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## Marginality as a Root Cause of Poverty: Identifying and Analysing Marginality Hotspots in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

Marginality has been identified as a root cause of poverty and its persistence. Marginality refers to a position of individuals or groups at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems and thus helps to explain why certain groups are left behind while other parts of a society prosper. The present study applies this concept to the case of Ethiopia. Marginality hotspots are mapped by overlaying seven different indicators using Geographic Information System software. The indicators used are total expenditure at household level, prevalence of stunting among children under five, travel time to major cities, percentage of households having health problem in last 2 months and not going to health institution or traditional healer, global land area with soil constraints, percent of households getting drinking water from unprotected well or spring and the percentage of women saying wife beating is ok if she neglects children. Results show that marginality is a severe and widespread problem in Ethiopia with more than 40 million people, i.e. almost half of the population, being severely marginalized. People in the South-West and in the North of Ethiopia are most marginalized while people in urban regions are generally less marginalized. Overlaying the marginality map with a map of agro-ecological belts indicates that marginality is not correlated with agro-ecological zones. As agro-ecological zones roughly indicate agricultural potential, this finding reveals that people living in areas with higher agricultural potential are not able to seize this potential and are as marginalized as people living in low-potential areas. Furthermore, overlaying the marginality map with a map showing the distribution of different ethnic groups in the country shows that marginality is not bound to specific ethnic groups. However, using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the equality of distributions it can be shown that ethnic fractionalization is significantly lower in marginality hotspots than in other areas. This result holds even if urban areas, that are likely to be characterized by a higher ethnic diversity due to rural urban migration, are excluded. Thus, this research identifies and locates the poorest and marginalized in Ethiopia. Based on the dimensions of marginality, root causes of poverty can be identified. Especially regarding constraints in the agro-ecological dimension, extension services and access to adequate agricultural inputs can help to contribute to the reduction of poverty and marginality.

**Keywords:** Agricultural potential, Ethiopia, ethnic diversity, geographic information system, marginality, poverty