



STRENGTHENING SOCIAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS IN SOUTH ARI WOREDA, ETHIOPIA:

REPORT OF COMMUNITY-BASED PERSPECTIVES



Strengthening social protection mechanisms in *South Ari woreda*, Ethiopia

Report of community- based perspectives

May 2023

This research was commissioned and funded by Christian Aid as part of a multi-country study on social protection for vulnerable people in fragile contexts.

Author:

- Haced Consultancy

Contributors:

- Dr Tara Korti, Research and Evidence Animator, Christian Aid.
- Tirivafi Shuro, Global Thematic Advisor, Markets & Livelihood, Christian Aid.
- Edelegnaw Agegn, Programme Officer, MEAL, Christian Aid Ethiopia.
- Tekalign Kebede, Programme Officer, Livelihoods and Markets/Enterprise development, Christian Aid Ethiopia.

Copyediting and Design:

- Adebola Adeeko, Knowledge Engagement and Research Communications Advisor, Christian Aid.

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caid.org.uk/ethiopia

Contact us

Christian Aid Ethiopia
Norwegian Church Aid Compound,
Wello Sefer Ethio-China
Friendship Ave
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
T: 011 553 6850/51/52
E: info@christian-aid.org
W: caid.org.uk

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List of acronyms

AFD	Action for Development
CBHI	Community Based Health Insurance
CBO	Community Based Organisation
DSWP	Developmental Social Welfare Policy
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Program
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WEA	Women Empowerment Action

Executive summary

Social protection programs have played a vital role in promoting inclusive and sustainable development, aiming to minimize vulnerabilities and support resilient pathways. It's heartening to see a growing recognition of their significance in addressing livelihood shocks and vulnerabilities. Consequently, an increasing number of developing countries have embraced social protection measures in recent years.

In Ethiopia, various contributory and non-contributory social protection programs are being implemented. However, it's important to acknowledge that the coverage of these programs remains relatively low, considering the country's substantial population and the extent of vulnerabilities faced by its people. One of the main challenges in expanding social protection lies in the high cost of implementing large-scale programs, necessitating partnerships between the government and development partners.

This Christian Aid Ethiopia was designed with this collaborative spirit in mind. This initiative seeks to provide evidence-based insights into social protection, informing future programming and advocacy efforts. The study specifically focuses on the South Ari district/*woreda*, which is recognized as a fragile area in Ethiopia. It aimed to examine factors constraining the expansion of social protection, identify key gaps in existing systems, and propose measures to strengthen them.

To accomplish this, the study employed qualitative methods, including 21 key informant interviews, six focus group discussions, participatory research tools, and document reviews. Through this process, it became evident that there is a substantial demand for social protection services in the *woreda*, especially as poverty and vulnerability resulting from climate variability and change have escalated, posing significant challenges. These risks manifest in food insecurity, exacerbated conflicts, displaced communities, and induced migration.

Within the *woreda*, community-based health insurance (CBHI) stands as the sole formal social protection program, while informal social protection mechanisms largely sustain the community. However, the expansion of social protection faces several obstacles. These include limited financial and human resources, a low saving culture (particularly for contributory programs), changing consumption patterns within farming communities, and a lack of well-organized structures for informal social protection mechanisms.

Furthermore, the study highlights polygamy as a major impediment, exposing women and children to increased poverty and vulnerability by eroding financial and physical assets. Therefore, strengthening the existing social protection system requires addressing not only financial and human resource limitations but also adopting a comprehensive, integrated approach that considers disaster risk reduction and gender inequality.

Duty bearers play a crucial role in enhancing social protection mechanisms. In South Ari *woreda*, the community believes that enrolling their *woreda* in the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) is essential due to persistent food insecurity caused by droughts and floods over the past decade. It's important to note that existing social networks are better suited for handling idiosyncratic shocks rather than covariate shocks like droughts and floods. Consequently, the current social protection mechanisms are inadequate for meeting the community's needs and shielding them from climate-induced livelihood shocks.

To address these challenges, the study recommends supporting existing social protection mechanisms through capacity building and fair resource transfers. Collaborative efforts involving local government, civil society organizations, and development partners are essential in this regard.

Additionally, it emphasizes the need to develop an innovative climate-shock responsive social protection program that reduces community vulnerability and enhances resilience. Such programs can be initiated by national or regional governments, with development partners providing financial support, particularly during the pilot phase.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

Social protection policies hold a vital role in upholding the human right to social security for all, while also addressing poverty, inequality, and fostering inclusive growth. By bolstering human capital, productivity, and facilitating the transformation of national economies, these policies contribute to a more equitable society. They act as a safety net, shielding individuals from the adverse effects of poverty, inequality, and income loss due to illness, disability, or old age (Razavi et al., 2020).

A compelling example of the positive impact of social protection can be seen in Latin America, the world's most unequal region. The expansion of public cash transfers has been attributed to significant reductions in income inequality in the region (Gasparini & Lustig, 2011, cited in Fernández & Serrano, 2022). However, the prevalence of social protection programs varies across countries, depending on their level of development and resource capacity.

In high-income countries, a majority of the population benefits from social protection in the form of social welfare or pensions, provided either by the state or through private schemes. In low-income countries, access to formal social protection is limited, influenced by factors such as economic strength and government resources.

Ethiopia stands as an exemplary case, with a robust policy and legislative framework that can effectively promote social protection programs. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's (FDRE) constitution incorporates provisions that underpin the state's duty to allocate resources for rehabilitation and assistance to its citizens, within available means. The Public Servants' Pension Proclamation No. 714/2011 establishes mandatory contributory social security through the civil service pension, as well as military and police service pension funds. The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) outlines a

comprehensive approach to social protection, encompassing safety nets, social security and health insurance, livelihood and employment schemes, and addressing inequality in access to basic services (FDRE, 2014).

Ethiopia has been a pioneer in Africa in this area since the 1960s when it responded to the International Labour Organization's call for decent work and social security. It established a civil service pension scheme that covered both civil and military personnel, making it one of the first countries in Africa to institutionalize contributory social security (Teshome, 2013). Over time, the country has used emergency response mechanisms to address shocks, such as food insecurity caused by frequent droughts. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government has committed, through its constitution, to providing rehabilitation and assistance to vulnerable groups such as people living with physical and mental disabilities, older people, and children without parents or guardians (FDRE, 1995, Article 41(5)). To achieve this, the government developed the Developmental Social Welfare Policy (DSWP) in 1996, outlining targeted interventions for social protection. However, limited funding hindered its full implementation (Teshome et al., 2015). In addition to the NSPP, Ethiopia has sector-specific strategies to address the vulnerabilities of different segments of society, including the Urban Food Security and Job Creation Strategy and the Pastoral Development Policy and Strategy, targeting youth, pastoral communities, and agro-pastoral communities¹.

Ethiopia has experienced rapid economic growth over the past 15 years, becoming one of the fastest-growing economies globally (with an average annual growth rate of 9.5%)². Gross domestic product (GDP) has increased substantially, from \$8 billion in 2000 to over \$111 billion in 2021³. The country has made significant strides in reducing poverty, with the share of the population below the national poverty line declining from 39% in 2004 to 24% in 2015⁴. Moreover, notable progress has been

achieved in critical human development indicators, including a fourfold increase in primary school enrolment and a 50% reduction in child mortality by 2016 (World Bank, 2019).

However, despite these advancements, social protection coverage in Ethiopia remains limited. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), only 7.4% of the population benefits from at least one social protection benefit (excluding health), and total expenditure on social protection (excluding health) accounts for 0.7% of GDP. When considering all social protection programs, including health insurance, the coverage extends to approximately 21% (Berhane, 2020). Recent studies attribute the low coverage and expenditure on social protection to the high costs associated with implementing large-scale programs, making donor financing a critical aspect of social protection in Ethiopia (Endale et al., 2019; Berhane, 2020). Therefore, to enhance the social and economic well-being of all Ethiopians, particularly the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized groups, a collaborative partnership between the government and development partners is crucial, given the substantial cost of implementing social protection programs⁵.

In pursuit of these objectives, Christian Aid Ethiopia has designed the Social Protection Mechanisms and Access to Justice to Vulnerable People in Fragile Contexts in Ethiopia research. Additionally, an evidence-based approach to social protection is essential to inform future advocacy efforts. Undertaking research is instrumental for Christian Aid to provide evidence that will guide future programming and advocacy on social protection in fragile states.

1.2 Objectives of the research

The study aimed to attain the following specific objectives:

- To understand how communities perceive and address gaps in social protection in fragile contexts.
- To understand the factors that constrain the expansion of social protection in fragile contexts from a community perspective.
- To understand the measures by which social protection mechanisms can be strengthened.
- To provide recommendations that are rooted in community knowledge which will inform:
 - the future course of social protection programmes in South Ari *woreda* in South Omo Zone, Ethiopia
 - inform potential funding bids
 - in-country advocacy work on social protection.

2.0 Research methodology

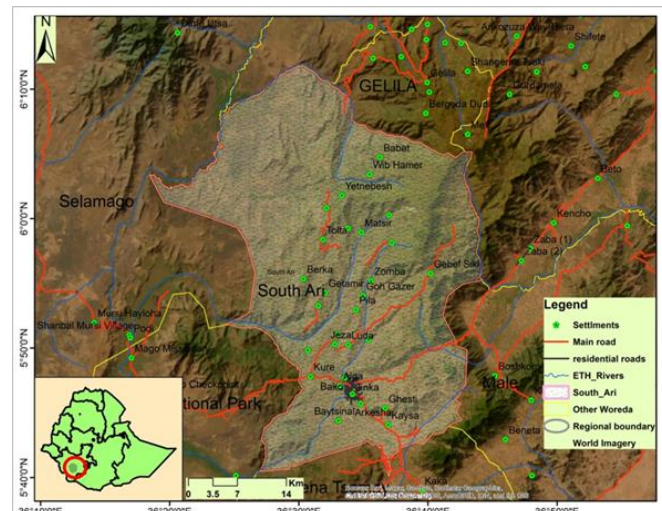
2.1 Description of the study area and agro ecology

The study took place in Southwest Ethiopia, specifically in South Ari *woreda*. South Ari *woreda* is one of the eight *woredas* in the South Omo zone, covering an area of 1,520 square kilometres. The estimated population of the *woreda* in 2022 was 316,792, with an annual population change of 2.7% between 2007 and 2022. The district has a population density of 208.3 per square kilometre.

Geographically, the *woreda* shares borders with Semen Ari *woreda* in the north, Mago National Park in the south, Salamago *woreda* in the west, Malle *woreda* in the east, and BenaTsemay *woreda* in the southeast (see Figure 1). It comprises 48 *kebeles*, which are small administrative units in Ethiopia. The altitude within the *woreda* varies from 500 meters above sea level to 3000 meters above sea level. The traditional agro-ecologies in the area consist of Dega (30%), Woina-dega (65%), and Kola (5%) of the total area. The *woreda* experiences a bimodal rainfall pattern, with a mean annual rainfall ranging between 601-1600 millimetres. The average annual temperature ranges from 10°C to 100°C (Gezahegn et al., 2018).

The people in South Ari *woreda* primarily rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. They cultivate cereals, pulses, green leafy vegetables, fruits, and rear domestic animals such as hens, sheep, goats, cows, and oxen. The *woreda* boasts a significant animal resource, including approximately 202,018 cattle, 108,167 sheep, 52,160 goats, 14,113 equines, 117,519 chickens, and more than 15,000 bee families. Major crops grown in the area include maize, sorghum, barley, wheat, teff, and coffee. Land use in the *woreda* comprises around 17% cultivated land, 15% grazing land, 22% cultivatable land and 0.08% forest land. The Ari ethnic group constitutes the largest ethnic group in the *woreda*, accounting for about 43% of the population size in the South Omo zone. Their

Figure 1: Map of the study area



Source: Developed by author using ArcGIS ESRI v10.8 software.

livelihoods revolve around a mixed crop-livestock farming system (Gezahegn et al., 2018).

According to information obtained from South Omo Zone's planning and finance office, in 2014 E.C., 58% of South Ari's cultivable land was under crop cultivation. Currently, the *woreda* is equipped with 57 schools and 38 healthcare facilities, including 1 hospital, 9 health centres, 52 health posts, and 15 private clinics (Wana et al., 2023). However, there are only 4 animal health clinics, which is merely 14% of the required amount. The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) masterplan of the *woreda* indicates that only 22% of people have access to at least basic water services (52% in urban areas and 20% in rural areas), 36% have access to basic sanitation services, and 9% have access to basic hygiene services. In addition to agriculture, there are a few non-farm income-generating opportunities available in the *woreda*, including employment in the service sector, particularly in tourism and affiliated services, trade and the manufacturing of local artifacts such as pottery.

The research employed a qualitative approach with inductive premises, emphasizing collaboration, co-ownership, and participatory

design. Various data collection methods were utilized to gather relevant information and conduct an in-depth analysis of the social protection landscape. These methods included desk review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). Additionally, a quantitative approach was adopted to analyse and interpret data obtained from the National Meteorology Agency of Ethiopia. This quantitative data served to supplement, triangulate, and provide further insights into key issues that emerged during the KIIs and FGDs, such as climate variability and change.

2.2 Sampling, data collection methods and tools

2.2.1 Sampling

In this study, we targeted institutions that have engaged in social protection activities, particularly those contributing to service provision in South Ari, as well as individuals benefiting from social protection. To achieve this, purposive sampling strategies were employed, alongside the utilization of snowball or chain referral sampling techniques, enabling us to identify participants for KIIs and FGDs in a thoughtful manner.

2.2.2 Data collection methods

A total of 21 KIIs and 6 FGDs were conducted. The KIIs included representatives from zonal and *woreda* government offices, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and community-based organisations (CBOs). While we strived for gender balance, it is worth noting that only three female interviewees were available for participation. For the FGDs, each session involved a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 11 participants. To ensure representation from different agro-ecological zones, six *kebeles* were selected. It is important to mention that two *kebeles*, namely Kayesa and Baytimal, were incorporated into the newly established Baka Dawela *woreda* a few days prior to data collection. The participants involved are outlined in tables 1 and 2.

We adjusted the number of *kebeles* and FGDs to ensure inclusivity and representation of all target groups. Our goal was to incorporate diverse perspectives, considering both urban or peri-urban areas (such as Kayesa and Baytimal) and rural settings, as well as different agro-ecologies. We also recognized the importance of gender representation, which led us to conduct all-women FGDs in Maytol and Shilshil.

To gather a comprehensive understanding of the social protection landscape, we conducted a thorough review of secondary sources. This involved examining a range of documents, studies, and policy papers, as outlined in the table 3 below. By leveraging these valuable resources, we aimed to capture the current status, challenges, and opportunities related to social protection.

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Table 1: Agro-ecological zones of Kebeles considered for the study

SN	Kebele	Agro-ecology	Number of female respondents	Number of male respondents	Number of research participants
1	Mahitol	Dega/ highland	8	0	8
2	Shilshil	Dega /highland	9	0	9
3	Shepi	Weynadega/midland	4	7	11
4	Ayekahamer	Weynadega/midland	7	4	11
5	Kayesa	Kola/low land	8	3	11
6	Baytimal	Kola/low land	8	3	11
Total			44	17	61

Table 2: Number of research participant groups considered for the study

Respondent group	Number of interviews conducted	Number of FGDs conducted
Zonal and <i>woreda</i> officials	5	
Zonal and <i>woreda</i> experts	13	
CBO representatives	3	
Community members		61
Total	21	61

Table 3: Overview of documents which were reviewed

Extant global scholarship	Local research and evidence in the sample countries	Policy and funding	Miscellany
Drawing from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ migration studies ■ conflict studies ■ climate change studies ■ social protection studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Annual Reports in Ethiopia ■ Research studies in Ethiopia ■ Regional research studies focusing on Africa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Global Level ■ ILO ■ Humanitarian Agencies working on social protection in Ethiopia. ■ International Agencies working on social protection in Ethiopia <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local Level ■ Social Protection program documents and reports (e.g. CBHI) 	Mainstream media on social protection coverage in Ethiopia

2.2.3. Research questions

The Terms of Reference served as a guide, setting the foundation for our research. We identified key research questions (table 4) that would shape our investigation, along with the appropriate data collection methods and tools. To delve deeper into this aspect, kindly refer you to Annex I.

2.3 Study team, recruitment, training, and data collection process

The study team consisted of a dedicated group of individuals, including four enumerators and a social protection expert serving as the main researcher. Our aim was to ensure the utmost quality in data collection, and to achieve this, we implemented several procedures. We paid significant attention to the selection and training of our research assistants and translators, specifically those who were fluent in the local language. Prior to the actual data collection, we conducted pre-tests of the interview checklists and FGD guides to refine and improve them. We

recruited experienced research assistants from the project sites, considering their ability to overcome language and cultural barriers during interviews. In selecting our data collectors, we also took into account their physical capacity to work in challenging settings, their teamwork skills, and their track records of collecting high-quality data.

To prepare our research assistants effectively, we developed training guides and materials such as notes and PowerPoint presentations. We conducted a comprehensive half-day training session in Jinca town, providing our research assistants with a clear understanding of the study objectives and equipping them with the necessary skills to conduct FGDs and key informant interviews. The training also included a pilot testing phase through role play to ensure comprehension of the questions, leading to some modifications and improvements. Additionally, the training covered essential topics such as data collection ethics, key guiding principles, and obtaining interviewee consent

Table 4: Research Questions and Corresponding Data Collection Methods/Tools

Research Questions	Sub questions	Data Collection Methods/Tools
RQ1: What are the factors that constrain the access and the expansion of social protection in fragile contexts?	SQ1.1: How do communities in fragile contexts perceive the barriers and opportunities to access social protection?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access and Control Matrix FGDs Key informant Interviews
	SQ1.2: What are the key external risk factors (such as climate change, conflict, displacement, etc) which affect social protection needs and the delivery of social protection?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature review KIIs FGDs
	SQ1.3: What are the existing good practices, enabling conditions and critical gaps in the policy and institutional environment for implementing and expanding social protection?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature Review KIIs
RQ2: How can social protection measures in fragile contexts be strengthened?	SQ 2.1: How are communities and various stakeholders (NGOs, Humanitarian agencies, etc.) addressing the perceived gaps in social protection provision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access and control matrix FGDs KIIs
	SQ 2.2 How do communities perceive the adequacy of the current social protection mechanisms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access and Control Matrix FGDs Observation KIIs
	SQ 2.3 How do communities perceive the role of duty bearers in strengthening social protection mechanisms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FGDs KIIs

before commencing each interview. By conducting pre-tests involving a key informant and an FGD simulation exercise with all training participants, we fine-tuned the wording and phrasing of the questions for enhanced clarity.

During data collection, translating from English to Amahric and then to Ari posed a challenge in some FGDs, potentially resulting in the loss of certain concepts in translation. However, we were proactive in addressing this issue. For instance, during FGDs, we employed local cases and scenarios based on exposure to natural disasters like floods and droughts to clarify concepts such as vulnerability. Another challenge we encountered during KIs was discerning mixed responses from various zonal officials who often discussed issues relating to the South Omo zone in general while referring specifically to the South Ari *woreda*. This created some confusion as some programs that operate at the zonal level (e.g., school feeding) were considered to be operational in the *woreda* as well. Overall, the FGDs proved to be highly effective data gathering tools and demonstrated greater efficiency.

2.4 Data management, processing, and analysis

To ensure the quality and consistency of the data collected from primary and secondary sources, we conducted successive checks. The team leader assessed the performance of the data collectors in the field, ensuring data quality before proceeding. Once the data quality was assured, we transcribed all interviews and FGDs verbatim and entered the information into NVivo v.20 software for analysis by the main researchers.

For data analysis and reporting, we employed a rigorous approach. The qualitative information obtained through KIs and were analysed, summarized and presented qualitatively. Following Bazeley's (2009) strategy, our analysis involved three key strategies: describing the data, classifying the data, and examining how concepts interconnect. We began by transcribing the raw data and then classified them based on similarities and differences. Subsequently, we established connections to construct a comprehensive understanding, reducing the data into manageable portions for analysis (data reduction). The study team meticulously organized the data by identifying regularities and patterns through coding, categorization, abstraction, and comparison to determine dimensions. To analyse the qualitative data, we employed thematic analysis, specifically using the framework approach. This approach allowed us to analyse, summarize, and present the qualitative information using an inductive approach, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive analysis of the data.

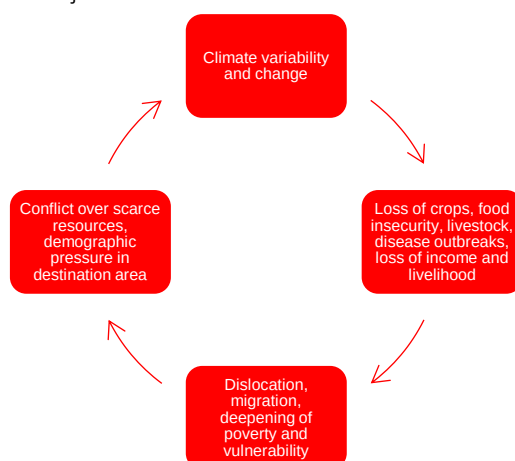
3.0 Results and discussion

The findings of this study represents a diverse range of perspectives, incorporating local viewpoints as well as those from the zonal, regional, and national levels, all contributing to our understanding of social protection. To ensure a comprehensive reflection of the research objectives, we have organized the findings of the desk review, KIIs, FGDs, PRA exercises, and observations thematically.

3.1 Social protection in fragile contexts: community perceptions and key gaps

In the South Ari *woreda*, it was evident from the overwhelming views expressed in both KIIs and FGDs that there is a pressing need for social protection services. The community members emphasized the increasing levels of poverty and vulnerability to climate variability and change. Through the FGDs and KIIs conducted, we discovered that the *woreda* has undergone visible changes in its climate, resulting in more frequent and intense extreme events, particularly droughts and floods. These events have had severe repercussions on the livelihoods of both agriculturalists and pastoralists within the *woreda*, leading to crop losses, food insecurity, displacement, and even conflicts. To provide a concise overview of the major shocks to livelihoods identified through the FGDs, KIIs, and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises, please refer to figure 2.

Figure 2: Conceptual model of major sources of livelihood shocks in Ari woreda*



In highlighting the interconnectedness of changing climate, malnutrition, and conflict in the *woreda*, a key informant from the South Ari *woreda* Disaster Risk Management Office staff, Habtamu Idasho succinctly encapsulated the situation by stating:

'The frequent drought that occurs each year for more than 14 years is causing a water shortage for both pastoral and agricultural communities between the months of October and May. All the major rivers including Weito, which has never dried up, recently run dry and pastoral communities are moving in search of pasture and water, which make them encroach territories and escalate conflicts between various groups'

The disaster risk management (DRM) key informant also explained that the temperature is consistently increasing from year to year in the *woreda*. FGD participants from Shepi *kebele* provided a case that illustrates the impact of climate change on conflict, which corroborates the DRM expert's point. They disclosed that:

'The erratic rainfall and shortage of rainfall when needed are the most common weather challenges that affect the productivity of our farmlands. Currently, this change in weather conditions became normal and the community do not harbour any hope on agricultural activities. Moreover, farmlands are getting smaller because of large family size and asset sharing practice and some of our family members attempted to settle in Male *woreda* and acquire farmlands but they were attacked by the pastoral communities and this conflict lingers until today and we don't go to neighbouring *woredas* for fear of conflict that this may result.'

Figure 3: Weito⁹ river has completely dried up



Figure 4: The drying up of the river has led to migration in search of water and pasture, leading to the escalation of conflict



As illustrated in Figure 2, the changing climate has had a profound impact on the agricultural sector, with far-reaching consequences such as crop loss, food insecurity, and even outbreaks of livestock diseases. These challenges have significantly contributed to income loss, making it exceedingly difficult for individuals and families to sustain their livelihoods, ultimately pushing them towards destitution. An excerpt from the discussion with FGD participants from Bayitsemal *kebele* sheds more light on the magnitude of this issue:

‘Erratic rain and erosion is becoming a common phenomenon, which [has] resulted in land degradation and loss of soil infertility that resulted [in] poor crop production. The temperature became hot, and the duration of the dry season is increasing from time to time. We don't have measuring techniques, but we can easily observe the irregularity of the rainy season, which became worse in recent years. Our cattle are dying due to lack of feed and water and their number is decreasing from time to time as they could easily get ill from livestock diseases.’

In addition to its impact on agriculture, climate change and variability has also had a profound influence on displacement and migration, exacerbating the challenges faced by communities and plunging them further into poverty and vulnerability. FGD participants from Bayitsemal *kebele* shared their perspectives:

‘In our *kebele*, the impact of climate change is more intense on the poor family members. For instance, the number of children exposed to the problem of poor nutrition and receiving emergency food rations is rising from time to time. Children from the poorest families, primarily move to urban areas and engage in daily labour to earn income in their tender age and they are exposed for jobs that demand high physical fitness. This is particularly worse for girls, who are more vulnerable for abuse and exploitation.’

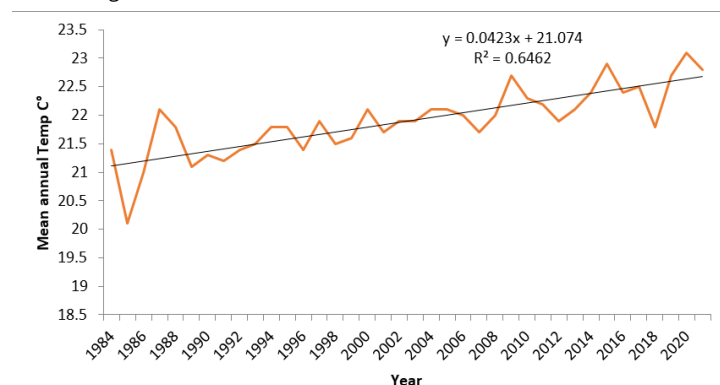
Apart from migration as a secondary effect of climate change, the above quote from FGD participants clearly indicates the challenges faced by women and children. It highlights the urgent need to address violence, abuse, and exploitation of women and children, along with providing legal protection and support as part of

social protection interventions in the *woreda*. In this regard, a few local organizations, primarily Women Empowerment Action (WEA), have taken the lead in implementing actions aimed at addressing the challenges faced by women, which can be considered a partial fulfilment of their social protection needs. A key informant from the organization stated the following:

'Our organization has been giving more focus on women empowerment activities like increasing the participation women in different interventions mainly self-help groups and GBV protection. So, our ultimate purpose is building the economic and social capacity of women in to help them become more effective in participation and decision-making processes. Subsequently, this condition allows the women to have more access to information that would help them to improve their livelihoods.'

The analysis of secondary meteorological data from Jinka station provides evidence of a gradual increase in the mean annual temperature within the *woreda* between 1984 and 2021. Figure 5 visually represents the average annual temperature recorded at Jinka station over the years. The findings reveal a notable change over the span of 38 years, with an average annual temperature rise of 0.0423°C per year or 0.423 °C every decade.

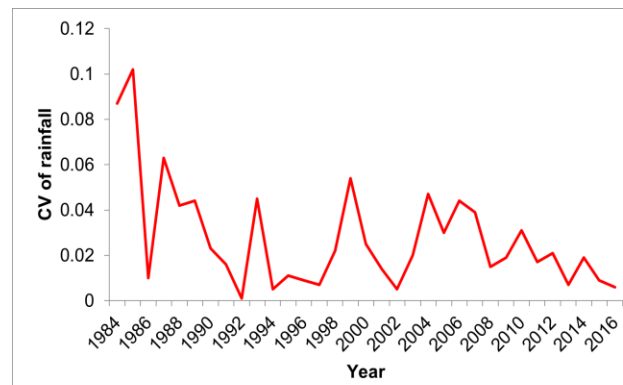
Figure 5: Mean annual temperature from 1984-2021 from Jinca meteorological station¹⁰



This trend analysis demonstrates a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 64.6% ($p = 0.001$), underscoring the significance of this temperature increase. Although it may appear as a modest change, considering the persistent nature of climate change and its interplay with environmental degradation and population growth, it is highly likely that the magnitude of this change will escalate. In fact, studies on the heat-aggression relationship suggest that with each 0.5°C increase in local temperatures, there is a 10 - 20% rise in the risk of conflicts (Hsiang et al., 2013).

In contrast, the rainfall patterns within the *woreda* did not exhibit a pronounced trend during the years 1984 to 2016, but rather displayed substantial year-to-year variation, as indicated by the coefficient of variation (refer to Figure 6 below). This characteristic variability in rainfall is likely attributed to the changing climate. Previous studies have pointed out a decreasing trend in rainfall across Ethiopia since the 1990s (Abebe, 2017). This decline has significantly impacted agricultural productivity and water availability in the country. For example, research on the impact of climate change on Ethiopian agriculture predicts significant declines in the production of teff, maize, and sorghum by 2050 compared to 2009/10, with estimates ranging from 21.8% to 25.4%. Additionally, climate change is expected to result in a loss

Figure 6: Rainfall variability in South Ari woreda



of 31.1% of agricultural GDP at factor cost by 2050 (Solomon et al., 2021). Another recent study assessing the impact of climate change on surface water availability and crop water demand in the Abbay/Nile Basin suggests a potential decrease of 42.96% in average annual stream flow after 2055 (Bekele et al., 2019).

Most climate models project a continued rise in temperatures for Ethiopia in the coming years, with estimates of a 2.1-degree Celsius increase by 2050 and a 3.4-degree Celsius increase by 2080. Over the past five decades, rainfall has displayed significant variability, and it is anticipated that this pattern will persist (Weldegebriel & Prowse, 2017). The interplay of natural variability in the ocean-atmosphere system, such as the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), and anthropogenic activities has been identified as major contributors to climate variability and change in the country (Haile et al., 2021).

Within the *woreda*, flooding and drought emerge as the primary sources of livelihood shocks associated with the changing climate. During discussions with FGD participants from Mayitol *kebele*, situated in a highland/dega/agro-ecological zone, significant shifts in weather conditions were expressed. The women, most of whom were above the age of 40 (excluding two participants), shared poignant reflections on the climate conditions of their local area compared to their childhood experiences:

'In this area, the weather condition has completely changed from the weather condition we used to know when we were kids. The temperature is increasing from day to day, the rainfall is decreasing and fails to come in time. Drought is becoming common, constraining agricultural activities and causing a huge shortage of water, which is a major challenge for farmers. The flow rates of rivers ("Abinet River and Maki River") have significantly

declined. Also, most of the water springs have dried and are out of function. This change is causing more intense impacts on the weather sensitive crops such as maize. This is not only affecting crop production, but also the production of "Godare" has declined. Most of the time our community use "Godare" during difficult times and until the main crop is ready for harvesting. The shortage of rainfall has also affected livestock. There is a significant shortage of animal feed in our village following the prolonged drought condition.'

In terms of formal social protection services, it was revealed by a key informant from the South Omo Zone Agriculture Office that the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), which is the major social protection program in Ethiopia, currently covers only six woredas in the Zone. These woredas receive food and cash transfers, but unfortunately, South Ari woreda is not among them. The exclusion of the woreda from the program is due to it not being initially designated as food-insecure. The PSNP utilizes a clustered targeting approach that involves both geographic and community-based criteria. As outlined in the PSNP Programme Implementation Manual, chronically food-insecure districts and kebeles are selected from across the country, and subsequently, chronically food-insecure households are identified through the Kebele Food Security Task Force, which includes community representatives. Eligibility for the program primarily relies on the definition of chronically food-insecure households, who either reside in one of the chronically food-insecure woredas and have experienced three or more months of food shortage in the past three years, or are unable to support themselves (Cirillo & Tebaldi, 2016).

While school feeding is reported to be active in the South Omo Zone, it has not been

implemented in South Ari *woreda*. However, preparations are underway to introduce the program in selected schools, particularly in Jinka town and its surrounding areas. According to a key informant from the Zone's Education Bureau, approximately 61,000 students currently benefit from the school feeding program in the South Omo Zone.

In terms of formal social protection schemes, the Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI)¹¹ operates in South Ari *woreda* as part of a contributory system. The CBHI has been implemented in 13 districts within the Zone since the 2017/18 period. The initial launch of the program took place in Male *woreda*. This coverage aligns with the nationwide expansion of CBHI, which has reached 770 *woredas* or 70% of all districts in the country as of 2019 (ILO, 2021).

During the FGDs conducted in three *kebeles* of South Ari *woreda*, it was evident that the community predominantly relies on informal social protection mechanisms and perceives a lack of access to formal social protection services. They expressed that while international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and communities do provide various forms of social support and services to those in need, many of these programs have limited coverage and are time-bound. The following excerpt from an FGD held in Kayisa Kebele illustrates this point:

'One of the common ways that we used to tackle livelihood problems is through borrowing cash from either relatives or pawnbrokers because there is no access to PSNP program in our village. Four or five years [ago], there were 1 to 5 group formation which most households were involved in and assisted each other¹². Nowadays, there is no such group with whom we have discussions or share our problems. In our *kebele*, we mainly rely on self-help groups, women and men

Iddirs¹³, and community associations that have experience on community mobilization, facilitation and assist when unexpected shock such as flooding occurs. But, the challenge is they had no capacity to withstand shocks sustainably due to resource limitation.'

The insights shared by these community members highlight the multifaceted ways in which climate change impacts the lives of individuals, underscoring the need for comprehensive social protection measures to address these interconnected challenges.

3.2 Factors that constrain the expansion of social protection in South Ari *woreda*: a community perspective

Based on interviews conducted with zonal and *woreda* experts and officials, the major factors that limit the expansion of social protection services in the *woreda* primarily revolve around the scarcity of financial and human resources. In fact, one of the interviewees pointed out that a significant portion of the 2014 E.C budget had to be redirected towards security activities following an ethnic-based conflict that occurred in the *woreda*. Consequently, a significant shortage of resources was created, adversely impacting essential social services like water supply and the maintenance of boreholes.

According to a key informant from the Zone's Water and Energy Office, the office 'failed to implement its 2014 E.C plan that include constructing additional water wells and maintaining existing ones due to a significant shortage of funds'. Another critical factor mentioned by the interviewees, hindering the expansion of social protection services in the *woreda*, is the prevalence of a very low saving culture. The study area exhibits various factors

that contribute to this low saving culture, including low-income levels, high levels of debt, low interest rates, and significant inflationary pressure.

The issue of low savings is particularly relevant to the CBHI program, which requires contributions from beneficiaries. The key informant from the Zone's Health Office highlighted that a low saving culture often leaves communities financially strained, making it difficult for them to fulfil their contributions regularly. In some cases, community members are even compelled to sell their livestock or assets to cover their CBHI contributions.

Table 5 presents a summary of the primary social protection mechanisms currently in place in the *woreda*, along with their implementation status and the major challenges and opportunities associated with them. The findings suggest that informal social protection mechanisms play a significant role in providing social protection services, serving as a vital support system for the majority of individuals who are not covered by formal social protection schemes. This reliance on informal mechanisms largely stems from limited access to formal social protection programs, which are constrained by inadequate financial resources (Berhane, 2020).

A significant and noteworthy trend, noted by a few key informants in the *woreda*, revolves around the evolving livelihoods of smallholder farming households. These households are gradually moving away from subsistence farming solely for their own needs and embracing the role of consumers in acquiring food grains. This shift indicates a transition towards greater reliance on the market, signifying a departure from self-sufficiency. It is important to recognize this transformation as it introduces a new level of vulnerability to the lives of farmers, exposing them to the same inflationary pressures faced by urban residents. This changing dynamic not only impacts the livelihoods of these communities but also poses challenges to the expansion of social protection

services. It is crucial to acknowledge the far-reaching consequences of this shift. The insights shared by the key informant from the *woreda* disaster risk management office shed light on the multifaceted nature of these challenges and their potential impacts on the community:

'Currently, the majority of farmers are buying crops and grains for consumption... [T]he fact is, recently the majority of farmers are not able to pay, even, their monthly *iddir* contributions because there are various expenses that they are obliged to pay throughout the year.'

This observation was corroborated by FGD participants from Shepi *kebele*, a middle altitude/weyna-dega/ agro-ecology zone dominated by farming households. They disclosed that:

'There is a rich culture of mutual support and commitment, particularly in facilitating conditions to maintain and restore houses burnt during conflicts and destroyed by flood disasters'.

However, they stressed that such measures are not sufficient and the informal social protection instruments (*iddirs* and women groups) available in the community lack well-organized structure and are financially incapable when faced with significant shocks caused by climate hazards and conflicts.

According to the key informant from the *woreda*'s Disaster Risk Management Office, there is a growing concern about the gradual decline of the local community's social capital. Inflationary pressure and the high cost of living are significant factors contributing to this decline. These challenges have put a strain on the community's financial resources and have weakened the culture of mutual support that once thrived among its members. The insights shared by the key informant align with the sentiments expressed during the focus group discussions conducted in Shepi *woreda*.

Table 5: Summary of social protection services in South Ari woreda

SN	Type of Social Protection	Implementation status	Opportunities	Key challenges & gaps identified
1	Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI)	Apart from the pension scheme for government and private employees, this is the only contributory SP program that exists in the <i>woreda</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing demand from community. Strong culture of mutual support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shortage of medicine forced beneficiaries to buy medicines from private suppliers & resulted in resentment & lack of trust. Recurrent disease outbreaks (e.g. Leishmaniasis, malaria, measles & cholera put strain on CBHI.
2	Informal social protection mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CBOs mainly iddirs¹⁴ provide a range of social protection services beyond covering funeral costs. Iddirs provide food for the needy, cover educational materials for OVCs, actively engage in catering the needs of PLWHAs. Neighbourhood groups in the agricultural communities' support women in maternity waiting rooms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong culture of mutual support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recurrent drought & floods overwhelm the capacity of CBOs. Lack of resources.
3	Free public services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This includes emergency food aid, water supply and catering the needs of IDPs. These services are largely provided during emergencies that follow natural disasters and conflicts. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergencies due to flooding & conflict created IDPs, which put pressure on the woreda resources

Source: compiled from the FGDs and KIs conducted in the *woreda*.

Participants highlighted that a common challenge that hampers the effectiveness of social protection activities is 'the inability of community members to pay their monthly contributions for CBHI and even *iddirs* and *mahibers*¹⁶. To illustrate their situation, participants often used the Amharic term "እጅግጠር," which conveys the sense of having no cash at hand or being penniless.

Similarly, participants from Mayito Kebele, an all-women group, emphasized their heavy reliance on informal social protection mechanisms, particularly *iddirs* and women's self-help groups, to extend support to those in need. However, they also emphasized that:

'Women SHGs available in the community had no capacity to provide better aid [social protection services] to fundamentally address climate-induced shocks that result in food insecurity and mainly emphasize on providing small credit services [up to 2000 ETB] for individuals whose family member got ill.'

The above quote clearly indicates that communities in South Ari woreda are suffering from covariate shocks, such as drought, that affect most of the community members. The existing social networks can only be used to deal with idiosyncratic shocks, such as illness. This further highlights the high degree of vulnerability of the community to shocks and their low level of resilience to the impacts of covariate shocks.

The participatory wealth ranking exercise conducted in Kayesa and Shepi *kebeles* with a mixed group identified the majority of community members as poor, which aligns with the narrative provided by the focus group discussion participants (see table 5).

When asked how they cope with livelihood shocks on their own, focus group discussion participants from the six *kebeles* mentioned the following coping strategies, without any particular order of importance:

Table 6: Summary of the participatory wealth ranking, South Ari woreda

Wealth ranking	Critical & current	Feasible opportunities ¹⁵
Well-off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two pairs of oxen for farming More than 2 hectares of land Three milk cows & several (between 20 and 30 goats or sheep) Grain mill Three wives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to land, finance, opportunities for income generating activities (e.g., fattening cattle & shoats) and market
Slightly better-off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A pair of oxen for farming. One cow Up to 2 ha of land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to land. Wage employment. May have some skills (e.g. artisan, blacksmith, pottery, waver etc.)
Poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No ox for farming. Engages in sharecropping. Usually has less than 0.5 ha farmland. 	
Very poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly engaged in daily labour. No farmland. 	

Source: Summarized from the participatory wealth ranking conducted in Kayesa and Shepi *kebeles*

Table 7: Coping strategies in South Ari woreda

SN	Coping strategies	Illustrations based on excerpts from FGDs & observations
1	Diversification of crops: planting and using cassava and Alako (Shiferaw's leaf) for consumption	According to the local market assessment and observation, these food items are currently used for consumption abundantly following the shortage of other vegetables such as cabbage that require a lot of water to grow. A key informant from Shephi <i>kebele</i> (<i>iddir</i> chairperson) noted that the practice of eating alako is taken from the Konso people, who use it as a staple food. 'It is drought resistant and nutritious, and more people are using it during the dry seasons'
2	Engaging in wage employment (both off-farm and non-farm)	'Diversification in our area has been undertaken as a response to failure of farming to withstand the stresses and shocks attributed to recurrent and severe droughts. Out of desperation, some of us send our children to Jinka town to engage in back-breaking construction works to earn income to feed their siblings' - FGD participant from Shilshil <i>kebele</i>
3	Moving to urban area (migration) and engaging in daily labour	Children from the poorest families, primarily move to urban areas and engage in daily labour to earn income in their tender age and they are exposed for jobs that demand high physical fitness. This is particularly worse for girls, who are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. - FGD participant from Bayitsemal <i>kebele</i>
4	Abundantly participating in the production and selling of charcoal	'As a coping mechanism, there are different measures that have been carried out. Firewood collection and selling, charcoal producing and selling, engaging in wage employment, sending children to cities are the most common mechanisms that the community is abundantly employing as a coping mechanism' - Key informant (a disaster risk reduction expert) from the <i>woreda</i> .
5	Changing type and frequency of food intake	'Due to the changing weather conditions, we recently started to cut bananas raw, dry them in the sun, grind them and eat them in the form of flour along with other grains. In the past, bananas used to be eaten when they were ripe but now most of us don't wait as hunger doesn't give time'. 'Mothers eat less these days, they give priority to their small kids. This, however, is causing harm to breastfed infants as the mother won't produce enough milk due to lack of food. So, the number of children exposed to the problem of poor nutrition and receiving emergency food rations is rising from time to time' FGD participant from Bayitsemal <i>kebele</i>

While it is important to acknowledge that some of the coping strategies above, such as crop and income diversification, have positive implications for improving livelihood conditions, it is crucial to recognize that many of these strategies also have negative consequences for both people's well-being and the environment in the medium and long term. For instance, activities like charcoal production, although providing short-term economic benefits,

contribute to the depletion of natural forest resources in the area. This, in turn, exacerbates issues like soil erosion and land degradation, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates poverty and vulnerability.

It is evident that, on their own, these strategies may not be sufficient to effectively address the complex livelihood challenges faced by the community. This realization underscores the necessity for a comprehensive social protection intervention in the study area.

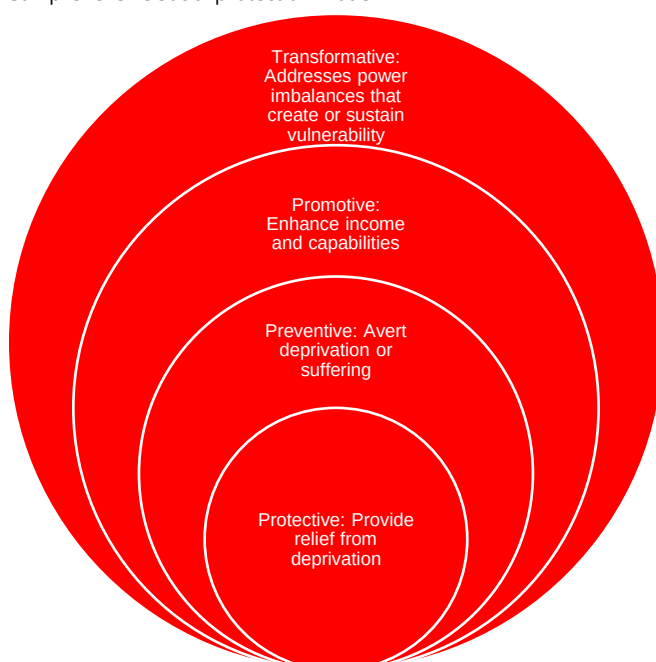
3.3 Strengthening Existing Social Protection Mechanisms

To gain a deeper understanding of how to strengthen the existing social protection mechanisms in South Ari *woreda*, this study relied on information obtained through KIIs with experts from various offices in the *woreda*. This was further enriched by triangulating with insights gained from the FGDs.

Through these, several gaps in social protection service provision were identified. They include limited capacity to effectively address shocks, stemming from a lack of both financial and human resources. Additionally, there is a notable absence of a responsive system that can effectively mitigate the effects of disasters and shocks by establishing a comprehensive and integrated approach.

In areas like South Ari, where community vulnerability to shocks is particularly high, the lack of proactive social protection interventions that encompass the essential elements of a comprehensive social protection model is a cause for concern. The comprehensive social protection model should embrace protective, preventive, promotive, and transformative approaches, as depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Comprehensive social protection model¹⁷



It is essential to recognize that a comprehensive social protection model acknowledges the interlinkages between economic and social risks, as well as their mutual reinforcement. This understanding underscores the importance of addressing the underlying structural causes of poverty and power relations, as noted by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004).

A key informant from Women Empowerment Action, a local NGO operating in South Ari *woreda*, emphasized the significance of these identified gaps in social protection:

'In South Ari *woreda* the gaps associated with social protections are poor identification of the available informal social protection and strengthening these mechanisms through capacity building and resource support. Most of the time both the government or non-government organizations give priority for supporting the community after a certain shock and don't think about using social protection mechanisms to lessen the severity and impact of the shocks as there is incapability of the existing informal social protections to shoulder or address the repetitive and ever-changing nature of shocks.'

In addition to the key gaps identified in the existing social protection services in the *woreda*, as summarized in table 4 (section 3.2), the practice of polygamy is identified as a major impediment that exposes women and children to poverty and vulnerability and erodes existing social capital, thereby affecting social protection for women. Women FGD discussants in Keyisa *kebele*, for instance, noted that:

'This practice [polygamy] is causing a significant negative impact on the livelihoods of families in our *kebele* because the limited resource available at one household is shared with the new family members, which not only deteriorates the asset of families but

‘also result in a conflict among the family members.’

The practice of polygamy has emerged as a factor that many key informants have pointed out, exacerbating the shortage of farmland, perpetuating poverty, and deepening vulnerability due to its impact on increasing population pressure. This issue, coupled with the escalating cost of living resulting from high inflation, has pushed numerous individuals from both rural and urban areas into extreme poverty. Consequently, there is a pressing need for social protection support in the form of safety nets, public housing¹⁸, and other non-contributory mechanisms¹⁹.

For instance, a perspective shared by a key informant from the zone's education bureau, revealed the challenges faced by teachers. He noted that the increasing cost of living and the scarcity of housing have driven many teachers

to leave their jobs within a year. This clearly indicates that the demand for social protection measures is high in the woreda, not only among the most vulnerable groups but also among wage earners and public servants²⁰.

Using mapping and power analysis tool as a participatory method, women FGD participants were encouraged to identify and rank vital resources and who has access and control over the resources²¹. The outcome of this exercise, summarized in table 6, highlights a disconcerting reality: men possess near-absolute control over key resources within the community. Moreover, it emphasizes that the practice of polygamy is both a manifestation of and a consequence of this prevailing power imbalance experienced by women in South Ari woreda.

Table 8: Access and control matrix in South Ari woreda

Asset/resource	Men		Women		Older People		Youth	
	access	Control	access	control	access	Control	access	Control
Farmland	✓	✓	✓	x	✓✓	✓	xx	xx
Livestock	✓✓	✓	✓	✓x	✓	✓	✓	✓x
House	✓✓	✓✓	✓	x	✓✓	✓x	x	x
Motorbike	✓✓	✓✓	x	x	x	x	✓✓	✓
IGAs (off-farm & non-farm)	✓	✓	✓	✓x	✓	x	✓	✓x

Source: summarized from the mapping and power analysis conducted in Shepi kebele (mixed group) and Mayito Kebele (all women group)

Notes: ✓ denotes equal access or control, ✓✓ denotes more access or control, xx signify lack of access or control; ✓x denotes partial access or control, depending on the sub-type of resource (e.g. women have more access to chicken but they don't have the decision making power when it comes to selling chicken or even in most cases eggs that would bring income to the household).

FGD participants from Shirshir *kebele*, an all women FGD group, proposed solutions for the differential access to resources. They opined that it **'could be tackled by availing alternative source of income for women and the poor and improving access to credit'**.

During the focused group discussions (FGDs), participants shared valuable insights regarding potential sources of financial resources. They highlighted the importance of utilizing revolving funds through village saving and credit associations or establishing connections between saving groups and microcredit service providers like Omo Bank. Additionally, participants suggested the provision of guarantees or collateral on behalf of saving groups to facilitate access to financial resources.

As disclosed by a key informant from AFD, there have been some improvements in the participation of women in economic activities in recent years. In this regard, self-help groups (SHGs) established by women have played a crucial role. According to him, NGOs can support such groups and should **'closely work with all groups available in the community to effectively help the households affected by the climate hazard'**. He further asserted that:

'The interaction and collaboration between the community and other stakeholders are very relevant to identify and use the local social protection mechanisms sustainably as one means of [social] protection mechanisms because they [SHGs] are the partners who have better opportunities for strengthening the local social protection mechanisms, they will be able to make them more effective in helping the others.'

In South Ari woreda, the local communities hold the belief that their woreda should be included in the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). They express this view due to the persisting challenges of food insecurity caused by recurrent droughts and floods over the past decade²².

According to the communities, their woreda fulfils the criteria of being a chronically food-insecure district, with a substantial number of farmers and pastoralists experiencing destitution and chronic food insecurity. The participants of the focused group discussions (FGDs) from Ayekahamer *kebele* strongly emphasized that food insecurity has become an increasingly complex issue within their local area.

'Shortage of food is a problem that needs urgent action. This is particularly the case for mothers and children and we heard that nearby woredas are part of the government's safety net program and given aid, and yet we are not given any aid while suffering the same and even worse fate.'

3.4 Existing good practices, enabling conditions, and critical gaps in the policy and institutional environment for implementing and expanding social protection

Ethiopia has been actively implementing various social protection programs since the 1960s and has recognized social protection as a vital instrument in its poverty reduction agenda in recent decades. This commitment was solidified with the endorsement of a comprehensive social protection policy in 2012, later updated in 2014 (FDRE, 2014). The policy encompasses four broad areas of intervention: safety nets, social security and health insurance, livelihood employment schemes, and addressing inequalities in accessing basic services. The policy created enabling condition and institutional environment that would cater the growing needs for social protection in the country. The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) envisions addressing gaps in standards, coverage, accessibility, program complementarity, institutional arrangements, and data management, as identified in the provision of social protection services by both government and non-governmental organizations (FDRE, 2014: 25).

Ethiopia implements a range of contributory and non-contributory social protection programs, including social security, health insurance, school feeding, and public works. These formal social protection programs currently cover approximately 21% of the population. However, it is important to note that the majority of the population relies on informal social protection mechanisms. While formal social protection has expanded significantly over the past two decades, the adequacy of benefits has not always kept pace (see Berhane, 2020). Furthermore, despite the expansion of social protection programs, the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of society, including older people, children, and persons with disabilities, are largely excluded from such benefits. The absence of statutory non-contributory social grants, such as old-age pensions, child grants, and disability grants, limits accessibility to social protection. This situation raises concerns as poverty and inequality persist among children, youth, women, older people, and persons with disabilities (Berhane, 2020; Cochrane & Lemma, 2020). Consequently, informal social protection mechanisms, which are already in place in rural and urban communities, play a crucial role. Regrettably, these mechanisms have often been overlooked in social protection discourse, not only in Ethiopia but also in other Sub-Saharan African countries.

In addition to the absence of statutory non-contributory social protection and unemployment protection, ensuring long-term financing for a life-cycle approach to social protection, as proposed in the policy, remains a critical challenge in Ethiopia's social protection system. The life-cycle approach recognizes that various life events, such as death, illness, disability, job-related accidents, domestic violence, substance abuse, natural disasters, and economic or political crises, can impose significant financial burdens on individuals and households. To achieve social justice, poverty reduction, and development, social protection

needs to incorporate a life-cycle continuum investment that addresses these challenges (ILO, 2003: 5-6). While progress has been made in expanding social protection in recent years, securing long-term financing remains a major hurdle (see Endale et al., 2019; Berhane, 2020).

Moving to the local context of South Ari *woreda*, CBHI emerges as the only formal social protection scheme currently reaching a relatively large portion of the population. The scheme is integrated into the existing *woreda* government structure and is managed by three full-time executive officers. The *woreda* health insurance board, led by the *woreda* administrator and composed of members from relevant sector offices, facilitates the implementation of the scheme, ensuring community ownership and active participation. Each functioning scheme holds an annual General Assembly where three community representatives from each *kebele* participate. The Zonal health office's key informant emphasized that the design and implementation of CBHI ensures community participation, credibility, and program sustainability. As reported by the informant, community participation in CBHI is on the rise.

Similar to the national context, most individuals in South Ari are not covered by formal social protection mechanisms and rely on informal systems such as *iddir*, *mahiber*, *sawii* (a group of unmarried youth pooling their savings), and *debo* (a mutual support group that contributes labour during farming activities). These informal mechanisms play a crucial role in South Ari *woreda*. A key informant from AFD, a local NGO operating in the *woreda* stated:

'There is an accumulated experience based on endogenous knowledge and wisdom that encourages sharing and mutual support in various forms such as *debo* that significantly supports households in need of labor during farming seasons.'

This reaffirms the significance of informal social protection mechanisms, which have a longstanding history and remain vital, particularly considering the limited reach of formal social protection schemes. In fact, estimations suggest that up to 90% of Ethiopians belong to at least one informal group or support system (Teshome, 2013). Recognizing this reality, the new National Social Protection Strategy (2016) provides a comprehensive definition of social protection as 'a set of formal and informal interventions that aim to reduce social and economic risks, vulnerabilities and deprivations from all people and facilitates equitable growth.' This provides an opportunity to integrate formal and informal social protection mechanisms, which is crucial for reaching the most vulnerable groups. The key informant from AFD disclosed that, despite the presence of a few NGOs, none of them specifically focus on social protection. He illustrated this by stating:

'For instance, Women Empowerment Action works on gender, World Vision works on water supply and education, and we, AFD, are working on WASH.'

Considering the discussion above, it becomes evident that a significant gap exists between the supply and demand for social protection services in South Ari *woreda*. Development partners, including NGOs and humanitarian agencies, can play a pivotal role in bridging this gap. This is particularly crucial given that community-based informal social protection mechanisms alone are insufficient to shield against the increasing magnitude and severity of shocks experienced in recent years, as outlined in section 3.1.

4.2 Recommendations

- **Designing climate-shock responsive programs:** The recurring theme of the changing climate, echoing through all KIIs and FGDs, underscores the importance of designing innovative social protection programs that respond to climate-induced shocks. Such programs should not only reduce the vulnerability of communities but also foster their resilience. Policymakers and key stakeholders, including donors, must prioritize climate change considerations in their interventions. These proactive programs can be initiated at the national or regional level, either as standalone initiatives or as part of existing programs. Development partners can provide crucial financial support, especially during the pilot phase.
- **Addressing gender inequalities and power relations:** In recognizing the detrimental impact of certain social practices, such as polygamy, it becomes evident that strengthening the existing social protection system necessitates a comprehensive and integrated response. This response should actively address gender inequalities and power relations. Local protection and civil society have a crucial role to play in engaging in awareness-raising activities, providing legal protection, and extending support to vulnerable women and children.

During the dissemination workshop, participants shared the following insightful recommendations²³:

- **Expanding research to non-fragile areas:** To gain a broader understanding of current social protection practices, conducting follow-on research in non-fragile areas is crucial. This expanded scope will enrich our knowledge and inform future interventions.
- **Strengthening informal social protection mechanisms:** To ensure sustainability, it is essential to strengthen informal social protection mechanisms and consider systemic-level interventions. Rather than solely focusing on minimal social protection issues, we must prioritize addressing the structural barriers that hinder communities from reaching their full potential.
- **Embracing a holistic approach:** Future research on social protection should embrace a wider lens, encompassing critical aspects such as education, water supply, and other infrastructure provisions. By examining these interconnected elements, we can develop more comprehensive strategies to enhance social protection outcomes.
- **Thoughtful dissemination of findings:** Utilizing multiple communication channels are essential for disseminating research findings and recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders. Thoughtful crafting of these findings, considering feasibility, sustainability, and community acceptance, is vital before broad implementation.
- **Incorporating quantitative data:** To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the existing social protection mechanisms in the study area, future research should incorporate quantitative data. This data-driven approach will bolster our knowledge base and strengthen decision-making processes.
- **Collaborative action:** It is imperative for different stakeholders operating in the area to embrace the research findings and integrate them into their future programming.

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Annex I: Data Collection Tools

Focus Group Discussion guide

Date and Location _____

FGD Team _____

1. Purpose of the FGD (5 minutes)

The objective of this Focus Group Discussion is to get information for social protection study that will be undertaken in South Ari Woreda, South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People Regional State (SNNPR) by Haced Consultancy. The main objectives of the study are to assess the practice of social protection in the Woreda, to identify the gaps in the implementation of social protection, and to understand the measures by which social protection mechanisms can be strengthened.

2. Introduction of participants and Facilitators (5 minutes)

Hello and welcome to our discussion! Thank you for taking the time to join us. My name is (_____). I'm working with (_____), who will be taking notes for us today. There are no right or wrong answers but rather various points of view. Please feel free to share your opinion even if it differs from what others have said. Before we begin, let me remind you to please talk one at a time. Please keep in mind also that we're interested to hear both positive and negative comments.

The information you share with us is for research only. It will be kept private and will not be disclosed to anyone but the researchers.

We are tape/video recording this session so that we don't miss anything important but just like the rest of your information, the recording is also private and will only be used by the note taker.

Our session will last about an hour to an hour and a half. But before we ask the first question, let's find out some more about each other. Tell us your name and how long have you lived in this village.

3. Discussion Themes

1. What are the factors that constrain the access and the expansion of social protection in your local area? (15 minutes)
 - What do you think of the level of access to social protection in your area/woreda? Probe: Is there difference in the level of access across the different social groups, Rural-urban and, agro-ecologies?
 - How do you perceive the barriers to access social protection in your woreda?
 - Are there any opportunities to access social protection in your woreda? If any, what are they?
2. What are the key external risk factors (such as climate change, conflict, displacement, etc...) that affect social protection needs and the delivery of social protection? (15 minutes)

Guiding questions:

- Do you think that the climate has shown a marked change over the last 30 years in your area?
 - Is there a noticeable change in average temperature over the last two decades?
 - What about the change in average rainfall?
 - How often do major climatic hazards occur in their area?
 - Are there any conflicts in your area? How about displacement?
3. How can social protection measures be strengthened in your local area? (10 minutes)

Guiding questions:

- What do you think of the various stakeholders (NGOs, Humanitarian agencies, etc.) addressing the perceived gaps in social protection provision?
- How do you perceive the adequacy of the current social protection mechanisms?
- How do you perceive the role of duty bearers in strengthening social protection mechanisms?

4. Summary of Discussion points (5 minutes)

5. Closing Remarks (5 minutes)

Semi-Structured key-informant interview checklist

Purpose of the KII (5 minutes)

The objective of this KII is to get information for social protection study that will be undertaken in South Ari Woreda, South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People Regional State (SNNPR) by Haced Consultancy. The main objectives of the study are to assess the practice of social protection in the Woreda, to identify the gaps in the implementation of social protection, and to understand the measures by which social protection mechanisms can be strengthened.

Introduction of participants and Facilitators (5 minutes)

Hello and welcome to our discussion! Thank you for taking the time to join us. My name is (_____). I'm working with (_____), who will be taking notes for us today. There are no right or wrong answers but rather various points of view.

The information you share with us is for research only. It will be kept private and will not be disclosed to anyone but the researchers.

We are tape/video recording this session so that we don't miss anything important but just like the rest of your information, the recording is also private and will only be used by the researchers.

Our session will last about an hour. But before we ask the first question, let's find out some more about each other.

Identification of key informants: _____

Name of Key informants: _____

Sex of the informant: _____

Key informants position: _____ & Years of experience _____

Name of the interviewer _____ Date & time of interview _____

I. Nature of Shocks and Vulnerabilities

What are the major sources of livelihood shocks in the district related to (climate variability and change? Conflict? Displacement? Etc...)

(Probe, would you please tell more about the nature of climate induced hazards (mainly drought and floods) in the district, in terms of their Coverage/extent, seasonality, frequency and duration?)

- The area of land usually affected by drought and floods in the district as measured in terms of hectare or other local units of measurements.

- What are the drought and flood seasons?
- How often do major droughts and floods occur in this district?
- How severe is the effects of these hazards on local people and their livelihoods?
- What types of households are most vulnerable to these climatic hazards? Conflicts? Displacements?
- What are local people's main coping mechanisms? Which of these mechanisms seem sustainable?
- For what supports communities most depend on your office?
- How do you assess the contribution of the office in terms of promoting the resilience of rural households towards climate-related disasters in the area? (In other words, do you have any programs or projects that deal with increasing the capacity of households to better withstand the effects).
- Outcome of shocks: loss of assets, loss of income, food shortage, and decline in consumption, health effect.
- Is there any NGOs intervention in this area with regards to promoting resilience of rural households in the face of climatic disasters?

II. On Social Protection

- What type of social protection services are provided in the woreda? PSNP? CBHI?
- The size of beneficiaries?
- What are the existing good practices, enabling conditions and critical gaps in the policy and institutional environment for implementing and expanding social protection?
- What is being transferred as payment to participating in public works and free distribution?
- Cash, food or mixed?
 - What do you think about this type of transfer?
 - What do you think are the advantages and disadvantage of cash transfer?
 - What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of food transfer?
 - What do the food-based safety net beneficiaries do with the food they received?
 - If beneficiaries are selling the food they received, why do you think this is the case?
- What do you think are the gaps in social protection provision in the woreda?
- How are communities and various stakeholders (NGOs, Humanitarian agencies, etc.) addressing the perceived gaps in social protection provision?
- What are the key external risk factors (such as climate change, conflict, displacement, etc) which affect social protection needs and the delivery of social protection?
- How do you cope with such external risk factors?
- What are the existing good practices, enabling conditions and critical gaps in the policy and institutional environment for implementing and expanding social protection?
- What measures (indigenous) to improve the practice of social protection in the *woreda*?

Endnotes

- ¹<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/mapping-national-social-protection-system-ethiopia-including-social-health>
- ²<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>
- ³ <https://tradingeconomics.com/ethiopia/gdp>
- ⁴https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2020/Global_POVEQ_ETH.pdf
- ⁵ The possibilities for expanding the fiscal space in order to extend coverage of social protection using ILO's social minimum or social protection floor, involving three programs—social pensions, child benefits, and disability grants, would cost up to 3.5 % of GDP annually to implement using the least costly program designs (Berhane, 2020).
- ⁶ District
- ⁷ UNICEF defines fragile contexts as: contexts where there is an accumulation and combination of risks as a result of context-specific underlying causes combined with insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.
- ⁸ Source: adopted from FGDs, KIs and PRA problem ranking exercises conducted in South Ari woreda
- ⁹ The river ran dry following the recent drought, which is reported to have exposed 338,000 thousand people in South Omo zone.
<https://www.ethiopianreporter.com/116595/>
- ¹⁰ Source: computed based on secondary data obtained from Kassahun and Hamer (2020) and extended using data from Jinca meteorological station
- ¹¹ CBHI was launched in 2012 as a government-driven contributory scheme but with community engagement aiming at the provision of universal and equitable access to health care services to the rural population and informal employees in urban areas through pre-payment and risk pooling arrangements (see Endale et al, 2019)
- ¹² The 1to 5 group formation was a strategy used by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party before 2018 to gain "massive expansion" in membership and used as a political surveillance mechanism. Local communities used the group as platform to enhance their social networks and mutual support structure.
- ¹³ There is no marked difference in the services provided by men and women iddirs. However, women iddirs usually involve their members in preparing food, taking care of the sick, children and the elderly, which goes in parallel with the expected role of women according to the prescribed norms and social division of labor in Ari community.
- ¹⁴ Iddirs are informal, traditional, community institutions that are established primarily to address death related shocks. Iddirs are the most pervasive community institutions that act as an informal social protection mechanism in Ethiopia. Iddirs are the most pervasive and inclusive CBOs in the country. In recent years, iddirs have been frequently noted to be involved in social protection of orphans and people living with HIV/AIDS, and are increasingly being used by both state and non-state actors as a point of entry for their community-targeted development interventions. In this regard, many studies show that iddirs are beginning to take formalized shapes, and often operate with semi-formal status as they become involved in diversified service provision (Teshome et al., 2015).
- ¹⁵ Feasible opportunities refer to access to services, assets, capital or institutions that create and sustain the socio-economic status of an individual in a community. These are akin to livelihood capitals and enabling conditions in the sustainable livelihood framework (SLF) discussed by the seminal work of Ian Scoons in 1998.
- ¹⁶ Neighbourhood associations usually based on the observation of a saint's day among the adherents of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and help each other in need through labor and cash contribution.
- ¹⁷ Source: Adopted from UNICEF (2008)
- ¹⁸ This refers to houses provided by the government to the poor in low rent (kebele houses)
- ¹⁹ The market observation in Jinca town reveals that the price of essential food items are relatively expensive and unpredictable as prices change on a daily basis (see, the market observation report, annexed in this report)
- ²⁰ In addition to the existing social security program (pension), these segments of the society have other social protection needs that may include health insurance, disability grants, housing, and school feeding for their children.
- ²¹ The mapping and power analysis is designed to encourage marginalized groups to visually represent and reflect on these resources and the power relations that shape who accesses and controls resources.
- ²² Due to the targeting procedure in the initial phase of the program, which remains to be the blueprint for program implementation as explained in an earlier section of the report, the woreda is not considered to be food insecure and it is not targeted by the program.
- ²³ The dissemination workshop was held on May 2, 2023 in Addis Ababa and stakeholders from various organizations such as Agri-service Ethiopia, HUNDEE, and SoS-Sahel attended the workshop.

Contact us

Christian Aid Ethiopia

Norwegian Church Aid Compound, Wello Sefer,
Ethio-China Friendship Ave,
Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia

T: 011 553 6850/51/52

E: info@christian-aid.org

W: caid.org.uk

