

Working toward durable local integration solutions for drought-displaced people

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This Policy Brief investigates possible solutions for internally displaced persons in Ethiopia after the 2017 drought, with a specific emphasis on local integration initiatives that support people's livelihoods. The recommendations underscore the pivotal role of these initiatives for advancing durable solutions to displacement amidst the challenges posed by the climate crisis.



Male displaced pastoralist, 35. Image credit: Pablo Cortés Ferrández.

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In the Horn of Africa, the challenges faced by pastoralist communities include droughts, conflicts, shrinking resources, and food insecurity. While pastoralists often use migration as an adaptive strategy, the aforementioned challenges can also forcibly displace them or compel them to settle in one place, abandoning their usually mobile livelihoods.² The 2017 drought in Ethiopia displaced over 300,000 pastoralists,³ highlighting the urgency to find durable solutions in a region where displacement pressures are increasing. This Brief discusses the drivers and impacts of that displacement, the needs of those affected, and pathways toward durable solutions. Based on extensive research,⁴ it emphasizes the importance of integrated humanitarian-development approaches for pastoralist communities displaced by the drought that allow for local integration and support people's livelihoods.

The Intricacies of Pastoralism and Displacement

The approximately 20 million pastoralists in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda, rely on dynamic, complex livelihood patterns. Pastoralism is characterized by constant fluctuations in the number of livestock, influenced by factors like rainfall and access to fodder and water in arid and semi-arid lands. This necessitates strategic mobility for pastoralists to secure access to grazing or water sources. Nomadic or semi-nomadic migration is essentially the strategic mobility of both people and livestock, pursued not only for seeking pasture and water but also for economic purposes, accessing livestock, markets, or urban centers, particularly for those who have diversified their lifestyle. Particularly in the context of slow-onset hazards such as drought, that are increasingly frequent and severe due to the climate crisis, it can be challenging to distinguish between voluntary nomadic movements, less voluntary migration, and displacement of inherently mobile pastoralists. *Pastoralist displacement* denotes situations when nomadic pastoralists face a critical threshold and their livelihoods become unsustainable, leading to either forced movement to new areas or the compelled abandonment of their pastoralist lifestyle to settle down (IDMC, 2014).

Pastoralist Displacement after the 2017 Drought

The 2017 drought led to widespread pastoralist displacement in the Somali region. It severely affected pastoralist communities, many of whom were highly vulnerable to the impacts of the disaster. The pastoral system's fragility was exacerbated by factors such as rangeland deterioration, population dispersion, mobility limitations, invasive plants, and human activities. Numerous pastoralists lost large shares of their livestock and related livelihood activities in the wake of the drought, and when a critical

² IDMC/ISS. 2012. *Kenya's Neglected IDPs: displacement and vulnerability of pastoralist communities in northern Kenya*, available at: <https://issafrica.org/research/situation-reports/kenyas-neglected-idps-internal-displacement-and-vulnerability-of-pastoralist-communities-in-northern-kenya>.

³ IDMC. 2019. *Nothing to put in your mouth: durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia*, IDMC, Geneva, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/durable-solutions-drought-displacement-ethiopia>.

⁴ The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) conducted the research for this Brief in the Doolo and Korahe zones, key areas affected by the 2017 drought in the Somali region of Ethiopia. In 2019 and 2020, it carried out a mobile phone survey with 219 respondents, social mapping, and key informant interviews, as well as 51 in-depth interviews and 3 focus groups in IDP camps. The author of this policy brief was the researcher in charge of the field research, in which he implemented qualitative and quantitative methodologies in a participatory manner with the communities and the different stakeholders involved.

threshold of their herd sizes was reached, a significant portion became displaced. They were often compelled to move to peri-urban areas that were home to extended family. Reflecting the push factors of livestock loss and poverty, The hope for better economic opportunities and food security also influenced the selection of destinations.

Three years after the 2017 drought in the Somali region, the impacts were still profoundly felt. In the worst-affected areas, over 260,000 people remained displaced in challenging living conditions. The pastoralists displaced during the drought found themselves in a protracted situation, with unmet basic needs, dependence on humanitarian aid, and limited prospects for participating in livelihood and economic projects. A significant lack of national identity cards and birth certificates complicated their access to basic services. While in displacement, communities faced additional challenges, including flooding, drought, desert locust infestations, conflict, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have exacerbated the humanitarian situation, challenged resilience, and complicated the recovery process of already displaced persons on the one side, and meanwhile have led to new displacements in the area on the other side. While participants acknowledged heightened vulnerability and low resilience to future shocks, such as new droughts, they also stressed that they had gained new knowledge post-2017 drought, emphasizing adaptation to urban life, increased migration for jobs, and improved communication with authorities.

Seeking Durable Solutions

Despite the launch of a Durable Solutions Initiative (DSI) by the Ethiopian government and the international community in 2019, the surveyed displaced persons noted limited progress in finding durable solutions when the data was collected. Most IDPs expressed a preference to locally integrate in their new peri-urban host communities as a durable solution to their displacement. Reasons behind this preference included the impossibility to return to their prior, mobile ways of living given the losses of livestock; the proximity to families; perceived improvements in security and basic services in host communities; as well as the peaceful coexistence in the new areas thanks to existing family bonds.

To enhance the sustainability of local integration, humanitarian aid must be coupled with developmental considerations. In particular, establishing viable livelihoods was seen as critical. Both IDPs and host communities emphasized priorities such as providing livestock through restocking or direct financial support, enhancing agricultural training, and offering capacity-building programs for urban employment, given that the former pastoralists required time to adjust to the urban living and acquire new skills.

Revitalizing livelihoods in affected regions has received backing from the regional government, UN agencies, and NGOs. The central emphasis has been on restocking, raising, and selling livestock in local markets. This has involved implementing start-up capital initiatives and forming small-scale business cooperatives for increased efficacy. The strategy avoids promoting a return to rural areas highly susceptible to climate change. Instead, the goal has been to assist displaced persons in reclaiming livestock within a more secure environment near small towns. Simultaneously, they have received livelihood training to explore day labor opportunities in the urban destinations. Nonetheless, the resurgence of animal-based livelihoods has been slow and would require heightened financial support for better outcomes. In addition, while efforts were made to train local authorities in community-based planning, more can still be done to include IDPs and host communities in efforts to support local integration.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the challenges and needs identified in the context of climate-related displacement of pastoralists in Ethiopia, several policy recommendations can be derived:

- Where desired and viable, develop and implement strategies for the local integration of displaced populations, considering the unique circumstances of pastoralists. However, prioritize people's agency and respect their choices for durable solutions, including repatriation or settlement elsewhere.
- To advance local integration, align efforts to address both immediate needs and long-term development goals, among other things by investing in programs that enhance the resilience and diversification of people's livelihoods, while ensuring basic needs such as legal identity and civil documentation are fulfilled.
- Increase funding to facilitate a more sustainable transition and livelihood resilience for displaced populations. Offer training and support to empower displaced pastoralists in adapting their valuable skills and experiences for life in new settings, particularly during the transition from rural to urban areas.
- Adopt a community-centered approach that involves engaging with local communities, understanding their priorities, needs, and capacities.
- Foster collaboration between the government, international organizations, and NGOs. Ensure that policies and interventions are coordinated, and resources are effectively utilized to maximize their impact on the ground.
- Strengthen efforts to collect, analyze, and disseminate data on risks, displacement, and its multifaceted impacts for evidence-based decision-making and targeted interventions.

Conclusion

Climate change has and will continue to significantly influence displacement patterns in the Horn of Africa, particularly among at-risk pastoralists. Seeking refuge in fragile peri-urban environments, many of these displaced pastoralists express a preference for longer-term local integration as a durable solution to their displacement. To support sustainable integration in their new homes, concerted efforts are needed to address both immediate needs and long-term development goals, especially resilience building and the recovery of livelihoods.

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