolved feudal landlord system regulated resource management and property rights in Kaffa. Most forest land was legally possessed by landlords, who distributed long term use rights to local peasants living within or adjacent to the forests, and in turn received use ‘fees’ paid in kind (mainly in honey). The management of forest coffee and other forest products followed informal rules and regulations, traditionally laid down in the local institutional system.

After the revolution in 1974, the new military government, popularly known as the *Derg*, drastically altered the institutional setting in Ethiopia. The feudal landlord system was dissolved, landlords were disposed and, in 1975, the probably most ambitious land reform in Africa was carried out. It implied the nationalisation of all land holdings, whether farmland, grazing land or forests, and hence forest resources came under direct possession of the state, which evoked manifold long standing negative impacts on the relationship between government and local communities (Pankhurst 2002).

Another historical event that considerably changed forest management in Kaffa Zone, were governmentally-initiated resettlement programmes in the 1980s. As a

respond to famine, people from drought-stricken areas of Ethiopia were resettled to more fertile and widely forested areas of the country, including Kaffa. During the 1985-88 settlement programme about 50.000 households with approximately 250.000 people were brought to Kaffa.<sup>2</sup> (Alemneh 1990). The influx of allochthonous<sup>3</sup> new settlers changed ethnic and institutional composition and put additional pressure on Kaffa forests, not only because of the pure number of new settlers, but also because they appeared to be less bound to the traditional forest resource management institutions.

### **Traditional community-initiated Institutions in Bonga Forest/Kaffa Zone**

Empirical research conducted in Yeyebitto *kebele*<sup>4</sup>, which covers a part of Bonga Forest and is inhabited by the autochthonous ethnic groups of Mandjah and Kaffa as well as the allochthonous Kambata which were resettled in the *Derg* time, revealed that despite governmental intervention, in practice, traditional community-initiated institutions from prior 1974 remained active to a large extend. After landlords have been disposed, peasants informally continued to 'own'<sup>5</sup> their forests plots and continued to assign use rights. Forest 'ownership' is thereby authorised by traditional community-initiated institutions such as the 'the elderly' and *iddir*<sup>6</sup> which guard forest management and serve as conflict resolution bodies.

Bonga Forest is almost entirely divided into plots informally 'owned' by autochthonous peasants living adjacent to the forest. Plot size varies from approximately one to fifteen hectares. Generally, the Mandjah, the traditional hunters and beekeepers (Hartmann 2004), 'own' larger plots than the Kaffa people, and the new settlers are predominantly non-forest 'owners'. Appropriation of plots predominantly takes place by patrilinear inheriting, but there is evidence that forest plot 'ownership' is also subject to disposal. Plot distribution pattern principally reflect status quo from End of the feudal area, and passed last 30 years in a status of tolerated illegality.

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers apply to the former Kaffa region, which also includes areas presently part of Maji and Jimma Zone.

<sup>3</sup> In the following, the terminology of autochthonous and allochthonous will be applied, understood as "native population", and "population that arrived from outside", respectively.

<sup>4</sup> *Kebele* is the smallest governmentally defined administrative unit in Ethiopia.

<sup>5</sup> The notion 'to own' refers to the perception of forest users who literally allude to 'I own this forest plot'.

<sup>6</sup> *Iddir* is a traditional community insurance institution with high levels of formality, e.g. definite membership and written by-laws.

Property rights very much depend on the particular features of the forest resource. Which forest resources are individual property, common property or open access, and how severe violations are prosecuted varies significantly. Nevertheless, when analysed in detail, it became clear that different local stakeholders perceive these traditional forest property rights differently. The following table presents the understanding of four stakeholders Mandjah (forest 'owners'), Kaffa (forest 'owners'), new settlers (non-forest 'owners'), and *kebele* administration concerning the status of forest resource property rights in Bonga Forest. The forest resources are listed according to their importance for the forest user communities.

**Table 1: Traditional forest resource property rights in Bonga Forest**

	Mandjah, forest 'owners'	Kaffa, forest 'owners'	New settlers, non-forest 'owners'	<i>Kebele</i> administration
Honey (hang beehives)	EXCLUSIVE Share-cropping	EXCLUSIVE Share-cropping	EXCLUSIVE Share-cropping, ( <i>'if the owner is serious'</i> )	EXCLUSIVE Share-cropping
Forest coffee	EXCLUSIVE	EXCLUSIVE (in productive areas)	OPEN ACCESS ( <i>"sometimes the owner complains"</i> )	EXCLUSIVE
Firewood	EXCLUSIVE	OPEN ACCESS (for personal need)	OPEN ACCESS	OPEN ACCESS (for personal need)
House construction materials	OPEN ACCESS (for personal need)	OPEN ACCESS (for personal need)	OPEN ACCESS (for personal need)	OPEN ACCESS (for personal need)
Spices	EXCLUSIVE	EXCLUSIVE Share-cropping	OPEN ACCESS	EXCLUSIVE

The table indicates that all stakeholders are concordant that hanging beehives in a particular forest plot is the exclusive right of the concerning forest 'owner'. Utilisation of forest coffee is dominated by exclusive individual ownership rights, with the exception that in new settlers' opinion, forest coffee is de jure individually owned, but de facto an open access resource. The collection of dry firewood is predominantly perceived to follow 'first come, first served' system, nevertheless Mandjah people

reported firewood to be exclusive. All stakeholders agree that use of timber for construction of community members houses is open access, whereas in the case of utilisation of spices, new settlers sight again oppugn with other stakeholders ones. In general, the table indicates that the more valuable a product is, the more limited is its open access character, and that allochthonous people's perception of traditional forest resource property rights differs from autochthonous ones. Moreover, it illustrates that the local *kebele* administration is well informed about traditional forest resource property rights, which leads the discussion towards the role of the government.

### **Government and the Forest**

Since nationalisation of land holdings in 1975, stewardship for forest resources is a governmental matter. Nevertheless, ever since, forest use and conservation has been a low priority topic in the governmental framework of Ethiopia, facing drastic financial and personnel shortage. For example, for the entire Southern Province (SNNPRS), which comprises largest areas of Ethiopian high forests, workforce responsible for natural resource conservation consists of two persons only, based at the Regional Agricultural Office in Awassa, the Province capital.

Moreover, governmental forest policy in Ethiopia primarily focuses on 'rigid conservation', hence on exclusion of human interference, rather than on management of forest resources. In this understanding, Ethiopian governments tried to implement different forest conservation approaches over time, the most ambitious started in the early 1980s with the incorporation of primary high forest areas as 'National Forest Priority Areas' (NFPA), and in 1986, also Bonga Forest was demarcated as "Bonga National Forest Priority Area" (BFCDP 1998). In practice, this conservation policy proved to be defectively implemented and for the most part did not go beyond signposting NFPA borders, since management plans were lacking or not realised, competences vaguely defined and structures dependent on inefficient governmental interference, and most importantly, needs and views of local communities were not taken into account (Teketay, Fetene et al. 2003).

### **Triangle of Contradictions: Autochthonous, Allochthonous, and Government**

In Bonga Forest, the consequences of absent, incongruous and defectively implemented governmental forest policies and land tenure rights, the weakening of

traditional forest management schemes, and the after-effects of governmental resettlement programmes contributed to enduring conflicts on forest resources. The perception of autochthonous settlers which traditionally 'own' forest plots, can be summarised in the statement "*The forest belongs to us, but government tries to take it over*", whereas allochthonous settlers (predominately non-forest 'owners'), perceive forest resources to be "*open for all*". From governmental bodies' point of view, the situation is perceived as: "*Peasants [all, autochthonous and allochthonous] destroy the forest and permanently violate forest conservation rules*". This triangle of contradictions determine stakeholders actions, thereby mutually undermining and weakening institutional clusters that formerly regulated or are intended to regulate human-forest relation. The outcome depicts an institutional vacuum in which forest management lacks definite and enforced institutions regulating access to resources. Forest resource property rights, - both, state property and individual property -, become de facto superseded by open access, and incentives to manage the forest resources in a sustainable manner are minimised. Consequently, this results in forest overuse and depletion.

### **What can be done? Challenging institutional change by means of NGO-driven participatory forest management**

As one reason for forest depletion we could identify the absence, malfunction, and non-enforceability of institutions of forest resource use and conservation, and the mismatch of community- and governmentally-initiated institutions. Therefore, institutional change has to be addressed as an 'adjusting screw' in order to promote sustainable forest use. In this regard institutional change is understood as a shift "in any rule affecting the set of participants, the set of strategies available to participants, the control they have over outcomes, the information they have, or the payoffs" (Ostrom 1990). In the following, a development project in which institutional change regarding forest resource management has been practically tackled will be discussed in detail.

Since the mid-1990s, several foreign donors engaged in forest management related projects in Ethiopia, all of them highlight a 'participatory' approach. Currently, five 'Participatory Forest Management' projects are conducted throughout Ethiopia.

In the following, chances and limitations of a NGO driven “Integrated Participatory Forest Management Project” located in Bonga Forest/Kaffa Zone are illustrated. Its underlying inspiration is to “harmonise rights of the communities to use and develop the forest together with the government’s mission of protecting natural resources” (Farm Africa 2003). The core initiative is the establishment of a “Forest User Society” (FUS) which gains governmentally authorised and exclusive use rights over a particular forest area and is bound by a Forest Management Plan, developed - under NGO-mediation - in negotiations between representatives of local governmental bodies and traditional community-initiated institutions, e.g. ‘the elders’ and *iddir*. The general approach of a NGO acting as a mediator has been perceived as promising particularly in the Ethiopian historical context and in comparison to solely governmentally executed forest conservation approaches. Nonetheless, limitations and difficulties have been encountered. The project has been exceptionally time taking and geographically limited, since it covers only 1200 ha, which seems marginal in comparison to an estimated annual deforestation rate of 22500 ha in Kaffa Zone alone (Bech 2002). Concerning the participatory approach, the question is posed who of the local community actually participates and makes the decisions in the Forest Management Plan preparation process, hence the project runs the risk that it may represent merely interests of certain groups of the community. This would create fractions of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, and conflicts that endanger participation, durability and enforceability of the project. Research identified autochthonous people (particularly Mandjah) who traditionally ‘owned’ the forest to be particularly vulnerable to constitute the group of ‘losers’. Nevertheless, the theoretical notion of ‘participation’ deserves particular (and critical) contemplation when applied in a heterogeneous traditional society of rural Ethiopia.

Notwithstanding that criticism, the project’s general approach is promising. Findings revealed that after the project’s commencement, Bonga Forest significantly recovered in terms of density and biodiversity. From an institutional point of view, the procedure of a NGO acting as a mediator between governmental and community interests can be assessed to be positive, especially in regard to the otherwise awkward relationship between governmental bodies and forest user communities in Ethiopia. NGOs are less historically burdened, and have more potential to manoeuvre independently and to arbitrate between the institutional settings than governmentally bound bodies. With the formation and empowerment of the FUS, the

local level institutional vacuum which has been identified to promote forest overuse in the last but one chapter, is filled with a legal authority. The FUS has high potential not only to authorise and organise forest management, but explicitly in regard to the valuable NTFP forest coffee, to address issues of processing and quality of cash crop forest products, and - by-passing conventional local markets - to link Bonga Forest users to eco and fair trade niche market entrepreneurs.

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