

Farmland, Family Farms and Food Security in Ethiopia

The Case of Farming Families in Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve



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Introduction

Ethiopia has a dominantly agrarian economy with about 85% of its population practicing family farming, primarily managed by family labor on small plots. Landless family farms are a relatively new, but fast growing, concern in Ethiopia. As part of the interdisciplinary research project BiomassWeb, this study investigates land access and use rights of family farms in the Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve, Oromia Regional State (Fig. 1), and the strategies and mechanisms used by family farms to adapt to the challenges in their efforts to gain or maintain food security.

Objective

- To understand challenges to have farmland and local arrangements to secure land among family farming households in Yayu area (Fig. 1).

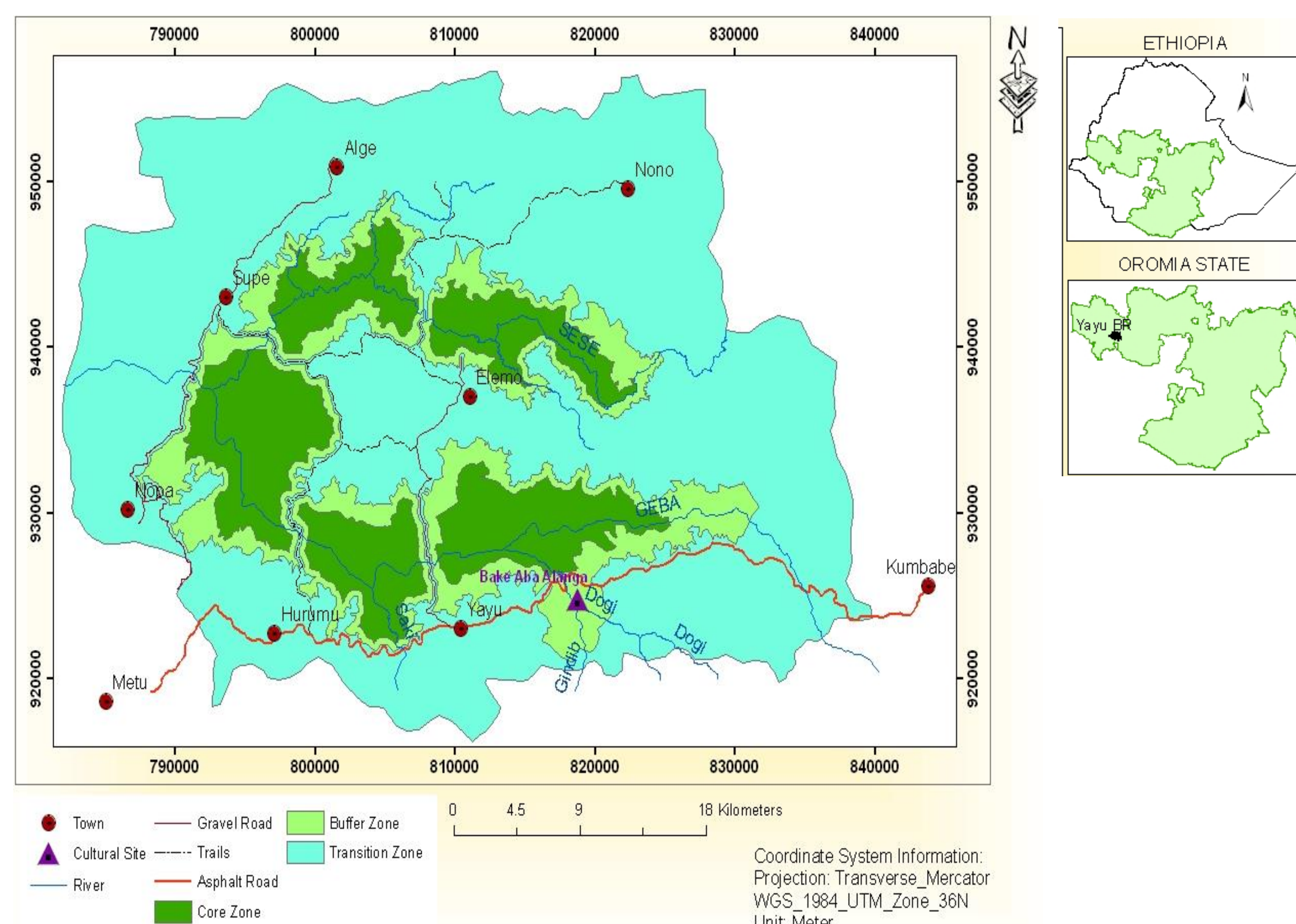


Fig. 1: Location of Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserve

Methodology

Data was collected through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods:

- Household survey was conducted with 300 randomly selected family farm households (Fig. 2) in 8 *kebeles*.
- Key informant and expert interviews, focus group discussions (Fig. 3) and guided farm observations were carried out to collect qualitative data.



Fig. 2: Family farm in Yayu



Fig. 3: A Focus Group Discussion

Findings

- Coffee and maize are the main crops produced in the area. Fruits and vegetables such as papaya, banana, mango, avocado, orange and lemon were observed in some farms.
- Farming families obtained their largest share of their land through inheritance (38%), through *kebele* (local state) land distribution (34%), through sharecropping and contract arrangements (25%) and through purchasing (3%).
- Around 55% of family farms in Yayu have a land holding size of 1.5 hectares or less (Fig. 4).

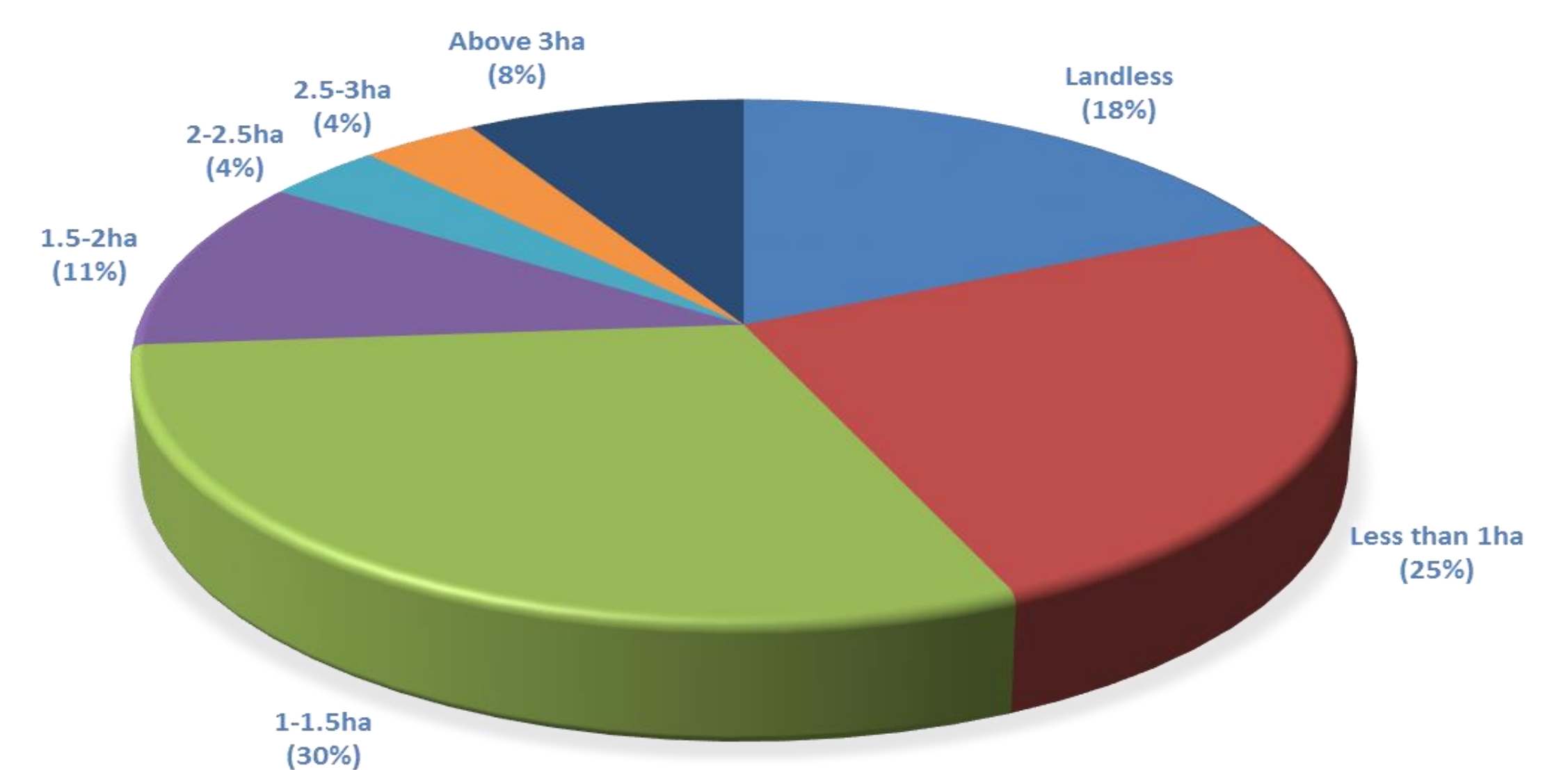


Fig. 4: Landholding size in Yayu

- About 18% of the farming families do not have land to produce cereals, the main staple.
- Farming families perceive sufficiency of their land holding in terms of feeding their own family throughout a year. Accordingly, 57% of the farming families interviewed perceive their own land holding as insufficient to produce enough for their families.
- For about 70% of the farming families, land size remained the same while family size has been increasing making it difficult to provide food throughout the year.
- Each of the family is traditionally responsible to make land available for the newly establishing families as children grow up and get married. This increasingly reduces the land holding for each of the family farms.
- A combination of strategies are used to overcome land shortage and landlessness. Depending on the importance, farmers used sharecropping and contract (46.7%), purchasing (21.6%), land contracts (12%), and expanding the land into forest (31.6%) as their priority strategies.

Conclusions

- More than half of the family farms in Yayu area do not have enough land for their subsistence, according to their own definition.
- Access to land for family farming depends on a mixture of formal and informal individual strategies and mechanisms.
- Official landlessness does not imply 'no land' for family farming, thanks to informal arrangements.
- Informal arrangements of access to farmland for family farms should be formalized and strengthened, thereby securing land use rights and contributing to more food security for family farming households.