

## Gendered Impacts of Climate Change: A case of Afar region, Ethiopia.



**COURTING  
CATASTROPHE?**

Humanitarian Policy and  
Practice in a Changing Climate

Predominantly pastoral, the Afar people of north eastern Ethiopia are severely affected by climate change risks mainly high prevalence of drought. In some places to the extent that they have no more livestock to be called pastoral communities. This brief narrates an ongoing research on the gendered impacts of climate change, subsequent adaptation strategies, and whether current adaptation interventions are building the adaptive capacity of Afar women. It draws lessons for future adaptation interventions having a gendered lens. Preliminary findings show that most of the adaptation interventions by the regional government lack gender lens even if climate change affects men and women differently. Women generally lack ownership and control over resources and do not participate in community organizations. This leaves women more vulnerable to climate risks. No Afar woman is allowed in the local community institutions such as council of elders, to name one. Moreover, the productive safety net transfers are not facilitating long term adaptation and resilience especially in the absence of custom made PSNP program implementation manual (PIM) particularly adopted for pastoral communities.

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### Introduction

There is a consensus among development practitioners and the academia that climate change affects men and women differently and adaptation interventions should be informed on the unique concerns of men and women. Knowledge is limited, though, about the specific gendered impacts of climate change in Afar region (Afar is located in the eastern lowlands of Ethiopia) and whether current aids are building the long term adaptive capacity of women & men in face of changing climate. This research is part of the international project on 'Courting Catastrophe? Humanitarian Policy and Practice in a Changing Climate where Ethiopia is one of six case studies<sup>3</sup>.

Afar people are heavily affected by climate change forcing a shift of livelihood from totally livestock laden livelihood to other forms such as external aid and petty trades. Recurrent drought has over the years destroyed most of the ecosystem (e.g., vegetative population) and thus a significant decline in the livestock of the community. Climate change is not gender neutral and women are highly vulnerable to the subsequent livelihood shocks. The distributional and relational dimensions of livelihood resources are in favour of men while women rely on the agency of men to access any resources. Existing sociopolitical institutions and awareness limitations of the pastoral women

themselves are largely responsible to this end.

A qualitative survey was conducted in two districts of Afar regional state seeking to assess the gendered impacts of climate change and whether aid interventions are building the adaptive capacity of women in Afar Regional State of Ethiopia.

### Research approach

The research carried two objectives: assessing the gendered impacts of climate change and examining whether current interventions really have gendered lens in building community adaptive capacity. Experience of climate change, gendered dimension of climate change, challenges of adaptation, whether men and women equally benefit from current interventions, what needs to be done to address climate change adaptation were some of the issues addressed. Moreover, the nature of future humanitarian adaptation interventions that can minimize long term vulnerability of the most vulnerable groups are also examined.

Using multiple approaches data has been gathered at households, community, and regional levels. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and transect walks, key informant interviews, institutional mapping, interviews with local development actors are the main instruments used to collect data.

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Young married girl fetching water (L); gruesome condition of livestock in Berahle (R) (©Solomon Petros)

## Preliminary findings

Findings from a two year long fieldwork in three districts of Afar region reveal that climate change is real and impacts are biased against women and state humanitarian interventions often lack the gender lens to break the socio-cultural barriers to adaptation. In fact, there are limited humanitarian interventions which support broader gender equality and women's empowerment challenges.

The results show that the prevalence of gender inequality is rampant especially with respect to activity profile, access and control over resources (along relational issues), participation in leadership, time use, and decision making. For instance, young girls are not allowed to go to school higher than grade 6 risking their long term adaptive capacity and growth opportunities including economic, social, leadership/decision-making, education, and health. Moreover, of 13 productive and reproductive activities<sup>4</sup> identified by the research project, women shoulder 11 or 84.62% of the tasks. It is getting worse in the face of changing climate, particularly in Berahle and Eli-'dear districts which are in the most drought affected livelihood belts of the region.

In fact, women are forced to walk longer distances to fetch water and fire woods. Our case study has also revealed that women can only acquire access to critical livelihood assets through the agency of men. Even if women may own and have 'control' over livestock units they inherit from their parents/clan, men are found to have the control over these resources due to cultural, institutional, and awareness challenges. In fact, if Afar women seek to pursue a legal means over the control of her resources, the law may support in their favor. However, this trend is long overdue and little experiences are documented in the study districts. Another important finding is that women are totally banned from taking part in the powerful local institution, namely the council of elders, which defines everyday socioeconomic and political life within its jurisdiction. This shows no place for women to voice their unique livelihood challenges - the fate of women is set at the mercy of a system totally patriarchal. Apart from this systematic denial of the basic livelihood

endowments, however, Afar women are free from domestic violence by men. For instance, no man (husband) hits his wife as it may amount to a disrespect of her cast and of Islamic values. This is rather important as a launching pad for bolstering women's empowerment at systemic levels.

Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) is the main adaptation support for most of the pastoral communities. Under this program, 15 kg of wheat per month per head is provided, and comprises the main source of consumption no other nutritious supplements are available. This undermines women and children's nutritional intakes. On the other hand, the number of food distribution centers (FDC) has increased from 18 in 2010 to 128 in 2015, which reduced the time and walking distance for women. Each FDC is accompanied by access road and milling machine. This is important in reducing time for women who are responsible to do the milling. However, no PSNP guideline and program implementation manual (PIM) exist specific to the context of pastoral communities and agro ecology. This might have affected pastoral women disproportionately as the PIM does not account the activity profile and access and control over resources of Afar women as the PIM has been adopted from highland communities.

Livelihood diversification has, more than ever, also become one of the adaptation strategies by pastoral communities in the study areas. Especially women and young girls are diversifying their livelihood sources into wage, crop/vegetable production, petty trades, remittance, firewood and charcoal production, and incense collection, ghee marketing while men tend to resort into a high income livelihood streams such as temporary migration. Yet, the types of economic sectors women are involved (e.g., petty trades), the relative gains thereof, and the subsequent institutional support mechanisms are far from adequately supporting the livelihood outcomes.

4) Milking; Selling of animal products e.g. milk, skin, ghee etc; Other petty trades e.g., traditional cloths, incense; Collecting firewood; Drying meat for expected drought periods; Fetching water; Food preparation; Cleaning; Purchase of food; Caring for children, the sick and the old people; Grazing of animals; Selling of large livestock (Men); and Migration (Men).

Despite mixed results over the livelihood impacts of relocation/villagization/sedentarization or resettlement, over 87% of the respondents believe that relocation/villagization is a good idea, and both men and women wanted it conditional to the fulfilment of necessary infrastructural (e.g., irrigation) and social amenities. This may represent a significant shift in opinion such that future humanitarian and development aids should also follow suit in directing their investments to supporting infrastructural fulfillment in relocation sites.



Afar women in Aba'ala district selling ghee and other goods (© Solomon Petros)

#### **Conclusion/recommendation**

The findings demonstrate that there are opportunities that need integrated efforts to ensure maximum community impact of adaptation interventions. One entry point is aggressive gender-transformative community awareness campaign coupled with incentive-loaded social service provision. Community mobilization towards a shared analysis and understanding of the main causes of vulnerability for different livelihood groups and genders is an urgent necessity in order to integrate the livelihood, social services, social protection, and integrated disaster risk reduction interventions.



Afar women in Dubti district (left) and Afambo district (right) (© Lutgart Lenaerts)

Humanitarian intervention should be integrated with villagization project of the government to foster the adaptive capacity of those resettled communities through joint investments in infrastructures (e.g., water wells) & alternative income generation schemes for both women and men.

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Afar woman standing at an irrigation canal (© Lutgart Lenaerts)



Afar woman fetching water in Dubti district (© Lutgart Lenaerts)

### Disclaimer

*This research brief does not represent the official view of project partners or the Norwegian Research Council. Responsibility for the text remains with the authors.*

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The main research objective of this project is to critically examine the scope and practical ways in which humanitarian responses may contribute to adaptation to climate change. It draws on experiences and lessons from six countries in Africa and Asia.

### Project partners

#### Main research partners

- Department of International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric), Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), Ås, Norway
- Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex, Brighton, England
- The Red Cross/ Red Crescent Climate Centre (RCCC), Hague, the Netherlands
- Institute of Environment, Gender and Development Studies, Mekelle University, Ethiopia
- COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT), Pakistan
- Norwegian Red Cross
- The Development Fund

#### Other partners

- Nepal Institute of Development Studies (NIDS)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD), Nepal
- Center for International Climate and Environmental Research (CICERO), Norway

For more info, see the project webpage:

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