

## Effects of Droughts on Pastoralist and Agro-Pastoralist Women in Somaliland

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### ABSTRACT

*Droughts have long been affecting the Somali society, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions. Although these persistent and recurrent droughts have affected all the members of the community in Somaliland, both in urban and rural areas, they have had a rather adverse impact on pastoral and agro-pastoral women. These vulnerable groups of society become victims of changing climate and ecological patterns than any other section of the community as droughts put greater risk on their livelihoods. This study assesses the impact of droughts on Somaliland's pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women. The study has relied on both primary and secondary data. In the primary data, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were employed, while literature related to the subject were also reviewed. The study found that the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women have struggled against long-lasting problems and difficulties, as most of them, if not all, have lost livestock and crops against the shocks of climate, and witnessed shortage or absence of rainwater and pasture. As a result, their social lives have suffered most and changed for the worst. However, there are no early mitigation measures for the onset of persistent and perilous recurrent droughts. Meanwhile, prolonged droughts continue to reduce the number of herds and crops owned by these hardworking women which significantly diminishes their sole source of income. While the negative impacts of drought are highly gendered, the responses from both the Somaliland Government and civil society organizations are highly holistic and don't give attention to gendered impact. It is essential to make these responses gendered if there is a need to bring about change to the most marginalized parts of society – the women.*

### INTRODUCTION

Somaliland was one of the British Protectorates in Africa before it gained its independence from the United Kingdom on 26 June 1960. It is a semi-arid<sup>1</sup> region in the Horn of Africa, with a population estimated around 4.5 million, in which 55% and 45% are female and male respectively.<sup>2</sup> Equally important, over 50% of the population is nomadic or semi-nomadic.<sup>3</sup> This makes the country's economy highly dependent on livestock and livestock products as well as agricultural production. Although the country's economy has been shrinking due to several reasons, on the other hand, the recurrence of droughts has extremely weakened the entire economy.

Climate shocks can generally have distressing consequences for assets, capital, and savings. Assets such as livestock and crop serve as more than a safety net for coping with climate shocks. They provide people with a productive resource, nutrition, collateral for credit, and a source of income

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<sup>1</sup> Guleid A. Jama (2016). “*Cycle of Droughts: Natural Disaster or Manmade Catastrophe*”, Center for Policy Analysis, Briefing Paper No. 4, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of National Planning and Development (2017). *Somaliland National Development Plan II*. Hargeisa: Ministry of National Planning and Development.

<sup>3</sup> Hartmann, Ingrid and J. Sugulle, Ahmed (2009). *The Impact of Climate Change on Pastoral Societies of Somaliland*. Germany: Heinrich Boell Foundation, pp. 1–62.

to meet health and education costs, while also providing security in the event of crop failure. In this regard, their loss increases potential vulnerability. Therefore, it is comprehensible that climate shocks create a distinctive threat to coping strategies. Unlike other challenges and threats to society such as diseases whose impact may be contained in some way and affect certain groups, climate shocks affect every household in society. If all affected households sell their assets to sustain the lives of their families, asset prices can be expected to fall. This brings in damage to their economic capability resulting in weakened coping strategies and reinforcing wider inequalities in the process.<sup>4</sup> Equally important, climate change reduces the capacity of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists to cope with irregular rainfall patterns as many rural livelihoods have adapted to the main rainy seasons. Accordingly, droughts and climate change have profoundly different effects on women and men. Its impact on women is greater than men.<sup>5</sup>

In Somaliland pastoralists and agro-pastoralists face socio-economic and environmental challenges brought by devastating and frequent droughts that continually threaten the livelihoods of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women. While both men and women experience droughts, women are the main victims and commonly face higher risks than men. Such instances increase the burdens on women due to the negative impacts of drought and climate change. Traditionally, they are responsible for securing food, fetching firewood, and water for their household by traveling to distant places away from their homes, families, and communities. However, the women and children share a disproportionate part of the consequences of drought as it affects the economy of the pastoral and agro-pastoral society i.e. livestock, livestock products, and agricultural production. It does not only affect the livelihoods of the pastoral and agro-pastoral community but also the livestock and livestock products and agricultural production significantly contribute to the coffers of the national treasury.<sup>6</sup>

The central objective of this study is, therefore, to evaluate the impact of drought on pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women in Somaliland. In this regard, drought, changing climate, land degradation and desertification, and deforestation are the primary causes of the severe problems facing rural society. The effects accumulate and result in social and economic problems that affect the vulnerable section of society. Those problems are mainly caused by poor governance and lack of responsive policies from responsible institutions that protect the interests of disadvantaged communities. Currently, policies are much more leaning towards the wealthy and not quite supportive of the poor in the state of Somaliland.

## DROUGHTS AND GENDERED ECONOMY IN THE RURAL SETTINGS

Indubitably, pastoralism, and agro-pastoralism is an important and subsistent lifestyle in Somaliland. Over 50% of the population practices pastoralism and agro-pastoralism and relies on

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<sup>4</sup> UNEP (2018). *Women leaders come together to fight climate change*. Available at <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/women-leaders-come-together-fight-climate-change>. Accessed on June 18, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Nhamo, Godwell (2014). Addressing women in climate change policies: A focus on the selected east and southern African countries, *Agenda*, 28:3, 156–167.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

livestock and livestock products as its source of income.<sup>7</sup> The sole source of livelihood for pastoralists in the production and trading of livestock. But this has never been without its challenges. One of those challenges is the male dominance of the Somali society, where the asset of the family falls in the hands of the male.<sup>8</sup> This has its effect on the families' livelihoods as the male mostly engages in chewing Khat and other substances which mostly drains the small amount of money the family has. However, to overcome this challenge of the domination of men on the family's economy, there are other livelihood schemes in which women groups have access to it an alternative income, including investment in grinding mills, value addition in milk processing, and crop processing into other forms of foods such as grinding grain to make raw flour among others. Indeed, pastoralists' women are almost invariably struggling strained economic conditions even during the mundane periods as they rely on the income from selling milk and periodic retail of livestock herds.

The monopolization of the scarce resources of the family by the male has affected the livelihoods of the family and greatly affected the women and the children who are subjected to malnutrition. However, droughts also aggravate the already worsening situation of women in rural areas. For instance, women do not have the early mitigation measures for the onset of the pervasive and perilous recurrent droughts, as prolonged droughts kill livestock herds and destroy their sole income source, and eventually put them in vulnerable positions. In reality, the extended droughts force some people to sell their livestock which in turn makes them even more vulnerable to the next droughts.<sup>9</sup>

However, the agro-pastoralist women are more permanent than the pure pastoralist women, where the latter rears a manageable number of livestock herds mainly cattle for milking purposes. Also, they are tilling varieties of crops, including stable sustenance and horticulture. This type of social cluster is more likely to get access to information, knowledge, grants, credit, and saving systems as humanitarian workers are always operating in semi-permanent and/or agro-pastoral zones. The combination of these factors enables them to have diversified income sources and a few more foods that are nutritious than the pure pastoralist women have.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of the droughts, the women in agro-pastoral communities are quite mobilized and possess slightly more resilient strategies than pastoral women when the pasture is depleted and denuded. However, this group affords the fodder for their lactating cattle because of their availability, particularly at the onset of the drought hitherto midterm, depending upon the scale of the drought.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the agro-pastoral women are more likely to migrate to bigger towns, and then become internally displaced persons in shanty towns and bursting at the seams.

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<sup>7</sup> Kedir Jemal & Nasir M. Ali (2017). *Mitigating Natural Disasters in Somaliland: Policy Options and Strategies*, IPCS Paper, No. 002 (November 2017). Pp. 1–8.

<sup>8</sup> Gardner, Judith & El Bushra, Judy (2004). *Somalia: The Untold Story – the War through the Eyes of Somali Women*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>9</sup> Abdulkadir G (2017). Assessment of Drought Recurrence in Somaliland: Causes, Impacts, and Mitigations, *Journal for Climatology and Forecasting*, Volume 5, Issue 2. Pp. 1–12.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with former Havoyoco Staff in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

It is customary to recover from the effects of droughts by selling the surviving livestock, livestock products, and agricultural production to fill the gap that has emerged from the changing environment. However, in the most recent years, the people have lost their livestock due to the drought, particularly in the eastern regions of Somaliland. During the 2016 and 2017 droughts, for instance, in the Sanaag region, the family who owned 100 herds was left with only 30 which survived from the drought.<sup>12</sup> It is very difficult for such families to send some of their remaining livestock to the market to save others.

Essentially, environmental difficulties and climate change put the rural areas in a vulnerable position and have a negative impact on the livelihoods of the population.<sup>13</sup> Hence, droughts have drastically affected pastoralist society, especially women. Women are vulnerable than men because they lactate, breastfeed, care, and perform most of the work at a household level. In that sense, they need sufficient nutrition to regain the energy spent on work and maternal responsibilities. However, during the drought and the dry season, the women are unable to receive nutritious food and in turn, whatever the family receives the mother will pass it on to the children rather than themselves. This makes the women the most vulnerable figure within the family and puts their life in danger.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE IMPACT OF DROUGHTS ON SOCIAL ASSETS

In most of Africa's drylands, rainfall is generally minimal though it greatly varies in time and space in terms of both inter-annual and inter-seasonal scales. As a result of those harsh environments, dryland areas are characterized by a difficult environment that is prone to high agricultural production risk<sup>15</sup>. Somaliland, a semi-arid region in the Horn of Africa is not immune to the climate problems and continued climate variation that affects large parts of the Horn region. Recurrent droughts are looming and remain the major natural disasters that destroy the lives and livelihoods of many citizens in Somaliland. However, despite witnessing the negative impact of Saqar, a tropical cyclone that hit Somaliland in 2018, a decrease in rainfall is considered to be the major driver of the frequent droughts that have significant environmental and economic impacts on the affected areas. In connection to this, the pastoral society is the primary victim of the rainfall shortage which directly affects the bases of their livelihoods.<sup>16</sup>

It appears that the droughts have created multifaceted vulnerabilities that affected the livelihoods of the pastoral and agro-pastoral societies, such as the number of livestock declining drastically because of the recurring droughts which extremely affect the environment. While the lives of the pastoral and agro-pastoral societies have been depending on the products of livestock and agricultural production such as ghee, milk, skin and hide, and crops. As a result of the droughts,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>14</sup> Focus Group Discussion with Arro-Malko agro-pastoralist women in Gabiley, Somaliland.

<sup>15</sup> R. Adano, Wario (2012). *Pastoralist Resources, Conflict and Climate Change in the Horn of Africa*. In Climate Change and Pastoralism: Traditional Coping Mechanisms and Conflict in the Horn of Africa. Addis Ababa: Eclipse Printing Agency.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a senior consultant at National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

the lives of the vulnerable section of the society such as women, children, and elderly persons are immensely affected.<sup>17</sup>

The fact remains, that vulnerability analysis should be linked to mitigation activities to provide insights for understanding the effects of any hazard on the people, livestock, and environment. On the other hand, while the pastoral societies fulfill their nutritious demands from the products they get from their livestock, the changing way of life as a consequence of climate change forces the families to send livestock products to the market to fill the gap that has emerged from the changing environment. As a result, the women who eat last in the families have faced colossal malnutrition and malnourishment.<sup>18</sup>

Without a doubt, drought brings more burdens to the women, in particular, as the family moves from one place to another in search of pasture and water. On this occasion, when the men move with some livestock, some others like calves and women are left home, this would increase the workload of the women. Also, the accessibility of water becomes scarce while other resources such as the grazing land face degradation. Therefore, the vulnerability of women becomes apparent. These vulnerabilities are linked to the responsibility of the women to fetch water and collect hay, to name but a few.

It is also observed that as drought hits the pastoralist areas more, there is a trend to move from raising cattle to the camel which is a disadvantage to the women as cattle stay around the household while the camels travel to far places. However, as a result of the severe drought, the milk decreases as women mostly generate income from selling milk, which means less income for the women. Therefore, the women, who are the heads of households, are more vulnerable to the impact that drought might have than any other women since they also try to do the men's role in the community which is mainly taking the livestock from one area to another.

Drought affects every type of assets and capitals which women used to access (not own) jeopardizing the whole family members' survival. Crop yield is reduced and livestock trade can also be reduced during periods of recurrent rain failures. The financial security of women is affected as women are the primary food providers for most families in Somaliland.<sup>19</sup>

This, in turn, made women more vulnerable by adding burden and responsibility which absorb much of their time, energy, and attention. As a result, their final decision for a considerable number of pastoralist women is to drop-out from pastoral livelihood either to sit hopelessly waiting for the hands of the donors and the government or to migrate to the nearest urban centers looking for alternative livelihoods.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, the loss of livestock due to droughts made many livelihoods weak and prone by facing socio-economic challenges caused by droughts. Women do not only face financial problems during harsh seasons but potentially face higher rates of domestic violence that put

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<sup>17</sup> ActionAid (2015). *Drought Needs Assessment, Somaliland*. Somaliland: ActionAid.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

women at greater risk of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) if they leave their localities.<sup>21</sup> In this case, women were unable to fetch food, water for the children, and go to relief centers to collect food aid for survival due to the risks of rape and other related abuses. This means that it is likely that pastoral women and girls walk through forest and mountains to fetch water and firewood and are being exposed to threats including rape and other physical assault. During the humanitarian emergency, for instance, there is often a greater chance the women experience gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the agro-pastoral women are also vulnerable to economic exploitation of the track workers who work in vicinities and outskirts surroundings.

Equally important, drought impacts health in many ways and it depends on both the duration and severity of the drought and also the economic and social fabric of the community,<sup>23</sup> in particular to women and girls whose health has been found to decline more than male health in times of food shortages. As the women are in the throes of the drought, they get debilitated and then become susceptible to various diseases because of lack of food and looms over the loss of livestock as well as famine which is inevitable during the drought periods. When there isn't enough food to eat, their nutritional intake is reduced and they often experience increased labor work during a drought, which reduces their physical ability and overall health.<sup>24</sup> This makes women more vulnerable to an illness or diseases because they don't get clean water, adequate food to eat to get energy because of gendered roles and the burden of care for the family falls on them. Also, there is poor sanitation resulting in absence of latrines and clean water, which have negative implications for the health and the wellbeing of the women and children.

As a result of drought, the home task of women increases. Thus, the workload and deficiency of food weaken the health of women<sup>25</sup> making them more susceptible to various diseases such as anemia, infectious diseases, cholera or salmonella, malnutrition, and skin disease which can affect their health. The maternal and infant mortality rate of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women have increased during the droughts in Somaliland, and even if they survive in the initial moment, the health implications will not be easy.

#### ADOPTING ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY POLICIES FOR A BETTER RURAL SOCIETY

Recurrent droughts have expanded the gender inequalities between men and women, boys and girls, and also increased the drop-out rates of school children. Meanwhile, the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women remain the most drought-affected section of the society in Somaliland. Nevertheless, the drought challenges persist and the future of the pastoral and agro-pastoral women

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<sup>21</sup> Pinna, Monica (2017). *Crisis in Somaliland: drought and famine threaten millions*. Available at <https://www.euronews.com/2017/05/11/crisis-in-somaliland-drought-and-famine-threaten-millions>. Accessed on June 15, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Candlelight Officer in Burao, Somaliland.

<sup>23</sup> Bifulco, Maurizio & Ranieri, Roberta (2017). Impact of drought on human health, *European Journal of Internal Medicine*, Vol. 46, pp. 1–3.

<sup>24</sup> UN Women Watch (2009). *Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change*. Available at [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate\\_change/downloads/Women\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Factsheet.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf). Accessed on June 10 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Diletta Carmi (2016). *The Gender Dimensions of Drought in Fedis Woreda District, Ethiopia*. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

depends on the intervention from the state institutions that are responsible for the environment and rural development.

Emphasizing this point, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women do not have the early warning and mitigation measures and mechanisms for the onset of the pervasive and perilous recurrent droughts, while any prolonged droughts perish the huge number of herds and destroyed the crops which are the sole source of income which increases their vulnerability.

In this respect, while the pastoral and agro-pastoral women have struggled with unbearable climate difficulties and shocks, weak economic sources, and social problems that put them in a vulnerable position, it is necessarily important to adopt policies and strategies to overcome the major challenges that face them. However, it is needed to mobilize and build their knowledge of climate variability and its changes, organize them into structural units as cooperatives and associations, establish in diversified livelihood incomes, improve water source availability at communal levels so that the women wouldn't be forced to move a long distance if drought happens, as well as training in horticulture systems. Moreover, it is important to put in place policies that encourage gender equality with a particular emphasis in rural areas to reduce the vulnerability of women during droughts and famines and focus on the nutrition of breastfeeding and pregnant women to reduce maternal mortality during droughts.

## CONCLUSION

Droughts have been affecting Somaliland for centuries and had a huge impact on individuals and families. However, the drought has deeply affected pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women who are more vulnerable and become victims of climate change than any other section of the society in rural areas. Indeed, the immediate, direct, or indirect impacts of drought on pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women are multidimensional and multifaceted, but several factors have greatly affected the women. The source of livelihood for pastoralists and agro-pastoralist depended on livestock and livestock products. This makes those people sell their livestock, livestock products, and agricultural production to sustain their lives and livelihoods. Due to the frequent droughts, crop production has failed, while the number of herds and flocks dramatically decreased as a result of the severe drought that hit the state.

However, while the Somaliland state is vulnerable in many ways, several issues are considered to be the source of Somaliland's state fragility, including weak institutions in terms of policies, infrastructures, and law enforcement machinery, in particular, at the margins to tackle the changing environment. Since 1991, when Somaliland separated from the rest of Somalia, its successive governments have failed to develop policies and strategies in favor of the environment and pastoral communities on which the livelihoods of the urban people are also dependent. Albeit the lack of those policies, on the other hand, the existing policy implementation is another critical issue that needs particular attention from the decision-makers. However, the urbanization and rural-urban mobility patterns that now prevail throughout much of Somaliland present policymakers with a dilemma. The fact, however, remains that the absence of coherent policies and programs at the national, regional and local levels hamper any efforts to address the environmental challenges

faced by the communities both in the rural and in the urban centers. This needs urgent intervention from the state to preserve national security and state survival in the long term.