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## The Influence of Land Degradation and Precipitation Variability on the Migratory Decision of Subsistence Farmers in Rural Ethiopia: An Empirical Study

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### Abstract

Migration can be one strategy of subsistence farmers to sustain, adapt or transform their livelihoods under changing environmental conditions. The sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) is well suited to tackle questions within the field of environmental change and human migration, as migratory decisions often emerge at the individual or household level. For Ethiopia the depletion of natural resources and climate variability is observed in large parts of the country and local case studies revealed the influence of environmental change on out-migration, usually in combination with socio-economic and political factors. But so far there is a lack of knowledge how these factors which shape the decision to adapt, for example through migration, or to stay are interrelated.

The presentation will focus on the research design for an empirical study which will be conducted in South Wollo end of 2017, South Wollo is an out-migration area in the Northern Ethiopian highlands, where precipitation variability, population pressure, land degradation and food insecurity are well known as putting the livelihoods of the rural population under pressure. By applying mainly semi-structured interviews and focus groups with local farmers and regional key informants, the research aims to 1) understand the livelihood strategies of subsistence farmers to deal with environmental changes, 2) identify the (in)direct influence of environmental change on out-migration and the interrelations with other factors and 3) examine what hampers or triggers the migratory decision of the farmers. The local data collection will take place in eight villages which differ in terms of severity of land degradation and livelihood strategies. Moreover, preliminary findings from a preparatory field visit in spring 2017 will be presented.

Being part of a dissertation project this empirical study is considered as a first crucial step to shed light on the complex interrelations between environmental change and human migration in the tropics and aims to support stakeholders and policy makers in Ethiopia. This study is part of the interdisciplinary junior research group MigSoKo (<https://www.ufz.de/index.php?en=41462>), which is based at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Leipzig.

**Keywords:** Climate variability, Ethiopia, human migration, land degradation, livelihoods