The Role of Local Institutions in Adaptive Processes to Climate Variability: The cases of southern Ethiopia and southern Mali

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Adaptation and Local Social Institutions

“Adaptation to climate is inevitably local . . .”

Local Social Institutions

- a) they structure impacts and vulnerability,
- b) they mediate between individual and collective responses to climate impacts and thereby shape outcomes of adaptation, and
- c) they act as the means of delivery of external resources to facilitate adaptation, and thus govern access to such resources.”

Agrawal 2008:2
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation research call on institutions and climate adaptation

Oxfam America

- Development NGOs want to engage in adaptation efforts
  - Creatively
  - Respectfully
  - Effectively
- What is there to know about local adaptive dynamics?
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Research approaches
- 1 International research coordinator
- 2 National research consultants, and teams
- 2 Wageningen MSc students
- Long term Oxfam sites
  - Southern Ethiopia
    - Borana pastoral zone
    - On-going drought and famine
  - Southeastern Mali
    - Cotton belt
    - Old/recent integration of cotton
- Spring to summer 2011
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Research questions

1. What role do local social institutions have in long-term adaptation to environmental change?
2. How have extra-local actors interacted with local social institutions in development and adaptation efforts?
3. How is the production and use of weather and climate information organized?
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- **Institutions (?)**
  - Formal organization
    - Village councils
    - Trade associations
  - Informal custom
    - Land tenure practices
    - Gender division of labor

- **Local (?)**
  - Legitimacy
  - Accountability

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- **Research approaches**
  - **Shared frameworks**
    - Research questions
    - Social mechanisms of change
    - Local perspectives and dynamics
    - Qualitative methods
  - **Mixed methods**
    - Life histories
    - Household surveys
    - Case studies
    - Key informant interviews
    - Focus groups
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Findings
- Production strategies
- Land and water governance
- Social support systems
- Households, gender and adaptive capacity
- Weather and climate information
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- **Production strategies**
  - **Ethiopia**
    - Borena cattle herding ➔ camel and goat herding
  - **Mali**
    - Dual seed system

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- Land and water governance
  - Ethiopia
    - Customary local institutions
    - State ("modern") local institutions
  - Mali
    - Land tenure
    - Decentralization

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- Social support systems
  - Ethiopia
    - *Buusa gonnofa*
  - Mali
    - Reciprocity, kinship and gifting
    - Market integration

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- Households, gender and adaptive capacity
  - Ethiopia
    - Shifting workload
  - Mali
    - Land access

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- Weather and climate information
  - Low access to and trust in scientific climatology
  - Active local practice of forecast
    - Mundane observation
    - Arcane specialization
Recommendations

- ↑ Adaptive capacities, ↓ adaptive technologies
- Start with local practices, institutions, dynamics
- Engage both customary and state institutions
- Integrate with markets selectively
- Increasing women’s access to educational, political and financial opportunities aids adaptive capacity
- Diversify livelihoods, inc. urban/foreign migration
- Synergize local/scientific climate info production
Discussion points

- ↑ Adaptive capacities, ↓ adaptive technologies
- Start with local practices, institutions, dynamics

Questions?