

Land conflicts in Africa: the role of institutions

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Rapid population growth and increasing agricultural commercialization have created mounting competition for land in many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa. This has resulted in many local land conflicts, hurting particularly groups of previous users with the least status and power -- typically women, migrants, and pastoralists. One objective of the paper is to construct a simple contest game that is concerned with discovering the relation between the dissipation of resources by groups in trying to establish property rights to land, the involvement of (formal or informal) institutions, and the degree of land tenure security. In this game, the reallocation of land between groups depends on how much time each group devotes to appropriative activities, distinguishing between defending its own land and threatening the land of the other, and the extent to which institutions enforce the initial claims to land. We are particularly interested in how authoritative institutions can provide tenure security by deterring groups to take offensive steps. Some dynamic extensions of the model are introduced that allow us to discuss the role of institutions in three issues: the endurance of land conflicts, the relation between land tenure security and productivity-enhancing investments, and the impact of population growth on this relation. Institutional protection is endogenized by assuming that changes in enforcement capacity are dictated by the balance between revenues (through land-related taxes and contributions) and enforcement costs.



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