

Social protection among the Afar pastoralist communities in Ethiopia: Beyond survival towards transformation

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Policy Brief



Afar Woman, Afar Region, Ethiopia by Jeff Salzer/PENHA 2016

The Afar region is an arid lowland area found in the north-east of Ethiopia bordering with Djibouti and Eritrea and is predominantly comprised of pastoralists (90%) and agropastoralists (10%), with over 95% of the region's 1.5 million population dependent almost entirely on livestock production for its livelihood. Poverty in the area has differed in previous decades, with the drought of the 1970s being the worst in living memory. In 1973/74 alone, it is estimated that the Afar lost 25% of their livestock and over 30% of their human population (ILCA, 1981, see also Tsegaye *et al.*, 2010). In recent years, compounded with multiple stressors, including that of the El Niño and the growing impact of climate change, their livelihood systems and resilience have been undermined and this is limiting livestock production, depleting assets, and exacerbating food insecurity.

In response to long-term food insecurity, the Ethiopian government has attempted to diversify the provision of food aid reliance by introducing the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (Devereux, 2002). Beginning in 2005, in conjunction with the World Food Programme (WFP) and other development partners, the objective has been to support food insecure households and build more resilient livelihoods and sustenance

that later enables them to graduate from the programme (MoA Ethiopia, 2014). After delivering three phases, PSNP's fourth phase began in 2015 and while the programme has been running with tangible measures of success across various regions in Ethiopia, the Afar Region –one of the most deprived areas of the country – has been experiencing disproportionate barriers in implementation. Research is already being undertaken to understand this regional disparity.

Social Protection for Inclusive Development in the Afar Region of Ethiopia (SPIDA) is a collaborative research project being carried out by Development Planning Unit (DPU) of University College London (UCL), Adigrat University of Ethiopia (ADU), and the Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA). Operating within the framework of the PSNP and focusing on Afar Regional State in Ethiopia, its main objective is to analyse the programme's contribution to poverty reduction and food security. In so doing, it aims to enhance social services, identify implementation difficulties, and assess the overall socio-economic situation of the Afar Region, to complement a smooth execution of the programme, fine-tune the policy, and develop a better alternative approach among the pastoral communities in Afar.



The overall research approach also aims to assist in generating policy options that promote resilience and livelihoods improvement among these communities.

Methodology

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a “growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes and behaviours to enable and empower people to share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect” (Chambers, 2005). Using the PRA guidelines and associated research tools, the project has carried out PRAs in the following six districts in Afar Regional State: Berhale, Abala, Mile, Chifra, Koneba and Afambo, covering a wide range of perspectives and emerging livelihood trends in the pastoral, agro-pastoral and peri-urban communities. Sample villages were selected based on the nature of their livelihoods, including their varied socio-economic status, mobility and community-based governance systems. For instance, the researchers selected the districts of Mile and Afambo, which differ from the other selected study areas due to their off-pastoral sources of income and sedentary type of livelihood.

Gender-inclusive approaches were adopted. The Afar is predominantly patrilineal and women sometimes find it difficult to express their views openly in front of men; hence, to ensure women’s full participation, separate groups were organised for men and women. Focus group discussions were oriented towards the following topics: 1) Pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and alternative

3) Gender and youth; 4) Village institutions; 5) Seasonal calendar and trend lines; 6) Wealth ranking, problem analysis, and community action plans.



Afar women, Afar region Ethiopia, Jeff Salzer/PENHA 2016

Findings

Research findings showed that the challenges that the Afar communities are facing are multi-faceted, and are inseparable from, but not limited to, the current drought:

- Food shortages affect both people and their cattle. In order to survive periods of food insecurity and the consequent increase in market prices, community members are forced to deplete their assets.
- There is a general lack of suitable infrastructure, including electricity and sanitary latrines.
- There has been an increase in the accessibility to education and healthcare, but both need to be better resourced.
- The populace lacks access to credit and cooperatives that will assist in asset building and economic diversification.

Strengths and limitations of the PSNP

The PSNP provides a development-oriented (as opposed to humanitarian) response to food insecurity. It increases social cohesiveness, since most of the public works requires the community to work together towards a common goal. In general, the PSNP has relatively elongated the asset protection of the households, as people are supported during periods of food shortages and are therefore not selling their livestock.

However, there is a mismatch between demand and supply regarding the provisions of the PSNP, which are only supplied for six months of the year.

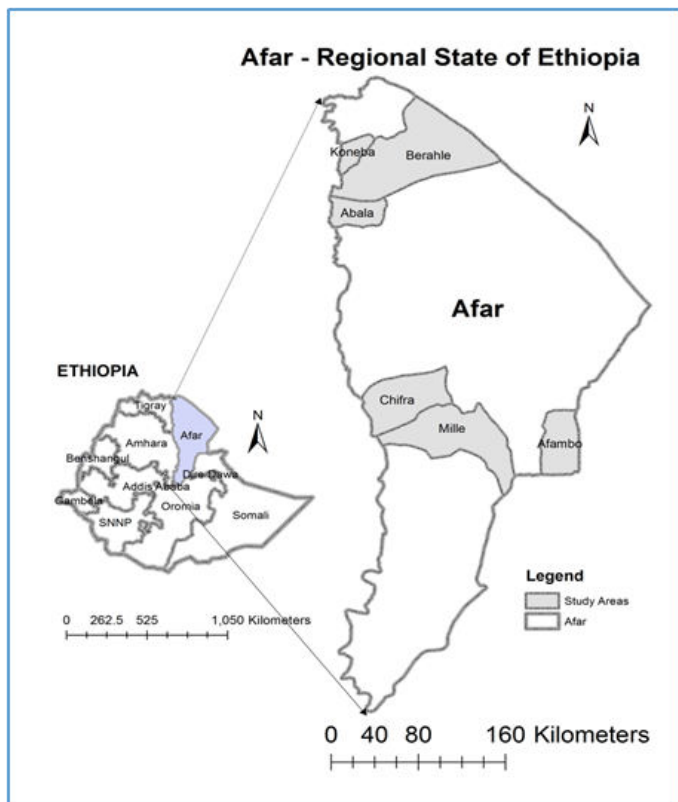


Figure 1: Afar regional map, showing the selected districts and villages. *Map credit:* Zubairul Islam, Adigrat University, Ethiopia.



Afar family members near their traditional hat, Anderkelo (Chifra), Afar region, Ethiopia, Bereket Tsegay PENHA 2016.

One household is assumed to comprise a maximum of five persons, regardless of the total number of family members. Furthermore, the supply of conservation tools and equipment is not matched with the demand of the public work participants. In the Afar Region, the PSNP only provides food to support related asset-building interventions. It is not tailored to the production and livelihood system of the people and does not consider the environmental condition of the villages.

Policy recommendations

From the findings of the PRA, SPIDA recommends the following for the long-term, inclusive development in the Afar Region.

Expanding the PSNP: The number of beneficiaries of the PSNP transfers should be increased to include new-born children and to take account of polygamous households. Due to the recurrent drought, transfers should be extended from six to ten months.

Understanding regional differences: Public works with a focus on soil and water conservation, terracing, etc. have been introduced from the nearby highland models which may not be appropriate for Afar conditions in the arid lowlands. The transfer period, public work schedule and activities, and the payment of transfers should be tailored to the pastoral communities.

Taking informal social networks into consideration: The Afar communities ensure that better-off households adopt traditional social responsibilities that assist disadvantaged groups, mostly through kinship networks of reciprocal solidarity and the religious practice of Zakat. These already built-in informal social practices (e.g. mutual sharing) may support or compromise the effectiveness of the transfers. Such traditions are worth investigating and building upon (For further reading on integrating local knowledge systems and adaptation, see Eriksen and Marin, 2011).

Supplying provisions to sustain livestock: Currently, El Niño is depleting the livestock of the people, therefore providing adequate animal fodder can enable pastoralists to retain their precious assets or help them to sell their animals before they die of starvation. The availability of mobile livestock clinics can also help them to retain their assets, especially during the mobility season.

Emphasis on alternative income generation approaches: Historically, the Afar pastoralist communities are known for coping with the natural and man-made disasters in the climatically harsh environment of the Horn of Africa, primarily due to their mobile livelihood systems and their informal social networks. However, the frequent droughts since 2008, coupled with the recent El Niño phenomenon, are challenging their resilience to shocks. Within the current capacities of PSNP, the Afar can survive but not thrive. For long-term

development, with the ultimate goal of removing dependency from these development programmes, the Afar people must be supported in diversifying their economic activities.

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The views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ADU, PENHA, UCL. And NWO.

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About the consortium members

SPIDA refers to the *Social Protection for Inclusive Development in the Afar Region of Ethiopia*, a two-year research project funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), and implemented by a consortium of the Development Planning Unit (DPU) of University College London (UCL), the Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA), and the University of Adigrat (ADU), Ethiopia.

Adigrat University (ADU), established in 2011, is a public university located in Eastern Tigray in the northern Ethiopian highlands, an area adjacent to the study site of the Afar Region, which is predominantly inhabited by the Afar pastoralist communities. Located in close proximity to the study area, the university has good links with both the Afar community and the emerging academic institution – Samara University.

Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA), an African-led organisation established in 1989, has been involved in action-oriented research related to pastoral and agro-pastoral development throughout the Horn of Africa. It has an established track record in the field of pastoral research, project implementation, gender studies and policy advocacy among pastoral peoples throughout the region. It promotes systemic and multi-disciplinary approaches that shape national and regional policies.

University College London (UCL), established in 1826, is ranked amongst a handful of the top research universities in the world, and UCL's Development Planning Unit (DPU) has over 60-years history of consultancy, research and teaching in and about the development sector. In this consortium, DPU takes primary responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards are maintained in research design and conduct, working in close partnership with other consortium members.

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