

## Case Study Brief No 3: Redistribution of communal land in Tigray, Ethiopia

This brief outlines a case study conducted by the International Livestock Research Institute's (ILRI's) and Overseas Development Institute's (ODI's) 'Process and Partnership for Pro-poor Policy Change' project, which seeks to identify and institutionalise innovative research and development approaches that lead to pro-poor policy outcomes. A new approach to policy process analysis was used, outlined in the accompanying brief: '*An Approach to Understanding the Role of Research in Policy Processes*'.

### Background – Communal natural resources management in Tigray



As in other areas of Ethiopia, Tigray faces twin problems of an increasing population farming on limited land, with available land affected by degradation (including declining fertility, erosion and deforestation). All land is state-owned, with cultivable land allocated for the use of individual households. With little additional land available for cultivation, the new government ceased to redistribute any more land after 1991. Whilst this, together with the recent introduction of land certification, has encouraged farmers to invest more in reversing degradation, it also means there is a growing number of landless individuals, especially young people. There is also communally managed land, usually used for livestock grazing (often hillsides and swampy land), forestry and collection of wood. These communal

resources are also affected by severe degradation because of overgrazing, over-use of the woody resources and generally poor management. Many initiatives have sought to address the problem of land degradation, usually technical activities such as building terraces, reclaiming eroded gully land and planting trees. Closure of areas to allow regeneration has also been encouraged. And whilst there have been some reported successes in some areas, the problem was still widely considered to be worsening. In the case of degraded communal land, communal initiatives did not seem to produce the incentives needed to manage it effectively.

### The policy change

In 1997 the Tigray regional administration passed the Hillside Guideline, intended to manage degraded hillside land. This promoted distribution of 'non-cultivable' degraded communal land to be managed by individuals, who received the benefit of produce consumed or sold. This policy addressed both the key issues of increased incentives to improve and manage degraded land, and also 'finding' land for the landless youth to access. Since 1997, the practice has been promoted by the Tigray Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BOARD) and more communities are using this policy innovation in combination with technical interventions. Communities decide which, if any, land should be distributed, the communal and individual investment for initial land improvement, and who should get individual access to such land. They also pass byelaws to cover the use of the land, including penalties for non-compliance. Whilst this communal land only represents a small proportion of the land affected by degradation, the initiative has proved popular both with communities and with both government and non-governmental support agencies. There are many examples of previously degraded land becoming productive and supporting the previously landless farmers. The policy is now being promoted in other regions, including Amhara, based on the Tigray experience. As yet, there is no overarching national policy covering this practice.



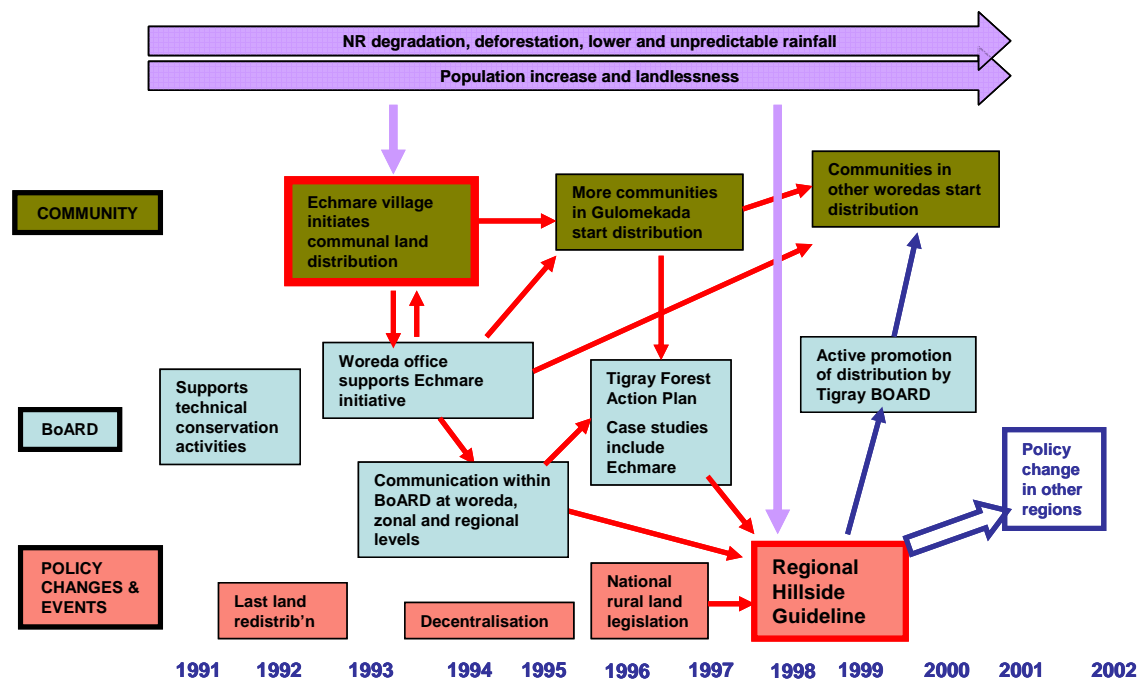
## Case study findings

### Key events and influences:

Much research has been done on land degradation and effective management of common property. However, in this case the major influence on the policy change was a community initiative. In Echmare village in 1993, the community proposed that degraded communal hillside forest land should be managed by individuals, as previous communal initiatives had failed. The BOARD supported Echmare in this initiative, helping to develop appropriate approaches and byelaws. As news of the successful initiative spread, nearby communities started similar initiatives. Within the BOARD, word spread through internal meetings and later through commissioned case studies. These studies fed into policy processes such as the Tigray Forest Action Plan, in turn influencing the Hillside Guidelines.

Formal research played little if any role in this change, nor did any influence from NGO activities or approaches – it seemed purely a process of a community-level initiative influencing an internal local government policy process, albeit with internally commissioned case studies. As decisions on management of communal land are ultimately made by the community, local influences, including people seeing with their own eyes, are the most powerful. BOARD staff responded to the experiences on the ground addressing real issues of degradation and landlessness, rather than research evidence that addressed similar issues. However, research may play more of a role in spreading awareness of a successful policy change more widely between regions of the country.

**Figure 1: Key influences and events leading to Hillside Guidelines**



### Key lessons

- Simple initiatives addressing locally-relevant NRM issues can result in local policy change.
- If NRM research is more closely linked to grass-roots practice – communities and service deliverers, findings may be more readily taken up in policy change.
- Seeing is believing and good news travels when people have seen the impact.
- Effective internal communication mechanisms within government bodies means evidence can spread effectively within organisations.
- Policy/institutional changes may need to be linked to technical interventions. Either on its own may fail to address the problem.

### More information

The case study report will be published by ILRI as a collaborative research report: Hooton, N. and Hagos, F. (2007) *Influences on natural resource management policy in Ethiopia: How a community initiative led to a new regional policy in Tigray*. More details are also available on the Process and Partnership for Pro-Poor Policy Change website [www.pppppc.org](http://www.pppppc.org).