



# Collective Actions in Agro-pastoral Communities of Shabelley Woreda, Somali Region

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## ABSTRACT

Collective action is organized when greater benefits are expected through joining a group than acting individually. Collective action enables to achieve goals that individuals could not meet in isolation. This study is conducted to identify type's collective actions practiced by agro-pastoral communities and to explore management of collective actions in Shabelley woreda. The selection of Shebelly woreda and agro-pastoralists who took part in the focus group discussions was done purposively. From shabelley Woreda six Kebeles were selected randomly. Data were collected through focus group discussions and data were analysed through narration. Five types of collective actions were identified. These include construction and management of ponds and water wells, collective herding, labor sharing groups (guus), milk collection and marketing groups, and mag-paying groups (a collective responsibility for paying blood compensation). Each of the collective actions consists of joint decisions, designing management rules and setting rules of conduct of group members. Whenever, agro-pastoral communities establish informal organization in a group, they establish institutions and the institutions are enforced by elders. The government need to support collective actions and their institutions, since the collective actions has a great role in development and conflict resolution.

**Key Words:** Agro-pastoral, Collective actions, Institutions, Elders.

## 1. Introduction

Collective action can be defined as voluntary action taken by a group to achieve common interests. Members can act directly on their own (internally initiated) or through an organization (externally initiated) (DiGregorio et al., 2008). Moreover, collective action requires the involvement of a group of people, shared interest within the group and it involves some kinds of common action which works in pursuit of that shared interest. Further, the action should be voluntary which distinguishes collective action from hired labor. Collective action is organized when greater benefits are expected through joining a group than acting individually. collective action enables to achieve goals that individuals could not meet in isolation. This implies a conscious working together, such as in investing in a resource or excluding outsiders from using it. Collective action might dif-

fer depending on the specific objective of collective action. In the literature, collective action has been described as taking various forms including the development of institutions, resource mobilization, coordination activities and information sharing, collective decision-making, setting rules of conduct of a group and designing management rules, implementing decision, and monitoring adherence to rules (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2004). Collective action and networks among community members can facilitate access to information and even allow farmers to participate in technology development (Ostrom, 2004).

Collective action is fundamental to the advancement of the welfare and rights of smallholder farmers. There are many different types of groups: producer organizations, self-help groups, cooperatives, marketing associations, etc. They may be loose and informal (e.g., for extension or information dissemination) or formal, with specific rules, regulations and structures. They may have single functions (such as sharing information or marketing produce) or many (purchasing inputs, organizing production, managing equipment, savings and loans, etc.). Collective action networks and associations can also help mitigate the effects of shocks that affect households, such as illness (Bernier & Meinzen-Dick, 2014). For smallholders and other marginalized groups in rural areas, collective action can secure more equitable access to labour, land, commodity and financial markets, and stimulate the development of more responsive and accountable state institutions (OECD, 2012). Collective action provides platforms for farmers to

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discuss issues, set priorities, make decisions, organize activities and develop leadership skills. When farmers are organized in groups, it is easier for capacity-building initiatives to target them rather than approaching them as individuals. Training can be better targeted by involving the group to identify its own needs, and more effective because of the mutual learning and reinforcement among members. When it comes to marketing groups, by pooling their produce and selling in bulk, members can get the volumes needed to attract buyers, sell to new markets, and negotiate for higher prices. Groups can also be eligible to apply for loans, buy bulk inputs, and get other business services that are not open to individuals (KIT et al., 2012).

In Ethiopia, farm households conduct their day-to-day activities individually and in groups in a synchronized manner. Labor demanding activities such as ploughing, and harvesting are usually undertaken in informal but well-structured groups. In addition to agriculture, saving and credit, marketing, funerals, and festivals do involve gatherings of selected group of people with favors reciprocated more often than not. Farm households in rural Ethiopia have rich experience with group efforts including cooperatives, iddir, senbete, wonfel, debo, and equb. These formal and informal institutions can all be considered as collective actions although in some cases these institutions are imposed upon the communities (Kassie et al., 2020).

Collective action activities are a common feature in rural areas of the Somali Regional State. Some of the widely practiced collective actions include construction and management of ponds and water wells, collective herding, labor sharing groups (guus), funeral associations, and magpaying groups (a collective responsibility for paying blood compensation). Each of the collective actions consists of joint decisions, designing management rules and setting rules of conduct of group members (Mahdi, 2011). Therefore, this study is conducted to identify types collective actions practiced by agro-pastoral communities and to explore management of collective actions in Shabelley woreda.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. The study area

Shabelley woreda is one of the woredas in the Fafen Zone of Somali Regional State. Shabelley is bordered on the south by Kebri Beyah, on the southwest by Gursum, on the northwest by the Tuli Guled, and on the north by Har-rays. The climate is semiarid type which is characterized by high temperature. The mean annual rainfall in the area ranges from 600 to 700 mm. Agro-pastoralism is the dominant production system (raising both crops and livestock). Agro-pastoralists mainly produce sorghum, maize and chat. Sorghum is the main staple food of rural people. Guus is the principal labor arrangement used to ensure all farmers are able to plough and cultivate their land. They rear camel, cattle and shoats. The major feed sources for the livestock are communal and private pasture, and crop residue. Income is mainly from crop and livestock production. Households rely on different markets for the sale and purchase of specific items. The potential market area is Jigjiga town

where households sale crops and livestock, charcoal and some labor; and buy improved seeds, fertilizers and farm implements. Small ruminants (sheep and goats) are sold to meet immediate cash need whereas milk is consumed by the household. The surplus milk is sold or converted to butter. Camels, Oxen (Bulls) and donkeys are used as a draft power.

### 2.2. Sampling, data collection and data analysis

This study was entirely qualitative research. The selection of woreda and agro-pastoralists who took part in the focus group discussions was done purposively. From shabelley Woreda six Kebeles such as Hadew, Shebelley, Amadle, Hodley, Yoosle, and Dumduma-as were selected randomly. In each of these Kebeles, three to four focus group discussions were held with nine members in each group at a time (in the entire data collection period 160 persons were participated in focus group discussions). Snowball sampling technique was also used while conducting key informant interviews. The qualitative data were analyzed using narrative and ethnographic analysis. This was done through engagement of the researcher in the fieldwork and in the various data collection techniques.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Collective action activities are a common feature in rural areas of the Shebelley woreda. Five types of collective actions are widely practiced. These include construction and management of ponds and water wells, collective herding, labor sharing groups (guus), milk collection and marketing groups, and mag-paying groups (a collective responsibility for paying blood compensation). Each of the collective actions consists of joint decisions, designing management rules and setting rules of conduct of group members, which are discussed in detail below.

### 3.1. Constructing and Managing Ponds and Water Wells

In the study area, there was no potable water for human consumption, and hence rural people depend on shallow water sources. So, people living this area used to harvest water by digging shallow wells near seasonal rivers for the consumption of both human and livestock. Moreover, where adequate groundwater is available, communities dig deep wells. This practice was a persisted activity of the people for generations. Members of the community employ collective labor to construct and maintain communal ponds and engaged in such activities like silt removal, channel cleaning and fencing (to prevent their use by unauthorized strangers). In case of water wells, they dig in depth and cover the wall by wood to prevent the collapse of the well, cover the top of the well with strong materials such as logs/bricks to prevent silt and sands entering into it during rainy seasons, and assign well monitors. Under effective management, ponds can retain water both for human and livestock use for about eight months after the heavy rainy season while water wells can sustain water for years.

In the course of constructing and maintaining ponds, the cooperation of all the able-bodied men of the settlements who use them is required. Days are planned for the work and men of the local settlements are called to assist. Men provide labor and women prepare meals and drinks for working men. A failure to assist without a reasonable cause will result in verbal warning and in payment of fines in the form of live-animals. Warning follows a day absence from group work, but if a member is repeatedly absent, other members impose fines. Then, the absentee is forced to provide a live-animal, which is slaughtered and eaten by all members who have been working on construction of the pond. The sanction of slaughtering an animal from a man's herds for his non-cooperation is usually called yakays. Similarly, a household that fails to contribute to the construction of common-pool of pond, which the laborers share at mid-day are liable to punishment.

Once the construction of pond or water well is finalized and water is accumulated, every member of the community has the right to water. Members practice much in encouraging for contribution rather than excluding from utilization. For watering animals, usually a rule is developed by community elders. Mostly the common rule in prioritizing the watering is based on first-come-first-served. Similar result is obtained by Beyene and Korf (2008). These arrangements are locally known as Kaalaysi. Such schedules are strictly followed by herders and any one violating it is punished. The punishment is usually in the form of temporary suspension of use rights. In case of members of another clan, other than the owners, come in search of water, they are given precedence in reciprocal arrangement established with their clan. Anyone refusing to give precedence for the guests will face social exclusion from his clan members, branded as "ridiculous" and receive stiff punishments.

### 3.2. Collective Herding

Collecting herding is the formation of herd tending group in which a group of herders keep its livestock jointly to graze on the pastures, to prevent animals from predators attack and matching of available pasture resources at a particular site with animals. Collective herding is also serves for confronting and addressing security risks related to theft and conflict over resources. Naess (2021) reported similar result. Thus, movement of animals is a classic strategy to exploit the special and temporal variation in resource availability resulting from uneven distribution of rainfall. When herds are moved opportunistically to follow the rains, they gain access to a more balanced pasture supply than if they were kept in one area. Collective tracking with livestock to feed and water is less costly than bringing feed and water to livestock, because of lower labor demand. Members share labor and the formed group moves with herd distant from the residence to graze livestock, sometimes move beyond their own grazing territory. The formation of the group creates the feeling of being secured.

Before going for collective herding, the herd is divided into two: the lactating and the nonlactating or dry animals. The lactating animals and young stock are left for the family under the supervision of female and young children,

while the management of the remaining livestock is taken by young men i.e. the herding group and move to where good pasture is available. This strategy allows the seasonal resting of dry-season pastures around the permanent residence. In case the household does not have a young man who joins the herding group, the responsibility of managing the herd is given to a hired herder. This procedure is known as xidhaale. A hired herder receives full package of clothing (arad box) consisting of a pair of shoes, shirts, and a sheet, which he uses for the period of herding in group.

### 3.3. Labor Sharing Group

The main task of men, in crop production, is ploughing, weeding and harvesting, and leading the daily activities of the household. Women do household activities like cooking and rearing children and help husbands in fields, especially in weeding and transporting grain from the farm field. Boys over 15 years old plough with their fathers and those who below often herd livestock. Hence, labor is provided by the household members but there are still traditional labor-sharing practices (Guus), which is established to help each other accomplish crop production and other activities.

Guus (a labor-sharing arrangement) is an informal network, which involves a group of people, usually neighboring households, who are organized for a particular agricultural task like oxploughing, weeding, harvesting, threshing, and transporting grain from the farm field. A group of people pools their labor resources and/or material resources (oxen, hand plough tools, sickles etc.) to help fellow neighbors. Even though a farm household is usually framed around a nuclear family, its relationship with the extended family remains strong; this favors the formation of labor sharing group. Similar result is presented by Kassie et al. (2020).

Household head, wife, and young men and girls will participate in the group productive activities including ploughing, weeding and harvesting according to their ability. Women, in the household that is calling and receiving the assistance, have also the duty to prepare meals and drinks for the working group. The assisted household is expected to provide labor for the households that have participated in the arrangement at some time in the next activity of the other group members, meaning group members pay for the labor they receive with their own personal labor. Member household, that has temporary difficulties because of illness or the need to care for the sick, is also assisted by the other group members through performing any agricultural activity on its land.

The other form of guus is labor sharing for house (hut) construction and dismantling, which is performed only by women group. It is established voluntarily and on mutual understanding to help each other through mobilizing labor to accomplish house construction during settling, and house dismantling during migration or shifting settlement. All households settling or migrating together have the responsibility to participate in the operations. The house is usually made of grass mats tied together and placed over a wooden frame structure. During the construction of new house, the women gather special grass from the woodland for weav-

ing mats. The men usually gather the wood from the trees (Galool, Dhumay etc.) and then the women get to construction of the house. But practice is diminishing, because rural people started constructing corrugated iron houses.

### 3.4. Milk collection and Marketing groups

Milk and milk product marketing is entirely done by the women groups. Not only milk and milk product marketing but also management of these products at home is exclusively the responsibility of women. Men pastoralists revealed that it is even taboo for a man to ask how his partner allocates milk and milk product in the household. How much to use at home and to sell out and for what purpose to use the proceedings from milk and milk product is the sole responsibility of the women. Mostly the morning milk marketed and the evening milk is often used for home consumption.

Women in the same locality form milk-selling group during peak production periods. Milk marketing groups is a self-organized group, which involve women who have milking cows and/or camels. The number of women that participate in milk marketing group depends on the number of neighborhoods. Members are organized on the basis of selling whole fresh cow and/or camel milk. Milk marketing group members contribute an agreed amount of milk on a weekly basis and this is allocated to an individual woman on a shift basis. The woman sells the milk and the daily income belongs to her. The cycle continues until every member gets her share of the milk income. Similar result is reported by Hussien (2007).

### 3.5. Mag-paying Group

The use of natural resources is susceptible to conflict particularly when the resources are scarce. Conflicts over natural resources have many negative impacts among this loss of human life is included. When a conflict occurs, the traditional mechanism of resolving it is through agreements made between conflicting clan elders and paying compensation for the lives lost (i.e. conflict resolution on the bases of blood compensation). To pay this compensation, Somali people commonly established collective blood compensation group known as mag-paying group. The mag-paying group is defined as a corporate agnatic group (Jilib/Bah) whose members are united in joint responsibility to collectively safeguard all matters of common interest. The mag-paying group is the most stable unit with a membership of groups of families ranging from a few hundred to more than a thousand.

The mag-paying group is collectively responsible for the payment of compensation in the event of the death or injury of a member of another group at the hands of one of its members. While members of the same mag-paying lineage group may live in different locations. Alene et al. (2023) reported similar results. It is also collectively entitled to the receipt of compensation in the event of the death or injury of one of its members at the hands of a member of another group. Moreover, the administration of mag-paying group

has adopted the practice of electing an individual (aaqil) to represent them with power and influence.

The process of negotiation is taken place through all elders in a mag-paying group gathering in an assembly (shir) under a tree and taking, democratically, on important decision of common interest to them. Arbitrating panels vary in size. Often four or five elders are considered sufficient, but where mag-paying group elders hear the case themselves concerning members of their own group, many men may take part as judges. Between mag-paying groups, the court's size tends often to vary with the magnitude of the case and the structural distance of the parties to the dispute.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Collective actions consist of joint decisions, designing management rules and setting rules of conduct of group members. Whenever, agro-pastoral communities establish informal organization in a group, they establish institutions and the institutions are enforced by elders. The government need to support collective actions and their institutions, since the collective actions has a great role in development and conflict resolution.

Agro-pastoralists have long experience of working in group and help each other at time of crisis. But, the collective actions such as milk marketing, and mutual aid and social insurance (idir) were not so strong. Therefore, there is a need to creating awareness about collective marketing and importance of cooperative organization and the mechanics of establishing and managing it.

### Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest involve in publishing this research paper.

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