



Save the Children
UK

No Time to Recover: Pastoralist women and children struggle to adapt to more frequent drought

APRIL 22, 2010 – On today's Earth Day, CARE International and Save the Children UK warn that urgent action is needed to help poor women and children adapt to the severe impacts of climate change on their livelihoods, health and education. This is vividly seen in Ethiopia, where pastoralists are struggling against increasingly frequent droughts.

CARE Ethiopia and Save the Children UK recently commissioned the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to undertake a study on pastoralist community perceptions of climate change, including rising temperatures and increasingly frequent drought.¹ The study revealed that drought frequency has historically occurred every 6-10 years, but is now occurring every 1-2 years. This – combined with additional stresses of overpopulation, conflict, land privatization and natural resource degradation – has left pastoralist communities little time to recover between droughts as they had been able to in the past.

“Now, we are all suffering from drought; and we have nothing to give to our fellow women. It is not because we are mean, but this is the problem with the drought and changing weather,” said Elima Huku from the Borana zone in southern Ethiopia. “Women are more vulnerable than men because they cannot trek long distances in search of water and work.”

The growing distance to water and work can be harmful to the productivity and health of families, and can especially increase the vulnerability of women to poverty. Beside the physical stress of the journey itself, the time pressure for these activities increases the burden of women to properly care for their children, and to engage in income-generating or other productive household activities.

Cynthia Awuor, CARE's Regional Climate Change Focal Point for East and Central Africa, said that women often face more severe consequences from drought due to inadequate access to or control over livelihood resources as well as limited decision-making power, formal education, mobility or livelihood options. “The majority of the world's poorest people today are women and girls. Climate change is making it even more difficult for them to realise their basic rights, and it is exacerbating inequalities,” Awuor said. “As well, due to their roles and responsibilities within the household and in agriculture, women are often limited in their ability to engage in alternative income-generating activities that could help raise them and their families out of poverty.”

Drought impacts include¹:

- Decreased pasture and water availability, leading to women having to travel over long distances in search of water;
- Decreased livestock disease resistance;
- Decreased livestock productivity;
- Crop failure in agro-pastoral areas;
- Food insecurity and malnutrition, mostly affecting children, pregnant women and old people;
- Abnormal community mobility;
- Increased school drop-out due to community migration in search of pasture and water;
- Interruption of development activities;
- Increased human diseases and death; and
- Increased conflicts over scarce resources.

¹ *Climate-Related Vulnerability and Adaptive-Capacity in Ethiopia's Borana and Somali Communities, 2009.*
www.careclimatechange.org/files/reports/ethiopia_pastoralists_report2009.pdf.

Increasing drought also has negative consequences on pastoralist children. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) research found that by 2050, 25 million children will be malnourished as a result of climate change² and increased water shortages, disease outbreaks and crop failures resulting from climate change will hit children the hardest affecting their access to education, their health and survival.

Trudi Dale, Senior Program Coordinator for Save the Children UK in Ethiopia, says that for the pastoralist child, the impact of climate change can be devastating. "What little control they had over their lives is lost," he said. "They become separated from their families for months and sometimes years at a time. There is no longer time each day to be with your friends and play games, or laugh and sing songs in school. The only thing that remains in the lives of the pastoralist child is the need to survive."

For example, in the Somali region, many pastoralist families seasonally migrate to make a living, leaving their children behind to go to school and to look after the livestock. "When there is rain, it is the small children who keep the sheep and goats," said Quresha Farah Egal, age 16. "But now since the sheep and goat need to go very far to find water, we older children are the ones who are responsible to take them. When I return back from keeping the sheep and goats, I am tired and go to bed without having studied."

In response, CARE and Save the Children UK are working to build people's resilience to climate change through livelihood support programmes that can help families break out of poverty. They are also advocating for policies – at both national and international levels – that can ensure funding for adaptation reaches the people who need it most.

In one example, the CARE Ethiopia Resilience Enhancement against Drought (READ) Project in the Borana zone supports livelihood alternatives and savings groups to help women adapt to more frequent drought. The project trains local women on hay production and storage. This reduces the burden of looking for pasture for livestock during the dry season. In addition, CARE supports a micro-credit self help group called the Dara Women Savings and Credit Group that is engaged in the purchase and sale of concentrated livestock feed and cereals for profit.

"A person who takes a loan from the group does what she can with the money and raises her children with the profit she gains," said Dama Boru, Chairwoman of the women's savings group. "We are also trading in salt and doing what we can. We are not sitting idle. We are trying our level best by doing haymaking, petty trade and all sorts of work to cope with the prevailing drought."

Additional resources available:

- Full report: www.careclimatechange.org/files/reports/ethiopia_pastoralists_report2009.pdf
- Policy Brief and Pastoralist Testimonials: http://www.careclimatechange.org/files/reports/Ethiopia_Pastoralists_Policy_Brief.pdf
- "No Time to Recover" video: <http://www.careclimatechange.org/videos/ethiopia>
- Photos available: Elima Huku, Dama Boru and the Savings Group, Quresha Farah Egal and haymaking.

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² Source IFPRI, September 2009: <http://www.ifpri.org/pressrelease/new-report-climate-change-projects-25-million-more-malnourished-children-2050>