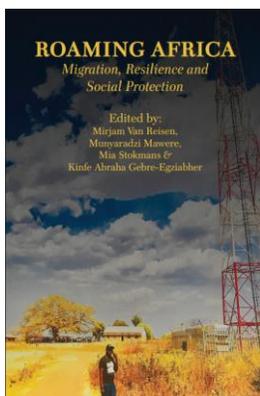


# Roaming Lifestyles: Designing Social Protection for the Pastoralist Afar in Ethiopia

*Zeremariam Fre & Naomi Dixon*

## Chapter in: Roaming Africa: Migration, Resilience and Social Protection

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# Roaming Lifestyles: Designing Social Protection for the Pastoralist Afar in Ethiopia

Zeremariam Fre & Naomi Dixon

### Introduction

Roaming with their cattle across three countries, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti, the Afar people live a pastoralist lifestyle in arid lands. Challenged by climate change and droughts, their resilience is at stake. The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), implemented by the Ethiopian government, aims to support their resilience by strengthening their productive capacity. But, how can the PSNP succeed in the Afar Regional State, possibly one of the most difficult regions in which to implement a social security programme, not in the least because the Afar people are moving within and across the region?

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*The pastoral lifestyle of the Afar people poses a challenge for social protection programmes, such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). This study looked at whether the design of this programme is relevant for the highly mobile Afar and if it has improved their socio-economic resilience. The study found that while the PSNP has the potential to contribute to the resilience of the Afar, their socio-political context needs to be better appreciated and reflected in programme design to increase local relevance. Efforts to improve the programme are certainly worthwhile given that it has the potential to contribute to the socio-economic resilience of the Afar.*

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Chronic food insecurity in Ethiopia is not just a modern problem, but one that has recurred throughout history; for example, it is believed that a third of the population perished in the Great Famine in the late

19<sup>th</sup> Century. Between 1998 and 2005, anywhere between 5 and 14 million Ethiopians relied on food aid (Devereux, 2006). This may have supported the basic survival of beneficiaries, but is criticised for creating aid dependency, as it failed to offer any long-term solution or protect household assets, the depletion of which left households even more vulnerable to poverty.

The Millennium Development Goals, launched in 2000, set tangible targets for global development that included the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. These were then revisited and expanded on by the Sustainable Development Goals, which began in 2015 and will be reviewed in 2030. The Government of Ethiopia has aligned itself to the African Union 2063 Agenda, 'The Africa We Want'. In line with this, the Ethiopian government has pursued various development policies to increase agricultural productivity, improve disaster prevention and management, diversify livelihoods and increase food security with the aim of achieving sustainable growth. These policies are provided as social protection policies, rolled out in Sub Sahara Africa (Chapter 16, *Is Trauma Counselling the Missing Link? Enhancing Socio-Economic Resilience among Post-war IDPs in Northern Uganda*, by Mirjam Van Reisen, Mia Stokmans, Primrose Nakazibwe, Zaminah Malole & Bertha Vallejo). One such policy is the PSNP, which was launched by the government in 2005, together with the World Bank and various other development partners. The programme initially targeted food insecure households in various highland regions and was expanded to the lowlands of the Afar and Somali regions in 2009, at which point the programme integrated with the Climate Smart Initiative (CSI) to prioritise climate resilience (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2011).

Ethiopia is both the largest landlocked country in Africa and the second most populated country in the Sub-Saharan region, with a current estimated population of approximately 100 million (CIA, 2017). Historically, as witnessed across the African continent, the Horn of Africa has been considerably disadvantaged by wider socio-economic processes. Ethiopia, which is located in the Horn of Africa, is marginalised in the globalised trade economy, while also being

disproportionately impacted on by the effects of climate change. Despite proportionately high rates of economic growth which, the World Bank (2017) estimated at nearly 11% per year between 2003 and 2015, the country has a low Human Development Index, ranking 174 out of 185 countries (Government of Ethiopia & UNOCHA, 2017). Furthermore, over 25 million Ethiopians are categorised as living in poverty.

Ethiopia has extreme geographical variations including both tropical and desert climatic zones. For example, the north of the country receives less than 5% of the precipitation received by the south-western highlands, which has 2,200 mm per year, compared to only 100 mm per year in the north. The country has long been susceptible to drought and regularly experiences food insecurity. Historical trends show that Ethiopia's temperature has increased by up to 1.3°C over the last century, with increases of up to 2.2°C predicted by mid-century (IPCC, 2014). It is expected that significant weather events will become more severe and more regular.

Farming is the cornerstone of Ethiopian livelihoods and relies on predictable rainy seasons. As Shitarek explains:

*Ethiopia's economy is based mainly on agriculture, including crop and livestock production, which contributes 45% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), more than 80% of employment opportunities and over 90% of the foreign exchange earnings of the country (Ministry of Agriculture, 2010). However, the Ethiopian economy, particularly agricultural development, is extremely vulnerable to external shocks like climate change, global price fluctuations of exports and imports and other external factors. (Shitarek, 2012, pp. 1)*

Changes to climatic conditions could cause further land degradation, making it both harder to grow crops, but also to locate vegetation to sustain cattle. Consequently, the country is increasingly at risk of food insecurity and chronic famine in the coming decades.

The sustainable development of Ethiopia is further strained by the impact of rapid population growth. The fertility rate (average number

of births per woman) is currently at 2.45 (World Bank, 2017) and, if the current growth rate is maintained, the country's population will exceed three hundred million by 2050. Already, cultivated land has expanded widely to meet the sustenance needs of the growing population. Forests, woods and grasslands have been considerably depleted, leading to land degradation.

As part of its strategy to deal with poverty and food insecurity in Ethiopia, the PSNP is being implemented, including in the Afar Regional State in north-eastern Ethiopia. This chapter looks at the implementation of this programme in the Afar region and its impact on communities. The main research question is: *Is the design of the social protection programme PSNP relevant for the Afar in Ethiopia and how has the programme improved the socio-economic resilience of this community?*

## **Research methodology**

The research presented here is an explorative case study of the implementation of the PSNP in Afar Regional State of Ethiopia. The methodology consisted of a desk review, information gained by interviewing Afar academics with relevant experience from Samara University, and observations made while spending time in the Afar region and with officials managing the programme. The documents reviewed consisted of programme documents, reports and assessments related to the implementation of the PSNP in Ethiopia and the Afar region. Two main questions were asked: 1) in what way is the design of the PSNP targeted to the specific situation of the Afar, and 2) what assessments are reported of the PSNP in terms of increasing the socio-economic resilience among the Afar. In this way in-depth insight was gained into the planning and preparatory processes for the implementation of the PSNP, the challenges that occurred during implementation, and the impact of the research on the beneficiaries, the Afar people.

The study follows Burawoy's (2009; 2013) extended case method. In this approach the researcher explores the terrain with an open mind without a predetermined frame. This method is particularly suitable

for studies of hitherto unexplored topics. This research places socio-economic resilience in the context of the approach set out in Chapter 1 of this book, as contextually specific (Chapter 1, *Roaming Africa: A Social Analysis of Migration and Resilience*, by Mirjam Van Reisen, Mia Stokmans, Munyaradzi Mawere & Kinfe Abraha Gebre-Egziabher). The promotion of resilience should, therefore, be understood as consisting of actions to protect people's livelihood assets and support their own priorities and strategies. Resilience is explicitly placed within locally-specific approaches that are relevant to the culture and values in the community. Resilience seen as part of people's dignity, as a basis for ensuring that people can cope and organise their own adequate living conditions.

### **The Afar region**

The Afar Regional State is an arid lowland area found in the north of Ethiopia bordering Djibouti and Eritrea. It is predominantly comprised of pastoralists (90%) and agro-pastoralists (10%), with over 95% of the region's 1.5 million population depending almost entirely on livestock production for their livelihood. Poverty in the area has differed in previous decades, with the drought of the 1970s being the worst in living memory. In 1973/1974 alone, it is estimated that the Afar people lost 25% of their livestock and over 30% of their human population (International Livestock Centre for Africa, 1981). Subsequent droughts from 1985 to 2017, exacerbated by the El Niño effect, again reduced herd sizes. Humanitarian assistance has been required to enable people to survive periods of drought so regularly that it has become institutionalised within government policy, with the assistance of external donor agencies.

Estimates regarding the pastoralist community vary, as they are often an invisible demographic, in both national and international statistics; however, the World Bank (2017) estimates there to be at least 12 million pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in Ethiopia. So far, there has been little opportunity for livelihood diversification and smallholder agriculture still accounts for up to 80% of the population's employment (Wondifraw, Wakaiga & Kibret, 2014).

## Determinants of vulnerability and resilience

The Afar region experiences a hot, dry climate. There is considerable topographical variation, with altitudes ranging from 1,500 m above to 120 m below sea level; in turn, daily temperatures range from between 20°C to nearly 50°C in the highest and lowest elevations. Much of the rainfall (between 150 and 500 mm per annum) occurs from mid-June to mid-September, with shorter showers from March to April (*suggum*) and October to November (*dababa*) (Eriksen & Marin, 2015). Consequently, the Afar pastoralists partake in seasonal migration patterns that are dictated by the availability of pasture (Chapter 5, *Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region*, Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen).

The Afar people are known for their strong social cohesion (Chapter 5, *Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region*, Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen). Each Afar locality is identified by a major clan and inhabited by a mixture of clans, which proves to be an effective support network in times of social, economic and political strain. (Chapter 5, *Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region*, Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen). They have their own traditional and informal methods for providing for members of the clan who are experiencing hardship. Predominantly Muslim, the Afar adhere to the duty of *zakat*, in which they provide resources to the mosque leader, who redistributes them to the poor. These resources can be used to provide daily sustenance and medication for the sick and disabled; cover funeral expenses; contribute livestock to settle debt in the case of a member of another clan being killed; rebuild assets for those families who have drought or migration-induced losses; and cover engagement and marriage expenses. The Afar maintain economic and cultural relationships with external communities, such as the Amharas, Tigrigna and Somalis, which enables alternative sources of income and employment during times of drought (Chapter 5, *Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region*, Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen). However, during concurrent

droughts almost all households are focused on supporting themselves.

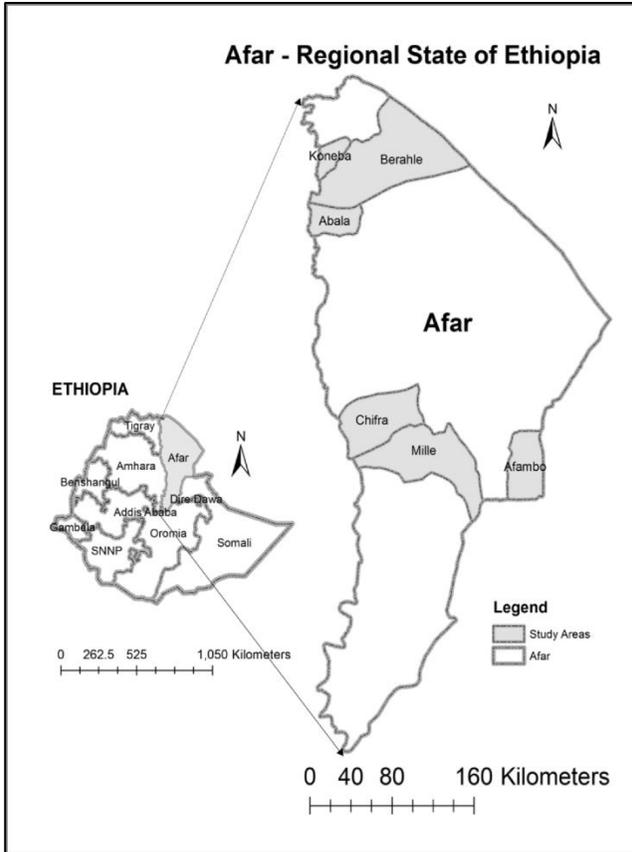


Figure 17.1. Map of Afar Regional State showing research sites where the study has been carried out

Source: Zubairul Islam, Adigrat University

Pastoralists have long been sustainable custodians of the natural resources of the dry lowland region. But in recent times the droughts have become more severe. The Afar region has experienced increasing drought during the *suggum* period over the last two decades (Viste & Sorteberg, 2013). In turn, livestock holding sizes have been steadily declining. This is caused by both the change in climatic conditions, but also the management and distribution of available

resources. Seasonal mobility usually occurs between December and May, but in some cases, this has been abandoned because there is no reachable pastureland. As it is becoming harder for pastoralists to find both water and pasture for their livestock, food insecurity and asset and resource depletion have become more common. Instead, pastoralists are forced to buy animal feed, such as wheat bran (*frusca*). The only months they do not buy *frusca* are the two summer (rainy) months.

The loss of grassland and forest cover has greatly impacted on the ability of the Afar to maintain livestock. Forest cover has been lost due to climate change (either through dry spells or flooding caused by heavy rains on the hard soil); overuse of the forest and overgrazing of the grasslands (for livestock fodder, charcoal, firewood for trade and construction); and drought. As the forest cover shrinks, so does the other vegetation that forms the grazing fields. Indigenous species have also been lost, with invasive species, such as the *Prosopis Juliflora*, which cannot be used for grazing, proliferating. Furthermore, the pastoralists have lost the fertile land surrounding the Awash River, which was vital for dry-season livestock migration, to irrigated agriculture. For example, between 1972 and 2007 alone, the grassland cover in northern Afar decreased by 88% as the land was cleared for cultivation purposes (Tsegaye, Moe, Vedeld & Aynekulu, 2010).

Many pastoralists have found it necessary to diversify to agriculture or are now highly dependent on external support and aid. The deteriorating conditions of the Afar pastoralists' environment has created the need to implement robust adaptation strategies that strengthen the local adaptive capacity and reduce the root causes of vulnerability (Eriksen & Marin, 2015). For the past 50 years the Ethiopian state has been converting communal grazing areas to irrigated agricultural land, particularly along the Awash River. Many Afar pastoralists are encouraged, both through lack of grazing pastures and government policy, to consider irrigated agriculture and sedentary living as an alternative livelihood to traditional pastoralism (Eriksen & Marin, 2015). Maintaining a sufficient and nomadic herd, considered true pastoralism, is no longer always achievable and so

some have adopted sedentary living. With climatic stresses, land management changes, resource depletion, as well as other economic and political factors, some Afar claim to have 'given up' pastoralism. However, livestock are both practically and culturally significant for the Afar, so the loss of livestock has both a practical and cultural impact. The reduction of livestock undermines social norms, such as slaughtering cattle in order to provide meat for visitors and cultural celebrations.

As the clan's social cohesion and support networks have been undermined by drought and resource depletion, some elders consider the Afar identity to have been weakened. The younger population consider the pursuit of traditional pastoralism less important than their elders, and 58% of the population in the Afar region is under the age of 19 (Devereux, 2006). As the younger generation re-evaluate what it means to be 'Afar', it is possible that the economic and social fabric of the region could change considerably in the coming decades. For example, consider *absuma* marriages, cross-cousin marriages practised within Islam which strengthen clan relations. Ethiopian state law and Islamic law state that the marriage is only valid if the woman accepts, but to refuse such a marriage is both socially stigmatised and requires financial compensation. Refusal of these marriages has been increasing, which is largely attributed to the increasing visibility of women in both education and employment, allowing their individual choice to be valued alongside clan loyalties.

Migration offers access to improved infrastructure, including better health and education, and the opportunity of an alternative, more resilient income that is not weather dependent. Furthermore, it could grant the opportunity for workers to send funds home to family and clan members. However, as well as socio-cultural and linguistic barriers, migrants are required to gain the permission of district officials before they can access state services. Youth unemployment remains high and so many young Afar chose to migrate to cities, or internationally (primarily to Djibouti, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), in search of better economic prospects. However, inequality is still

pronounced and pastoralists are often socially and economically marginalised.

The Afar people usually maintain a good condition of health between December and April, but malaria, cholera and the common cold are prevalent in the rainy periods. One of the indirect impacts of climate change has been the decrease of available livestock by-products, which has negatively affected nutrition. Without sufficient butter, meat and milk there has been a deterioration in health, which has particularly affected old people, women and children. Consequently, pregnancy and childbirth can prove to be particularly risky. Traditional midwives are still common in the Afar region. Due to multiple factors, including high infant mortality and the need for future assets, an Afar woman may be expected to produce 6 to 14 children. Contraception is usually forbidden and birth spacing is not commonly practised if the woman is healthy. Diseases and ill health are not just a threat to the Afar people, but also to their livestock. Their animals are susceptible to sheep and goat plague, pasturellosis, shoat pox, ORF (contagious dermatitis), camel respiratory disease complex, as well as parasites and diarrhoea. Veterinary experts visit villages administering free vaccinations, which keep outbreaks under control, but cases increase during times of drought.

Education is difficult among the Afar people, because of their mobile lifestyle. In addition, there is a negative attitude towards education in the region, which is partly due to previous development policies, which saw children forcibly removed from their communities to fulfil enrolment quotas, as seen all across the Sub-Saharan region in the last half century (Tsegay, 2017). However, the demand for education is increasing as attitudes change. But still, there are considerable barriers regarding the supply of standard education, particularly in the remote and arid parts of the Afar region. For example, the teachers provided are often short term, unpaid, under resourced and newly trained. Mobile schools have been difficult to maintain, as the pastoralists within Afar perform irregular migration patterns, meaning social groups disconnect and reform, so long-term contact with students is almost impossible. Barriers to the success rates of boarding schools

include the social stigma of pastoralist livelihoods, which prevents children integrating fully, linguistic barriers caused by differences in dialect, and the separation of the children from their own community and culture. Qur'anic schools have proved to be effective and trusted institutions in the community and could be adapted to include basic literacy and numeracy.

Predominantly, the Afar rely on the following economic activities for sustenance: animal husbandry, trade (such as wood and charcoal), remittances, daily labour work, agriculture and the PSNP. Livestock and livestock products are traded at market, which usually take place once a week. Livestock are purchased in the summer season when animal fodder is available and sold in the winter when there are shortages of water and fodder. Moreover, for profit purposes, livestock are ideally bought when they are most affordable and are sold when their price increases. However, there is a general lack of transport and travel distances can be significant, meaning that products must be sold at market when there, whether or not the price offered is favourable. This is exacerbated in times of drought, when livestock must be sold to mitigate weather shocks and there are no livestock by-products to offer.

Richer pastoralists have greater ability to diversify income sources to increase returns and hedge against livestock risks. Off-farm activities are limited, but include selling firewood and charcoal, daily labour for construction and unloading grain sacks from the tracks (as part of the PSNP). When construction work is available, it is usually completed by highland workers who travel to the area, as they have a more established skill set. Furthermore, there is a general lack of micro-finance institutions and loaning money is often forbidden for religious reasons. Instead, people use an informal system of relatives and clan members to borrow funds. When borrowing is permitted, clan members will share the costs if an individual defaults on a loan.

The Afar share information in a variety of ways, including through mobile phones, the village council or mosque, or an exchange system called *dagu*. *Dagu* is an informal communication network through

which news is shared between passing members of the ethnic group and in doing so, can travel great distances, including to clan members who have migrated. *Dagu* can pass between men or women (not youth), but only if the information does not have the potential to incite fighting. Clan leaders are responsible for the security of each clan member and must ensure good standards of behaviour. In times of conflict, which can occur in disputes over grazing land, peace committees are established to allow for discussion (Chapter 5, *Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region*, by Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen). Trade, conflict resolution, community management and social provisions are coordinated and managed by clan leaders wherever possible.

### **Productive Safety Net Programme**

As climate change increases the frequency and severity of weather events, it has become a priority for the Ethiopian government to address the issue of food security. As agriculture is the cornerstone of its economy, the government has designed seasonal policies to mitigate hardship when harvests are poor. The Productive Safety Net Programme is an attempt by the Ethiopian government and the World Food Programme to advance the country's development process by supporting long-term resilience to food shortages. The PSNP arose because the government decided it was necessary to end the aid dependency of the population affected by poverty-related problems.

The PSNP seeks to mitigate food insecurity by promoting livelihoods, preventing impoverishment and protecting against hunger. In doing so, it hopes to increase resilience to drought and, in turn, allow beneficiaries to escape cycles of poverty and humanitarian aid dependency. It does this by providing food and cash transfers for households that cannot feed themselves for at least three months per annum, to protect household assets (as beneficiaries do not have to sell their livestock, or their livestock by-products, or assume high interest loans in order to purchase food). These transfers are mostly given in exchange for labour, known as public works. Work-for-

resources programmes have long been used by the Ethiopian government to mobilise its large supply of unskilled labour to fulfil infrastructure deficit (for example, the Employment Generation Scheme and Project 2488, supported by the World Bank). The labour provided under such programmes has supported the development of social infrastructure (such as education and health buildings), which are investments in future human capital. Those households without able-bodied members are not required to work, but instead receive direct support payments (Teka, Temesgen & Fre, 2018)

It was believed that dependable cash transfers over an extended period would lead to better spending and saving, which in turn would stimulate growth: “Through the provision of cash transfers rather than food, the programme will enable smallholders to increase consumption and investment levels and stimulate the development of rural markets” (Devereux, Sabates-Wheeler, Tefera & Taye, 2006, p. 2). However, the purchasing power of cash transfers has decreased over time, which has resulted in many beneficiaries preferring food transfers. Typically, transfers are usually three kilograms of grain per day per person for up to five days a month. The PSNP transfer period runs primarily from January to June with able-bodied persons providing labour for approximately six hours (five hours for women) per day. During droughts, the programme has a contingency fund that allows for new beneficiaries to increase the length of time they receive benefits (from five to seven months). Since the beginning of the programme’s implementation, the government has established a network of staff who work at both the district and national level (Fre *et al.*, 2017).

So far, the PSNP is reported to have benefited nearly eight million Ethiopians. The multi-faceted impacts of the programme were demonstrated in a 2015 report by the European Commission, which found that the PSNP has enhanced the climate change resilience of vulnerable populations. The report also found that: soil erosion and sediment losses had decreased by 50%, the average household food gap had decreased from 3.6 months to 2.3 months, 40,000 kilometres of rural access roads (dry weather roads) had been constructed or

were being maintained, 600,000 km of soil and water structures had been rehabilitated, 200,000 ponds and 35,000 hand-dug wells for rainwater harvesting had been built, 2,800 kilometres of canals had been provided for small-scale irrigation, as well as access to water for households, and 4,000 classrooms and 600 new health posts had been built or were being rehabilitated (European Commission, 2017).

The PSNP is now in its fourth phase, which will be implemented between 2015 and 2020. During 2015/2016, the country experienced the most severe drought in 50 years. The Ethiopian government managed a wide-scale response, providing 18.2 million people – 20% of the country’s total population – with food or the cash to buy it, in part through the PSNP. However, the government is still not adequately able to provide for the population's food needs. In response, the World Bank has since approved another USD 100 million to the PSNP, on top of the extra USD 100 million it gave the programme last year. The next sections present the results of the research in answer to the two parts of the research question: Is the design of the PSNP relevant for the Afar in Ethiopia? And how has the programme improved the socio-economic resilience of this community?

### **Relevance of design of the PSNP**

One of the problems with the design of the PSNP is that it is applied in the same way in each region. However, it cannot be assumed that what is applicable in the lowlands is also applicable in the highlands, when there are considerable geographical, socio-cultural, economic and environmental differences. For example, are the crops produced under the programme compatible with the regional diet? Does recruitment for public works projects conflict with the seasonal labour demands of local farms? The PSNP is not tailored to the production and livelihood system of the Afar people, as transfers and public works under the programme do not consider the environmental conditions of the villages. In addition, there are many contextual factors that are not included in the programme design. For instance, polygamous households in the Afar are not recognised and

receive only as much as one household. Likewise, one household is assumed to be comprised of a maximum of five persons, regardless of the total number of family members in the household.

However, the PSNP does include clan leaders in the decision-making process, which does not occur in the highland regions. Clan leaders play a big role in screening residents, both within the appeal committee and regarding beneficiary selection. They work side-by-side with the formal task force to smooth the PSNP transfers and public works activities. Targeting criteria is gender sensitive and considers those most vulnerable. While traditional leaders play a key role, they are not supposed to override formal protocol. While this process grants value to the clan structure, strengthens social ties (which have been consistently undermined by the drought), grants community autonomy in the development process and uses local knowledge in a large-scale development programme, it leaves the PSNP open to manipulation and social connections, authority, social ties, or influence can impact on the decision-making process.

The PSNP does not specifically address gender inequalities, which are high in pastoral areas, particularly in terms of access to, and control over, resources. This contributes to impoverishment because it undermines women's productive capacity. For example, apart from the lack of power of women in political, social and economic affairs, deep-rooted socio-cultural norms in pastoral areas further marginalise them in poverty reduction efforts. The transfer arrangements in the PSNP do not acknowledge these gender disparities or the diverse cultural contexts.

### **Impact of PSNP on socio-economic resilience**

Although there are many practical (logistical and resource based) barriers that affect the implementation of the PSNP across Ethiopia, including lack of funds, staff turnover, transportation difficulties and transfer delays, the PSNP has had a significant impact across Ethiopia. It has been praised for providing a productive approach to addressing the food gap, in which households are more able to

maintain their assets. Where drought has undermined the ability of communities to provide for each other, people have been brought together to develop their communal resources through public works projects. A 2006 review of the first phase of the PSNP found that three-quarters of PSNP households reported consuming more food, or better-quality food (Devereux, 2006, p. 46). While many PSNP households still resorted to selling their assets to sustain themselves, 62% of PSNP households reported that their assets were effectively protected against 'distress sale', while nearly a quarter (23%) increased their assets throughout the year.

But has the PSNP enhanced the resilience of the Afar people? The programme considers multiple factors, including assets, climate change and food security, affecting the resilience of beneficiaries to poverty. Even so, reports on the programme grant more value to the economic processes of development, as is common in global development, but do little to acknowledge socio-cultural data collection or reflection. There is no attention paid to how the programme should be adapted to regional differences. As before, the programme is economically-focused and so omits the need to address social and cultural barriers to implementation. In doing so, the programme frames development as an economic issue, with little attention given to the welfare or satisfaction of beneficiaries.

While the PSNP is being implemented in many areas of Ethiopia, both the Afar and Somali lowland regions are experiencing similar barriers to implementation and success. For this reason, some of the programme reporting refers to these regions together. According to the observations of researchers in the region, the food gap has generally decreased across both the Afar and Somali regions. Furthermore, there has been a general increase in trade, with public works contributing to considerable crop cultivation development and improving access to markets, water, and social and educational services. However, progress has been uneven and some areas have experienced an increase in food insecurity. Consequently, there is no clear evidence that the PSNP can be said to have directly improved food security. Asset protection has not been successful, with the

livestock holdings of the Afar declining; at the same time wealth disparity is pronounced. From our observations we conclude that targeting has been poor in the region, with some well-off households receiving resources and some poor households not being sufficiently supported. Transfers of cash have been inconsistent, both in terms of amount and timing. While the majority of highland and Somali households have a transfer point less than three hours from their home, this does not apply to nearly 40% of the Afar people.

Although the PSNP has been successful as a multi-faceted approach to addressing food insecurity, in the Afar region, one of the most globally vulnerable regions to the impacts of climate change, we need to consider whether the programme is addressing long-term adaptation. As it stands, the programme has insufficient resources to provide for all the food insecure households in the country, which is partly being dealt with by an increase of funds from the World Bank. As well as sustaining the survival of the Afar, the programme needs to be evaluated in terms of its capacity to produce graduate beneficiaries that are resilient to poverty in the future. This is somewhat undermined by the sharing that occurs between PSNP and non-PSNP beneficiaries, as members of the community attempt to support their peers. This is further exacerbated by graduation targets in which regional stakeholders may graduate beneficiaries before they are appropriately resilient. As it stands, there is no proof that the assets retained by PSNP beneficiaries are sustainable or evidence of how vulnerable these are to depletion following graduation, as is highlighted by the proportion of the community who report worsened food security after leaving the programme (Fre *et al.*, 2017).

In relation to general programme coordination in the Afar, the drought has severely impacted on the effective implementation of the PSNP. There has been insufficient targeting and there have been delays in addressing this when trying to support the population most in need. Technical software is not yet fully functional in most of the

*kebeles*<sup>1</sup> where the PSNP is being implemented, delays in receiving transfers have been experienced and there is a low quality of reporting. The procurement plan of the PSNP is regarded as poor, both at the *woreda*<sup>2</sup> and regional levels. There have been severe delays in food transfers, largely accredited to the lack of available transport. Consequently, many of the beneficiaries have had to sell some household assets to survive, further depleting community resilience to future drought.

So far, the food and cash transfer element of the PSNP has received the most attention, but the public works element has also gone some way to mitigating the resource deficit. For instance, a school was constructed in Da'ar, of which four of the eight classrooms were built using PSNP labour. Similarly, houses have been provided for teachers in Eruhna, Adegahnu and Da'ar. Furthermore, in Urkudi, PSNP coordinators have been playing a significant role in introducing and expanding latrines. As many still rely on open defecation, the PSNP coordinators have been trying to create awareness of the benefits of improved sanitation. Public works projects have also created temporary employment for youth, which helps them to continue their studies and provide for their food needs.

However, many of the communal public works assets created have been reported to be below technical standards, such as feeder roads, water harvesting structures, diversion and irrigation canals, and conservation structures. Public works planning and reporting is also generally inadequate. Public works reports were found to be almost non-existent in the Afar region (only 4 of the 32 *woredas* submitted one of the three required quarterly reports). The public works programmes that have been implemented are based on nearby highland models (with a focus on terracing and soil and water conservation), which may not be appropriate for conditions in the arid lowlands.

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<sup>1</sup> A *kebele* is the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia, equivalent to a village or ward.

<sup>2</sup> A *woreda* is equivalent to a district.

More needs to be done to map these resources and who is benefiting from them, how they will be maintained in the future, and whether this would be better managed if it occurred as a programme in its own entity. The way in which this labour is sourced and managed also needs to be considered. It is not that the Afar region experiences a labour deficit, but many households are labour constrained, in that they have limited access to the resources to do so and a disproportionate resource return for this labour. Public works plans have primarily been tailored to the needs of the highlanders, so work needs to be tailored to pastoralist needs. In addition, public work projects are not fully utilised to develop long-term infrastructure to mitigate against climate change.

Furthermore, there has been no progress on the livelihood's component of the PSNP. Livelihood opportunities in the region have not yet been properly assessed, mapped and developed. One idea was to re-route funds to deal specifically with drought activities. However, this has been hindered by changes in the approved budget and a revised budget needs to be submitted and discussed at the federal level before this can be done. In addition, the programme is not linked to credit or related asset building interventions. There is a need for income diversification opportunities, like off-pastoral income generation and asset building activities (e.g., through cooperatives). Unlike other in regions, the Household Asset Building Programme has yet to be implemented in the Afar region. This is due to the religiously inclined tendency of the Afar people to avoid borrowing.

More broadly, there is debate about whether development programmes in high risk areas like the Afar should be conservative in their approach, to minimise possible losses with smaller returns on poverty reduction or take a more aggressive approach to growth. The PSNP coordinator for the Somali region explained that there is very little to distinguish between beneficiaries of the PSNP and those of food aid programmes, other than the technical terms adopted (Ahmednur Daud, personal communication with Fre, November 2016). While rises in food prices assist net producers, those who struggle to meet their subsistence needs (who must resort to

purchasing food on top of their own agricultural products) are made more vulnerable by such cost increases. So rising food prices are generally good for agriculture, but bad for food security; so, paradoxically, improve economic growth, but increase reliance on social safety nets such as the PSNP.

Little to no action is being taken to instigate tangible improvement in the Afar region. On a nationwide scale, policies still actively discriminate against, or discount the importance of, pastoralist communities and their way of life. Hence, at the regional level, vulnerable groups must be better targeted to ensure development occurs evenly and for those who need it the most. Furthermore, the next generation of Afar – the youth – need to be targeted for tailored interventions to support them in their future ambitions, whether this is pastoral living, a sedentary lifestyle or migrating to urban centres.

## **Conclusion**

This study considered the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia and its implementation in the Afar region among the mobile pastoralists who roam across the region. In particular, it looked at whether or not the design of the PSNP is relevant for the Afar people and if the programme improved the socio-economic resilience of this community. The research aimed to understand whether the PSNP can be positively linked to the socio-economic resilience of the Afar people to cope with hardship and emergencies, which is defined as local and context-specific. The research was based on a desk study of locally-collected documents regarding the programme design and implementation of the PSNP, as well as assessments of its impact. Furthermore, observations in the region and contact with officials and members of the Afar communities informed the research.

In relation to the design of the programme and its suitability to the Afar region, there seems to be a lack of understanding of the local culture and reality on the ground. The result is a disconnect with what is provided by the programme on paper and its implementation in the region, resulting in the programme not reaching the intended

beneficiaries resulting in reduced impact. The PSNP has been designed by policymakers and planners who have sedentary or urban backgrounds and who may not appreciate the particular nomadic culture of the Afar and tailor the programme accordingly.

The second part of the research question was on the impact of the PSNP on increasing the socio-economic resilience of the Afar people. The conclusion is that the PSNP does not sufficiently consider the specific conditions of the Afar people, including their traditional coping mechanisms, to be able to enhance resilience. There is a need to recognise the relevance of traditional resource-sharing mechanisms, as a form of community support for those affected by hardship, which the PSNP should aim to supplement and support, not replace. The PSNP should promote livelihoods, with understanding of pastoral livelihood production systems, to support households to maintain food security, even in times of crisis. Migratory patterns are an essential part of pastoral livelihoods; the PSNP can help only by explicitly recognising migration as key to the resilience of the Afar people.

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that PSNP has the potential to yield better results, provided that the following recommendations are taken into account:

- Allow for seasonal adjustments to be made to the transfer period, public works schedule and other activities, as well as the payment of transfers, to make them better suited to the needs of pastoral communities
- Focus on alternative income generation approaches to address decreases in pastoral livelihoods due to climate change, youth outmigration, insecurity and other factors
- Consider the allocation of resources in polygamous households in the targeting of beneficiaries
- Establish links to financial and credit institutions to enable pastoralists to build productive assets

In conclusion, the socio-political context of the ethnically-marginalised Afar communities need to be better appreciated and reflected in programme design in order to enhance the impact of the PSNP on the socio-economic resilience of the Afar people. With better contextualisation, social protection programmes can support the nomadic Afar community.

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