

# Social Learning in Agriculture and the Battle Against Systemic Inequalities: The case of southwestern Ethiopia



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## Introduction

- In Ethiopia, regardless of the huge public investment and intervention in agriculture, agricultural extension services are not equally accessible to all farmers.
- Models, who are about 10% of the farmers, access skill training, experience sharing opportunities, new technologies, inputs, and technical support directly from the extension system better than other farmers.
- Instead, social learning, learning and acquiring of practical skills, new patterns of behavior or new technologies through direct experience or observation of the work/behavior of others in ad hoc settings (Fig. 1) is widely used for agricultural knowledge and technology transfer to the majority of the farmers. However, it is hardly documented and analyzed with reference to the translation and adaptation processes through which the transferred knowledge and technology are embedded into the local system of knowledge production and sharing.



Figure 1. Collective labour groups, public meeting and social event as means of learning.

## Objectives

- To identify the settings of social learning;
- To analyze the contribution of social learning processes to innovation development and diffusion within the context of Ethiopian agriculture.

## Methodology

- The study was conducted in 2015/16 in two districts and four *kebeles* in southwest Ethiopia (Fig. 2).
- A mixed methods approach was employed to collect qualitative and quantitative data: household survey, expert interviews, focus group discussion, key informant interviews, informal discussion and desk literature reviews were applied to generate data.
- Data are documented and analyzed using SPSS and ATLAS.ti.

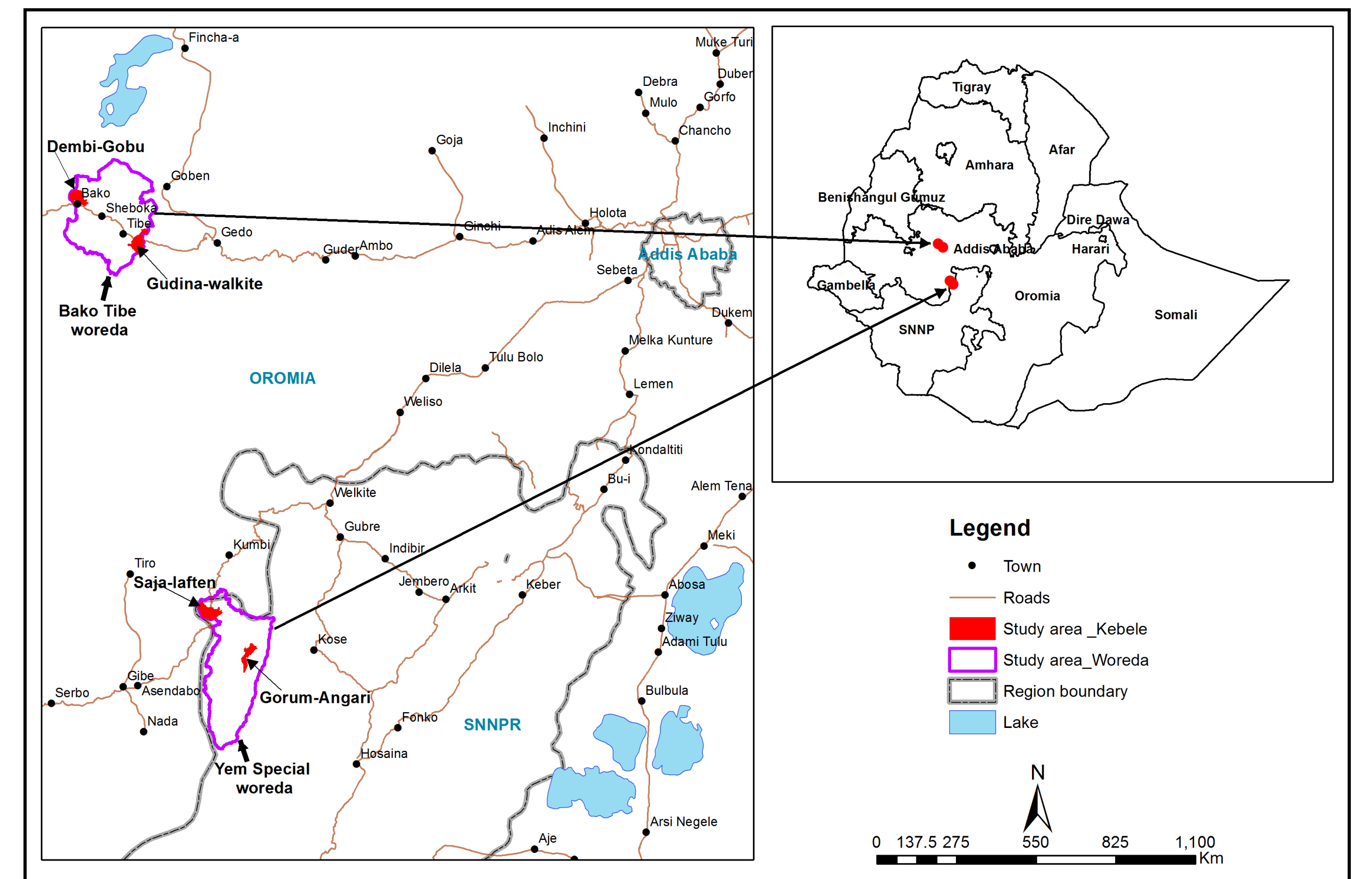


Figure 2. Study sites, southwest Ethiopia

## Results

- Institutions such as *Iddir*, *Debo*, *Dado*, *Mahiber*, and social events including wedding and funeral services, and public meetings are used as social learning platforms.
- During on-farm demonstrations, the hosting farmer, knowledgeable individual (the “model”), may show application of new practices to the participants.
- In the study area, 55% of the farmers do not have direct access to extension services mainly because of uneven distribution of service provision, shortage of resources, lack of direct access to agricultural inputs and farmers’ unwillingness to participate in formal extension. Social learning enabled these farmers acquire information on new technologies/best practices.
- Social learning supports 35% of the farmers partly access technical skill/information. These farmers complement the knowledge/information they obtained through formal extension service.
- Social learning has provided an opportunity to majority of the farmers to adopt new agricultural technologies/practices free of enforcement.

## Conclusion

- Social learning serves as a coping mechanism to the growing systemic inequalities, and stabilizes a knowledge system that allows for further promoting of social, political and epistemic inequalities.