

Actors Interactions and Local People's Resistance in Participatory Forest Management in Chilimo-Gaji Forest, West Shewa, Ethiopia

*Deressa Shime*¹ and *Desalegn Wana*²

Abstract

This article examines the nature and dynamics of actors' interactions and describes how various forms of local people's adaptation and everyday forms of resistances were employed in Chilimo-Gaji participatory forest management (PFM) in Ethiopia. Data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and structured field observations. The data were transcribed and indexed for analyses and interpretations. Our study showed that various forms of resistances to collaborative forest management schemes could undermine the intended goals of PFM and often resulted in conflicts between Forest User Group members and non-members. The local communities adopted illicit networks among participatory forest management executives and business people as adaptive strategy to access forest resources. When they found adaptation was not enough, or circumstances compelled them, they resorted to hidden forms of resistances towards PFM arrangements. The range of responses varied from circum-navigating legal and administrative caveats, sabotaging election of committee members to overt offenses on the forest management executives and the forest itself. These responses were employed by local communities to continually negotiate their customary rights and access forest resources for their livelihoods against the existing institutional configurations and stronger state and non-state actors. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of local level actors, power relationships among various actors and intra-actor interactions should be given due attentions to fully realize the intended goals of PFM arrangements in Ethiopia.

Keywords: actors' networks, infra-politics, power relationship, resistances

¹Deressa Shime is School Supervisor, GinchiWoreda Education Office, Oromia Regional State, Ginchi. E-mail: deressashime@gmail.com; Cell Phone: +251 912083528

²Dessalegn Wana, PhD, is Assisatant Professor in the department of Geography and Environmental Studies, College of Social sciences, Addis Ababa University, P. O. Box 150178 Ethiopia. He is the corresponding author; E.mail: deswana2002@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Most of the protected areas, including protected forests, were impositions from the colonial powers in most parts of Africa, while the local people were not only alienated physically from the use of resources for their livelihoods but socially and historically (Holmes 2007; Neumann 1998). Such impositions are often always faced with some forms of resistance (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015) but the local people are often very cautious not to engage themselves in violent actions that may result in jeopardizing their livelihoods and exacerbating their plights through further repressions (Bryant and Bailey 1997). This may lead them to what Scott (1985) has termed as “everyday forms of resistance” or infra-politics. He extensively discussed why the peasants in a paddy rice production system in a Malaysian village rather opted to everyday forms of resistances than open rebellions. He pointed out four features which characterized peasants in a Malaysian village setting; firstly, changes in peasants’ property regimes in a ‘piecemeal’ manner, and the pains of such changes at a time; secondly, the complexity of social structure (well-off vs. poor) and relationships (kinship, patronage, friendship), thirdly, what he calls ‘the livelihood imperatives’ and finally ‘avoidance forms of resistance’ where the peasants fled from the reach of their elite landlords (Scott 1985:242–246). As it is the case with Malaysian peasants, the local population, affected by conservation initiatives, were also constrained by a number of factors but, most importantly, by the imperative of balancing their daily livelihoods while, at the same time, engaging in a subtle form of resistance (Holmes 2007), thus the option for an open protest was a rare phenomenon (Neumann 1998).

Though there is a strong parallelism to Malaysian peasants in resorting to daily forms of resistances, there are, however, striking differences with regards to the local populations surrounding protected forests (Holmes 2007). In contrast to the peasants who might face their landlords on a daily basis, local communities dealt with conservation decisions which were made by scientific elites, or government officials that were located many thousands of miles away (Holmes 2007; Hochleithner 2017). The landscape of resistance by local people varies depending on their local contexts and historical and socio-economic conditions. As such there is no universal

'transcripts' through which local communities carry out their daily struggle to environmental injustice perpetrated by conservation institutions. In some instances, it has been attached to historical antecedents such as anti-colonial struggle to dislodge the oppressors from their territories (Neumann 1998). While in many instances, however, resistances were meant to meet the challenges of livelihoods and to reclaim their customary rights of access to forest resources (Neumann 1998; Bryant and Bailey 1997). The local people surrounding forests, as much as possible, try to avoid any form of overt confrontation which might result in further repressions (Holmes 2007; Hochleithner 2017).

Many case studies conducted in sub-Saharan African countries provided different tactics of everyday forms of resistances to protected forests and national parks (see Holmes 2007 for a review of resistances in conservation). A particular case in point is a study by Cavanagh and Benjaminsen (2015) in Mt. Elgon in Uganda, where the local population employed a combination of non-violent, militant, discursive or formal legal tactics to counter the dispossession of their ancestral land to conservation. These combinations of tactics, at least, partially ensured their access to forest products and also helped them employ what the authors' called 'Guerrilla' agriculture, where illicit forms of farming took place along the boundaries of conservation areas (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen, 2015). Thus, such acts create a blurred boundary between a need for survival and/or an act of refusing the legitimacy of conservation estates implying their customary rights to ancestral lands. Similarly, Hochleithner (2017) showed an interesting interface of covert and overt form of resistance towards protected areas in conflict prone villages surrounding Virunga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where overt forms of resistances were employed by local politicians and businessmen to promote their social and economic interests through activist and legal ways, whereas the local small holder farmers resorted to the hidden forms of resistance to delegitimize the existence of colonial time protected area establishment in their ancestral lands mainly through practices of banned livelihood activities.

The continuation of such banned forms of livelihood activities in DRC is an indication of the local populations' continual struggle to assert their historical (customary) rights to access resources and fulfill their daily survival needs. Participatory forest management are not immune from the wider problems of social resistances, and recent study conducted in South Africa and Zimbabwe further showed the dynamics of local peoples resistances to co-management arrangement of forests in the two countries (Matose 2016). This study revealed that local people resisted covertly by articulating their positions regarding the political battles with the state to access natural resources citing their customary rights and existential strategies (livelihoods). Such strategies were used by the local communities to resist the imposition of co-management schemes through which governments had exerted control over forest tenure rights and limited local communities' access to forest products (Matose 2016).

The annual rate of forest loss in Ethiopia from 1995- 2010 was estimated to be 141, 000 hectares, roughly a 1.1% decline per annum (FAO 2010). The main drivers of deforestations in Ethiopia were increasing demand for household energy, small holder farms and livestock grazing (FAO 2015). In fact, Ethiopia is one of the top ten countries in the world with the highest volume of wood removal, about 104.2 million cubic meters in 2011, mainly as wood-fuel for household consumptions (FAO 2015: 35). Moreover, subsequent governments land (and, by extension, forest) tenure regimes have been considered as the underlying causes of rapid deforestation in Ethiopia (Desalegn 2001; 2004). Desalegn (2001: 78) succinctly put it:

Deforestation should not only be seen as a response to material needs and demographic pressure, it is, in addition, the outcome of social struggles arising from the claims and counter-claims of groups and political forces...[T]he Ethiopian peasants know from experience that a natural resource is not a bounty of nature given equally to all, on the contrary such a resource is sooner or later claimed by the powerful and privileged, even if his community has *a priori*, customary right over it.

Owing to the above background, deforestation drivers and a global paradigm shift in environmental resource governance (Tole 2010; Vaccaro *et al.* 2013), the 1990s have seen a number of changes in the overall governance of forests in many African countries (Mustalahti and Lund

2009; Takahashi and Todo 2012; Tole 2010). Ethiopia has embraced PFM approach as pilot projects financed by bilateral development organizations and NGOs (Aklilu *et al.* 2014). These pilot projects were taken as learning platforms to experiment decentralized forms of forest governance to overcome deforestation and help improve the livelihoods of local communities.

Studies conducted in Ethiopia reported success of these projects and good implications for policy directions, albeit many, based on the livelihoods contributions, (e.g., Solomon *et al.* 2017), and/or improved areal coverage of forests or species composition and stand structure (Aklilu *et al.* 2016; Solomon *et al.* 2016). Nevertheless, a number of serious concerns emerged regarding the performance of PFM such as institutional set-up vis-a-vis local practices (Alemayehu *et al.* 2017), poor socio-economic and environmental outcomes (Abrar and Inoue 2012; 2014; Aklilu *et al.* 2014), and increasing presence of the state (Abrar and Inoue 2012).

However, the unfolding of hidden forms of resistance or infra-politics (Scott 1985; 1990) is one of the attendant issues in and around protected forests (Matose 2016) and nature conservation initiatives (Holmes 2007) in Africa, but, to the best of our knowledge, it has not been researched in Ethiopia. The question, thus, remains to be answered as why PFM arrangements which were meant to democratize forest governance and, thereby, reverse deforestation as well as improve local livelihoods had come short of fully realizing their intended goals? Local community members often are 'cynical' analysts of the historical contexts and situations on the ground so that they develop certain strategies to overcome the heavy presence of stronger state or other powerful local actors' networks and to circumvent legal and administrative barriers. These sorts of routine daily hidden forms of resistances or infra-politics (Scott 1985; 1990), in order to create opportune means to win back apparently forgone interests and access rights to natural resources, have recently gained increasing attention (Holmes 2007; Matose 2016; Mohanty 2004; Vaccaro *et al.* 2013).

Informed by the above discussions of resistances on protected areas, we attempt to describe some of the repertoire of everyday resistance as they

unfold in participatory forest management scheme in the Chilimo-Gaji, West Shewa, Ethiopia.

Our aims in this paper were, therefore, three-fold. Firstly, we were interested to examine the nature, evolving roles and dynamics of local forest management institutions in Chilimo-Gaji; secondly, we were interested to describe the nuanced day to day interactions of various actors¹ and power dynamics in the process of PFM and its wider implications to the success of sustainable forest management; and finally, but most importantly, we attempted to provide an account on how the local communities adapt to or resist against the stronger state and local actor networks, and institutional configurations surrounding PFM in Chilimo-Gaji, Central Ethiopia.

2. Study Sites and Methods

Chilimo-Gaji is located in west Shewa zone, Oromiya Regional State in central Ethiopia. It is located between 9° 30'N – 9° 50'N and 38° 07'E – 38° 10'E (Figure 1), with elevations ranging from 2000 to 3200 m a.s.l. Chilimo-Gaji forest is one of the 58 national forest priority areas of Ethiopia (Mulugeta and Melaku 2008). It is one of the remnant dry Afromontane forests in Ethiopia which had survived millennia of human exploitation and land conversions (Friis *et al.* 2010). The forest is a mixed dry Afromontane forest dominated by conifer species, namely *Juniperus procera* and *Podocarpus falctus* in the upper canopy stratum. However, broad-leaved indigenous trees such as *Prunus africana*, *Apodytes dimidiata*, *Olea europea* subsp. *Cuspidata* and *Ficus* spp. are also important.

Chilimo-Gaji forest has lost its original cover of 20,000 ha in 1980s to only 5000 ha in 1997, out of which 415 ha were industrial plantations (Melaku 2003). In order to curb such a massive level of deforestation and to win the support of local communities to conserve forests, PFM pilot project was introduced in 1997 while the actual signing of the contract was done in 2004 (Aklilu *et al.* 2014) and the project phased out in 2007. Farm Africa, a British based non-governmental organization, launched the PFM project with financial support from the World Bank while similar other national

priority forests were supported by GIZ, SOS-Sahel or Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in various parts of Ethiopia.

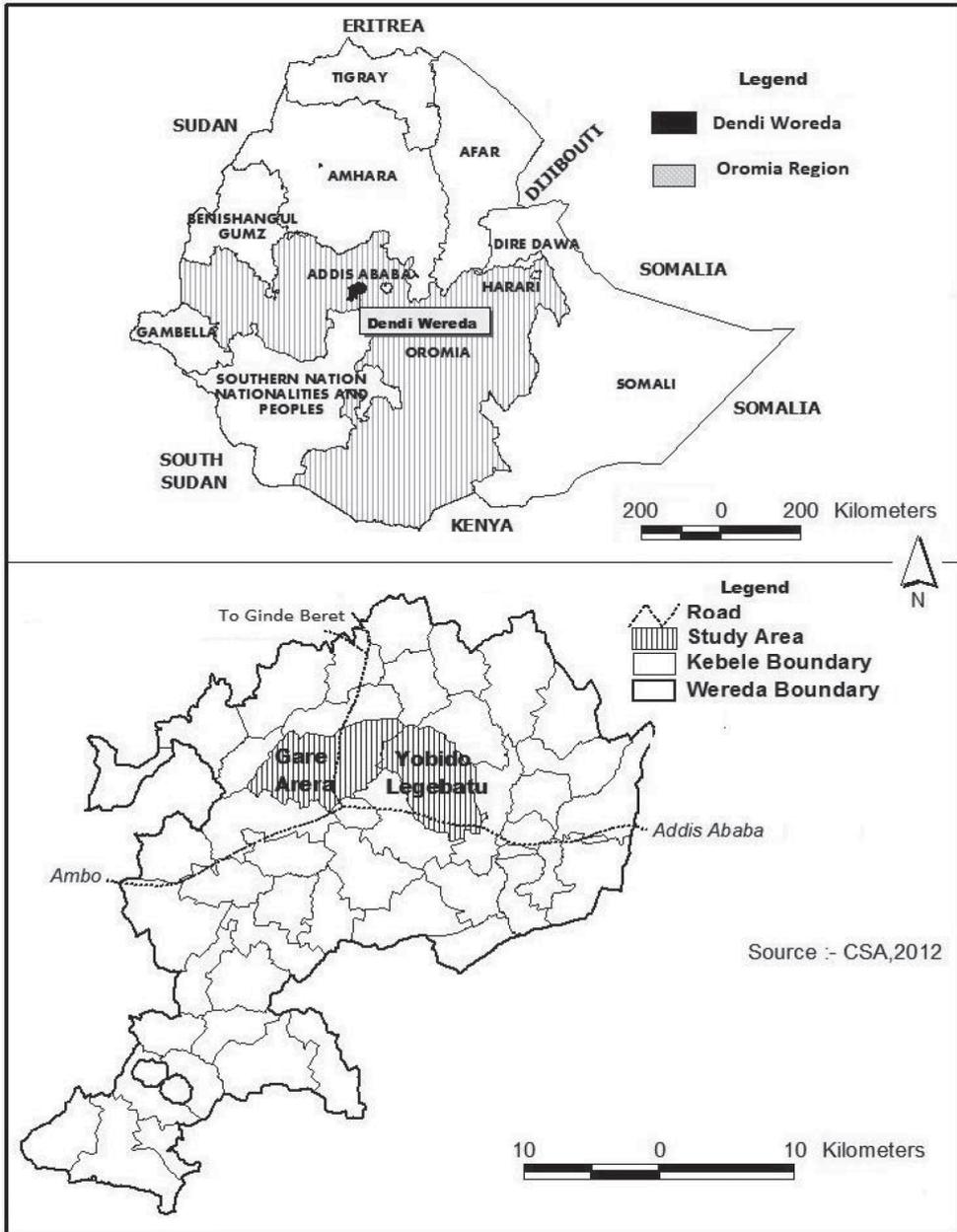


Figure 1: Location Map of the Study Area

2.1. Sampling design and techniques of data collection

Sampling Design: In Chilimo-Gaji about 1600 households organized into 12 Forest User Groups (FUGs) were included to participate in the PFM project from which about eight were registered as forest users' cooperatives (Abrar and Inoue 2014) to get legal status from the Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise. Though inclusion and exclusion criteria for membership varied among the pilot projects in Ethiopia, in Chilimo-Gaji the criterion was mainly the proximity of the homestead to PFM forests (Aklilu *et al.* 2014). Local communities were in charge of identifying FUG members while FUGs executive committees were democratically elected from the FUG members (Aklilu *et al.* 2014). We purposively selected Chilimo, Jijiga and Gaji FUGs (later registered as Cooperatives in 2004) out of the eight forest users' cooperatives because of the following reasons. Firstly, according to our field observations, there were high recent human disturbances which resulted in rapid decline in forest density and coverage in these areas because these areas were now the new frontiers of forest degradation as compared to already degraded areas such as Dano Sangota, where the vegetation was dominated by shrubs such as *Carissa spinarium*, and *Rubus* spp. and a high density of re-sprouts of species of dry Afromontane species after recent deforestations, while in Mesalemiya, the vegetation was highly dominated by plantation trees. Secondly, the presence of both plantations and highly valued remnants of dry Afromontane forest trees were available and relatively easily accessible in these sites. Thirdly, the selected forest blocks were 'relative accessible' and the first author had a close knowledge about them.

3.2 Techniques of data collection

Data collections took place in two phases: the first round was conducted from October 2013 to February 2014, and the second round was done from February to March 2017. We employed data collection techniques such as focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and direct field observations to acquire qualitative data.

Observation and field notes: We conducted structured field observation based on pre-designed observation checklist to collect data which would be

used to triangulate with other methods of data collection and help us to refine interview questions for subsequent key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Direct observation (structured observation) was conducted on the selected study area to see the social dynamics and power relationships, day-to-day activities and relationships among FUGs, FPC and local communities in the study area. The main emphases were to have firsthand information via direct observation of the conditions of forests (via transect walks across the forest blocks to record for fresh disturbances and to observe regeneration status of forests), and the dynamics of actors' interactions on the ground via attending meetings during which the first author was part of the process but only observing and taking notes.

Focus group discussion: Focus group discussions were conducted for qualitative data collection. Participants in these discussions were selected from ordinary members of FUGs and non-forest user group members from the three selected study sites. Forest users group members who had long years of participation in the PFM scheme were purposefully selected because they were assumed to have a detailed knowledge on practices of forest management and problems encountered therein. To identify the study participants for focus group discussions, list of forest user group (FUG) members were obtained from Forest Cooperative Unions Promotion Office. We considered FUG members as candidates for being selected only if their membership year was more than five years because we assumed that the longer they stayed the more informed they were about the dynamics of participatory forest management activities. We then purposefully selected six participants for each focus group discussions from FUG members (three focus group discussion in the three forest user cooperatives). Similarly, we conducted three focus group discussions where each group consisted of six non-forest user participants, who were not included in the participatory forest management.

Key Informant Interview: We selected a total of 26 participants for Key informant interviewees representing FUG members, Forest Protection Committee (FPC), and experts drawn from various offices of the local government in Dendi Woreda. We captured gender, age and socio-economic status in the community from the three forest users' cooperatives (six men

and six women covering different age and socio-economic categories). We were very cautious when selecting participants for an in-depth key informant interview from the forest users' cooperatives. We cross-checked with other members before we conducted interviews whether a particular person had a strong kin relationship, business interest or any other special relationship to FPC. Nevertheless, we could not claim that we were able to avoid such incidences altogether or verify them in definitive terms. In order to accommodate the views of the forest protecting committees, we interviewed nine members from the three forest cooperatives including their respective chairpersons. We also interviewed experts from various offices of the local government (five experts) including a forestry expert from Dendi Woreda agriculture and rural development office, Woreda cooperative promotion office expert, an expert from Dendi Woreda Forest and Wildlife Enterprise, and for issues related to law enforcements, a legal expert from Woreda justice office and police officers from Dendi Woreda.

2.2. Data analysis

The collected qualitative data were transcribed and key words or phrases were generated based on recurrence of the concepts and also prior set objectives. The key terms and phrases were further elaborated with details as 'expressions of key terms/phrases' on a separate column in the Table (Ritchie *et al.* 2003). Then the table was iteratively reduced into few categories or themes based on the key terms/phrases with their detailed expressions until we got sizeable categories for descriptions and interpretations. While coalescing the sub-categories into main themes we gave due attention to carry through the original key terms and phrases as described in Ritchie *et al.* (2003).

3. Results and Discussion

4.1. Actors' interactions and institutional dynamics of PFM

The success of any participatory forest management scheme is measured, *inter alia*, on the basis of sound institutional arrangement to properly carry out forest management activities (Mustalahti and Lund 2009). This is so because institutions represent legal entities for entrusting responsibilities and subsequent decision making on the processes of PFM activities (Aklilu

et al. 2014). In many instances, institutional arrangements and their interplay in various ways entails not only the nature and concentration of power at certain level but also the level of interactions among different proponents and actors involved in forest management regimes (Mohanty 2004; Mcginnis and Ostrom 2014).

We identified two major key actors in Chilimo-Gaji PFM. These were the 'local actors' representing multiple groups in the local communities adjacent to forests, and the 'state actors' which were usually represented by formal institutional setups to manage and oversee forests. The local actors included Forest Protection Committee (FPC), the Forest Users Groups (FUGs) members, who did have *de jure* use rights based on the provisions of the community by-law and the non-members who did not have *de jure* use rights to forest products but had claims of customary rights and livelihood challenges to use forest resources. This group represented a heterogeneous array of interests, power and intra-actor dynamics due to asymmetrical power relationships owing to their socio-economic standings (Fischer *et al.* 2014), affiliations and allegiances to state actors and the level of dependence on forests for their livelihoods (Lenaerts 2013). Though FPC were elected from the forest user groups, the role they played and uneven concentration of executive power they wielded constituted them as if they were independent actors in the context of Chilimo PFM.

The interactions between FPC members among themselves and other ordinary forest user community members were characterized by a stiff competition among themselves and members of forest user groups. FPCs were, in principle, responsible for safeguarding the forest and facilitating utilization of forests in a sustainable manner. The FPCs were further divided into different sub-committees to speed up and effectively carry out daily routines of forest management activities. Among them, natural resources development and livelihood development committees were very active and involved in coordination of planning of forest development activities, mobilized members for the proper implementation of natural forest development plans, and facilitated training on natural resource management activities (Community bylaw 1998). The fact that these two committees and only few members from FPC involved in major activities of PFM, indicated

that most of the power was concentrated around FPC regarding decision making and income distribution from the sale of timber from plantations. Moreover, competitions among all FPCs to give ‘permission to obtain construction materials’ to forest guarding individuals during their turn also exacerbated forest degradation especially through selective logging of valuable timber trees. During the absence of forest guard, any informed community member, relatives and friends of the committee members and even non-member groups had the chance to access the forest resources illegally. With the use of communication devices, even remote distant dwellers had also the chance to access forest resources. Christopher (2013) reported similar incidences in national forest reserve of Kenya, where forest guards abstained from patrolling the forest area with permission; the villagers then harvested the timber for household or commercial purposes.

The other important issues impairing the healthy relationship of FUGs members and FPC was financial mismanagement. In Chilimo-Gaji, according to the provisions of community by-law (1998), the executive committee members were responsible to protect the forest against illegal tree smuggling. Contrary to such responsibility, some of the FPC members were alleged to have involved in illicit networks of timber smugglers. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews held at all study sites in Chilimo and Gaji, asserted that most fines and penalties obtained from the individuals who were engaged in illegal smuggling were collected without official receipt. The confiscated timber products from remnant dry Afromontane forests, firewood and charcoal were also sold out to consumers without auction to possible buyers. Lack of transparency and, particularly, absence of downward accountability of the elected members of FUGs on matters of financial management and decision making had been identified as the crucial component of decentralized forest governance in African countries (Chinangwa *et al.* 2016).

The state actors also represented heterogeneous institutional setups with multiple responsibilities and temporal dynamics. During the study period, the administrative tiers from the lower tentacles of the political administration upwards were the Woreda Cooperative Promotion Office, Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development, Oromia Forest and Wildlife

Enterprise including its district branch office, and the Oromia National Regional State (Abrar and Inoue, 2014). The second line of state structure that had broader policy implications on local populace surrounding the forest and forest itself began from the line ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change but it was unclear how far that institution exerted its influence in the PFM policies and directives. Moreover, there had been frequent reorganization of forestry sector being placed under different line ministries in the last two decades and, more recently, it was placed under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The Woreda cooperative promotion office was entrusted to act as a facilitator, ensuring community participation in line with the state government directives and community forest management bylaw. Dendi branch of Oromia Forest and Wildlife enterprise did also play similar role as a facilitator of PFM. But, according to key informant interview with the Woreda level Oromia Forest and Wildlife enterprise office expert, this forest, which was under PFM, still faced 'illegal' encroachers; these were people who abandoned their right to membership during the inception process at their own discretion, while some were those excluded on the basis of membership criteria. These former members, but now turned non-members, were repeatedly caught in some areas while illegally harvesting forest products. Key informant interviews with the Woreda police and justice office experts, revealed that although individuals were accused of offenses on the forests (cutting tree or grazing), FPCs did not present concrete evidences and often lacked witness against the suspects. Therefore, the cases of offenses were rarely referred to the court.

Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise of Dendi Woreda was also responsible for identifying and selling plantation logs for the market. Their approval was needed before logging the timber for sell. It is again the responsibility of forest and wildlife enterprise to oversee the activities of Forest Protection Committee. However, legal cases and subsequent corrective measures against FPC members, who failed to carry out their responsibilities, were referred to the cooperative promotion office. District government officials, who oversee the cooperative office activities, used this as a means to create a patronage network with wealthy non-members and

community leaders to usurp the power and benefits of local people and were largely involve in corruptions (Abrar and Inoue 2012: 32). In this regard, a key informant interview with Woreda Cooperative promotion officer pointed out that the issue lied not only on distributional injustice of the revenue but also on micro-corruptions and illicit networks among forest users cooperatives, forest protection committee members and financial auditors from Woreda cooperative promotion office. The whole issue then came down to a simple disagreement of audit services fee dispute between the auditors and forest protection committee.

A further note by the experts of forest cooperative promotion officer was that such dispute was a tacit technique to evade any misdoings by those who were involved in corruption as legal caveats since there were no clearly indicated directives on how to make and settle payments for cooperative promotion auditors. Using the illicit network and their political power, district government officials and FPC leaders sold out plantation timber to wealthy non-members at a price much lower than the market price. Various studies conducted in Ethiopia (Aklilu *et al.* 2014; Abrar and Inoue 2012) and many Sub-Saharan countries revealed that officials and community forest management individuals had informal connection with wealthy non-members to share illegal benefits from the forests (Christopher 2013; Klopp 2012; Polansky 2003).

However, the interaction of the local institutions to achieve the intended goal of PFM appeared to be less effective. Key informant interview with cooperative promotion office expert indicated that Oromia Forest and Wildlife enterprise was supposed to train FUG members on different forest management issues because 30% of the revenue generated from timber sell was allocated for the Forest and Wildlife enterprise. The inability of Oromia Forest and Wildlife enterprise to provide training, as capacity building, and effect a number of overlapping responsibilities with other government institutions created unfavorable conditions among these actors to effectively execute their responsibilities (Abrar and Inoue, 2012). A number of studies in South Asian (Siswanto and Wardojo 2005) and African countries (Chinangwa *et al.* 2016) implicated inability/unwillingness of government institutions to properly empower local institutions and forest user

communities as the main impeding factors for the success of decentralized forest governance.

4.2. Adapting to the new forest governance regime?

Local level actors had long been responding to various stronger state and non-state actors in the process of natural resource management (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Lenaerts 2013; Vaccaro *et al.* 2013). The local communities had developed some adapted strategies to the existing institutional arrangements and uneven power relationships with regards to benefit sharing, access to NTFP, and inequalities among FPC to exercise the perceived roles in different forms. According to an interview made with Gaji FPC chairperson, strategy of adaptation had been used frequently by these actors since the establishment of community based forest management. Many local actors employed different forms of adaptive strategies that aimed to minimize any adverse effects on them while, at the same time, avoiding confrontation with powerful actors (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Scott 1990). For example, according to discussions made with non-FUG members at the study area, some of them were forming informal networks with forest executive committee members; some were working as laborers for these committee members and later got the permission to become members into FUGs. Here it is important to note that provision of labor or otherwise appeared to work as a bargain mechanism as well by poor people to maneuver participatory forest management administrative structures and hence gaining access to membership (Mohanty 2004).

Another form of adaptive strategy was exploiting kin relationship. Non-members tried whatsoever they could to get accession to membership. The community forest management bylaw of the study area stated that “any person who wants to be a member shall pay a registration fee and utilization fee when approved” (Community by-law 1998:54). Since the establishment of forest users’ cooperatives in 2004, members had been depositing money in the form of utilization fee and savings on a monthly basis. Dividend share for the members was based on the ‘mandatory savings’ that they deposited in the bank as well as the level of their participation in forest management activities. Therefore, according to the explanation of the FPC in study area the newly accepted members should pay the registration fee, utilization fee

and ‘mandatory saving’ which were calculated from the year of establishment of forest users’ cooperatives. But non-members’ focus group discussants explained that they preferred another option rather than paying the prescribed amount of money citing financial mismanagement and corruptions as a reason.

As it was already discussed above, non-members were denied of using any form of timber and NTFP from forests. But most members in focus group discussions expressed that these groups of the communities were renting their donkeys to the poor, who totally depended on forest products to sustain their life, so that they could transport maximum pack of fire wood or charcoal to the market. In this kind of arrangements, out of three packs of donkeys, one pack’s sale went to the non-member who rented his/her donkeys. This kind of adaptive arrangement was not only limited to non-forest user group members but also adopted by FUG members since power relationships among them was also not even. Some members, during focus group discussions, stated that the executive committee members were getting additional revenue from different sources such as from benefit sharing, fines, confiscated firewood and charcoal. It seemed that, due to the violation of community forest management bylaw and poor regulatory mechanisms, few individual members of the FUGs obtained multiple benefits which might undermine the long term relationships between forest user groups and the community at large. During focus group discussions and also from the observation of the first author during field data, it was attested that most of the forest user’s ordinary members fought to ascend to the status of executive committee. Ascension to decision making status and often holding political power was as much important or even more important than access to natural resources in many rural contexts of Ethiopia (Lenaerts 2013).

4.3. Resisting against PFM institutional operations mechanism?

Different forms of resistance, notably associated with the illegal exploitation of environmental resource such as forests by the poor and other local actors, were widely observed phenomena (Fischer *et al.* 2014; Mohanty 2004; Scott 1985). In the study area, livestock grazing inside the forest was allowed

only for identified groups who were poor and depended largely on forest resources for their livelihoods. The community forest management bylaw (1998) provided special rights to individuals, who did not have farmland for crop production, access to streams of benefit flows from forest grasses through cut-and-carry schemes or providing grazing rights to their livestock. There had, however, been a mounting disagreement regarding the provisions of community by-law (1998) for grazing rights between participatory forest management members, represented by forest protection committee, and the non-members who had no *de jure* rights to acquiring such rights within forests. The non-members challenged the provisions of the by-law itself and wanted it to be revised to broaden its provisions by including non-members with livelihood challenges and other groups with concrete evidence to have access to the grazing resources or streams of benefit sharing from forest products.

On the other hand, the forest protecting committee members complained that grasses which generated income for their group were 'illegally' cut and taken to individual's houses at night time and often there were cases where cut grasses were also stolen from the field by the non-members. During focus group discussions, the non-members explicitly indicated that they would push hard to open space for representation and inclusion into forest management schemes and access to the resources they needed through 'illegal use' and/or encroaching into the forests for farmland and grazing. This kind of covert resistance had been a widely observed response in many parts of Southeast Asia forest dwellings and/or adjacent communities (Mohanty 2004) and many parts of Africa regarding their marginalization to environmental resources including forests (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015; Fischer *et al.* 2014; Guillozet and Bliss 2010; Matose 2016). Matose (2016) presented a vivid picture of the unraveling of hidden politics in participatory forest management schemes in South Africa and Zimbabwe protected forests. His study revealed that local people resisted covertly the imposition of co-management schemes through which the governments had exerted their control over forest tenure rights and access to forest products.

The other form of resistance observed in our study area was 'sabotaging of election' of FPC by the forest user group members. One of the

responsibilities of FUG members was to make patrolling of their respective forest blocks to keep off illegal tree smugglers and cattle grazers within forests. Patrolling was done on turn-by-turn bases by the FUG members but some members who were relatives of FPC did not adhere to the rules and accomplish their duties. Hence, some of the FUG members were purposely reluctant to keep their turn to patrol the forest blocks and did not attend the meeting. Sometimes they formed informal groups and discussed unrelated issues vis-à-vis formal meeting agenda thereby challenging the day to day activities of FPC members. In such situations, the FUGs members often organized themselves and voted against the existing FPC to replace them with their relatives so as to get access to illegal tree smuggling.

The last forms of resistance by the local communities who were excluded from PFM and concomitant benefits pursued confrontational approach. Non-members usually cut trees at night and transported them closer to users and hid the logs in the house of FUG member(s) where informal network was already established. Focus group discussion with the FUG members, in all the three research sites, indicated that illegal tree smugglers were often forming gangs and attacked forest guards or forest user group members if they were challenged. The focus group members were some individual, who previously worked as forest guards and who sustained physical attacks and lost their teeth by gangs of tree smugglers. This kind of 'violent attack on forest guards and rangers was reported in Ugandan (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015: 737) and Matose (2016) in South Africa. A focus group discussion in Gaji with non-forest user group members also showed that they would continue to smuggle logs, and, if challenged, would attack those who benefited from PFM, and claimed that they would continue to do so until their rights were respected. This kind of physical confrontation or what Cavanagh and Benjaminsen (2015) termed as 'militant' form of resistance was not uncommon in Ethiopia where, often, the whole community (about 2000 individuals) chased down forest enterprise officers and government representatives during demarcation of forest boundaries in Arsi (Guillozet and Bliss, 2010). Guillozet and Bliss (2010) further noted that such incidences forced community forestry enterprise to acquiesce and negotiate with local communities and political leaders to make concessions to address

livelihoods challenges of the poor via provision of alternative farm plots, bank loans for small business and other income generation schemes such as ecotourism.

4. Conclusion

Participatory forest management approaches have been seen as yielding positive results mainly because of their contributions to local livelihoods and improved conditions of forests during or after project interventions. However, our study showed that various forms of resistances to collaborative forest management schemes could undermine the intended goals of PFM and often resulted in conflicts between FUG members and non-forest user group members. The local communities adopted illicit networks with participatory forest management executives and business people as adaptive strategy to access forest resources. When they found adaptation was not enough, or circumstances compelled them, they resorted to hidden forms of resistances towards PFM arrangements. The range of responses varied from circum-navigating legal and administrative caveats, sabotaging election of forest protecting committee members, taking militant actions on the forest management executives and damaging the forest itself. These responses were employed by local communities to continually negotiate their customary rights and access forest resources for their livelihoods against the existing institutional configurations and stronger state and non-state actors. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of local level actors, power relationships among various actors and intra-actor interactions should be given due attentions to fully realize the intended goals of PFM arrangements in Ethiopia. We also suggest further research on what we would like to call the 'resistance landscapes' of the local people against powerful state and non-state actors and how they unfold across multiple actors during collaborative forest management arrangements in Ethiopia.

Endnote

We employed a broader definition of actors following Mcginnis and Ostrom (2014) which included resources users and government structures. Resource users are those who directly or indirectly depend on forest resources for their livelihoods through production, harvesting and consumption of forest

products (Mcginnis and Ostrom, 2014). With regards to government structures, Mcginnis and Ostrom (2014) place them either in actors' category when the analyst is interested in actions taken by the agents of a particular organization; otherwise it can be placed under the category of governance systems when one is interested to explain the capability and responsibility of that agent. For our purpose here we put them under the actors' category since, at the local level, the boundaries between actions of the agents and capabilities and responsibilities by the same were less distinct.

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