

STRUCTURED SUMMARY

FOOD AID SHARING AND RESILIENCE

The role of collectivity and connectivity in drought-affected pastoralist systems in Ethiopia

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Motivation

The Horn of Africa is experiencing increased frequency, duration and severity of droughts, strongly influenced by climate change. Considerable attention has been given to targeting food aid, concerned that its impact may be diluted by recipients sharing food with others or diverting it to better-off households. Community social structures and coping mechanisms are perceived by government and aid agencies to be weakening to a point of failure.

Purpose

To understand if and how pastoralists shared food aid, and if this affected their ability to cope with and recover from drought, we studied households in three purposively selected *kebeles* of Su'ula (Afar), Asli (Somali) and Fuldowa (Oromia) that had received food aid during the drought of 2020–2023.

Approach and methods

We interviewed all 1,805 heads of households in three *kebeles* (one in each region where the drought had significant impact) using a survey to ask about sharing of food (and other types of) aid (receiving and giving), its effects on coping with and recovering from drought, and about the strength of the community. Following an initial analysis of survey data including social network mapping of giving and receiving of food aid, households seen to play an important or clear connecting role in the network were interviewed to explore the reasons for their exceptionalness.

Findings

Some 86% of the households surveyed reported having received food aid from formal aid distribution sources, with 86% of households reporting that they received food aid shared from another household. Seventy-nine percent said that they shared food aid with another household, with a significant number both receiving and sharing. Sharing was most prevalent in Oromia (Fuldowa), with 98% of households receiving food aid from another household. Most transactions took place within the *kebele*. Relationships between givers and receivers highlighted the emphasis on family and the community. About 61% of households sharing the food aid said they shared because the recipient had

none, and another 27% said, '[]it is normal to share'. Though 61% of households said that the single most important factor that helped them cope with drought was formal food aid distribution, the sharing of food aid between households is seen as a key, often perceived as obligatory, social interaction that keeps their community strong.

Policy implications

Social resilience during a drought is not solely determined by access to aid but also by the social fabric through which it flows. Social networks including improving inclusivity need to be strengthened, rather than trying to stop or limit their functionality by telling communities not to share food aid. Targeting of food aid (as with other aid) needs to be improved through co-design of interventions by humanitarian actors and community members to account for and support household connectivity.

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