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“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Pastoral Households’ Livelihood Diversification Strategies: Evidence from Afar Region, Northern Ethiopia

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Abstract

Animal husbandry is the major economic activity for pastoralists. Though it plays an important role in the pastoral livelihood, livestock on its own is not providing sustainable and sufficient basis of living for the nomadic society. Evidences indicate that pastoralism in Afar continues to be affected by uncertain and variable climate situations as well as land use changes. One of the phenomena which is gaining prominence in the pastoral development literature is the promotion and support of diversification of non-pastoral income activities to meet consumption needs and prepare them against shocks such as drought. This research, therefore, is interested on an intervention project designed by Engineers without Borders, Germany, which intends to enhance the livelihood resilience of Afar people (Mille, Arsis) through challenging water scarcity and land management practices. The study attempts to answer the following research questions: a) What is the vulnerability situation of households who are under pressure arising from both policy-related and natural challenges? b) What are their livelihood patterns? c) What are the potential opportunities and constraints for the livelihood diversification of pastoral households? Data were gathered from sample of 98 households who are randomly selected out of the project participants. Household questionnaire, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and grey literature were used for the data collection. Key results of the scoping study are that livestock and livestock related activities, either as sales of animal products or direct consumption, are the dominant drivers of livelihoods. Household income portfolios witness the prevalence of poor livelihood diversification strategies. Key challenges to overcome at production level are lack of water both for human and for livestock, and rural finance institutions are least developed. Loss of grazing land, poor pasture and low productivity are major manifesting features.

Keywords: Afar, climate variability, livelihood diversification, pastoral development