

## **Decentralisation of Land Management and Administration: Case Studies from Siraro and Deguna Fanigo in Southern Ethiopia**

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Decentralisation and land policies are two closely interlinked issues shaping the current debate over rural development in Africa. Over the last years, decentralised approaches to land management and administration came into prominence for their ability to foster more democratic access to policy implementation at the local level, reducing poverty and stimulating land productivity. Effectiveness of decentralisation depends on the nature of local bodies and the powers transferred, the role granted to customary authorities, the arrangements on land dispute resolution. Rural areas play a key role in Ethiopia. They represent the main development challenge of a country where more than 80% of the people base their subsistence on agriculture. Despite of that, poverty is widespread and food security remains extremely critical even at the top of rains and climatic conditions. Ethiopian rural areas face what is usually referred as a productive crisis where population growth is both cause and effect of land shortage, landlessness, and environmental degradation, therefore contributing to widespread poverty. The process of social differentiation in Ethiopian rural areas generates complex outcomes on the citizenship rights of the poor and on the ways rural dwellers gain access to basic resources such as land and natural resources in order to meet their subsistence. Poverty has its deep roots on power inequalities which usually reproduce social, economic and political relations, strongly affecting how rural poor design their livelihood strategies. Therefore, investigating how these social transformations are produced and reproduced by different institutional actors – the State, the community, the market – is a relevant issue determining the patterns of social inclusion and exclusion that over time affected rural poverty and destitution. In this article I argue that decentralisation of land management rather than opening new spaces for local democracy, is strengthening the verticality of policy making. Furthermore, when decentralisation of land management and administration is associated with state ownership of land – as in the Ethiopian case – it tends to create incentives for local level official to reward political loyalty with land- related benefits. Case studies will be taken from Deguna Fanigo in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, and Siraro Woreda in Oromia Region.