

# Farmland, family farms and food security in Ethiopia: The case of farming families around Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve

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## Abstract

Ethiopia leads a dominantly agrarian economy with about 85% of its population practicing family farming. Land, the underlying resource for farming, however, is a limiting and increasingly contested factor for family farming. The average landholding of a family farm in Ethiopia is about 1 hectare, and continues to shrink due to increasing population. Landless family farms are a relatively new but fast growing concern. This study investigates the dynamics of land access in and around the Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve, Oromia Regional State, and the mechanisms and strategies used by family farms to adapt to the challenges given their efforts to gain or maintain food security. A mixed methods approach was used for data collection and analysis. Data was collected through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. For household survey, 300 randomly selected family farm households in 8 *kebeles*<sup>1</sup> were interviewed. Key informant and expert interviews, focus group discussions and guided farm observations were applied to collect qualitative data. Our findings show that informal arrangements among farmers play a key role to gain and maintain access to land. For 57% of the interviewees, the land holding they have is insufficient to produce enough for their families; 20% do not have cereal producing area; 6% have no coffee land. They fill in the land shortage or landlessness through sharecropping (30%), land contract (12%), and a combination of sharecropping, contract, and entering into forest (31%). Based on the data, we conclude that shortage of land or landlessness is not an end to family farms thanks to informal arrangements. In addition, a comprehensive consideration to the informal arrangements of access to farmland should be considered in institutional support to strengthen the efforts of farming families in the process of securing food for their households.

Key words: Family farms, food security, biosphere reserve

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<sup>1</sup> The lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia.