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Land Rehabilitation and Female-Headed Households: Evidence from the Bilate Area Closure Project in Halaba Special Woreda, South Ethiopia

SISAY SEIFU¹, TILL STELLMACHER², GIRMA KELBORO²

¹*Ethiopian Institute of Architecture, Building Construction and City Development (EiABC), Chair of Ecosystem Planning and Management,*

²*University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Germany*

Abstract

Female-headed households in developing countries are particularly prone to poverty. They are structurally disadvantaged in terms of access to land, labour and other resources, and are often among the most food insecure. In 1995, the Halaba Special Woreda Agricultural Office in South Ethiopia has launched a community based Bilate Area Closure (hereafter Bilate AC) project with the aim to rehabilitate degraded lands and to sustain local people's livelihoods. Various land conservation measures were implemented ever since. The Bilate AC is managed by a community-selected Forest Committee (FC) in which women are represented with 50 %. This study aims to show the impact on and perception of the Bilate AC project with regard to female-headed households. The study is based on empirical field work conducted in 2012 using semi-structured household interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. A total of 218 men and female headed households were interviewed. The result of our study show that female-headed households benefit comparatively more from the Bilate AC project than men-headed ones. 57 % of the interviewed heads of female-headed households said that the project substantially supports their households, compared to 20 % of the men-headed ones. This is mainly due to the fact that the Bilate AC provides food-for-work jobs and opportunities for cash income generation during off-season - such as selling grass fodder and firewood collected from the AC - which are particularly relevant for female-headed households. However, 100 % of the interviewed men stated that the representation of female-headed households in the FC is of no value for the overall project. In conclusion this study empirically shows the strong differences in impact and perception of a rural land rehabilitation project between men- and women-headed households, a fact which is often neglected or underestimated in project conceptualisation and implementation.

Keywords: Bilate area closure, female-headed households, Men-headed households