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## Village Bylaws Strengthen the Sustainable Management of Exclosures in the Drylands of Northern Ethiopia

MASTEWAL YAMI DEGEFA<sup>1</sup>, WOLDE MEKURIA<sup>2</sup>, MICHAEL HAUSER<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Centre for Development Research, Austria*

<sup>2</sup>*Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Soil Science of Tropical and Subtropical Ecosystems, Germany*

### Abstract

In Ethiopia, deforestation and over exploitation of forests compromised the efforts of local and external bodies to reduce rural poverty and improve livelihoods of the poor. To address this problem, communities in Tigray established exclosures on formerly degraded grazing lands for promoting natural regeneration of plants, and getting economic benefits. The communities devised village bylaws to prevent human and livestock interference and to enhance the sustainable use and management of exclosures. This article analyses the contribution of village bylaws to strengthen the sustainable management of exclosures by addressing forest degradation, conflicts among users, and meeting the economic needs of users. We used qualitative research methods including in depth interviews and focus group discussions for data collection during July and November 2008 in two villages of Tigray that differ in distance from market and district town. Results revealed that the village bylaws mitigated the forest degradation by mobilising users towards common goals in the management of exclosures and resolved the conflicts among users by using monetary sanctions. In the village closer to market and district town, the enforcement of village bylaws was weak. This could arise from the high social capital among users which increased the negligence among users in exposing free riders that were their relatives and neighbours. Moreover, the village bylaws were not effective in meeting the higher expectations of users to get economic benefits from exclosures and improve their livelihoods. A possible reason for this could be the poor grass and wood production due to few years after establishment of the exclosures regardless of distance from market and district town. Recurrent drought, shortage of fuel wood, and the growing number of landless youths in the rural villages constrained the effectiveness of village bylaws and the further expansion of exclosures. In future, overcoming the poor rule enforcement by creating awareness among users on the need of strictly enforcing the village bylaws for equal benefit sharing will be very important. In addition, enrichment plantation of fast growing tree species that enhance wood and grass production will be crucial to enhance the contribution of exclosures to rural poverty reduction.

**Keywords:** Conflicts among users, exclosures, forest degradation, village bylaws

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**Contact Address:** Mastewal Yami Degefa, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU), Centre for Development Research, Gymnasiumstrasse 85/pf335, 1190 Vienna, Austria, e-mail: mastewalyami@yahoo.com