



THE AGRICULTURE KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING, DOCUMENTATION AND POLICY PROJECT (AKLDP)

EL NIÑO IN ETHIOPIA

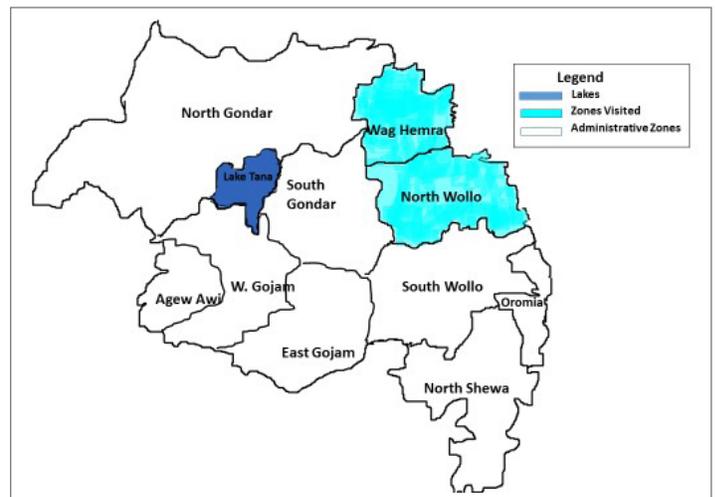
IMPACTS OF DROUGHT ON YOUNG RURAL WOMEN IN EASTERN AMHARA NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE

Introduction

In June 2016 the AKLDP produced the first of two Field Notes that documents the impact of the El Niño on the lives and livelihoods of young rural women in North and South Gondar, Amhara National Regional State. This edition of *Field Notes* documents the impact of the El Niño on rural young women in two zones of eastern Amhara National Regional State: Wag Hemra and North Wollo.

The AKLDP commissioned two women researchers¹ who interviewed 92 young women aged 15 to 25² from severely drought affected *woredas*. The researchers conducted 10 focus group discussions — five in each zone. Specifically, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in Zikuala *woreda* and three in Sekota *woreda* (Sirel and Tsemera rural *kebeles*) in Wag Hemra. In North Wollo, three FGDs were held in Guba Lafto *woreda* (Jarsa and Estaysh *kebeles*), one in Habru *woreda* (Mehal Amba *kebele*) and one in Raya Kobo *woreda* (*kebele* 15).

In each case, FGDs were structured around key questions including the impact of drought, household coping strategies, and interventions that might help address priority needs. As with the Field Notes from North and South Gondar, the researchers made every effort to interview poorer young rural women who, it could be expected, had suffered the worst impacts of the drought. The fieldwork was carried out in the last week of March and the first week of April 2016.



Impact of the 2015 El Niño on young rural women's lives and livelihoods

The interviewees confirmed the delayed onset of the 2015 summer *meher* rains. They also confirmed that overall the rains had been erratic and poor with the result that the harvest was well below normal in many areas. The focus groups in North Wollo reported that drought conditions had appeared in mid-September 2015, while those in Wag Hemra stated that drought conditions had appeared as early as the end of May or beginning of June 2015.

In order to understand and better document the impact of the drought, the researchers structured questions around the following: workload, health and diet, home and community life, and education and training. Many findings were similar to the North and South Gondar study, but there were also significant differences.



I. WORKLOAD

Following the onset of drought conditions, all interviewees said the first major effect was an increase in their daily workload. In particular, they reported that they had to travel further to collect water and firewood, and that the average time spent collecting these necessities had increased to an average of 3 to 4 hours each day. Interviewees explained that they typically rose very early in the morning in order to take their 20 litre plastic jerry cans to the nearest water point, where they were placed in a line with others. If they were late, the queue that had formed was already long and the wait time increased. Having spent so much time on these tasks, the interviewees reported having less time to look after their children and fulfill their

other household responsibilities. They also reported that in travelling longer distances to collect water and firewood they had been subjected to an increase in gender-based violence, including rape.

In contrast to participants in other focus group discussions, the interviewees in Raya Kobo noted that they worked as daily laborers on various infrastructure projects. They explained that the work was hard and they returned home tired, so they could not spend much time with their young children. As a result, this responsibility fell to older family members and other older children.

2. HEALTH AND DIET

The majority of the women interviewed complained that they constantly suffered from back pain as a result of having to carry water over long distances. They also reported that, due to the distance and the time required to collect water, they tried to use less each day for cooking, washing and washing clothes. Some of the interviewees said that they used water of very poor quality and that, as a result, they and many of their neighbors had suffered from water quality related diseases — amoebas, diarrhea, typhoid and vomiting. In addition, because they were using less water, many suffered from scabies³ and eye infections. In Guba Lafto *woreda*, North Wollo, the women also reported that they or their close friends had suffered from malaria, meningitis and tetanus. The interviewees attributed the increased incidence of diseases to high temperatures, tiredness and poor nutrition.

The reduced availability of water made preparing food more difficult. All of the interviewees also reported that their diet was monotonous⁴ — mainly wheat in the form of bread (*dabo*) and roasted wheat (*kolo*) — and that almost all households were eating fewer and smaller meals each day. Some of the women stated that they had reduced their own food intake in order to ensure that there was more food for their children. One of the researchers, also a nutritionist, observed that a number of the women were suffering from moderate acute malnutrition⁵.

3. HOME AND COMMUNITY LIFE

The El Niño reduced the harvest in some areas by as much as 50 to 90 per cent⁶. As a result of the reduced availability of food in the household, the interviewees reported that tensions between husbands and wives had increased significantly. The young women reported that in many households the men felt 'forced' to leave to try to find employment in neighboring towns so that they could send money and food home. However, interviewees also reported that while some men did send money back to their families, others did not and some simply 'disappeared'. They said that the rate of divorce had also increased.

The interviewees observed that when the family head left the farm in search of employment, the additional workload and pressure that fell on his wife was considerable. In addition to her own normal day-to-day responsibilities, she became responsible for providing food for the children and older family members as well as caring for the livestock and managing the farm.

In marked contrast to the findings from the fieldwork in North and South Gondar, the interviewees in North Wollo reported that young women also migrate in search of employment. While the men typically migrate to nearby urban areas to try to secure casual work, young women migrate to the Middle East — Dubai, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia — and Sudan. The interviewees confirmed that the main motivation for migrating is to find a good job so they can earn money to send back to their families. They also reported that the drought had increased the pressures on young women to migrate. For despite the challenges — interviewees noted that over the years many young women have returned without having earned much money and with stories of hardship and abuse — the opportunities to earn can be substantial. Reports indicate that in some cases women who migrate to Arabic countries can earn between ETB 4,000 and ETB 12,000 (US \$180 - \$540) per month⁷.

All the interviewees also reported that the drought had negatively impacted community life and that there had been no social gatherings in recent months. They also noted that, contrary to what is typically expected, no marriages took place after the 2015 harvest because households lacked the necessary resources.

4. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

All of the young women interviewed confirmed that many children had been forced to drop-out of school, whether as a result of hunger or because their families needed them to help at home or because they were unable to afford to buy shoes, uniforms, school materials and stationery. In the Guba Lafto focus group, several interviewees reported that some girls were dropping out of school as a result of an increase in pregnancies,

Food and Cash Assistance

In the three *woredas*, the rural young women reported that the Productive Safety Net Program — introduced to Ethiopia after the 2002-2003 El Niño — provided important cash and food assistance. The food transfers were typically 15kg wheat, 0,5 liter oil and 1kg pulses. The cash transfers varied between *woredas* from Eth Birr 78-150 per person per month according to whether or not 'extension fees' were deducted.

Although it was universally agreed that the assistance was important, it was also widely stated that the level of assistance was inadequate in amount (typically there was only enough to support four household members) and that transfers were irregular (in some cases there had been only 2 or 3 distribution rounds since October 2015). As a result, the interviewees said that the distributions were not adequate to meet household needs.

It should also be noted that households that received food assistance felt it necessary to share their rations with their neighbours who had not received emergency food assistance, as they recognised that they were equally in need.

Finally, the interviewees said while they appreciated that the transfers were directed to the most vulnerable — the elderly, sick and disabled, as well as orphans — at times this resulted in conflict as other needy households were overlooked.

several of which were the result of rape when the girls were collecting water far from home. Many of those who continued to attend arrived late as they had household chores to complete before they could set off for school.

The interviewees reported that the introduction of a school feeding program set up by the World Food Programme in some *kebeles* of Zikuala *woreda* had reversed the drop-out rate and that absentee rates were in some cases, less than usual thanks to the school meals. There is keen interest amongst communities in other areas that the school feeding program be extended.

Coping strategies

When asked for examples of typical household coping strategies (*mequaquamiya*) the interviewees offered the following:

- Food and cash assistance (see box above)
- Preparing and selling local beer and alcohol: some interviewees reported that, as a result of reduced water availability, fewer rural women were making local beer (*tella*) and locally-made alcohol (*areki*)
- Buying and selling vegetables
- Daily laboring: in particular on construction sites
- Employment: some were employed as domestic helpers — nannies, maids and cooks, while others worked in bars, cafes and tea houses in nearby towns and cities
- Borrowing money: from neighbors and money lenders
- Livestock sales: but at low prices, as during the drought livestock prices fell by up to 50%. As a result, households were forced to sell more livestock to secure the same amount of cereals i.e. declining terms-of-trade
- Migration and remittances: adults — men and women — and children left in search of work in local towns and cities and in the Middle East

Women's needs and priority emergency assistance interventions

The interviewees were also asked to identify and prioritize short-term humanitarian and medium-term resilience interventions that they felt would help improve their lives. The results are summarized in the table below:

SHORT-TERM HUMANITARIAN PRIORITIES	MEDIUM-TERM RESILIENCE PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to safe drinking water • Improved food assistance distribution at <i>kebele</i> level – to reduce the long delays • Food for all community members in need – to reduce the need for sharing • Access to livestock feed supplementation – to protect livestock assets • School uniforms and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of rural roads • Small-scale irrigation schemes • Extended credit provision – with modest interest rates • Extended and improved health services • Vocational skills training programs • Better employment opportunities – including in rural areas • School feeding programs

Conclusions

The interviews with the young women from rural areas in Wag Hemra and North Wollo zones appear to confirm the findings of the interviews in North and South Gondar zones that the 2015 El Niño drought had a profound impact — and that the impact is likely to continue through until the 2016 autumn meher harvest, when it is anticipated that household food security will improve

markedly. As in North and South Gondar zones, the young women clearly articulated a range of challenges related to workload, health and diet, home and community — including female migration to the Middle East — and schooling and training.

In all of the areas of Amhara National Regional State where the AKLDP researchers travelled and met with young women in rural areas, there is widespread appreciation for the government-led relief efforts. However, similar to the focus group discussions in North and South Gondar zones, the focus groups in eastern Amhara also expressed their concerns that the food distributions are not well organized and that the level of assistance is not adequate to meet the need. As a result of the limited supplies, households are compelled to share with their neighbors, with the result that few if any families receive enough to meet their basic food needs. The lack of adequate food has resulted in a range of coping strategies including the sale of livestock, casual laboring, migration to local towns and cities for wage employment and emigration — of both men and women — to the Middle East.

It would appear that the introduction of school feeding is appreciated and that it arrests and reverses previously rising levels of absenteeism. It would appear, however, that such programs will need to be scaled-up quickly to all drought affected areas in Amhara National Regional State if a generation of school children is not to be lost: children that drop-out of school and migrate in search of work are less likely to return to school, irrespective of the incentives. It may be that school feeding programs will need to be accompanied by conditional cash transfers to enable very poor households to purchase shoes, uniforms and school stationery.

Looking to the future, it would appear that young women in rural areas continue to have an interest in agriculture, specifically when their livelihoods are less dependent on rainfall. Access to irrigation enables households to produce food year round and has the potential to make smallholders, even those with modest amounts of land, viable. Other medium-term aspirations include rural road construction to improve access to markets, improved access to credit (with modest interest rates), vocational training and improved rural employment opportunities. Mention was also made of the need for improved access to health care and school feeding programs.

It would seem that, despite a decade of impressive growth rates and investment in infrastructure and schooling, too many rural Ethiopians remain dependent on rainfed agriculture. In the next decade growth and investment needs to be channeled into generating employment in non rain-dependent livelihoods that will achieve improved levels of resilience ahead of the next El Niño episode.

Endnotes

- ¹ Silvia Possenti works with the World Food Program as Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for the Food Management Improvement Project (FMIP), while Mestawet Gebru works with the AKLDP as the Home Gardens Coordinator
- ² This age group was selected because many of them have one or more children — the result of early marriage in the rural areas of Ethiopia
- ³ UN-OCHA reported in early 2016 that almost a million people in Ethiopia were suffering from scabies with the majority in Amhara Region.
- ⁴ The AKLDP commissioned a study 'Dietary Diversity and Associated Factors Among Rural Households, South Gondar zone, Northern Ethiopia', through Gondar University in November and December 2015. It was found that only 16.2% of the study participants had high dietary diversity — consuming seven or more food groups — even at harvest time
- ⁵ UN-OCHA estimates the current caseload for moderate acute malnutrition in Ethiopia is 665,000 children and pregnant and lactating women of which 546,257 received treatment in the first quarter (Government of Ethiopia (2016). Ethiopia: Drought Response, Situation Report No. 01. Disaster Risk Management — Technical Working Group)
- ⁶ Joint Government of Ethiopia and Development Partners. 2015. 2016 Humanitarian Requirements Document. Addis Ababa. Ethiopia.
- ⁷ Gray, George. 2016. Building Resilience Capacity and Recovery for the Vulnerable Population of Wag Himra Zone, Amhara Region - Wag Himra Social Transformation Program. Assessment and Preliminary Design, EC SHARE-Ethiopia Program. Save the Children International and ACF, Addis Ababa.
- ⁸ Separate research carried out by the AKLDP confirms that livestock prices fell by as much as 50% in parts of Amhara Region in the period November 2014 to November 2015. El Niño in Ethiopia: early impacts of drought in Amhara National Regional State <http://www.agri-learning-ethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/AKLDP-Field-Notes-Amhara-Jan-2016.pdf>