

## From “Private Land” to “Communal Land” Again

—The process of reaching an agreement about the use of seasonal swamp in Shiwinga village, Tanzania—

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Place of fieldwork: Tanzania

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### ● Research background

On the Mbozi plateau in southern Tanzania, there are seasonal swamps. In the research area, since early times, cattle have supplied extraction power for cultivation. The abundant grass in seasonal swamps is important as feed for the livestock, thus village councils have been maintaining seasonal swamps as grazing lands. Agricultural land, however, has expanded rapidly into these seasonal swamps because of a growing population and an increasing desire for money. Under an increasing demand for cultivating these seasonal swamps, a way to secure grazing land is sought.



Picture 1. Farm land expanding into seasonal swamps.

### ● Research purpose and aim

At Shiwinga village, in 2002, the village council sold seasonal swamp land to farmers who were without sufficient agricultural land in order to raise the money for the construction of a well. Cattle owners became afraid that grazing land would become insufficient and started trying to restore grazing land. They succeeded in restoring wetland. In this study I made clear the process of restoring communal land.



Picture 2. Cultivation with an ox-drawn plow

### ● Results and achievements of fieldwork

In Shiwinga village, from 1980 agricultural land has expanded gradually into seasonal swamps, on the other hand, the village council has also secured a certain amount of grazing lands. The village council of 2002, however, sold swamp land in order to raise money. Farmers without sufficient land bought the land and began cultivation there.

Mr. M and his comrade called farmers who had bought wetland to a sub-village meeting and told them to stop cultivation. They, however, refused to stop cultivation, so Mr. M and others requested that the village council restore grazing land. The village council rejected their request because the village council took side with the farmers who had bought wetland.

Angered by this, Mr. M and others released cattle into the farming land in the wetland and made cattle eat maize leaves. It was in this way that the conflict gradually became violent. In the end Mr. M and others asked the district office to cooperate in order to restore grazing land, and succeeded in getting a letter of guidance. Upon receiving this letter, the village council started to restore grazing land and pressed to stop cultivation. Some farmers, however, continued cultivation, insisting that they formally possessed the wetland. The court of ward, however, decided that they had to give up cultivation. Eventually many farmers agreed to stop cultivation in the wetland area.



Picture 3. Cultivated land was restored to grazing land.

- Implications and impacts on future research

Now individual interests are taking priority and communal lands that sustain the local community are in decline. In Shiwinga, however, through the intervention of the government, people became conscious that maintaining communal land is of benefit to the community, and the whole community moved to secure the communal resource.