

# Landlessness, Land Access Modalities and Poverty in Rural Areas of Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Land is the most critical asset in rural Ethiopia. With ever-increasing number of population and sluggish rural transformation, the number of landless people has increased tremendously. There is a critical lack of comprehensive study on the extent of landlessness, its effects and coping mechanisms of the landless populations in the country. This paper explores landlessness, reasons for landlessness, its effects on the livelihood of the population; existing coping strategies and the relationships between landlessness and poverty in three selected *woredas* (districts) of Oromia National Regional State. Fieldwork for this study was conducted between September 2015 and February 2016. Interviews, focus group discussions and informal conversations were used to collect qualitative data, which were supplemented by results of numeric data which were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings showed that more than one-third of the rural farmers in Oromia were landless. Population growth was the most important reason for landlessness. Troubled livelihood, such as food insecurity, difficulty to send children to school, lack of land for erecting home on, lack of grazing land, and overall marginalization of the landless from taking part in rural development initiatives were among the effects of landlessness. In this paper, we argue that, in a context where a great mass of the people directly depends on subsistence agriculture and there is little industry to provide employment for a considerable part of the population, landlessness or near to landlessness is a critical problem that would have a far reaching implication, including political instability. It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to knowledge production and policy development on the governance of land and the landless population.

**Keywords:** Landlessness, land rent, sharecropping, Oromia National Regional State, poverty

## 1. Introduction

Land is the most crucial, if not the only, means of livelihood for poor rural farmers. According to CSA's report (CSA 2007), land is the mainstay of 85 percent of Ethiopia's population of nearly 100 million. Agriculture

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contributes about 90% of the exports; 70% of the raw materials utilized by domestic industries and, above all, employs 80% of the labor force (NBE 2015). Besides, there are emerging competing interests on land that aggravates the pressures on farmland. These include large-scale agro-investments, small-scale intensive agri-businesses such as floricultures; investments in other sectors that need agricultural raw materials (for instance, breweries), and industrial constructions and mushrooming of cities and towns. The pressure on land has also caused over-exploitation of the existing farmlands that result in environmental degradation.

On the other hand, population growth, coupled with a slow rural transformation and land degradation, leads to shortage of holdings and landlessness. Land redistribution has not taken place in Oromia since the fall of the Derg, which means that farming households that have been established since then have not received land officially. However, these are the most energetic working age population of the country. Indeed, the 2007 amended Oromia Land Proclamation (ORNS 2007) clearly states that “Redistribution of peasants’ or pastoralists’ or semi-pastoralists’ landholding shall not be carried out in the region, except irrigation land” (Article 14/1). In other words, this means that a son of a landless household, who has got married in the post 1991 period, inherits landlessness from his parents and further passes the same status over to his children. This inequality in accessing land shapes further inequalities that would perpetuate itself resulting in “unequal life chances” (Galtung 1969: 171) among the rural population.

Though land tenure has attracted multi-disciplinary studies (EEA 2002; Dessalegn 2004; 2008; Yeraswork 2000; Mamo 2006; Hussein 2001; Tesema 2002; Crummey 2000), landlessness and its implications on rural poverty in Ethiopia has not gained the attention it deserves. The former has been emphasized because land tenure and governance are the most contested and persistently debated public political agenda in the country. These debates have largely been revolving around public versus private land tenure options. The government argues in favor of state ownership stressing that privatizing land would encourage land sale, which in turn would expose smallholder peasants and pastoralists to land speculation, and eventually to

eviction as the well-off could opt for land grabbing. This, in turn, would lead to high numbers of unemployed and unemployable peasants and pastoralists. On the other hand, critics of the government's position argue that state ownership of land prevents the development of a land market and thereby holds down productivity (EEA 2002; Dessalegn 2004).

In response to both internal and external pressures, the government has introduced a land registration and certification program with a declared objective of easing tenure insecurity. The program entitles peasants to contract out land to those who invest on it but short of selling it. Unfortunately, again, the registration and certification program that has been praised for contributing to the enhancement of rural land dynamics (Deininger *et al.* 2009) has contributed little when it is seen in terms of providing landless households with access to land or improving their livelihood.

A few studies mentioned the problem of landlessness in the passing. Among these, Dessalegn (1994), Teferi (1994), Aklilu and Tadesse (1994) and Crewett and Korf (2008) are worth mentioning. According to Dessalegn (1994:2) high level of landlessness, unemployment and widening of rural poverty are eroding Ethiopian peasants' ability to withstand environmental stress and food shortages. Teferi (1994) provides evidence from North Shewa that redistribution within the "family farm" has fragmented the land to the level it could not be sub-divided anymore. Another insightful study (in the same area) is Aklilu and Tadesse's (1994) chapter on rapid population growth and access to farmland. They note that there is increasing fragmentation of farmland, and for those who are lucky enough to access land, especially for newly formed households, holdings have reached what Dessalegn calls "starvation plots" (Dessalegn 1994: 37). A study conducted in Haramaya *Woreda*, Oromia, (Crewett and Korf 2008) also reveals the inability of farmers to support their families through working on their plots due to the severe scarcity of land. In an attempt to fill the existing knowledge gap in this theme, this paper explores modalities of accessing land, the degree of landlessness and its impacts on rural poverty in Oromia National Regional State.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is a result of an exploratory study designed to contribute to our knowledge of land governance, landlessness and poverty. The study took place in three farming *woredas* (not pastoral and agro-pastoral communities) located in three different zones of Oromia National Regional States: Ada'a in East Shewa, Limo Bilbilo in Arsi and Kuyu in North Shewa. The *woredas* share similarities in fundamental elements such as the dominant role agriculture plays; high population density and prevalence of land shortage. The three *woredas* differ in their local dynamics. Ada'a, for instance, is a famous *teff* (*Eragrostis tef*) producing area in the country. Being not far away from Addis Ababa (over 40 Kms), the competition for land from a number of industries have enhanced external pressure on land. Limu-Bilbilo *woreda* is located about 220 kilometers southeast of Addis Ababa. It is a productive area with good moisture, less land degradation and good weather conditions. It is famous for its wheat and barley production. Kuyu is located 160 kilometers northwest of Addis Ababa on the main road to Gojjam. It is a farming *woreda* with a very limited off-farm employment opportunity. A long history of cultivation of land has resulted in severe land degradation and consequent less productivity (GIZ 2006).

We used mixed method where the data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions and informal conversations which were supplemented by quantitative survey. One *Kebele* was selected from each of the three *woredas* for the surveys and detailed study. In all the three *woredas*, the *Kebeles* were identified in consultation with the experts from relevant offices such as Land Administration and Environmental Protection, Agriculture and Rural Development and relevant officials from the *woreda* administration offices, of course, based on certain criteria. The role of cereal production in the *Kebele*, in contrast to livestock dependent lowland areas, relative population density and landlessness/land shortage were the main criteria. Accordingly, Ude from Ada'a, Limu-Dima from Limu Bilbilo and Wuye Gose from Kuyu were selected. One hundred households were selected from each *Kebele* through stratified random sampling as participants in the survey. We stratified the households of the *Kebele* into male-headed landholding households, female-headed landholding

households, and male- and female-headed landless households. The main objectives of such stratifications were to see the extent to which land ownership and landlessness could be associated with poverty, gender, economic class and the like.

### 3. Key Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 Mechanisms of holding land in Oromia

Looking into how the current landholders managed to obtain the land they were holding and using<sup>1</sup> would help us understand the historical background of land holding as well as the current dynamics of land governance. Current landholders in rural Oromia acquired the land they were currently holding through land redistribution, land allocation, inheritance, and gift<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1).

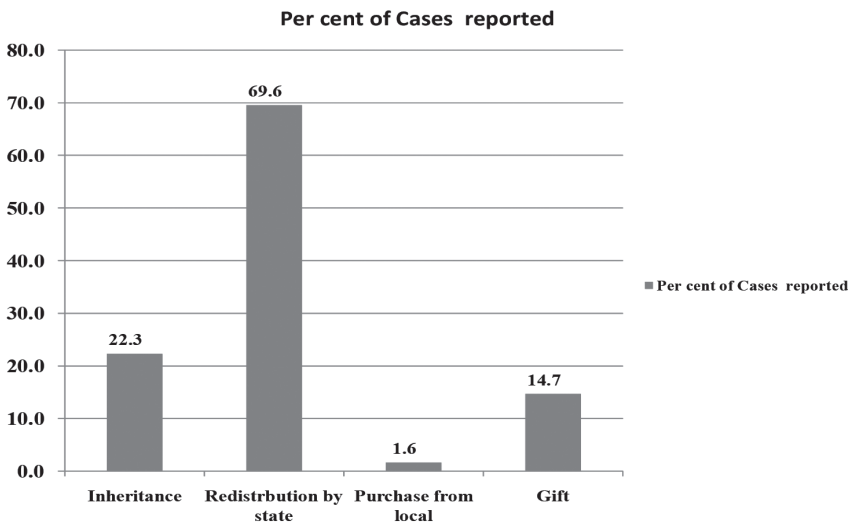


Figure 1. Mechanisms of Accessing Land

##### 3.1.1 Land redistribution

The general history and trend of land redistribution is more or less similar in all the three research sites. All peasants here were subject to the feudal-tenant system, which was prevalent during the imperial regime and benefited from the radical land reform of 1975 that resulted in land redistribution. According to our survey, 69.6% of the current landholders got all or part of their holding directly through land redistribution. This

showed how much the land redistribution was important not only in liberating the tenants from the feudal landholding system but also in establishing farmers' sustainable access to land. According to elders, who were part of the then "land redistribution committee", the size of land households acquired at that time primarily depended on household size. The households who had between two and six children were given 2.5 hectares. Our own survey, in which we tried to reconstruct the households' memory of their initial holding size during the first redistribution, supported the information provided in the interview. The average holding has now been reduced from 1.99 to 1.73 ha, and the mode declined from 2.5ha to 1.0ha.

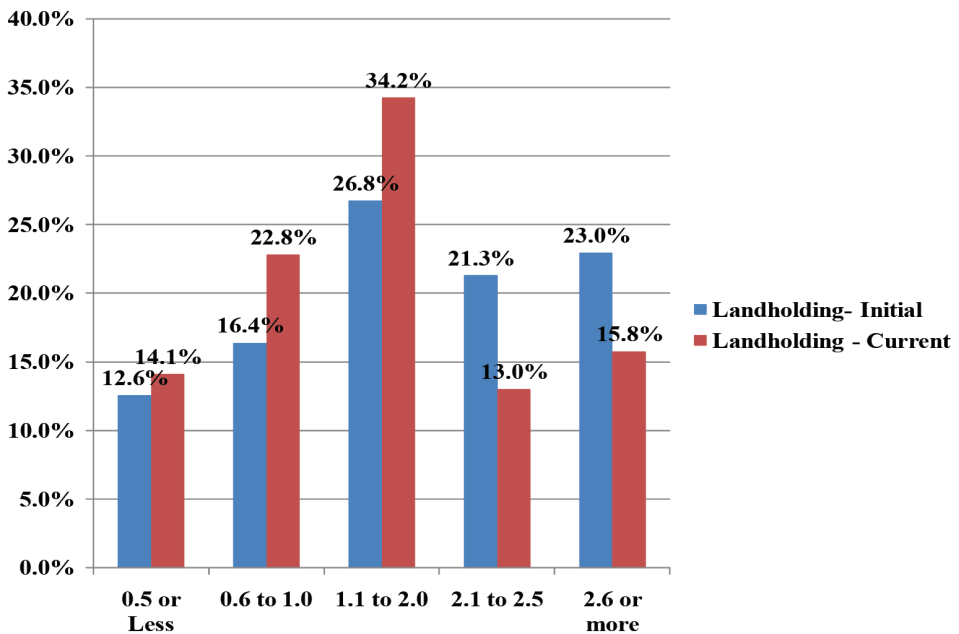


Figure 2. Comparison of the Initial and Current Landholding

Even though the farmers remembered the 1975 land redistribution as a turning point in the agrarian history of the country, the military regime (the Derg) subsequently made farmers' lives stressful by setting up Farmers Producers Cooperatives, which reduced the efficient use of the land they got as a result of the revolution. They were forced to pool their land and other productive resources together and work in common. They were not able to

produce what they wanted on their land. A few people were forced to forfeit their land rights when they refused to join the cooperatives, while a very few others managed to get unproductive marginal land as replacement for the fertile land taken by the cooperatives. Membership in the cooperatives was dynamic: many young ‘revolutionaries’ were allowed to join, which, in turn, allowed these young households, that had not got farmland during the initial land redistribution, to acquire land. Thus, throughout the Derg period, there were occasional land redistributions as well as other means of getting access to land.

The dismantling of the cooperatives brought about some readjustments in farmers’ holdings. In the three sites, the disbanding of the producers’ cooperatives in 1989 and the subsequent division of the land among members was considered the last land redistribution. This division of land was relatively smooth and accepted in most parts of Oromia. However, exceptionally, in Limu-Dima *Kebele* of Limu-Bilbilo *woreda*, disagreement over the division of the cooperative land resulted in a new redistribution in 1992. Similar to the initial redistribution, they used family size as a major criterion to determine the size of the land a household got. Members with two children and above were given two and half hectares. Households having less than two children got less than this, and a few households with very large families were given three hectares.

### ***3.1.2 Land allocation***

The informants recalled that the Derg regime had undertaken land allocation to landless individuals on several occasions. However, the major land allocation, according to our informants, took place in 1992 when all Kebeles in Oromia allocated communal grazing lands to former members of the Derg army. The size depended on the amount of available communal land in the Kebele. For instance, in Arsi, each demobilized soldier got 0.75 hectare while in Ada’a and Kuyu, they secured around half a hectare. Some of the land allocated was marshland, which was difficult to farm.

### ***3.1.3 Inheritance (‘dhaala’)***

Inheritance has become the major means of transfer of land from deceased parents to children or other dependents. This means upon the death of either

of the parents, the surviving ones divide up half of the family holding among their living children, keeping the remaining for themselves. When both parents die, the children partition all the land among themselves. This is in line with the Oromia Land Proclamation (ORNS 2007: 9/1), which states that “any peasant, pastoralist, or semi pastoralist landholder shall have the right to transfer his land use right to his family members who have inheritance right according to the law”. This gave inheritance a legal backing, which otherwise was undertaken according to local custom in the past. The proclamation set a priority among those eligible for inheritance. It states that priority should be given to those “... whose livelihood is entirely dependent on the income from that land, or [those who] have no other income ...” (ORNS 2007:9/2). Regardless of this provision, however, the division is often among all the living children, including sons and daughters, the unmarried and married, the landless and the landholder, the unemployed and employed. This article is, however, important as it is the main reference when claimants file a law suit in court.

Traditionally, daughters were often excluded from land inheritance. In this regard, the provision in the Oromia Land Proclamation (ORNS 2007: 5/2) that states “women have equal rights with men to possess, use and administer rural land” has a great bearing on women’s right to inheritance. Now, every woman claims the right to inherit her deceased parents’ land. This is also attributed to the increase in the value of land and the ease of managing inherited land for married women who live far away from where the land is located.

The formalization and legalization of renting out and sharecropping has made the management of the land easy. As a result of the combination of these factors, married daughters living far from their parents’ land, even if they have sufficient land for their livelihood, often claim their share of inheritance even if it is less than 0.25 hectare.

The landless youth complained that “no one shows mercy in land inheritance”.<sup>4</sup> Parents even exaggerated the problem saying that when one of the parents died, children quarrelled with the surviving parent over dividing up the land before the funeral service took place for the deceased.<sup>5</sup>



The landless youth, on the other hand, complained “they are damned to wait for the death of their parents to acquire a plot of land”. One of our informants in Limu-Bilbilo, said, “Imagine this is a highland where people live beyond hundred years. Should I wait for that long to inherit that piece of land?”<sup>6</sup>

The contribution of inheritance in accessing land and in the dynamics of rural landholding was also apparent in our survey. Among our landholding respondents, 22.3% secured their entire holdings through inheritance. This made inheritance the second most important means of acquiring land (second to redistribution). At *woreda* level, 40.4%, 16.5% and 11.7% of the landholding farmers in Kuyu, Limu-Bilbilo and Ada’a respectively got their current holdings through inheritance. Among those who had managed to obtain land through different ways, inheritance was again the most important means of increasing one’s holding. Out of those who claimed that their landholding had increased over time, 84.6% attributed it to inheritance.

The important role that inheritance played implied two things. First, land was currently concentrated in the hands of the elderly, the first generation that benefited from land redistribution. As a result, inheritance continued to play important role in the dynamics we saw around landholding as increasing number of children and dependents would benefit from inheritance in the years to come. Indeed, this was understandable as the major redistribution took place in 1975. Our FGD participants in Kuyu told us that, in one of their *garee* (“development group”), consisting of 29 households, six of them died of old age in the last two years and 10 of them were too old to cultivate their holdings, showing how much inheritance continued to be important in transferring land. Second, even though inheritance transferred land to young energetic and efficient people, land fragmentation, as a result of inheritance, had become the major challenge. The death of parents usually resulted in the division of their land into several pieces. In several interviews and FGDs, we heard about many households whose land had been sub-divided up among up to eight children on the death of the parents. This was not surprising, given that the average household size was 5.1 (maximum 15 and minimum one).<sup>7</sup> One story we heard in Kuyu was revealing:

Nagassa Dejene<sup>8</sup> and his wife passed away in 2014. They had six children and one hectare of land. All the six children claimed their share of the land including their sister who lives in Addis Ababa. Elders in the neighborhood who were familiar with the case initiated discussions on how to handle the inheritance. During the discussion, all the six children suggested dividing up the land among themselves. On the other hand, the elders told them that dividing up the land would make it literally valueless as the land would be fragmented into six uncultivable small pieces, and rather suggested to keep it together and discuss a mechanism of using it together. The children refused the elders' suggestions and submitted application to the Kebele administration which submitted their case, and the processes of arbitration they had gone through, to the Woreda Court. As their demand was clear, i.e., dividing up the land among themselves, the court ordered the Land Administration Office to cancel the holding certificate of the land and divide it up into six and register it under the name of the heirs. The Land Administration Office registered the land under their name, but informed them that they would not be given land certificate as it was too small to do so.<sup>9</sup>

This story might be considered an extreme case, not because of the claim and the number of the claimants, which was locally normal, rather due to the size of the land. Informants referred to this case as a good example of how much land fragmentation was becoming a problem, and how much it had become difficult for the elderly to arbitrate siblings during disputes over inheritance claims. The result of the partition made the land practically valueless as it was too small to cultivate. If, on the other hand, someone had a plot of land registered under his/her name, regardless of its size, he/she would be subject to tax and other related levies.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, when we visited the area in February 2016, two years after dividing up the land, the siblings had put the land back together under the guardianship of one of their brothers. They made a deal that this brother cultivated the land and the other five siblings covered the costs of inputs, and on harvest time, he took half and the remaining five shared the rest.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, fragmentation of the family land into less than what Dessalegn (1994) called "starvation plot" due to inheritance was a major worry. The Land Administration Office was trying to discourage fragmentation by denying those who obtained less than 0.5 hectares land certificates, but subjecting

them to taxation regardless of the amount of land registered under their name.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.1.4 Gift ('Kenna')**

Gift is a form of donating land by living parent/s or relatives to an individual or a household. Among the rural Oromo, it is customary for parents to give a piece of land to their sons upon their marriage, at least, for house construction. Parents declare this in public either in the evening of the marriage day or the following day. This type of gift, called a marriage gift, in some areas, was binding in the past. It was part of a package that parents donate to their sons during their marriage to help them establish and manage the new family.

At present, customary land gift has been diminishing due to many factors. The ever worsening shortage of land and the increasing value of land could be the underlying factors. But, the formalization of land gift<sup>13</sup> and the recent land certification scheme is said to have brought noticeable changes to this type of gift. Parents hesitate before donating land in a situation when the transfer is supported by legal provisions. Parents complained that customary land gift was a family matter and used to contribute to an extended family's relationship, while at present, their sons were so assertive that they immediately requested their parents to formalize the customary gift before the law. "Once they obtain the certificate," said the parents, "their married sons feel like 'landlords' and never care about their parents". Therefore, instead of donating land, parents allowed their married sons to construct their houses in the family's homesteads, keeping their sons relationship to the land dubious. In other words, they told their sons to use the land but should not demand a certificate of holding. One observer drew analogy between the state's relation to the public and the parent's relation to their children. He said "similar to what the state does, the parents want to give only use right to their children, so that they can control them".<sup>14</sup>

This could also be seen from our survey. Only 27(13%) out of the 184 landholding respondents attributed their source of holding to donation from their parents, whereas, 67(36.4%) landholding households claimed that the size of their landholding had significantly diminished over time due to gift

to their children. In other words, parents did give land to their married sons for different purposes; however, they did not allow them to get certificate for the land. Thus, the gift did not make them legal landholders, which meant the parents reserved the power to take it away without any legal procedure whenever they wanted it or for other reasons. This has been one of the factors for many parents to reclaim land they had previously donated during the implementation of land certification.

## **3.2 Landlessness in Oromia**

### ***3.2.1 Defining landlessness***

The operational meanings of “landlessness” and “landless farmers” are ambiguous. Based on his Indian experience, Singh (1982, 381) gave three definitions of landless farmers which were mutually non-exclusive and overlapping: (a) those who *owned* no land; (b) those who *operated* no land; and (c) those whose *major* source of income was wage employment. The landless farmer who did not own land may not operate land (due to lack of the capacity to rent-in for instance) and thus might live on wage labor. We suggest an operational definition which is based on the land tenure system and socio-political context of this country. Accordingly, our operational definition of a landless household is a household that resides in a rural *Kebele* and who does not hold land that is supported by a landholding certificate. This includes those who operate land through renting-in and sharecropping, and those who dwell in the rural *Kebele* and live on off-farm employment. Landlessness is, thus, a state or a condition of lacking the right to hold land.

Most of the ‘landless farmers’ got a small plot to build their own houses, by and large, in their parents’ homesteads or in the homestead of a close relative. The space often enabled them to construct a house and helped them keep a cow and an ox or two oxen; however, this did not make them landholders. Thus, our definition of landless farmers is based on landholding rather than the operation of land.

### ***3.2.2 The extent of landlessness in Oromia***

Except Wuye-Gose *Kebele* (Kuyu *woreda*), the *Kebele* and *woreda* offices did not have a list of landless households. In other words, landless

households were not registered and documented in the government administrative structures. Membership of the *Kebele* is equivalent to tax-paying or landholding. Wuye-Gose kebele was a beneficiary of Productive Safety-net Programme (PSNP). As landlessness was one of the criteria in the selection of PSNP beneficiaries, 324 poorest landless households had been registered and known to the *Kebele*. But, this was an incomplete list as many landless households who, for different reasons, were not selected to participate in the PSNP were not registered.

We, therefore, attempted to show the extent of landlessness in the three selected *woredas* by undertaking a survey of households. Based on the result of the survey, 38.3% of the rural households in the three *Kebeles* were landless with fair variation between the three. Specifically, 43% in Wuye-Gose, 37.8% in Ude and 33% in Limu-Dima *Kebeles* were landless households.

Table 6. Landed and landless households' as to whether they have their own farm or grazing land?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	184	61.7
No	114	38.3
Total	298	100.0

Besides the landless, a significant number of households lived in a near-landless situation. We considered small holdings that were less than 0.5 hectare as near-landlessness. In fact, the government also did not issue certificate for holdings that were less than 0.5 hectares. In the *woreda* official documents from the three *Kebeles*, 139 households (11.5%) in Wuye-Gose, 45 households (5.26%) in Limu-Dima and 12 households (2.2%) in Ude had less than 0.5 hectares of land registered under their name. In average, this was 7.1% of the landholding households. If we add this up to the 38.3% landless households, we get 45.4% of the households living in landlessness and near-landlessness. Wuye-Gose *Kebele*, with 43% landless and 12% near landless, was the worst of the three. The number of households with small holdings would increase as more land fragmentation was expected due to transfers through inheritance. If we increase our cut off point to less than one hectare, 19.76% of the households in the three *Kebeles*

would be in what we call near-landlessness (see the table below). Thus, one can ask: how could a country or Regional state manage to reduce poverty in condition where close to a half of its farming population were living in a state of landlessness and near landlessness?

Table 7. Size of households' land in the three sample *Kebeles*

No.	Land Size	Number and percent of Landholding Household					
		<i>Limu-Dima</i>		<i>Wuye-Gose</i>		<i>Ude</i>	
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
1	Less than 0.5	45	5.26	139	11.5	12	2.2
2	0.5 to 0.99	121	14.4	178	14.7	19	3.55
3	1 to 1.99	95	11.10	321	26.5	253	47.3
4	2 to 2.99	405	47.31	256	21.1	229	42.9
5	3 to 3.99	119	13.9	171	14.1	19	3.55
6	4 to 4.99	42	4.91	88	7.2	0	0
7	5 to 5.99	19	2.22	57	4.7	2	0.37
8	6 and above	10	1.17	0		0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>856</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1210</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>100</b>

Looking closely at how the landholding farmers used their land would help us understand the situation of near-landlessness. Households divided up their land into three parts: land for house construction, land for cultivation and grazing land for their livestock. They also planted eucalyptus trees near their houses, basically for firewood and construction. In the past, people used to use communal lands for grazing, and used communal forests as sources of firewood and construction materials, and the household's landholding was meant solely for homestead and farmland. At present, there was no communal grazing and communal forest land. Thus, an individual household had to maintain the balance between land for homestead, cultivation and livestock. Many of the landholding households had at least a pair of oxen to manage the family's subsistence agriculture and one or two cows for dairy products. Thus, one had to have own *kaloo* (enclosure) for grazing. Without one's own *kaloo*, the only alternatives were renting land for grazing and purchasing fodder, which were unaffordable unless the household generated additional income. Thus, the near-landless households

also had to rent-in additional land or enter into sharecropping arrangement to help their families survive.

### **2.2.3 Reasons for landlessness**

#### *a. Demographic factors*

The most important cause for landlessness is the demographic factor – population growth since the last land redistribution. Out of our 114 landless respondents, 100 (87.7 percent) were too young to benefit from the last land redistribution in their locality. In other words, one third of our 298 responding households were established after the land redistribution, i.e more than 27 years ago. Though the major land redistribution took place in 1975, there were small-scale land allocations throughout the Derg period as we discussed above. For instance, communal land and land whose holders had passed away or left the *Kebele* was reallocated to the newly established households several times until the end of the Derg regime. Since 1991, there had not been any land redistribution in Oromia. Thus, households established since then had not acquired land from the state. The only exceptions to this were the ex-army members of the Derg regime who were given small pieces, as we have discussed above.

Other factors of landlessness, such as absence from their locality during land redistribution and cases of forfeiting their holding rights, are quite insignificant. Only 10 of the landless households (8.8%) said that they were married but were not in their current *Kebele* of residence when the re/distributions were effected. Only two landless households (1.1 percent) attributed the reason for their landlessness to dispossession due to different reasons such as resistance to membership in producer's cooperatives and running away from National Military Service during the Derg.

#### *b. Land degradation*

There was an alarming increase in land degradation in Oromia. In fact, it became one of the significant causes for land shortage, if not landlessness. Local residents attributed the major reason for this to the recent unprecedented expansion of farming, including in areas which were customarily not used for cultivation. Customarily, for instance, hillsides and marshlands were reserved for forestry and grazing, respectively. Currently,

due to severe shortage of farmland, any type of land available was subject to cultivation. Speaking about this issue, an elderly informant from Ada'a stated the following: "if you tell them that they can produce a glass of *teff*, the present generation would even tend to cultivate inside their houses".<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in Ada'a, according to informants, every piece of land including steep mountains such as Erer, had been cultivated.<sup>17</sup> People complained it even got difficult to identify borders between individuals' plots as the traditional boundary markers were all removed through cultivation. The boundary markers were also used to help protect against soil erosion. In the past, it was also mandatory for farmers to leave trees such as acacia in the farmland; those are rarely observable today, however.

Reinforcing this argument, documents from the three *woredas* showed that 57% of the land area of Kuyu, 60% of Ada'a and 48.6% of Limu-Bilbilo's was under cultivation. On the other hand, grazing land and forest land covered 14.7% and 11%, respectively in Kuyu,<sup>18</sup> and 13.9% and 6.8%, respectively in Limu-Bilbilo.<sup>19</sup> Ada'a, with 2.6% grazing land and 8.7% forest land had the least area of forest land and grazing land.<sup>20</sup> The remaining land was occupied by homesteads, road constructions, institutions, water bodies and degraded areas.

Though land degradation was observable across Oromia, it became a severe problem in North Shewa Zone. A study conducted ten years ago for a project called Sustainable Land Management (SLM) indicated that degraded hillsides covered 16% of the land (GIZ 2006). According to this study, the extent of degraded hillsides grew from 2% in the 1970s to 16% in the 2000s and grazing land decreased from 27% to 5% in the same period (GIZ, 2006). This revealed the speedy degeneration of the landscape. The problem was even worse than what the numbers showed because what had been reported as forest was privately owned in most cases and, by and large, did not qualify as forest.

#### **2.2.4 Effects of landlessness**

##### *a. Troubled livelihood*

An informant in Limu-Dima stated "*lafitti lafee dudda qote bulaati. Ni jabeessas, Ni lamshessas*", which literally means, "land is the backbone of



the farmers. It reinforces [those who have it], and paralyzes [those who do not have it]”. He explained that if someone’s backbone failed, he/she was paralyzed, and was thus not able to work and fulfill his/her basic needs. Rather he/she would depend on others. In the same way, he explained, “we are young, but depend on landholders for survival. For instance, we wait for the willingness of the landholders to get a sharecropping contract in order to sustain our family”. The explanation showed how the people who had no land conceptualized the impact of landlessness and the value of land.

Life, as a landless farmer, was hard. It was tough to live in a rural environment without holding the basic asset—land, the mainstay of livelihood. Out of the 87 households who said they were severely affected by landlessness, 72 (82.8%) were food insecure, and 37% complained about the difficulty to lead life properly and have access to assets. They complained that, regardless of how hard they worked, it was difficult for them to acquire assets. They were often concerned with how to get land (on sharecropping or renting) in the following season. Out of the landless farmers, 35.6% and 23% complained that they were even unable to send their children to school and to dress them properly, respectively. Figure 4 shows the major effects of landlessness for all the three *Kebeles* calculated together.

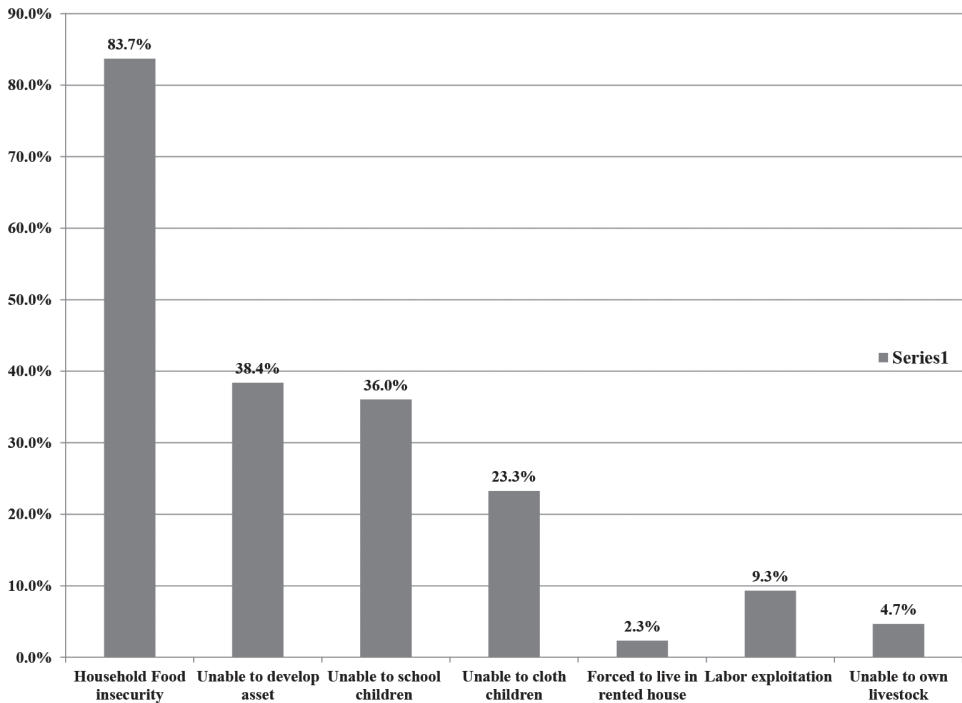


Figure 4. Effects of Landlessness on the Landless Households

Even though the impact of landlessness was, somewhat, common in all the three *woredas*, there were some differences in terms of the degree of the problems. For instance, family food insecurity was a serious concern for landless farmers in all the *woredas*, but it was severe in Kuyu where 94.9% were food insecure, compared to Ada'a and Limu-Bilbilo, where 76% and 72% of the landless, respectively, reported that they faced food shortages. Similarly, the difficulty of sending children to school had been reported in all the *woredas*, but in Kuyu, the problem was reported by almost half of the landless. The children either joined their parents and got engaged in daily labor or were given out to the better-off farmers as herders or they were sent to urban areas to work as house maids or guards. The following experience of a family<sup>21</sup>, a resident of Wuye-Gose *Kebele*, Kuyu, was an insightful story.

My father never held land. He was a traditional musician (azmari). My mother had passed away when I was a small boy. My father left us [him and his brother] and went away. We were both forced to join different

families serving them, initially as herd-boys and later on as farmers. When I got married, my cousin gave me a small space sufficient for putting my hut up. Last year, due to minor fall out, my cousin asked me to leave his land. I resisted. Actually, I did not have any place to go. He appealed to the Kebele. The Kebele chairman and the village elders pressured him to drop the appeal. They asked “How could you dislodge him from where he lived for more than 26 years?” He was somewhat embarrassed and allowed me to continue living here.

I have 10 children. Four of them dropped out of school and they were engaged in daily labor as you see us today.<sup>22</sup> They dropped out complaining that it was hard to go to school while starving and without proper clothes. One of them was taken by her grandmother. I gave away two of them, one was eight years old boy and the other ten years old, to families who engaged them as herd-boys. They allowed them to attend school half a day. They lived there and they covered their school expenses and I received 75 kg teff per year for each of them.

As it was difficult to get share-cropping without oxen, my wife and myself often helped our family through daily labor and selling firewood. Today she took firewood to the town and my four children and myself were digging land here. For five years we benefitted from safety net program until we were dropped last year.

This story shows the vicious cycle of the effect of landlessness. His father did not have land, and he himself grew up as a poor herder serving other people. As a head of a household, he spent his life doing daily labor work, in fact with his wife and four of their children. Now, two of his 10 children were repeating what he used to live through as a boy, serving another family as a herder. Four other children dropped out of school and were engaged in daily labor with him. His oldest son was twenty-five years old. He had been doing daily labor now for several years helping his parents bring up his younger siblings. He could not sharecrop due to lack of oxen. It was so hard to imagine the horrible future of those 10 poor children of the landless household, who themselves inherited that state of affairs from their parents. It is an example of how landlessness shaped and perpetuated differences in accessing land that resulted in poverty and suffering. This is a story of one household, but it tells the life experience of many landless households in Kuyu.

*b. Lack of land for home construction*

The worst experience of landlessness was reported by those who were unable to get land for home construction. These were mostly people whose parents were landless for different reasons and, thus, inherited that landlessness instead of land. Their number was very small (only 2.3% of the landless) at present, but, the number was expected to rise very soon as children of many of the landless households were approaching marriageable age. In fact, many told us that they could not marry due to landlessness, in spite of their age.

We often heard the proverb, *simbirren illee bariite bariitee lafa irra qubatti*, (“even birds fly but finally land on the ground”) from landless youth, who then asked “how can a human being survive without a space to land on?”<sup>23</sup> In rural Ethiopia, where there was no experience of renting a house and where there was no house to rent, for that matter, the only option for someone, who could not get a plot from relatives was to rent a small piece of land for building a house. As renting land was often for a short period of time, people in this situation had to dismantle their homes when asked by the land owner and looked for another place or kept on paying the landholder extra money to get more time. They led a life full of uncertainties. Some of them were forced to leave their villages and move to towns in search of house for rent and commute between the villages where they rented land or sharecropped and the town where they were forced to reside. This was not a sustainable solution as it was tough to commute. Some of them purchased land under the guise of donation or ‘renewable renting’, both of which were not supported by the law, and, thus, ended up in serious difficulties.

*c. Lack of grazing land, woodland and woodland products*

An emerging problem regarding land and rural livelihood in Oromia was the increasing shortage of communal grazing and forest land. In all the three sites we studied, there was a drastic change in this regard. In official *woreda* records, for instance, there was not a single hectare of communal grazing land specified in the three *woredas*.<sup>24</sup> The *woreda* agriculture offices trained farmers to reduce the number of their livestock, ‘modernize’ and use their

own private enclosure (*kaloo*). The development agents tried to persuade farmers to start private enclosures where they did not exist.

The absence of communal grazing land and forestland had a serious impact on the landless and near landless population. Every piece of land in each *kebele* was owned by individuals. Every standing tree was also owned by individuals. This was what we call the tragedy of individualism. In Kuyu, for instance, in front of every house there were eucalyptus trees, which were meant to be used for house construction as well as a source of income, as people sold them either locally or at the nearby town. But even more importantly, it became the sole source of firewood for the rural population. Landless households, not only had to purchase trees to construct their huts in the rural village, but also bought firewood for home use. A destitute landless person, who lived by selling firewood and charcoal, had first to buy a eucalyptus tree and turn it into firewood or charcoal. With that added value, he/she carried it to the nearby town for sale. One of the major sources of dispute in the rural villages today was over firewood collection from branches of trees owned by individual households. Individualism had done away with tolerance. The landless were often accused of stealing leaves, branches of trees and wood from the land held by their neighbors.

*d. Marginalization in rural development initiatives*

Another interesting feature of landless farmers was how they were being easily by-passed by programs designed to benefit ‘farmers’. The major problem with agricultural policy interventions, so far, had been that rural agents never considered the landless as worthy of attention. Thus, ‘farmers’, ‘rural women’ and ‘rural poor’ had been regarded as homogenous when, in reality, they were very much heterogeneous. As a result, some of the interventions, which were meant to increase farmers’ benefits, actually negatively affected the landless section of the population. A good example was how interventions by two breweries (Meta and Heineken) in Limu-Bilbilo affected the landed and the landless population. These breweries were engaged in contract farming with the local landholders who could allocate, at least 0.5 hectares of their land, for malt production. Accordingly, Meta and Heineken signed contractual agreements with hundreds of farmers who availed land. For the breweries and government officials, the

intervention had been beneficial to the rural farmers. Indeed, as discussed above, the breweries gave selected seeds, fertilizers, trainings etc and purchased the produce at a high price. Thus, it had been received positively by those who had sufficient land to allocate for malt barley and participated in the program. But, on the other hand, this initiative did not only marginalize the landless farmers who could not be part of it, but it also contributed to the increasing shortage of land and dramatic increase in the price of land. This harmed the landless population whose livelihood depended on accessing land through renting and sharecropping.

*e. Effects on female headed households*

The differences in the experience of the landless were not only across *woredas*, but also within a given *woreda*. Within a *woreda*, landless experiences varied mainly between male and female headed households. The variation to a large extent lied in the differences of the difficulties of the coping mechanisms that made the effects of landlessness particularly tough for female headed households. The two relatively sustainable and preferred means of obtaining livelihood for the rural landless farmers were renting-in land and sharecropping. Both were less attainable by the female headed households as compared to male headed households. For female headed households, renting land, for instance, did require employing more labor to cultivate the land, unless there was a grown-up son in the household. Employing labor was an additional expense for the household, difficult to cover in addition to costs of renting and agricultural inputs. Sharecropping was even more difficult as the landholders hesitated to give their land to a female headed household, as they did not trust their ability to use the land effectively. Thus in most cases, female headed households were more severely impacted by landlessness than male headed households.

**3.2.4 Coping strategies of landless households**

Landless households used diversified survival strategies. Among these, the most important were renting in land, share-cropping, daily labor (in local farms, in private investments and in nearby towns), and seasonal migration. The following figure shows the proportion of landless households' engagement in each of this.

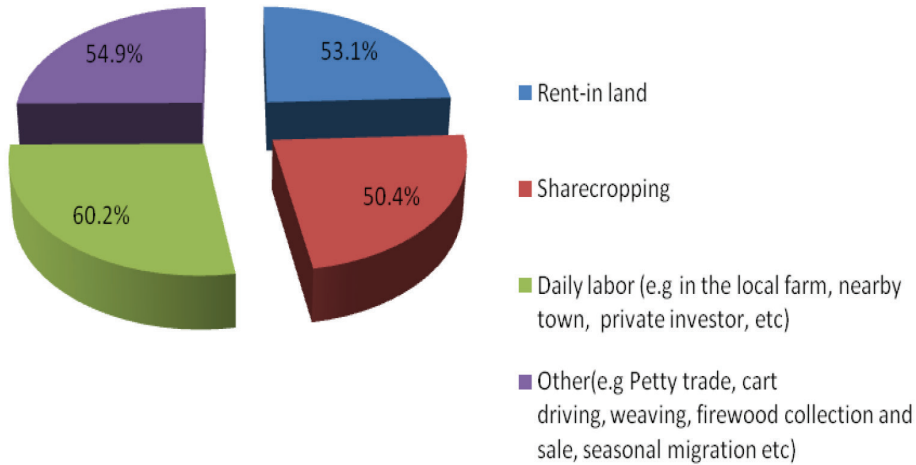


Fig 5. Coping Strategies of Landless Households

*a. Renting*

Renting was the most important means of coping with landlessness and land shortage (Daniel 2015, for its legal aspects). Slightly more than half of the 114 landless households used renting in land as coping strategy. At *woreda* level, 36.8% in Ada’a, 90.9% in Limu-Bilbilo and 34.9% in Kuyu asserted that renting was their major means of livelihood. Renting became important also because it served different categories of people besides the landless and land deficient households. Better-off local landholding farmers, civil servants and urban dwellers also rented land. The better-off farmers rented in additional land to produce surplus, which they sold at the market; there was an ever growing demand for cereals. Many civil servants and urban dwellers in the *woreda* towns supplemented their livelihood by renting land. They either hired labor or employed close relatives. The wide use of modern agricultural machineries, such as tractors and combine harvesters, in Arsi, for instance, had made the management of rented land simpler and effective for civil servants and urban dwellers. It had radically reduced the time it took for cultivation and harvesting. Thus, the absentee ‘urban farmers’ were engaged in a bidding for rented land by using their comparative advantage of access to cash.

The increasing value of land and perhaps the multiple interests in land can also be seen from the very dynamic price of land rent. In Ada'a, one *qarxi* (0.25 hectare of land) for rain-fed agriculture was rented for up to Birr 4,000 per season in 2014. The same size of land was rented in Limu-Bilbilo and Kuyu for up to Birr 2000 and 1200 respectively. The price depends on the productivity of the land, the type of cereal they produce and the residents' income. In Ada'a, where the land is fertile black soil that is suitable for *teff* production, the price is very high. In Limu-Bilbilo where the land is again productive, but for wheat and barley, the renting price is medium. In Kuyu where land is degraded and productivity is low the renting price is the lowest as compared to the other two. Ada'a *teff* is the best, and due to this as well as other factors, farmers in the area have much better income than Limu-Bilbilo and Kuyu farmers.

Renting in was considered more advantageous than share-cropping. It was only in cases where there was no land for rent or where the rent price was unaffordable that the landless population turned to share-cropping instead of renting. While renting seemed to be equally important in Ada'a and Limu-Bilbilo, it was less important in Kuyu. The number of landless people that afforded to rent in land in a *woreda* showed their economic status. In Ada'a, landless people could generate income from multiple sources, such as employment in private investments and nearby urban areas, from a quarry work, etc, and used their money for renting in land. Thus, the number of landless renters was significantly higher than sharecroppers. On the other hand, in Kuyu, the number of the landless who could afford to rent land was small as compared to those who sharecropped and worked as daily laborers. Most of the landless in Kuyu could not afford to rent land and cover the cost of agricultural inputs. To make matters worse for the landless farmers in Kuyu, renting deals were often made in the months of September and October. These were months when many rural households faced food shortages. These were also months when households sent their children to school and, thus, incurred more expenses. Economic distress forced landholders to rent out their land. While the landless in Ada'a who had multiple sources of income might afford it, it was quite hard for those in Kuyu to rent in land while, at the same time, dealing with food shortages



and covering school expenses during these months. Thus, in Kuyu, most land renters were the better-off farmers, civil servants and urban dwellers.

An emerging development regarding renting was rent of grazing land. This was going on, mainly, in Kuyu and Limu-Bilbilo but varied in its workings. In Kuyu, income from selling of milk had become very important. It had contributed to the increment of the value of grazing land. Renting a grazing land was more expensive than farming land. For instance, 0.25 hectare of grazing land generated up to Birr 2000 while the same size of farming land was rented only for up to Birr 1200. People who rented out land also preferred grazing to cultivation. This was not only due to the price difference but also because keeping the land out of cultivation for one year, through renting it for grazing, was considered as good as fallowing.

Interestingly, most of the renting deals were made in the presence of the village elders and sometimes the agreement was registered at the *Kebele*. This meant that only a few deals followed the proclamation that stated “land renting shall be valid before the law, if and only if it is registered and approved by Oromia Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau...” (ORNS 2007). Currently, the task of registering was given to the *woreda* Land Administration and Environmental Protection Office. Fulfilling this requires, at least, the husband and the wife/wives who rented out their land, the man/woman who rented in the land and three witnesses to travel to the *Woreda* to make the agreement formal. For local people, this was quite costly; therefore, they made the deal and signed agreements locally, which might not be valid before the law. In Kuyu, in the past several years, not more than five cases had been signed in the *woreda* land office.

#### *b. Share-cropping*

Share-cropping was the second most important means of accessing land for the landless population. Half of the landless surveyed responded that sharecropping was their important strategy of accessing land and survival. Put in terms of districts, 36.8%, 54.5% and 72.1%, respectively, of the landless respondents in Ada’a, Limu-Bilbilo and Kuyu *woredas* claimed that they were engaged in sharecropping arrangements with landholders as a survival strategy. Sharecropping was considered more beneficial to the

landholder than the sharecropper. Thus, less landless sharecroppers in Ada'a meant the landless in the *woreda* had other options, such as land renting. The landless in Kuyu, on the other hand, did not have renting and other options.

Similar to renting, share-cropping arrangements were also quite dynamic. According to informants, during the Imperial era, tenants used to cultivate landlords' land in an arrangement called *erbo*. The tenants cultivated the land with their own labor and oxen, though some landlords used to contribute half of the seed. The tenant provided, to the land owner, one fourth of the produce at harvest time. The landless lived on the same land with additional charges for grazing. That system was abolished by the revolution that ended the feudal-tenant land system in the country. Then, during the Derg period, sharecropping became an informal practice as landholders were expected to cultivate the land themselves, and if not, had to forfeit their holding right. However, sharecropping, called *siso* (one-third), was widespread. Here, the landless and the landholder entered into an arrangement where the landless contributed labor and oxen whilst the landholder contributed land, and all the remaining inputs were shared equally. The term *siso* implied to the mode of sharing of the harvest in which the landholder took one-third and the sharecropper got two-third. In Ada'a and Limu-Bilbilo *siso* survived until recently.

Currently, share-cropping called *qixxee* (equal) was prevalent, with significant variations in the contributions to landholder and share-cropper. They were not uniform in all the three sites, indicating the evolution of the system and the differences in the economic value of land. In Ada'a, the landholder contributed only land and the landless contributed everything else (labor, oxen and inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticides etc), but the modality of output sharing was on equal basis. The only extra benefit a share-cropper got was crop residue for his/her oxen. In Limu-Bilbilo and Kuyu, the landholder contributed, besides land, half of the fertilizer and seed expenses, and the mode of sharing the produce was on equal basis. But, the disadvantage to the landless was that crop residue was also equally shared. Thus, the difference between the three sites, in terms of net benefit, was insignificant. The changes in the mode of sharecropping explained,

principally, the ever-increasing value of land, with adverse effects on landless households.

*c. Daily labor*

Daily labor was the least preferred coping strategy of the rural poor, but it was widely used and a crucial survival strategy. The varieties of daily labor included labor in local farms, in private investments and in nearby towns. Daily labor was crucially important in that it also supported other livelihood strategies: households were engaged in daily labor of some kind and used the income for renting land, purchasing inputs or even buying oxen, as well as covering the immediate subsistence needs of the family.

Concerning the similarities and differences between the districts, daily labor was used as a survival strategy in Kuyu where 65.1% and 30.2% of the landless found employment on local farms and nearby towns, respectively. In Limu-Bilbilo, 57.6% and 3%, respectively, were similarly engaged in such activity. In both cases, agricultural work ranged from land preparation to harvesting and threshing. In Limu-Bilbilo, harvesting potato and garlic had also become an important source of livelihood. In Ada'a, it was somewhat different from both districts; 60.5% of landless households said that they worked in one of the private investments in the *woreda*, and only 15% and 10.5% worked in nearby towns and local farms, respectively. The overwhelming majority of laborers worked in the flower farms where the payment was embarrassingly low and workers faced multiple health risks. Nevertheless, landless women in the village, with their multiple household responsibilities, preferred to work in these farms instead of traveling to the nearby towns in search of daily work. Again, different from the other two, in Ada'a, working as daily laborer in agricultural farms/ was not common. It was a choice left for seasonal migrants and the very destitute.

*d. Migration*

Migration was also another important coping strategy of the landless, especially in Kuyu. Two kinds of migration were prevalent: seasonal and permanent. According to our survey, 30% of the landless in Kuyu were engaged in seasonal migration, but other sources of information indicated that the number was higher. Thousands of able-bodied men, young and

adults, landless and near landless, migrated every harvesting season, from October to the beginning of December. The usual destinations were the cereal producing areas of East Shewa and Arsi. Fortunate for them, the harvesting season started in Kuyu only in December, when it ended in East Shewa and in much of Arsi. Most of our informants had the experiences of seasonal migration. at least. once in their lives. For most of the landless and near landless that was the moment when they acquired money to cover their annual costs of agricultural inputs. Some even took loans from friends relying on income from that season.<sup>25</sup>

Our informants also mentioned several cases of permanent voluntary migration. Addis Ababa, Bale, Arsi and West Hararghe were the major destinations of the permanent migrants. Such migrations were not new for landless farmers in North Shewa. During the Imperial regime, pressured by ruthless landlords, tens of thousands left for Arsi, Bale and Hararghe in search of land.

### **1.5 Landlessness and poverty**

According to Singh (1982), landless farmers comprised a majority of the poor in South Asia. His argument was simple: as land was the source of wellbeing in agrarian society; most people, without sufficient access to land, were poor and often unable to sustain their families. Land, in fact, as we tried to show above, both in its quality and quantity, was the key limiting factor in agriculture and food production, and hence it was a major indicator of poverty. In other words, there was a strong relationship between access to land and rural poverty.<sup>26</sup> However, it was simplistic to draw a one to one correlation between landlessness and poverty. This section attempted to draw attention to the relationship between landlessness and rural poverty.

During the first FGD, participants often said that, as long as the household head is in good health, landlessness did not cause poverty. They argued that he or she could work and feed his or her family. Especially, in Ada'a, at the beginning, it was not easy to see the correlation between the two. In each site, there were examples that one could cite to disprove a one-to-one relationship between landlessness and poverty. Indeed, in all the three study sites, there were better-off landless farmers. In our survey, out of 114

landless households, 27 (23.8%) reported that, by local standards, they led a fairly good life. Of the total number, 13 (48.1%) were from Ada'a, 10 (37%) from Limi-Bilbil and only 4 (14.8%) from Kuyu. Their food insecurity was not especially worse when compared to landholders in their neighborhood; they had oxen and cow/s and managed to send their children to school. Many of them had houses covered by corrugated iron roofs.

In Ada'a and Limu-Bilbilo, where the land was highly productive, young and vigorous landless households rented in land and/or sharecropped and produced what was sufficient for their family. A few of them produced *teff*, wheat, barley, potato and garlic for the market on the land they rented. Young landless households were often very good in diversifying their income where it was possible. For instance, in Ada'a, while the husbands involved in daily labor in the nearby towns and worked in a quarry, the wives often worked in private investment companies, mostly in floriculture. They used their combined income to purchase oxen and rent in land. In Limmu-Bilbilo, where land was also very fertile and productive, though there were few opportunities for multiple engagements as compared to Ada'a, there were possibilities for the young landless farmers to be successful farmers. They usually tried to be innovative and diversified their production on their rented land or were engaged in more than one sharecropping arrangements. Our young informant in Limu-Bilbilo told us that, in the last season, he planted potato on 1.25 hectares of land (0.75 was rented and 0.5 was sharecropped), 0.5-hectare wheat and 1 hectare barley (0.5 of it was a new seed called traveler). Another informant told us how he cultivated his irrigated rented land three times in a year. In April he planted potato, which was harvested in early July, and immediately followed it up by barley to be harvested in late November, and in December he planted potato again. Nevertheless, they overused chemical fertilizers to gain as much as the land could give in the shortest possible time. This was an emerging mode of exploiting rented land by the dynamic and energetic young farmers where the land was less productive and suitable. The landholders complained that, in the long run, this practice would kill the land.

The situation in Kuyu was different because the land was degraded and productivity already declined. There was little opportunity available, as the type of land, one could rent or sharecrop, did not allow improvements in living conditions. In fact, most of the landless households had no financial capacity to rent in land and covered the costs of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and selected seeds. Thus, they were forced to look for sharecropping, which was to the disadvantage of the landless. Therefore, here landlessness was a true indicator of poverty though it was not as such synonymous with it.

The extent to which landlessness and poverty were interrelated depended on a number of factors. The most important were the accessibility of land to rent or sharecrop; the productivity of the land; the availability of sufficient labor in the household and the existence of off-farm employment opportunities. Where land was accessible for renting or sharecropping, and where the household had sufficient energetic labor, landlessness might not directly result in poverty. The availability of off-farm job opportunities supported the landless households in two ways: one, the income from the off-farm activities directly supported the household's subsistence needs, and two, the income generated from the off-farm activities could be used to buy oxen, to rent in land and to purchase agricultural inputs. The productivity of the land was crucial as it determined the persistence of a household as farmers through renting and sharecropping. One season's failure of production could disrupt the landless households' survival strategy. Factors, such as climatic change, affected the landless more than the landed. Thus, the correlation between landlessness and poverty varied between areas and households based on all these variables.

## **2. Conclusion**

This paper explored the desperate situation of landlessness in three *woredas* of Oromia. As land is the source of wellbeing in an agrarian society, most landless and near to landless people are poor and often in a difficult situation to sustain their families (Dekker 2005:18). Indeed, landlessness, which is a function of demographic, political and environmental factors, is the major determinant of rural poverty. Thus, meaningful discussions

concerning strategies of rural poverty reduction should take into consideration the farming households' access to land, and the prevailing situation of landlessness. The fact that the landless and near landless people are the young and adult sections of the society, and that land is held by the old has a number of implications. Among others, it reduces the productivity of the land; inheritance, share-cropping and rent continue to be important means of accessing land both permanently and temporarily; in a context of stagnant rural transformation and limited alternative employment opportunities, youth landlessness has broader ramifications including socio-political instabilities of the country.

### **Acknowledgement**

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Accessing and holding, in this regard, does not mean temporary accessing such as renting or sharecropping. Rather it is permanent holding.

<sup>2</sup> Purchasing might be another source of accessing land and there are some indications for that but it is insignificant and difficult to trace.

<sup>3</sup> Households in Limu-Dima remembered the 1992 redistribution very well and it clearly showed that most households got 2.5 hectares. Interestingly, in all the sites, members of the 'land committee', who were assigned to undertake the redistribution, got larger land size as compared to the rest of the households.

<sup>4</sup> A landless young person in Limu-Dima *Kebele*.

<sup>5</sup> Commonly, inheritance is discussed on the days following the fortieth day commemoration of the deceased parent/s.

<sup>6</sup> Informant in Lemu-Dima.

<sup>7</sup> This is based on our own survey. The survey shows some disparity between the woredas. While Kuyu and Limu-Bilbilo have average household size of 5.8 in Ada'a it is 3.6.

<sup>8</sup> The name is a pseudonym.

<sup>9</sup>This is in line with Oromia Land Proclamation (No. 130/ 2007 article 7, No. 1) that determines farm plot size, which states that “Maintaining the existing farm plot size as it is, the holding size for the future shall not be less than 0 .5 hectares for annual crops, and 0 .25 hectares for perennial crops” .

<sup>10</sup>In Oromia there are numerous types of levies including land tax, each zone has its own development duty, road fund, sport, red cross, insurance (not mandatory).It is more than 700 birr per household.

<sup>11</sup>Putting the land back together is also supported by the Oromia Land Proclamation (No. 130/ 2007, Article 9, No. 3).

<sup>12</sup>Discussion with Hirpha, Kuyu Woreda Land Administration and Environmental Protection, February 2016.

<sup>13</sup>The Oromia land Proclamation (ORNS 2007, 9:5) states that “Any peasant or pastoralist or semi pastoralist shall have the right to transfer his land use right to his family members or children whose livelihood depends on it, or have no other income, or to his children who have no other incomes or are landless as a gift”.

<sup>14</sup>Personal communication with Melkamu Amsalu, an MA student in the Department of Social Anthropology, and formerly served as surveyor in Maskan Woreda Land Administration Office.

<sup>15</sup>*Kebele* officials told us that the number would have increased significantly had we included unmarried youth above 18 years old in our sample, instead of taking a household. Indeed, they had a point, as there were many landless unmarried youth in each *Kebele*, who put the blame for delaying their marriage on landlessness. A common answer of the youth for a question, “why don’t you marry?” was “where is the land to survive on”. This showed the hopelessness in the life of the landless youth.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Belay Shalama, W/Gose, September 2015.

<sup>17</sup>Discussion with experts in Ada’a Wareda, August 2015.

<sup>18</sup>Kuyu Woreda Land Administration Office document.

<sup>19</sup>Limu-Bilbilo Woreda Land Administration Office document.

<sup>20</sup>Ada’a Woreda Land Administration Office document.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Adugna Lami in Wuye Gose, February 2016

<sup>22</sup> I found Adugna Lami the first day while he and his four children were building terraces on daily labor to mitigate land degradation funded by SLM.



- <sup>23</sup>An old man historicized landlessness and compared the current landlessness with the tenancy during the Imperial era. The old man said, “Things now resemble the Imperial era. Look, the number of the landless is out numbering the landed. Some landholders sit in the towns and give their land for sharecropping and the sharecroppers transport their produce up to their homes in the towns. But, the difference is that during the Imperial era the tenants live on the land and the lords demand one-fourth of the produce, while the current sharecroppers take half. ..”
- <sup>24</sup>Documents from Woreda Land Use Administration and Environmental Protection.
- <sup>25</sup>An interesting disparity from other sites is “there is no free loan in Kuyu”, which means there is interest rate for any loan. In other word loan in Kuyu is usury. The interest rate is in most cases 20%. This is another potential area of research.
- <sup>26</sup>Thus, meaningful discussions concerning rural poverty reduction/alleviation strategies should take into consideration the farming households’ access to land and the prevailing situation of landlessness.

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