



# Resilience-building in the Afar National Regional State, Ethiopia



## Introduction

The Horn of Africa drought of 2011 was triggered by a deep and prolonged *La Niña* episode and resulted in a severe food security and nutrition crisis that affected the lives and livelihoods of more than 12.5 million people living in the region's drylands including the Afar National Regional State in Ethiopia. The United Nations declared famine in Somalia in July 2011 and an estimated 250,000 people died, most of them children.<sup>i</sup> In neighbouring countries, including Ethiopia<sup>ii</sup>, the drought was better managed and losses were confined to livelihoods impacts.

While the drought episode was better managed in Ethiopia and Kenya, the cost of the humanitarian response<sup>iii</sup> resulted in widespread recognition amongst national governments, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), international development partners and the humanitarian community of the need to do things differently. Specifically, it was recognized that more needed to be known about the underlying and structural causes of drought-related crises and that humanitarian and development tools needed to be overhauled if improvements in poverty reduction and nutrition were to be sustained. Therefore, a collective search began for strategies, frameworks and programmes to understand and build resilience with a particular focus on the region's drylands. This focus has resulted in substantial resilience-related investment in the Horn including in Afar Region.

## What is "resilience"?

While there is no single definition for resilience many definitions include the following core elements: *the ability to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and/or recover from the effects of shocks - natural disasters, economic instability, conflict - in a manner which protects livelihoods, accelerates and sustains recovery, and supports economic and social development and transformation.* There is also common agreement that people in resilient communities realize positive livelihood outcomes including sufficient assets and income, food security, safety, proper nutrition, good health, education and protect local ecosystems.

Work carried out in Ethiopia by the UN's Humanitarian Country Team (EHCT) recognized the importance of a holistic approach and that resilience building requires the connectedness of physical, social, environmental, human, political and economic elements and conditions<sup>iv</sup>, focusing in particular on four key elements: livelihoods, basic services, social protection and disaster risk reduction. It is therefore important that all sectors and stakeholders including communities and households develop a shared analysis of the complex causes of vulnerability and crises and work together in complementary and mutually reinforcing approaches and interventions. The UN team also recognized the importance of building the capacity of key federal, regional and local government institutions<sup>v</sup> to lead resilience-building work and to ensure that development and humanitarian actors work collaboratively to build capacities to deliver the four key elements outlined above at community and household level.

Finally, although resilience building will need to continue to focus on the most vulnerable, population trends, patchy basic service delivery, conflict and further loss of key pastoral rangelands to other land-users will result in increased levels of vulnerability among the medium wealth group. So, it will also be important to monitor resilience trends comprehensively to include changes in resilience status among other groups. In particular, it will be important to track changes in resilience during future *La Niña* triggered droughts.

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Resilience is the capacity to manage, adapt to, cope with, or recover from stresses, shocks and disasters - or the ability of a system to remain stable or adapt to a new situation without undergoing catastrophic changes in its basic functioning.

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Resilience-building needs an understanding of the main livelihoods groups in Afar Region, and the specific needs of vulnerable people and households within each group.

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### **Livelihood-based resilience building**

To address high and potentially rising levels of vulnerability in Afar Region, resilience building needs to be livelihood-based and therefore, recognise and respond to the specific needs of different livelihood groups: pastoral, agro-pastoral and households transitioning out of pastoralism.

Pastoralists can be defined as communities/ households that derive more than 50 per cent of their food and income needs from livestock.<sup>vi</sup> With increasing herd size, pastoralists become more engaged in commercial livestock markets. In contrast, agro-pastoralists can be defined as communities/households that typically derive between 50 and 25 per cent of their food and income needs from livestock. Households who move out of pastoralism may have only small numbers of livestock, meeting no more than around 25 per cent of their income and food needs. These households may succeed in building up small herds in good years, only to lose them in a subsequent drought cycle.<sup>vii</sup> These different livelihood groups will therefore have very different resilience-building priorities:

**Pastoral households** often prioritize access to seasonal grazing and pasture - research in Ethiopia confirms that mobile pastoralists who trek their livestock between different wet and dry seasonal pastures, achieve higher levels of production per unit area than ranchers in areas of similar rainfall in the United States and Australia.<sup>viii</sup> Hence, policies and strategies that restrict livestock movements to seasonal grazing and water or that result in the loss of key pastures to other forms of land use<sup>ix</sup> will tend to erode levels of resilience and impact on livestock production and productivity. Creating a policy and strategy environment that provides for mobile pastoralism and strengthens trade in livestock and livestock products<sup>x</sup> is central to building resilience for pastoralists. These mobile communities also need improved access to basic services including human and animal health and education.

**Agro-pastoralists** also herd livestock and need access to seasonal grazing, though their migratory routes may be more modest in scale. In addition however, agro-pastoralists also need continued access to land for rainfed and/or irrigated agriculture. Access to irrigation water in Afar Region is of particular importance if the small-scale irrigation sector is to achieve higher levels of production and employment for households from the region. Agro-pastoralists also need access to inputs, in particular seeds and seedlings<sup>xi</sup>, and extension services e.g. to support irrigated agriculture, integrated pest management, and reduce storage losses, as well as support to maintain farm gate prices through improved marketing. These households require access to basic services including human and animal health, education and water - and for poorer agro-pastoralists access to social protection programmes such as the PSNP.<sup>xii</sup>

**Households in transition** - for those transitioning out of pastoralism the focus for resilience-building is the towns and small trading centers to which they commonly gravitate. Many of these households have low levels of education and lack the skills or capital to find employment or start small businesses. This requires investments in skills training and creating employment opportunities, which will provide income for this very vulnerable group. Bearing in mind the remoteness and harshness of some of Afar's rural areas, it is important to create an enabling environment that will attract businesses and therefore generate jobs e.g. via tax incentives to businesses from outside the region. In addition, households transitioning out of pastoralism require access to quality basic services - health, WASH and education. Afar Region has the highest levels of child stunting - a useful proxy indicator for levels of resilience - of any region in Ethiopia<sup>xiii</sup>, and hence much more needs to be done to improve the quality of basic service delivery, strengthen social protection programming, and increase employment opportunities if levels of stunting are to be managed and reduced. Investment in education is perhaps the single biggest priority as educated young people have increased options for employment, including outside the region and the country, with associated benefits such as remittance inflows.




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Education – especially for girls – is a core resilience approach and cuts across all livelihoods groups in Afar Region.

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The lessons from DCM are well-documented and cover three decades of learning in the drylands.

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Commercial destocking can be a very effective response during the alarm stage of a drought.

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## Strengthening disaster risk management

In addition to the developmental dimensions of resilience-building that have been outlined above, it is also important that Afar Region is able to predict, prepare for and respond to drought. Based on the lessons learned in Ethiopia during the *La Niña* years, including by federal and regional Disaster Risk Management - Agriculture Task Forces, the **drought cycle management (DCM) model** offers opportunities to integrate longer term resilience-building work with drought preparedness and response.

Used appropriately, DCM prioritizes the early and rapid scale-up of livelihood-based interventions that have demonstrated good impact and high return on humanitarian investment. For example, agencies operating in Afar have implemented slaughter destocking with the meat distributed to poorer households.<sup>xiv</sup> Similarly, several agencies including the Afar Pastoralist Development Association, CARE Ethiopia, FAO and VSF Germany have implemented livestock feed supplementation to protect core breeding animals and sustain lactations into the dry season to ensure that children have access to milk. These approaches are covered in the Ethiopian government's national guidelines for drought response in pastoralist areas.<sup>xv</sup> However, commercial destocking is among the best livelihoods-based programmes during drought and can be 130 times less expensive than distributions of imported food aid.<sup>xvi</sup> The approach has not been widely used in Afar and needs further support.

Based on the lessons learned in Ethiopia, Afar Region may decide to increase the area of irrigated land allocated to fodder production, that can be used in normal years and times of crisis to protect core breeding animals and sustain milk production. The DCM model also recognises the importance of social protection and would support an expanded PSNP in the late alert and early alarm phases in pastoral, agro-pastoral and urban contexts.

## Key themes for the Afar National Regional State Resilience Conference

The media attention on the Horn of Africa drought is now fading and being replaced by other humanitarian crises around the world. However, the challenge remains for policy and strategy makers to build resilience and avoid the devastating impact of droughts. In response, the Afar National Regional State is convening a regional resilience conference in October 2014. The conference will map "who is doing what" and will explore ways to strengthen basic services, livelihoods, disaster risk management and social protection.

Preliminary assessments indicate that high levels of complementary planning and programming in some *woredas*, while other *woredas* appear to receive much less attention. For example, *woredas* in the upper and middle Awash which are more accessible from Addis Ababa appear to be better serviced than some more northern and remote *woredas*. These assessments also suggest a strong focus on practical resilience-building interventions with less emphasis on capacity building, coordination and institutional development. While meeting immediate community-level resilience-building needs is important, so too is the need to sustain these gains through incorporating evidence-based good practice into regional and *woreda* development plans and budgets.

Based on the analysis in this technical brief, the conference is encouraged to explore the following issues:

**1. Understanding resilience-building needs<sup>xvii</sup>** - it is commonly assumed that drought management is the main resilience-building challenge in the arid and semi-arid lands. While drought will continue to be important, changes in levels of mobility and the loss of key seasonal rangelands - to *Prosopis* infestation, to irrigation, to conflict - may be as important for determining future trends in resilience. For households that have transitioned or are transitioning out of pastoralism, resilience-building priorities will be very different from those of pastoralists, and for example, may focus on improved access basic services and employment.

Whatever the needs, it will be important for development partners and implementing partners to be able to clearly articulate how their programmes meet the specific needs of different livelihood groups in different livelihood zones.

**2. Coordination and integration of humanitarian and development programming** - it has long been recognised that improved resilience outcomes require improved levels of coordination between humanitarian and development programmes. More specifically, better coordination should be aiming to achieve synergies between emergency and development efforts. For example, humanitarian support for household level fodder provision for milking goats during dry seasons in pastoralist areas has been found to have a large and measurable impact on child nutrition, which is also a planned development outcome.<sup>xviii</sup> The extent to which humanitarian and development partners are actively collaborating in programme design and delivery in Afar will serve as a useful proxy for improved resilience at the community level.

**3. Resilience information systems**- the importance of quality early warning information systems has been demonstrated repeatedly in the Horn of Africa, and Ethiopia has a long tradition of delivering high quality early warning information. The challenge now is for early warning bulletins and related information services to also meet the needs of resilience actors, by for example, including information on social protection and basic social services delivery, as well as livelihoods and DRR.

**4. Education for resilience** – Afar Region has some of the lowest education indicators in Ethiopia, yet education is a core strategy for enabling access to employment in the region and beyond; education indicators are especially low for girls. There needs to be a concerted effort to strengthen education across the region, and develop approaches that make education accessible to pastoralist communities and girls. Understanding the cultural barriers to education will be central to improving girls access to schools, and long-term attendance and graduation.

**5. Prosopis control and management** - the Pastoral Directorate of the State Ministry of Livestock launched the Rangeland Management Platform in April 2014. The aim was for policy makers, researchers, government and non-government representatives with a shared interest in rangeland development, to come together to share information and lessons learned, and to harmonize approaches and scale-up good practice. Notably, *Prosopis juliflora* was the topic of the inaugural meeting in April 2014, with more than 1 million hectares of rangeland lost to *Prosopis* in Afar Region alone. The meeting passed a number of recommendations including:

- Recommendation 1: The government adopts an overall vision of eradicating *Prosopis juliflora*, through the control of its spread and its removal from invaded areas
- Recommendation 4: A national policy and associated legislation is developed to guide and take forward a national action plan on *Prosopis*, and the development of more context-specific rules and regulations at regional government levels in order to prevent and control *Prosopis* spread and rehabilitate invaded lands.

**6. Conflict-sensitive programming** - conflicts and the threat of conflict have short and long-term resilience implications for Afar. While the large-scale and better documented conflicts can hardly be overlooked, localized conflicts can have equally negative resilience-building outcomes in the affected communities.<sup>xix</sup> All resilience-building programming in conflict-affected areas in Afar region should therefore adopt conflict-sensitive approaches and as appropriate development partners should also support the Afar National Regional State to work with neighbouring regions to manage and mitigate conflict for improved resilience outcomes.

**7. Flexible funding** - the strategic importance of flexible funding as required by the DCM model is well documented<sup>xx</sup> and the EHCT has adopted a flexible funding strategy. However this approach has yet to be endorsed and widely implemented by development partners and implementing agencies. Ways therefore need to be found to mainstream and take to scale flexible funding approaches in order to achieve high levels of resilience-building gains.

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DCM can be supported when development projects have built-in flexibility and can transfer funds from development activities towards early drought response – the USAID ‘crisis modifier’ is an example.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation, United Nations, 2012. Somalia Country Reports
- <sup>ii</sup> Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) played a lead role in the drought response.
- <sup>iii</sup> Estimated to have cost US\$850 million in Ethiopia alone.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team, 2013. *Towards Resilience: A position paper for the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team*. EHCT, Addis Ababa
- <sup>v</sup> A challenge made more difficult by the high turn-over of government staff.
- <sup>vi</sup> Kratli, S and Swift, J., 2014. *Counting Pastoralists*. Dryland Learning and Capacity Building Initiative, Nairobi  
[http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/drought/docs/1\\_Counting%20Pastoralists%20FINAL%2030%20April%202014.pdf](http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/fileadmin/user_upload/drought/docs/1_Counting%20Pastoralists%20FINAL%2030%20April%202014.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> Households continue to invest in livestock in some cases simply because there are few alternatives
- <sup>viii</sup> Coppock, L. (ed.), 1994. *The Borana Plateau of Southern Ethiopia: synthesis of pastoral research, development and change, 1980-1991*. ILCA, Addis Ababa [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNABW360.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABW360.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> Including large scale irrigation systems and to Prosopis invasion.
- <sup>x</sup> The demand for Afari camels, sheep and goats is higher than Afari cattle.
- <sup>xi</sup> For example, dates and other fruit could play a much bigger role in the local agricultural production.
- <sup>xii</sup> Productive Safety Net Programme
- <sup>xiii</sup> Department of Health Statistics (2014)
- <sup>xiv</sup> VSF 2012 and 2013
- <sup>xv</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, 2008. *Guidelines on Livelihoods-based Livestock Relief Interventions in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia*. Federal Democratic Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Addis Ababa
- <sup>xvi</sup> Catley, A. and Cullis, A., 2012. *Money to Burn? Comparing the costs and benefits of drought responses in pastoralist areas of Ethiopia*. Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, 24 April, 2012 <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1548>
- <sup>xvii</sup> USAID-AKLDP and Tufts University will carry out a detailed study of emerging lessons in resilience building in Afar Regional State. The study findings will be available in early 2015.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Sadler, K. et al., 2012. *Milk Matters: the impact of dry season livestock support on milk supply and child nutrition in Somali Region, Ethiopia*. Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University and Save the Children Ethiopia, Addis Ababa  
<http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Milk-Matters-2.pdf>
- <sup>xix</sup> Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team, 2013, *ibid*
- <sup>xx</sup> Including the crisis modifier in Ethiopia, developed under USAID's Pastoral Livelihoods Initiative.

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## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this technical brief are those of the AKLDP project and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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