



Mekelle University

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Institute of Environment, Gender and Development Studies.

Courting catastrophe? Humanitarian policy and practice in a changing climate

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COURTING CATASTROPHE?

Humanitarian Policy and Practice in a Changing Climate

Introduction

Climate change is likely to result in more extreme events such as droughts, floods and cyclones (Christensen et al., 2007; Shongwe et al. 2011), necessitating humanitarian interventions alongside a host of other actions to prepare populations for disaster, increase their resilience and reduce suffering. Humanitarian interventions will continue to constitute a main response to disasters relating to climate change, and there is growing awareness both among scientific and practitioner communities of the need to relate these distinct fields (O'Brien et al., 2008; Red Cross, 2009; DFID, 2011). Humanitarian responses and climate change adaptation have largely remained separate policy spheres (Agarwal and Perrin, 2009). In order to avoid courting catastrophe by indirectly contributing to the perpetuation of longer term vulnerability processes, new thinking around the links between short-term responses to emergencies defined by acute needs and longer-term transformations inherent in sustainable adaptation is required.

Objective

Critically examine the scope and practical ways in which humanitarian responses may contribute to adaptation to climate change.

Materials and Methods

- . *Ethnographic research has been underway since June, 2013. Research sites in pastoralist Afar and Agropastoral eastern Tigray (Kelisha Emni Tabia) have been selected purposefully.*
- . *Key informant interviews, interviews, Focus Group Discussions and observations were used to collect data.*

Results and conclusion

- Despite recognition of the existence of changing climate, coordination of humanitarian and development aid work is weak resulting in uneven distribution of aid.
- The government's PSNP program: despite its good intentions and importance in relieving current food shortages, its budget as well as the proportion of the targeted population is far below what's expected by the people to solve their existing problems. Its program activities couldn't bring sustainable improvements of livelihoods given the magnitude of the problem and extent of support provided.
- NGO/humanitarian activities are designed externally and give less attention to local needs and expectations.
- Women and children are the most vulnerable sections of communities but humanitarian aid interventions put very little effort to address their problems

In conclusion, despite so much rhetoric regarding the transition of humanitarian aid towards supporting sustainable development and livelihood improvements, practice at local level show that humanitarian actors are still mostly engaged in addressing immediate problems which have low/no positive impact in the long run.