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Local Community’s Perception, Assessment and Management of Food Insecurity Risks: the Case of Family Farming Households in South Western Ethiopia

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Abstract

Understanding how local communities perceive, assess and manage food insecurity risks is helpful in developing interventions for sustainable food security. This study is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from Jimma and Bako areas of Oromia region in Ethiopia during May 2015 to April 2016 using household survey, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and observation of community practices.

The findings show that climate-related variables and institutions influencing agricultural inputs, outputs and food prices were perceived to be important sources of household food insecurity risks. About 90 percent, 55 percent and 49 percent of the sample farmers respectively perceived that late onset and early cessation of rainfall and extended drought are the major sources of risk of food insecurity. About 70 percent, 30 percent and almost all the sample farmers respectively have suffered from the effects of late onset and early termination of rainfall and drought in the last five years. Farmers assessed drought as an unpredictable and unavoidable source of risk with the highest negative impact on crop productivity as they depend on rain-fed agriculture. About 78 percent and 98 percent of farmers respectively perceived large decreases in maize prices and large increases in input prices as important sources of risk of food insecurity mainly associated with government interventions. This has been observed to cause low input use and disincentive to increase grain production in Ethiopia for over six decades, during the last two governments and the current government. Such path dependent government regulations have resulted in famines that claimed state power in the past.

The local community and households are using different risk management strategies to protect themselves from the risks of food insecurity. These strategies range from the usual risk coping strategies such as reduction of consumption to adaptation strategies such as use of short season and early maturing crop varieties, development of agronomic practices suitable to the changing climatic variables, and amending local institutions in response

to the changing sources of risk of food security. Promoting such coping and adaptation strategies would be essential to build sustainable solutions to the food insecurity risks.

Keywords: Local community, risk assessment, risk management, risk perception