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## From Conflict to Coping:

### Evidence from Southern Ethiopia on the contributions of peacebuilding to drought resilience among pastoralist groups



Households that were unable to access pastures or water for their animals due to insecurity were nearly four times more likely to have resorted to killing of their calves during the recent drought than households which did not experience such conflict-related barriers.

*“Our livestock would have perished if it was not for the improvements in our ability to travel to other areas to access feed and water for our livestock.”*

*- Respondent from El Nasib community*

Within the search for reliable evidence on programs and policies that work to strengthen resilience among pastoral groups in the Horn of Africa, the potential contributions of peacebuilding have not been widely considered or studied. To help fill this knowledge gap, Mercy Corps recently undertook research into the links between conflict and drought resilience within the context of its programs in Southern Ethiopia.

The study provides strong evidence of the contributions of peacebuilding programming to pastoralists’ abilities to productively cope with and adapt to the recent drought. The findings showed that the improvements to freedom of movement and access to water, pasture, and other natural resources brought about by Mercy Corps programs were key contributing factors to households’ drought resilience.

The results lend validity to the broad theory of change examined by the study: ***Pastoralists in areas that have seen increased peace and security are more likely to have opportunities to employ effective livelihoods coping strategies, thus reducing their vulnerability to and aiding their recovery from extreme droughts.***

Several program activities stand out as having contributed to the improvements in security, mobility, and access to resources: support to negotiation and development of peace accords and agreements governing the management of natural resources; and strengthening the capacities and linkages between customary and government institutions. These actions appear to have built social cohesion, transferred the skills necessary to resolve disputes and manage shared resources, and laid the foundations for livelihoods which are more resilient to external shocks, including droughts.

The study sheds light on how peacebuilding programming can be done in a way that helps mitigate the effects of severe drought among pastoralists and speed their recovery from them. By extension, the research shows how such programs can serve as an effective part of disaster risk reduction efforts aimed at reducing the need for large scale humanitarian relief during periods of severe drought.

This evidence points to the need for greater consideration and dedicated resources for conflict management within disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and food security policies and programs in the Horn of Africa.

## Key Findings

### METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed methods approach to understand the extent of apparent drought resilience among pastoralist households, and to produce insights into if / how the peacebuilding activities contributed to any differences observed.

Data was collected through representative household surveys and participatory impact assessment techniques among focus groups of men, women, and youth from both intervention and comparison populations. Comparative and correlation analyses were conducted to isolate the program effects, and to determine the factors most closely associated with drought resilience.



***Improved peace and security within the intervention areas have created conditions that enable greater freedom of movement and access to important resources that pastoralist groups depend on to cope with and adapt to severe drought.***

Since early 2010, freedom of movement has increased by 15%, and conflict-related obstacles to accessing water for livestock, markets, and livelihood opportunities have decreased by half in the intervention areas. During the same period, access to natural resources and public services has deteriorated in the non-target communities studied, which they attributed primarily to conflict and insecurity. These findings strongly indicate that the greater access to productive resources in the intervention communities was program related, rather than being due to a more general trend of improvement in the area.

***Pastoralist groups in Somali-Oromiya areas of Ethiopia who have greater freedom of movement and access to natural resources are less likely to have to rely on distressful coping mechanisms in response to extreme drought and more likely to be able to employ adaptive capacities, compared to groups without such access.***

While nearly 90% of households in the intervention area had to resort to distressful coping strategies in response to the recent drought, they reported doing so at lower levels than during previous droughts of equal severity and less frequently than non-target communities. Loss of access to water, grazing, or farmland due to conflict was found to be strongly associated with reduced food consumption and productive asset depletion, including selling of livestock at distress level prices. Households that relied less on such distressful coping mechanisms, especially those that involve the loss of productive assets, are in a position to recover from drought more quickly and easily.

## Recommendations

Programming intended to strengthen resilience among pastoralist households and communities in the regions of the Horn of Africa where chronic violent conflict is present should:

- Work on peacebuilding and disaster risk reduction simultaneously. Conflict should be regarded as one of the risks to be reduced, rather than an externality.
- Take an approach to conflict management which strengthens the local governance structures and social cohesion that underpin communities' resilience to disasters, conflict, and other shocks.
- Support efforts to identify accurate measures and predictors of resilience and adaptive capacity, which are an essential pre-requisite to knowing when programs have had an impact on them.

The full report summarized in this briefing paper can be found at:

<http://www.mercycorps.org/resources/copingwithdroughtthroughbuildingpeaceinethiopia>

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