

Exploring the implications of formal and informal social protection practices among the Afar communities in Ethiopia

Araya Mebrahtu Teka and Gabriel Temesgen

Abstract Evaluating the real impact of social protection instruments on social welfare is an important concern for governments, policymakers, and donors. This review explores social protection practices and the associated social institutional arrangements in the pastoral communities of Afar region, Ethiopia. Social capital in Ethiopia has involved different mechanisms and institutions and is implemented through various modalities. Traditional forms of social capital have made strong contributions, enabling people to mitigate crises. In the Afar community, the role of informal social networks is crucial and involves the sharing of food, animals and money during crises. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) has wider developmental aims, but its impact in pastoral communities has not gone beyond consumption smoothing. Climate change, which is associated with high rainfall variability, frequent drought and the fragile nature of the land, with serious degradation of natural resources, have presented severe problems for the pastoral community. And the effects are felt more by female-led households. The unequal treatment of women in social and economic affairs in these communities limits the ability of women to contribute to appropriate responses and adaptation. To cope with climate-related shocks, pastoralists pursue the traditional strategy of seasonal migration in search of pasture and water, and other strategies such as reducing the number of animals, selling off animals and herd diversification and conversion. Establishing efficient disaster prevention mechanisms, empowering women, enhancing local PSNP implementation capacity, strengthening and formalizing local networks, providing alternative employment and strengthening and introducing agricultural practices are all important in efforts to increase the effectiveness of the program, and complement efforts to improve pastoral livelihoods.

Keywords: Afar, pastoral, safety net, social capital, social protection and social welfare

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social protection has attracted increasing attention from governments, researchers, policymakers and donors, and is bound up with efforts to enhance social

welfare, livelihoods and food security. Social Protection for Inclusive Development in Afar (SPIDA) is a research project supported by Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) analyzing the biggest program in Ethiopia, the

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Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), with a focus on the Afar regional state. It aims to analyze the program's contribution to poverty reduction, food security and the enhancement of social services, as well as to identify implementation difficulties and assess the overall socio-economic situation of the Afar Region. The research aims to contribute insights that help to improve the effectiveness of implementation.

Exploring formal and informal social protection practices and the associated institutional arrangements, this review is organized into four sections. The first section deals with the economic situation and social capital formation in Ethiopia. The second section is devoted to social protection practices in Ethiopia while the third section deals with practice and institutional arrangements in Afar Region and assesses Afar society, traditional institutions, indigenous knowledge, the effects of climate change and gender issues. The last section presents concluding remarks and identifies some policy implications. A review of the related literature provides for comparison against the results of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) survey conducted under SPIDA. This review also informed the design of a quantitative survey examining the impact of the social protection program on food security, livelihoods and poverty in the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of the Afar region.

1.1 ECONOMIC OVERVIEW OF ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has made tremendous economic progress since the overthrow of the military junta in 1991. Ethiopia's sustained economic growth and accelerated poverty reduction is the result of the policies, strategies and programs that the nation has implemented. The Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy was developed and introduced in 1994 to address poverty, food security and agricultural productivity. The policy aimed to drive the process of industrialization by improving agricultural productivity and creating strong linkages between the two sectors (Stefan and Andrew, 2009).

As the 2002 Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) of Ethiopia report notes, the government aimed, through the ADLI strategy, to harmonize policies and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Subsequently, a poverty reduction strategy paper, the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), was developed and sought to provide a coherent basis for cooperation with the international community. This strategy maintained the emphasis on agricultural

development, with a particular focus on skills development for farmers. Significant attention was given to water harvesting practices, marketing, cooperatives and microfinance institutions serving rural communities.

After evaluating the implementation challenges faced under the SDPRP, its deficiencies and its impact on subsistence farmers, Ethiopia introduced the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), implemented over 2005/06–2009/10. Building on the progress achieved under these strategies, over 2010/11–2014/15, the country adopted the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I), with the ambitious aims of transforming the economy and achieving middle-income status. Throughout policy has been consistent and coherent, the overarching purpose is to achieve fast, inclusive and equitable economic growth and to tackle the root causes of poverty. The Ethiopian economy has shown considerable improvement under these successive development strategies.

Ethiopia's economy has experienced strong and broad-based economic growth, averaging 10.8 percent a year over the last ten years¹. This strong economic performance has been recognized by different international organizations and donor governments. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ethiopia has been amongst the five fastest growing economies in the world in recent years.

Ethiopian GDP increased dramatically from \$47 billion in 2012/13 to \$55 billion in 2013/14, reaching \$61.63 billion in 2015 and \$69.22 billion in 2016. Per capita GDP grew from \$142 in 2003/04 to \$550 in 2012/13 and \$631 in 2013/14. There was an economic transformation in the country, and the share of the agricultural sector in GDP has declined, while those of the service and manufacturing sectors have grown. The share of the agricultural sector in GDP decreased from 57 percent in 2007 to 46 percent in the 2013/14 budget year, while the share of the service sector increased from 38.9 percent in 2007 to 45 percent in 2013 (MoFED, 2014).

Ethiopia has also shown progress in the human development index. In the budget year of 2014, the country's HDI 0.433, up from 0.363 in 2013 and 20 percent higher than that of 2011 (see HDI UNDP report 2015).

In pursuing rapid economic growth, policy emphasizes poverty reduction, equity concerns and

¹A 2015 UNDP report confirmed that the Ethiopian economy grew by an average of 10.3 percent over the previous eleven years.

broad-based development. The GTP has aimed to address multidimensional poverty in the country and sustain inclusive and pro-poor development, with the collaborative efforts of stakeholders. There has been a gradual reduction in poverty, though the level of poverty in Ethiopia remains high. The Household Income and Consumption Expenditure Survey 2010/11 showed that the level of poverty has declined from 38.7 percent of (the population) in 2004/05 to 29.6 percent in 2010/11. And in 2013, MoFED reported that the headcount index had declined by 9.1 percent over the preceding five years (2013).

In Afar Region, populated overwhelmingly by pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, the percentage of people living below the poverty line is more than 36 percent, in spite of support provided under the national poverty reduction. And, it is important to note, this poverty rate increases during harsh dry seasons and periods of poor rainfall.

In 2015, due to El-Nino and erratic rainfall, more than ten million Ethiopian people were exposed to food shortages and had to depend on emergency food aid. This was the worst drought of the past fifty years in terms of severity and scope. Successive failed rains over a wide geographical area overwhelmed traditional coping strategies and led to severe food shortages in the pastoral community (ECMO, 2015).

1.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL IN ETHIOPIA

Social capital is viewed as a set of connections among individuals, groups and social networks based on social norms and a high level of trust within society. It has been analyzed by sociologists and economists in a growing literature. It is widely thought that physical and human capital are complemented by social capital to improve the productivity of individuals and groups of people. Social capital may have collective and/or individual aspects that can be supplementary or complementary to each other, with different motivations, incentives and externalities at work.

In Ethiopia, the practice of social capital involves a wide range of activities, particularly, the cultural contexts of the different regions, and these are based on high levels of trust as well as the main faith traditions. Microfinance institutions, aiming to address local challenges and improve livelihoods, provide credit services and this rests to an important degree on levels of trust. In Ethiopia, in both rural and urban areas, most microfinance institutions use both material collateral and social collateral, with the latter practiced widely. Thus, social capital in a community

is very significant in efforts to enhance the welfare of poor beneficiaries and support economic progress.

In the rural communities, in times of crisis and when experiencing shocks, social cohesion and local connections enable local people to transfer, share and mitigate risks. Social capital, in the form of religious, clan, neighborhood or family-based networks, enables people to overcome difficulties and to share their sorrows and difficulties as well as expenses, even in good times and seasons. For example, it is common to share marriage and ceremonial expenses.

A number of studies carried out in Ethiopia have emphasized the correlation between social capital and socio-economic development. Nega *et al.* (2009) using panel data for 385 households in Northern Ethiopia found that the number of memberships of a household in local associations, taken as a proxy for social capital, had a positive and statistically significant effect in empowering women and is associated with decisions that change the situation of a given household.

Another study also found that both intra-community bonding and social capital positively influence the productivity and economic performance of cooperative farmers engaged in coffee production in the southern part of Ethiopia, while extra-community bridging social capital negatively affected the performance of coffee grower farmers. Stronger social capital and trust were seen among the cooperative members in those cooperatives that perform well than among members of those with weaker performance. Moreover, the level of trust declines with proximity to urban centers. Trust and social capital are weaker among cooperative members situated close to district towns and having access to the main roads. The main reason behind this might be that remotely situated cooperative members enjoy strong social and intra-group homogeneity. On the other hand, among cooperative members living near towns, there is heterogeneity resulting from diversified membership in terms of ethnicity, religion and language, which is also accompanied by a lower level of trust (Ruben and Heras, 2012).

A study conducted by Samson (2014), using a multivariate regression with a sample of 497 respondents, found that social trust and confidence in institutions are positively influenced by different dimensions of social capital and various human and economic features of households. Likewise, social trust and confidence in institutions are strongly linked with increased participation in local networks and a pattern of mutual dependence among residents.

Using historical data, a study conducted in Ethiopia and Tanzania revealed that local institutions, taking different forms and having different objectives, with environmental issues identified as a distinct set of tasks, have direct and/or indirect impacts on natural resource management. Historical trend analysis showed a decline in the importance of institutions, in customary beliefs and holiness, and an increase in the significance of labor shared support and cultural dance institutions due to the effects of new religions or religious practices, and of disclosure to other cultures and practices as well as to new technology. However, local traditional institutions are still relevant and play important roles in natural resource management alongside more recent and formal institutions despite the level of modernization (Mowo *et al.*, 2011).

A study conducted in both urban and rural areas, using data from the 2004 Ethiopian Rural Household Survey (ERHS), found that living with both parents had a significant positive effect on the well-being of children, in a comparison against children whose parents had passed away or separated. The probability of children living with their parents is taken as a proxy for the level of social capital.

Another study, using three rounds of panel data (1997, 2004 and 2009) found that asset inheritance and the social well-being of women are positively correlated, when women have access to the property, including land, in their community (Kumar and Quisumbing, 2010).

Since at least the early 19th century, rural communities in Ethiopia have established and sustained their own associations and organizations. This form of social capital is centered on mutual cooperation and assistance during times of crisis and risk, and on helping people to meet pressing needs. In rural communities, there is a diversity of practice and local associations take different forms appropriate to particular situations and the specific objectives that households need to achieve. Based on the specific interests and objectives of households in different communities, there are different social institutions and cultural practices like religious events, cultural associations and arrangements such as *Idir*, *Equip* and *Hudad*. These culturally specific social institutions are based on local norms. They give households a means to share risks and to provide each other material support, in cash or in kind, as well as emotional support (Dercon *et al.*, 2007).

2. SOCIAL PROTECTION PRACTICES IN ETHIOPIA

2.1. THE IMPACT OF THE PSNP ON LIVELIHOODS IN ETHIOPIA

With large numbers of people around the world exposed to different hazards, which might be natural, market, social or political hazards, social protection issues have remained a central theme of the global development agenda (World Bank, 2001). In Ethiopia, Article 41(5-7) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) states that social protection practices are the base for the government's efforts on social security, policy formulation, interventions and programs.

The Ethiopian government has launched various strategies and programs aiming to enhance the well-being of the poor and to improve the capacity of the vulnerable to cope with social and economic risks, vulnerabilities and deprivation. Ethiopian national social protection policy has four components, namely: the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), the Household Asset Building Program (HABP), the Voluntary Resettlement Program and the Complementary Community Investment Program (CCI).

The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) is among the most important interventions implemented since 2005. It aims not only to respond to chronic food insecurity but also to prevent asset depletion and protect against short-term shocks in chronically food-insecure areas as well as to create assets at the community level, to enhance access to services, to prevent the depletion of natural resources and to rehabilitate ecosystems. The total number of PSNP beneficiaries reached 8.3 million across 319 woreda², in the distinct categories of labor-intensive public works, 80 percent of beneficiaries, and direct support to old people, the disabled and the sick, 20 percent of beneficiaries (Zoellick, 2014).

The social protection program increased its coverage from around 4.16 million beneficiaries in 2006 to around 7.6 million people in 2009, in eight regions and 290 chronically food insecure districts. The budget allocated for the program was equivalent to 1.2 percent of the nation's GDP (Sarah and Matt, 2011).

In 2011/12, the number of PSNP beneficiaries reached a peak of 7.642 million people, in 319 districts and eight regions, due to the depth of the severe drought-related crisis affected Ethiopia. Later in the same year,

² It is a district and the lowest government administrative structure above Kebele (village).

since some of the beneficiaries were in transitory food insecurity, and others become self-sufficient and graduated from the program, the number of program participants decreased by 762,000 persons (Assefa, 2013).

Various studies have been conducted on the impact of the PSNP and demonstrated its positive contribution and effectiveness in addressing the intended objectives, even if the results and the degree of change differ from one region to another. A study conducted by the World Food Program (WFP) in 2012 showed that the livelihoods of households were improved due to participation in the program, PSNP. Moreover, the PSNP made a significant contribution in enhancing community-level assets, improving environmental rehabilitation, increasing asset creation and protection, increasing utilization of social services and enhancing agricultural productivity.

A study by Gilligan *et al.* (2008) showed that PSNP beneficiary households have a reduced likelihood of having a very low caloric intake and increased average calorie availability at the household level. When compared to non-PSNP beneficiaries, PSNP beneficiary households are more likely to have adequate access to food and are more likely to take loans for productive purposes, use new agricultural technologies and operate their own non-farm business activities.

The productive safety net program is expected to increase household's livestock holdings and improve natural resource management at the household level. In an analysis of panel data, Anderson *et al.* (2008) found that the PSNP enabled households to increase the number of trees planted but there was no change found in rural households' livestock holdings.

Taken together these studies show that the PSNP had positive and significant impacts in terms of children's nutrition, asset protection, asset building and resilience to shocks, as well as increased propensity to take on loans for productive purposes, which many people previously found too risky in the study areas (Slater *et al.*, 2006).

Another study using data from a cross-sectional household survey in eight woredas over the first year of PSNP implementation showed that 65 percent of PSNP beneficiary households had improved their incomes. Visits to and use of healthcare services and centers rose by 50 percent among beneficiary households. There was also very substantial increase (76%) in the utilization of credit access. 62 percent of beneficiaries were able to avoid selling off assets to buy food. 75 percent of PSNP beneficiaries were

found to consume higher quality of food items, with better nutrition, and 86 percent of the beneficiaries were also found to own new assets (Taylor, 2007).

A study by Terefe and Woldehanna (2012) showed that, despite the number of economic and household related shocks, the real value of cash and food transfers declined from 2006 to 2009. While the unconditional transfers of direct support had a positive contribution in terms of schooling, the labor-intensive public works component of the PSNP did not improve schooling of children and had a negative impact on children's education. Moreover, though the PSNP made a positive contribution in terms of hunger protection, the program made little contribution to poverty reduction.

Using a 2004-2009 longitudinal household survey, Rodrigo (2013) found that the public works component of the PSNP had no impact on adults' on-farm labor contribution, while it reduced child labor. Also, demand for capital inputs such as livestock and farming tools was not affected by the public works employment.

3. SOCIAL PROTECTION PRACTICES IN AFAR REGION

Pastoralism in Ethiopia is a way of life for more than 12 percent of the total population. The pastoral and agro-pastoral population is spread across several regions: Somali region (53%), Afar region (29%) and Oromia (10%), with the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and the Gambela and Benshangul regions accounting for 8 percent of the pastoral population. Geographically, these pastoral regions constitute around 60 percent of the nation's land area. The pastoralist communities are engaged in extensive livestock production, with much of the population moving seasonally from one place to another in search of water and pasture for their animals. Farming is practiced, mostly on a small scale as a supplementary activity (Sandford and Yohannes, 2000; Abdel *et al.*, 2002 and CSA, 2007).

It is widely recognized that the pastoralist communities are socially and economically marginalized, and this partly explains why there is a higher extent of poverty and vulnerability in these regions than in other regions of Ethiopia. Hence, it is imperative to help the poor in these communities, bolstering the different social protection efforts of the state and of donor organizations and the PSNP is particularly important from the perspective of the pastoral communities.

Accordingly, after the first year of the PSNP's implementation in four major regions, Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and SNNP the government introduced the program in 2007 as a pilot project in the low lands (pastoral areas) of the nation, specifically in the Afar and Somali regions.

Ethiopia's pastoralists suffer from an absolute as well as relative deprivation in terms of basic social services and economic infrastructure. The Afar region, even in comparison to other pastoral regions, features a high level of poverty, serious environmental degradation and high vulnerability to climate change and drought. The incidence of poverty in the Afar region is high, and about 56 percent of the total population is poor. The region is characterized by high temperatures, low and erratic rainfall, a very small area of cultivable land and limited access to social and credit services. Nomadic and semi-nomadic livestock keeping is the mainstay of Afar people's livelihoods (GIZ, 2015).

3.1. THE PRODUCTIVE SAFETY NET PROGRAM IN AFAR REGION

3.1.1. The Impact of PSNP on Livelihoods and Asset Holdings

While the livelihoods of the population of the Afar region depend primarily on livestock production, in order to enhance the well-being of the society, different strategies and programs have been designed to ensure food security and reduce poverty and people have pursued a degree of economic diversification. These economic alternatives include participating in trading activities, adapting their pastoral systems and introducing some small-scale farming, as well as migration to urban areas or abroad and seeking employment in other sectors.

Seasonal mobility remains a central strategy practiced by the pastoral communities in order to utilize a variety of resources, with different seasonal grazing lands, in which all the members of a household or just the herders migrate in search of pasture and water. Mobility is important in enabling pastoralists to cope with natural hazards (Virtanen, 2011). The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) was fully introduced in 2010 in the Afar region and is the largest social protection scheme in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia. As we have noted, it is designed to ensure households' food security, reduce poverty and protect assets.

Currently, there are more than half a million people involved in the PSNP through its public works and direct support components, under which a major proportion of the population gets a basic ration for half of the year (Johan, 2015). Moreover, as Johan

(2015) notes, in the first phase of the social protection scheme, most of the pastoral people were dependent on food aid of different forms. In the region, as in the other regions, the program is implemented through two components; public works (with beneficiaries employed on infrastructure and other projects identified as likely to bring lasting benefits) and direct support (targeting the most vulnerable). The latter accounts for about 25 percent of program beneficiaries, those unable to perform physical labor including the incapacitated, disabled people, the elderly, pregnant women and children.

The impact of the existing social protection scheme, the PSNP, on livelihoods, asset creation and women's empowerment in the Afar region is scantily studied. There have been a few small-scale empirical studies including a cross-sectional pilot survey that was carried out in the Dewe woreda. This survey found that 79 percent of PSNP beneficiary households were participating in the public works component. All of the program participants received payments. 98 percent of respondents used these payments for direct consumption while the remaining 2 percent used the money to meet additional household needs, to purchase washing products and manufactured products and to pay fees for social services. Hence, the program helped people to fill a consumption gap and meet their immediate needs (CARE Ethiopia, 2010).

A study conducted by Save the Children, UK and USAID (2010), looking at the implementation of the PSNP in the Chifra Teru and Gulina woredas of Afar region found that the program helped households to participate in the development of local infrastructure, including the construction of social infrastructures like community roads and soil and water conservation structures in the two woredas. This was achieved in spite of some major limitations and difficulties. The actual amount of support provided to the participants was quite limited, 15 kilograms per participant per month. The effectiveness of PSNP implementation in the study areas has been affected by seasonal factors. For example, floods destroyed some major bridges, making it difficult to carry out public works and making it difficult to reach target beneficiaries (Save the Children, 2010).

Hoddinott (2012) put forward his view that there are great hopes for the PSNP among people in the Afar and Somali pastoral communities. However, there are two salient difficulties for program implementation in pastoral areas. Settlements and households are scattered over a wide area and pastoral livelihoods depend on seasonal movements. These facts make

implementation very challenging and necessitate careful attention to the design of appropriate methods and grassroots follow-up with communities.

3.2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND VULNERABILITY

Climate change, sometimes referred to as global warming, is a global problem which imposes natural hazards and impacts on people's livelihoods, on natural resources and ecosystems. The impact of climate change is not uniformly distributed and is more noticeable in developing countries due to factors including limited capacity to respond to the impacts and ability to adapt. For instance, Ethiopia is a largely agrarian country and climate change can cause soil erosion and crop damage which makes cultivation of agricultural crops impossible. Furthermore, the effects of climate change are extremely challenging for nomadic pastoral societies whose livelihood system relies on livestock production and seasonal mobility in search of water and pasture.

Climate change threatens pastoralists' traditional way of life, with its consequences of water and animal feed scarcities. Pastoral livelihoods in Afar Region are threatened and broader development prospects diminished. The region's challenges include the risks of natural shocks and widening economic imbalances. The severity of climate-related impacts is greatest for the poor and vulnerable, altering livelihood patterns and mechanisms, and introducing complex new challenges for food-deficient people and the pastoral community (Assefa *et al.*, 2010).

The region experiences low and highly variable rainfall, making people more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Moreover, Afar region's fragile land is highly vulnerable to these impacts. Pastoral and agro-pastoral areas are suffering accelerated land degradation, with much of the land area already not suitable for cultivation (ANRS, 2010).

The Ethiopian economy is highly dependent on natural resource-based activities, which are, of course, those most affected by climate change. Estimates of the vulnerability index, which considers exposure, sensitivity, adaptive capacity and elasticity (or the recovery rate after perturbations), have shown that the Afar region is among those most affected or susceptible (Deressa *et al.*, 2008). These estimates bolster the argument, advanced over some time, that vulnerability to climate change increases as one approaches the sub-arid and sub-humid lowlands (Admasie, Adenew and Tadege, 2008).

Resilience to climate change can be described as the ability to cope with shocks related to climate change. It also encompasses the capacities to recover from, to adapt to and to anticipate the impacts of natural disasters, economic insecurity and social and political conflicts. In recent years, resilience has attracted a great deal of attention in development and policy circles. Certainly, the question of resilience and how it might be strengthened, particularly in the pastoral lowland areas in Ethiopia, is important to policymakers. From a wider perspective, resilience has to do with enhancing livelihoods, speeding up and sustaining recovery, the promotion of economic and social development and providing a base for transformation to occur.

Clearly, the Afar communities are facing extreme challenges due to the increasing pressure of climate variability and because of this, they need special attention. Nearly 90 percent of people in Afar region depend primarily on pastoralism for their livelihoods and more than half of pastoralists' income comes from livestock and livestock products. But it is important to recognize that pastoral livelihoods also encompass non-pastoral work. Hence, the resilience building effort should involve an integrated and inclusive approach, involving people at all levels of the community, including youth and women. Youth and gender issues are important in program implementation and for society at large. No group of people is separated one from the other and the various social groups form a single society. Therefore, the approaches to development agenda should involve all social groups and be inclusive in both design and implementation, so as to avoid compromising the benefits of one group in favor of another or having the benefits that accrue to one social group come at the expense of another.

3.3. INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION INSTRUMENTS

In the Afar region, social capital has developed on the basis of common experiences as well as social norms, habits and evolving practices. Religious belief and practice are important elements. Social organization and social support are centered around kinship or clan arrangements. Kinship and clan networks provide the basis for sharing, cooperation and mutual support which take different forms in different places and times. There are many different social protection instruments and practices in Afar region that are commonly implemented to provide support to households, groups and communities during times of crisis or need.

In the Afar community, particularly when it comes to members of the same clan, there is a strong belief that no one should eat while others are starving. Thus, it is common practice among Afar people to share food with community members when food shortages or crises occur. So, in some instances, households who get food support do not use it for themselves exclusively but instead share it with members of other households.

Another important social protection instrument is the sharing of livestock, which is exercised when households lose their livestock due to disease, drought or other causes. In addition, for newly established households, clan leaders and other wealthy households provide gifts of livestock for the newly married couples. Upon special occasions such as marriages, funerals and burials or when conflicts are settled, community and clan members are bound to provide assistance in the form of livestock. Such livestock transfers play a crucial role in the pastoral society of the Afar region. Sharing and reciprocity within networks of social support are important to livelihoods, reducing vulnerability and risk, and affording a measure of social insurance.

In addition, religious obligations have buttressed social protection in the Afar region. *Zakat* is another important means of social support practiced in the Afar community. *Zakat* is religious tax collected on the basis of the number of livestock owned and holdings of other assets. *Zakat* has collected annually and on a voluntary basis. Collections, in cash or in kind, are distributed among households that need support or face particular difficulties.

3.4. WOMEN AND HOUSEHOLD RESILIENCE

Women in Ethiopia have long faced challenges associated with gender inequality and negative societal attitudes towards them. This is manifested in, among other things, socio-economic imbalances, differences in access to educational opportunity and as women's own lack of awareness of their rights. This gender inequality is a significant causal factor in poverty and the poverty rate in female-headed households remains double that of male-headed households. A fairly recent assessment showed that, in the Afar region, the incidence of poverty in female-headed households is far higher than it is among male-headed households (MoARD, 2014).

Women's vulnerability must be seen in the broader context of pastoral vulnerability and poverty. Vulnerability to all forms of hazards is rising in the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist livelihood systems.

Poverty in the lowland areas of Ethiopia results in loss of productive assets and increasing food insecurity, principally due to drought. The high level of deprivation and resource depletion is an aggravating factor. While all families are vulnerable to climate-related risks, vulnerability to risks and shocks is much greater for the poorer households. Moreover, within households, women, children and the elderly are more vulnerable and suffer impacts disproportionately (FDRE, 2013). Sadly, women, one of the most exposed social groups, are discriminated against and have their rights violated simply because of their sex.

Women have very limited roles in decision making in the household and in the community, even on matters that directly concern them and affect their human rights. The same applies to resource ownership and sharing. Consultations conducted in the Afar region confirmed that women have very restricted access to finance, little or no control over capital generated from the sale of livestock and only a nominal say in the utilization of money and other fundamental household decisions (Fre *et al.*, 2017). As a consequence of their social marginalization, women and female-heads of households suffer from a lack of self-confidence and have limited life skills. Discriminatory customs and norms exercised at household and community level make them more vulnerable and women's voices go unheard. Given women's social and economic marginalization, it is perhaps not surprising that households led by women are often amongst the first to seek economic alternatives, as their opportunities in conventional activities are constrained and they are forced to diversify their sources of income in order to maintain themselves.

Women are also underserved when it comes to education and training. They have relatively low rates of literacy, low educational attainment and fewer prospects for skills development. Participation in economic and political activities are also much lower for women. With these restrictions on women's public role, women have been described as the "unseen hands" of pastoralism, in recognition of the important roles that they play in households, in society and in the pastoral economy. In spite of the various key tasks and responsibilities pastoral women perform, they are double discriminated, marginalized within a marginalized community. Moreover, women carry heavy burdens, in maintaining, caring for and providing food for households and this lowers their participation in education and in public affairs. Traditionally, women work longer hours than men and perform physically demanding work. They must

perform traditional domestic tasks and tasks such as collecting firewood while also taking on income generating activities such as making and selling handicrafts (Kipuri and Ridgewell, 2008).

Moreover, the fact that women are often unable to inherit property reinforces their marginalization. Women have important roles in livestock rearing, which is the basis of pastoral livelihoods, incomes and wealth, as well as the main source of prestige and social status. But women's ownership and control of livestock are constrained. Women also have valuable knowledge, of the environment, crucial in dealing with environmental stress. Yet this knowledge is often ignored in the design of drought mitigation strategies and programs. Women are excluded from household decision making and also excluded from community-level decision making, which is mainly in the hands of male elders. As pastoralists, women are victims of cultural, social, economic and political marginalization, and as women and pastoralist women are disadvantaged in terms of access to resources and social services, in the same way as pastoralist men. Traditional norms hold sway, with girls seen as the weaker sex and taught to submit to men (Ibid). The clan structure of society also plays a role in women's marginalization. Pastoralist women are often not seen as permanent members of households and clans, as they must leave the household and marry outside of the clan. Marriage is an important part of pastoralist kinship relations and young women have little say in whom they will marry. Early and forced marriage is common. Moreover, the payment of bridewealth and discriminatory inheritance laws (in customary law) make it difficult to seek a divorce. Often widows are forced into marriage with in-laws. All of this is disempowering and inequitable gender relations mean that women are socially, politically and economically marginalized in pastoral societies.

Natural and man-made calamities are making it more difficult to maintain traditional livelihood systems and increasingly necessary to diversify away from a sole reliance on livestock. In this changing context, pastoralist women, traditionally marginalized when it comes to decision-making processes and development opportunities have been seeking alternatives. For the most part, these new activities have been survival strategies and short-term crisis responses, with just the beginnings of a shift towards what might be optimal over the longer term (UNCCD & IFAD, 2007).

Heightened pressure on pastoral systems is forcing change, but it is important to recognize that it has always been the case that a certain number of pastoralists are forced to drop out of the pastoral

livelihood system due to drought or else enticed away by alternative opportunities. However, any large-scale change, brought about over a short space of time by a crisis, is likely to have a dramatic and potentially negative impact on pastoralists themselves and also, potentially, on their social and natural environment. Nevertheless, the experience described here shows how pastoralists can contribute positively to the protection of the environment, whilst raising incomes and contributing to the wider local economy. Diversifying and adapting their livelihoods and environmental management can help the pastoralist system in the longer term in the face of increasing challenges and pressures for change (Ibid).

Notwithstanding the positive features outlined above, we have to recognize that there are gaps in traditional social safety nets. In pastoral areas, it seems there are no informal instruments that specifically protect poor and vulnerable households against discrimination or abuse. Traditional social support is allocated or provided according to unwritten rules and does not amount to a systematized set of guarantees. Female-headed households and divorced or widowed women may be excluded from or poorly served by informal social protection if they do not have close male relations who can link them into social support structures (Ali and Hobson, 2009).

Article 35 of the Constitution of the FDRE acknowledges the equal rights of men and women. And the regions also have their own rules and guidelines based on the constitution. But, the reality on the ground is different. Women continue to be discriminated against and in the pastoral Afar region, suffer from sharp gender inequality, in terms of decision making over productive and reproductive assets, resource ownership, access and use. Women and girls are largely confined to the domestic sphere and household management. Women's participation in new or alternative economic activities that generate income has been relatively limited. They have not been given sufficient access to opportunities and remain, for the most part, reliant on men (FDRE, 2013).

Pastoral women are members of a pastoral community, a collective grouping of people within a clan-based system. While the clan offers many benefits, including social protection, women are generally marginalized, disempowered and viewed as subservient. During times of severe drought, households and communities adapt their activities, roles and responsibilities in order to survive. Difficult decisions need to be made concerning whether the family should split or not, when undertaking pastoral

migration and on how remaining resources should be distributed. Men and women have their own roles to play, and each will be affected by the decisions made by the other. When facing drought and other crises, it is sometimes the case that, although women can be considered to be more vulnerable than men, they may more easily cope with the situation and make the most of new economic and social opportunities. Women can be as capable as men in adapting to drought and in finding ways to ensure the survival of household members and assets such as livestock. On the other hand, it is likely that women will have to walk further to find water and other requirements and there will be less food to go round: it is often women who will miss out on a meal so that the children are fed (Flintan, 2011).

In designing drought responses and social protection activities, the specific needs and roles of women must be considered carefully. In this regard, it is notable that the PSNP's manual specifies that women have equal rights to participate and be benefited by modern social protection programs under the PSNP, something that is not necessarily the case in traditional forms of social protection (MoARD, 2010). Unfortunately, these positive stipulations for PSNP implementation are not always followed and their translation into practical execution on the ground is not straightforward. In the Afar region, as in other pastoral communities, women have not been equal beneficiaries of the PSNP, particularly in households led by females and in the cases of members of a polygamy family.

It is clear that earlier phases of the PSNP have significantly enhanced the livelihoods of households run by women and helped to empower them in important ways. And, as noted in a 2014 MoARD report, their "participation in public works (PW) earned them greater respect in their communities". However, there are areas that require more attention and some adjustments in approach. For instance, Afar women are finding it difficult to shoulder their participation in PW and at the same time their household responsibilities. The same report notes some gender bias in the hearing of complaints. Female-headed households were less likely to have their voices heard or to lodge a complaint if they felt that the selection process was unfair. In most pastoral communities, women participate actively in the Kebele Appeals Committee (KAC) and had no particular problem putting forward complaints. But, in some Afar kebeles, women complained that the KAC does not listen to them and that their views or statements are not taken seriously. Moreover,

beneficiary women have a relatively poor understanding of the objectives of the PSNP and as a consequence is in a weak position to challenge targeting decisions (MoARD, 2014).

Cultural, religious and clan practices affect married women in particular ways, with regard to decisions on assets and major issues that might determine a women's future or her involvement in anti-poverty programs. As in other Ethiopian communities where polygamy is practiced, when she marries an Afar woman goes to join her husband in his village and on his ancestral land. This is a basic characteristic of a patriarchal society. Since women do not, traditionally, own land or other major assets, they are vulnerable to economic insecurity. Moreover, women often experience chronic food insecurity, as Afar men often lack the resources to provide for the basic needs of their families. The PSNP also fails to address the issue of co-wives. The co-wives and their children are dependent on one male household head and therefore are treated (irrespective of the total, combined number of dependent children) as one family in PSNP targeting (Ibid).

Cultural and religious practices are a very significant factor in the widespread gender discrimination that exists across Ethiopia and especially in the Afar pastoral community. For many years, indeed for generations, gender inequality, discrimination and the mistreatment of women has persisted, affecting all aspects of Ethiopian society and the economy. In many communities, women remain vulnerable due to their lack of educational opportunity and consequently weak set of capabilities as well as gender bias in institutions. Custom and culture confine women to their biological and natural roles, to homemaking and too disempowered economic roles (Lemlem & Yemane, 2007).

Establishing and increasing people's resilience, to some degree, involves confronting social norms and tackling gender inequalities so that women and girls are able to participate fully in efforts to reduce vulnerability to shocks and strengthen livelihoods. Still, it is also necessary to work with, rather than against, the culture and to base interventions on a proper understanding of social norms. Interventions ignoring vulnerability and gender inequality in opportunities, or the particular interests of people either at household or community level, will fail to improve peoples' well-being and increase their resilience. In the Afar community, social norms, which are expressed in terms of informal and formal laws, beliefs and practices are crucial to determining

collective understandings and identifying acceptable behaviors (Harper *et al.*, 2014).

Sustainable and effective programs that build resilience must take gender issues into account in a thorough and consistent way and must address issues at the household and community levels. In the Afar community, it has been observed that heavy burdens are placed on women and that additional responsibilities are shouldered by women during droughts and dry seasons when there are increased mobility and increased labour requirements with respect to transportation, house construction and the collection of feed for animals (Lemlem & Yemane, 2007).

Among the Afar pastoralists, women have long played important roles in coping with recurrent drought. Practices include the gathering of famine-time wild feeds, petty trading, shifts in herd composition, the utilization of particular trees and the adoption of special cooking practices (Fassil *et al.*, 2001).

3.5. DROUGHT COPING STRATEGIES AND THE AFAR PASTORALISTS

Communities around the world are facing various natural hazards associated with climate change, El Nino as well as man-made challenges. Particular challenges are presented by frequent and severe drought. To address and mitigate impacts and the challenges that are expected to emerge, households and communities are employing various coping mechanisms. These differ according to the nature of the specific challenges faced. In the least developed countries, the extent and severity of the natural and man-made challenges faced are much greater than they are in developed countries, and as one would expect coping and mitigation strategies are also very different.

Pastoralism is a livelihood system upon which millions of people in the Horn of Africa depend. Coppock (1994) drew attention to the fact that pastoralism in Ethiopia accounts for 30-40 percent of the country's livestock population. As noted above, Afar region is overwhelmingly pastoral. However, the performance of the pastoral sector in the Horn and Eastern Africa has been severely inadequate, in the sense that it has become unable to support pastoral populations and provide for their basic needs. The poor performance of the pastoral sector has been attributed to a set of factors, including population growth, recurrent drought, the conversion of rangelands to other uses, weak governance and increasing insecurity, as well as political and

economic marginalization (Kashay *et al.*, 1998; Mkutu 2001).

Pastoralists in the Horn of Africa have been affected by man-made as well as natural calamities. Pastoral communities have faced drought, political isolation and conflict, accompanied by falling or stagnant incomes and the rising competition for natural resources. Moreover, pastoralists have suffered from the introduction of inappropriate as well as poorly designed and managed development and aid policies and programs (Helland, 1997).

Economic growth in Ethiopia closely follows the performance of the agricultural sector, which in turn is heavily influenced by weather-related shocks, in particular, recurrent droughts. The high variability in yields due to weather-related shocks implies increased risk and has negative impacts on pastoralists' incentives to invest in agricultural production or diversification. To deal with climate variability, pastoral households have adopted risk-reducing, management and control strategies based on a wealth of indigenous knowledge.

To deal with shocks, households implement a variety of risk mitigating measures and coping strategies. These include economic, social, political and behavioral responses to drought. But it is important to distinguish between two categories of response, those whose negative effects can be easily reversed and those that impose damaging costs. The latter might include environmentally destructive charcoal production that generates incomes, but undermines the basis of pastoral livelihoods (Young *et al.*, 2001).

Ethiopian pastoralists have over time developed a range of risk management methods and coping strategies. Ex-ante strategies, reducing exposure to shocks, include precautionary saving, selecting and modifying the environment, specialization and diversification. When these fail and shocks occur, ex-post measures include reducing consumption (the quality and quantity of food consumed) in order to avoid having to sell productive assets and borrowing (Fafchamps, 1999; Hoogeveen *et al.*, 2005).

But, households' wealth status and access to different assets determine the risk management and strategies used. Households with a better economic situation are more likely to be able to implement ex-ante shock handling mechanisms, avoid risks and continue their livelihoods than poorer households.

Ellis (2000) noted that households and individuals living in rural areas have widely differing access to assets. The livelihoods of those with more modest

endowments are much more vulnerable to shocks, not only because they have fewer assets but also because of diminished possibilities of substituting between assets and activities. The risk prevention and mitigation strategies used by rural households significantly affect their welfare and overall ability to sustain and develop their livelihoods. Much will depend on the asset base of each specific household.

Webb and von Braun (1994) showed that coping mechanisms form a descending ladder of strategies from “risk minimization” to “risk absorption” and finally to “risk-taking”. First, risk minimization involves asset accumulation, saving and income diversification. Then, risk absorption involves drawing on savings and food reserves and reducing consumption of food and non-food items. Finally, risk-taking involves desperate measures, such as splitting up the family through migration, resort to survival or famine foods and the sale of possessions and assets.

Again, it is important to emphasize the particular, defining features of the local context. In the Afar region, pastoralism is the dominant livelihood activity. The clan-based system of administering the community is the basis for the strong social networks that help people to cope with catastrophes and shocks (PFE *et al.*, 2010). Crop production is in its infant stages and limited to specific areas around the rivers, and so animal husbandry remains the primary and usually the only viable option under current technologies (Ahmed *et al.*, 2002). But, as a result of climate change, frequent drought and the rapid depletion of pastoral resources, households are modifying their livelihood systems to incorporate new activities; even on a provisional basis. Since they have few or no other alternatives, adopting agriculture is seen as the sole option in most pastoral areas. In fact, in most pastoral areas in Ethiopia and specifically in the Afar region, there is a broad move towards the adoption of crop cultivation as a drought coping mechanism (Yemane, 2003).

Different studies have presented a variety of coping strategies that households are likely to adopt when faced with drought in pastoral regions. One basic strategy is to adjust animal management practices (Chung, 2007). For most pastoralists, herd diversification is the first ex-ante strategy, maintaining a balanced, mixed herd. Afar pastoralists have multispecies herds with a mix of goats, cattle and camels. Many are switching from cattle to camels in order to increase the drought-resilience of the herd.

However, in recent times, some Afar pastoralists are reducing herd size in order to reduce exposure to shocks. If a livestock keeper has the financial resources to invest in improved management, with good water supply, feed and veterinary services, a smaller herd of higher quality animals can generate higher financial returns. Increased income from the sale of livestock can then be used to meet household needs and diversify assets (Ibid). An intensification of pastoral production has occurred across the Horn, with a strong trend towards smaller herd sizes, with greater investments in management, water supply and veterinary services, and a more commercial orientation.

But, these shifts are also happening for less benign reasons. Herd composition is changing and the total number of livestock is decreasing over time for reasons that include animal disease and death of livestock emanating from a shortage of water and feed (due to droughts, floods and limited grazing land) and local conflict and insecurity. The implication here is that mobile pastoralism is becoming less viable, with these reduced numbers, which dilute or erode traditional coping mechanisms. The trend towards sedentarization has also undermined traditional coping mechanisms. A basic coping mechanism for pastoralists has always been a seasonal movement to areas where there is relatively better access to pasture and water. So, as pastoralists settle, they are less able to cope with drought and climate-related shocks (Chung, 2007).

The Ethiopian Food Security Program, with its three main components, the ‘Productive Safety Net Program’, ‘Household Asset Building Program’ and, ‘Voluntary Resettlement Program’, has been designed as a “Social Risk Management” strategy (Holzmann and Kozel, 2007). Whereas the HABP and the resettlement program are risk reduction instruments, direct support under the PSNP helps people to cope with risk. The public works component can involve risk reduction and risk mitigation or cope with risk, depending on what kinds of public works activities are undertaken. One important principle here is to build on and strengthen existing social capital.

But, over recent decades, Afar pastoralists have been dependent on food aid and other forms of assistance, including the PSNP. This sustained, seemingly permanent, dependence on external support has distorted economic decision making and has eroded pastoral coping strategies, which have been based on the accumulation of experience, practice and knowledge over generations and practiced through local institutions (with a wealth of indigenous

knowledge and resource management experience). As Fassil *et al.* (2001) argue inappropriate development interventions (food aid) lead communities to be unduly dependent on external aid. Yemane (2003) supports this argument, adding that the erosion of “safe” coping strategies leaves only irreversible and risky survival strategies and deepening pastoral vulnerability.

3.6. SOCIAL PROTECTION PRACTICES AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

“Indigenous knowledge has been defined as institutionalized local knowledge that has been built upon and passed on from one generation to the other by word of mouth.” (Warren, 1992)

Afar pastoral communities employ various strategies to effectively utilize and administer their natural resources. Land, which is the major resource of the Afar people, is allocated first among various sultanates and further divided into tribe and clan areas in order to facilitate its effective distribution, administration and utilization (Getahun, 2004).

Indigenous laws governing resources are indispensable tools used to control, channel and distribute resources, including land. In the Afar community, the indigenous pastoral law determines access to and control of natural resources. Each clan is assigned control over certain strategic resources, grazing lands and water resources. Decisions on access to and control of natural resources are made through a process of consultation involving members of the village council, which comprises the clan leader, clan elders and selected local people and a traditional rule-enforcing unit (Hundie, 2006).

Indigenous knowledge plays an important role in pastoral rangeland management. Pastoralists use an extensive range of assessment techniques to identify changes in environmental conditions.

Key plant species are used to assess soils, grazing suitability and grazing potential. Pastoralists are able to assess the carrying capacity of the land over the course of the dry season and the wet season. In tracking livestock production performance, pastoralists assess milk yields, as well as body condition and weight (Gufu, 2012).

Afar communities also have indigenous methods of forecasting and tracking the weather, seasonal changes and trends in the climate. *Dagu*, the pastoralists’ own local information sharing mechanism, is used to collect and share information on the local environment

and climate trends, as well as the security situation. To some degree, this acts as an early warning tool and enables local people to make appropriate preparations or adjustments in anticipation of worsening conditions. Afar clan leaders can make decisions, based upon the information gathered, instructing people to make the necessary preparations before problems such as drought, poor rainfall, floods, high temperatures, outbreaks of animal or human disease, fully emerge or materialize. They can also do the same in anticipation of emerging man-made crises. For example, if people expect drought, they might take measures such as selling off their livestock or slaughter and make dried meat, in anticipation of a lack of pasture and water (Tibebu, 2013).

Afar pastoralists have a long tradition of using changes in specific animal features as well as looking at the status of the sky, the moon and the stars, to predict seasonal variations and changes. They assess weather conditions and seek to determine when rains or dry seasons are coming, by looking at the body condition of the animals, the way that cattle behave and changes in their appetite. For instance, it is taken as a sign of coming rains when cattle breathe with their mouths open wide, erect their ears and sniff the air and when goats shake their legs in a particular way and their body hair becomes erect. Afar pastoralists also look for signs of a coming drought. Cattle might lose their appetite, consuming less, fodder and water. The cattle might also appear to feel sleepy and look weak.

Pastoral mobility is an important feature of Afar pastoralism. Communities move seasonally across a wide geographical area, to grazing lands in the highlands of the north, and to others in the lowlands and in the valleys of the region. Depending on the nature of livestock and season, they make very organized and systematic movements so as to optimize their use of available resources. Afar pastoralists use the Awash River basin and its nearby grazing lands during the dry season and they move their animals to the highland grazing areas during the wet season.

For the Afar, grazing land is communal property. Clan leaders administer and allocate the grasslands, plants and water resources. Each clan has allocated boundaries, with specified grazing and water resources. There is no free or uncontrolled, utilization of grazing lands. Grazing is regulated, with specific areas allocated on the basis of the type of livestock. Afar pastoralists maintain grazing reserves, protected areas to be grazed only when absolutely needed (Muller-Mahn *et al.*, 2010).

Davies and Bennet (2007) describe how the demand for grazing and the allocation of grazing vary by season and according to the quality of rains. When there is above average rainfall in their areas, Afar pastoralists find that their grazing lands produce sufficient grass for different types of livestock. The various types of livestock are allocated to different grazing lands. Depending on the steepness of the area, the nature of the soil and the appropriateness of the land, the small or large stock like cattle and camels are allocated to specific areas of grazing land. Cattle mostly prefer lowlands, while goats and sheep usually graze in low-lying areas after the rain stops and the soil becomes strong and dry (Ibid).

All of the indigenous knowledge and traditions described here enable Afar pastoralists to cope better with fluctuations in rainfall and with harsh dry seasons, and pastoral mobility is a central element in this. The combination of these different elements underpins traditional forms of social protection and all need to be taken into account when designing appropriate (modern) social protection programs.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Addressing poverty and food insecurity at the household level remains the first priority of the Ethiopian government. In the early 1990s, immediately after the establishment of the transitional government of Ethiopia a set of development and welfare enhancing policies and strategies were initiated. Since then, various interventions have been carried out by government, stakeholders and the international community. Among these, the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) stands out as the leading, central, intervention intended to support the poor, to fill food gaps and enable people to increase their assets or livestock holdings, reducing asset depletion while enhancing market opportunities and social well-being. These interventions and the commitment of the government to bring about economic change are highly appreciated. Ethiopia's outstanding performance in combining strong economic growth with a major social protection program is widely recognized. The nation has achieved continuous economic growth at more than 10 percent per annum over a period of twelve years.

The impact of the Productive Safety Net Program has been studied by a number of scholars, focusing on different aspects and employing different methods of analysis, with different sample sizes and in various

regions. In most cases, the analysis shows that the Productive Safety Net Program has made a positive contribution, enhancing the consumption patterns of households, increasing the livestock and asset holdings of households, facilitating the provision of social services, contributing to environmental conservation and the mitigation of the impacts of climate change.

Households across Ethiopia and in the Afar pastoral region, use their accumulated social capital to share risk and to cope with the challenges they face. This social capital facilitates local people's involvement in microfinance institutions and can promote the empowerment of women as well as enhance community members' ability to participate in economic activities.

Social capital and social networks, in rural areas, are working well in communities that are homogenous with respect to religion, ethnicity and culture. The well-being of households and individuals is enhanced by social capital and the existence of strong social networks.

The pastoralist communities, in all regions, have weaker economic and social services than other communities. But most pastoralist communities have particularly strong cultural traditions and social networks, which help people to cope with and overcome economic crises resulting from drought and other factors.

In Afar region, social capital takes various forms, with a variety of traditional social protection tools based on common understandings and kinship networks. There are cultural, religious and non-religious institutions and practices which underpin a support system for households that need help or are faced with emergencies. When vulnerable households are hit by severe drought, a death in the family, the loss of livestock or other difficulties, there are social protection tools such as crop sharing, livestock sharing and the provision of *Zakat*.

Traditional resource management, with strong customary laws and institutions, enables Afar pastoralists to make the best use of available resources. But, Afar pastoralism is struggling to cope with the impacts of successive severe and protracted droughts. The conversion of grazing land to other uses is a particular problem, and there are widening economic imbalances. Impacts are felt most by the poor and vulnerable, with major shifts in livelihood patterns and strategies and a worrying dependency on food aid.

Another set of concerns has to do with gender inequality and the ability of women to participate in development efforts. In spite of the extreme gender inequality in the Afar community and the lack of support for women's empowerment, women play important roles in social affairs and in the economy. Beyond their domestic role, in homemaking, child rearing and household management, women are also increasingly generating new sources of income, from handicrafts and other activities. And they continue to participate in livestock production.

The implementation of the PSNP in the Afar region has involved dealing with the issues outlined above and has generated a lot of interesting questions and lessons, related to practice on the ground. The PSNP has produced valuable results, including a notable contribution to consumption smoothing, addressing food supply gaps at household and community level. There has been an expansion of community development work, encompassing road construction and maintenance, environmental management and protection work and watershed management practices carried out largely through the support provided by the program. All of this has been achieved in spite of some significant challenges, which have included weaknesses in implementation capacity and the seasonal mobility of pastoral households.

4.2. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Productive Safety Net Program has had a positive impact on the livelihoods of households in the regions which have implemented the program, over the decade and a half since its introduction. But, there have been differences in the contribution of the program across regions and to a degree, this reflects weak administrative capacity in some areas. Strengthening local capacity to implement the program is a challenge in itself.

Across regions, there are also differences in the kinds of activities selected for implementation through the food-for-work component of the PSNP. Some regions are focusing on natural resource management and environmental protection. Others focus on social services and others have different priorities. What is important here is that the implementing organs should identify and prioritize those activities that can make the strongest contribution to the particular community concerned. There have been instances where PSNP investments were made, yet gaps remain, the expected returns have not been realized and community members are complaining.

Indigenous knowledge on environmental management, social networks, local institutions and social protection tools such as livestock sharing all play important roles in helping communities to withstand shocks and cope with drought. These systems and institutions should be strengthened and due attention should be given by the regional, zone and woreda government organs to enhancing their structures and administration, as well as addressing any difficulties and concerns they might have.

The PSNP in Afar region has been relatively contributing towards the survival of the pastoralist and agro-pastoral communities, with notable successes in terms of smoothing consumption gaps, partly retaining household assets and increasing households access to social services. While a comprehensive and rigorous study has not yet been carried out, the various reports and initial studies conducted to date have demonstrated the PSNP's positive contributions, despite administrative challenges and implementation difficulties in the region. Hence, there is a need to strengthen and build the skills of the implementing organs existing at the different levels of the governmental structure as well as to design ways to optimally utilize resources in Afar settlements, taking into account the scattered nature of the population and bring a transformative impact on their livelihoods.

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