



## **Impact of Climate Change on Women and CARE Ethiopia's Role**

*By Nigist Abraha, Public Relations Officer  
CARE Ethiopia*

Climate change is shifting the way we live, and the trend is expected to persist, with an increase of between 1.8 and 4°C predicted this century. It is affecting human resources that are important to people's livelihoods, including education, health and human labor. Broadly speaking, poor people are the most affected by climate change. And with women making up 70 percent of poor people, climate change is expected to magnify existing patterns of gender disadvantage. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), women produce half of the world's food, and in rural areas poor women produce 60-80 percent of staple crops. Yet women earn only 10 percent of the world's income and own less than two percent of property. Women and female children spend more than 10 million 'person-years' carrying water from remote sources each year. In Africa alone, the World Health Organization estimates there are more than 40 billion work hours lost each year to the need to fetch drinking water.

As climate conditions change, women will be left with even less time available to take up income-generating activities and diversify their livelihood strategies. Girls will be left with even less time available to attend school. In times of crisis, if the nutritional needs of men and boys are viewed as more important, women and girls become the last to eat when their families run short of food.

These injustices become all too stark when disasters hit. More women than men are injured or killed during hurricanes and floods. Women are less likely to hear official warnings or know how to swim. They are also slower to run, or restricted by their clothing, their role as caretakers of very young children and older people, and cultural rules that restrict them from leaving their homes without the accompaniment of a male relative.

### **CARE International's Commitment**

CARE International's climate change strategy is geared towards the empowerment of poor and marginalized communities where CARE works, the inequitable distribution of rights, resources and power, as well as repressive cultural rules and norms, render women especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

At the COP15 Climate Change Conference in December 2009, CARE International played a significant role to ensure that a fair deal was made in Copenhagen that addresses the rights and needs of the most vulnerable people – particularly women. The key issues CARE addressed in the conference, among others, were that the agreement must ensure that adequate and predictable funds are made available for adaptation and that those funds reach the most vulnerable people. It also includes the call for national governments to involve affected stakeholders in the setting, implementation and monitoring of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) measures, and deep and legally binding emission reductions.

## **CARE Ethiopia's Experience in Adaptation of Climate Change**

CARE Ethiopia and Save the Children UK recently commissioned the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to undertake a study on pastoralist community perceptions on climate change variability and trends such as increasing temperatures and drought.<sup>1</sup> The report showed that the changes that are threatening our existence include increasing temperatures and drought frequency, as well as unpredictable rains that fall in shorter but more intense episodes.

The magnitude and rate of current climate change, combined with additional environmental, social and political issues, are making many traditional coping strategies ineffective and/or unsustainable, amplifying environmental degradation and food insecurity, and forcing communities to rapidly find new livelihood strategies.

CARE is working to enhance the adaptive capacity of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, through community-based and community-led interventions. For example, we are organizing communities into village saving and loans groups to help them to diversify their livelihood and engage in income generating activities. This includes petty trading, animal fattening, bee keeping, hay making in the pastoralist communities, and credit groups to prepare for adverse conditions or drought periods when no pasture is available. CARE Ethiopia also supports communities with agricultural and technological diversification.

CARE is supporting communities to better manage their rangeland using techniques such as area closure and scaling up pasture enclosures to ensure that weak animals, lactating cows and calves can be fed during dry seasons and bush clearing. In the drought-prone, pastoralist area of Borana zone, CARE has rehabilitated traditional wells and constructed water infrastructure such as hand dug wells, cisterns and cattle troughs to help store water, so that women do not have to spend so much time finding water, especially in times of drought, and can spend that time instead on income generating/productive activities. This has given women more options for coping when confronted by increasingly unpredictable rainfall, and for long-term adaptation if trends continue.

In partnership with the government and other partner organizations, CARE is working to strengthen existing conflict resolution mechanisms to ensure and enhance access to existing resources for pastoralist communities.

In the agro-pastoralist communities, CARE also supports the government Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) to build the resilience of chronically food insecure communities, particularly women, by creating, protecting and promoting assets and diversifying agricultural technology to strengthen their livelihoods. Moreover, through its Productive Safety Net plus (PSNP Plus) project, CARE creates access and linkage to market for communities.

Evidence of change so far gathered from CARE Ethiopia's initiatives witnessed that women are becoming powerful change agents in both adaptation to and mitigating climate change impacts, and many more women are willing to take on leadership roles if empowered to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> *Climate-Related Vulnerability and Adaptive Capacity in Ethiopia's Borana and Somali Communities, 2009.*  
[www.careclimatechange.org/files/reports/ethiopia\\_pastoralists\\_report2009.pdf](http://www.careclimatechange.org/files/reports/ethiopia_pastoralists_report2009.pdf).