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Author: Daniel Gebretsadik Ayele

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Challenges to Rural Livelihoods: A Case Study of Chichu, Gedeo, Southern Ethiopia

Daniel Gebretsadik Ayele
Dilla University
Dilla, Ethiopia
daniel.gebretsadik@yahoo.com

Abstract

The aim of this article is to understand the livelihood challenges of farming households from an insider perspective. The empirical data upon which the author draws was gathered through repeated periods of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2017 with 36 participating farming households in the community of Chichu in Gedeo, Southern Ethiopia. Observation, interviews, and focus group discussions were used to obtain the required primary data. This study has also benefited from various secondary sources. As the study shows, climatic change, land scarcity, limited livestock production, limited financial capital, limited non-farm income, livelihood displacement, and marginalization of women are major livelihood challenges facing farmers in the Chichu community. Thus, a holistic approach is necessary to mitigate the constraints that threaten farmers' livelihoods.

Keywords: Agroforestry, climate change, land scarcity, rural livelihood, Chichu community

1.0 Introduction

In Ethiopia, agriculture serves as the primary means of livelihood. It contributes 41.4% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), 83.9% of the total exports, and 80% of all employment in the country (Matouš, Todo, & Mojo, 2013). This makes agriculture the most indispensable sector in the country's development prospect. Despite its importance, the agricultural sector is based on traditions and a subsistence economy and it cannot adequately feed the fast-growing population of the country. So far, much has been done at all levels (national, regional, and household levels) to increase agricultural productivity and attain livelihood security (Amare & Belaineh, 2013) and to provide rural people with adequate access to income and resources to meet basic needs (Frankenberger, 1996). Livelihoods are secure when households have secure ownership of, or access to, tangible and intangible resources and income-earning activities, including reserves and assets, to offset risks, ease shocks and meet contingencies (Chambers, 1988). In the attempts to create livelihood-secure situations, the focus has been on land tenure, lack of inputs, inadequate and fragmented farm size, pricing and marketing, as well as on overall macro policies of the country. However, these structural problems continue to challenge the livelihoods of farmers in Ethiopia, and if there are no appropriate measures taken that deal with these problems, the younger generations will face serious challenges in the future.

Gedeo is one of twelve districts which lie within the very green but deprived edge of the Rift Valley in Southern Ethiopia. Like many other *enset* growing areas in Ethiopia, which have a high population-carrying capacity, Gedeo has been relatively self-sufficient. The high productivity of the agro-forest helps the Gedeo community to have stable livelihoods for long periods of time. Put differently, the people have been managing to cope with and recover from stresses and shocks due to land scarcity, temperature and rainfall variability, drought, and low crop production through Agroforestry practices that help create more diverse, productive, profitable, healthy, and sustainable land use systems (Tewabech & Efrem, 2014). However, the livelihoods of the Gedeo population have recently been challenged by what scholars call ‘demographic, economic, and social pressures’ (Habtamu & Zemedu, 2011; Ayele, Ewnetu & Asfaw, 2014; Sileshi, 2016). Being under pressure due to land fragmentation and environmental and societal change, many smallholders have transformed their farming strategy from self-reliant subsistence farming toward market-oriented mono-cropping (cash crop production) (Sileshi, 2016). As Abebe (2008) indicated, a transformation of the farming strategy based on the ideal that the production of ‘cash-rich’ crops like coffee is necessary for rapid economic development has a considerable impact on farmers’ living conditions. Insecure income from coffee due to a more liberalized market approach is the root of this disadvantage.

In the community of Chichu, farmers have been engaging in subsistence agriculture mainly depending on *enset* as their staple food. *Enset* produces non-edible fruit, but the trunk and root can be processed as food. *Enset* has advantages over cereal grains in that it will support a high population as it has a high caloric yield per unit of land and is far more drought resistant (Tadesse, 2002). The fact that the Chichu community remains ‘green’ the whole year has the effect of masking the livelihood challenges facing rural households. For someone who travels across this green area observing the green agro-forestry system can be deceiving, allowing one to generalize that the community of Chichu maintains stable livelihoods. However, the reality is different. The fact that the population has been growing rapidly in the community has put considerable pressure on existing resources, and the resources per capita have become scarcer over time (Shumete, 2009). Recently, farming households have faced various environmental and structural constraints that impacted their livelihoods. Based on farmer-focused qualitative research methods, the author argues that the livelihood challenges that farming households are facing are highly contextual to the ecological, political, social, economic, and historical realities (O'Brien, Quinlan, & Ziervogel, 2009) of the community. With this understanding, this paper looks into the array of challenges that rural livelihoods face based on an in-depth qualitative study of farmers of the community of Chichu in Gedeo, Southern Ethiopia.

2.0 Livelihoods as Means and Ways of Living

The livelihood framework depicts people as operating in a context of vulnerability (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002). The vulnerability context frames the external environment in which people exist. Critical trends, as well as shocks over which people have limited or no control, have great influence on people’s livelihoods and the wider availability of assets (Panda, 2014). Vulnerability encompasses vulnerable context elements such as shocks, seasonality, and trends that are in a varying degree exogenous to household and to local circumstances (Ellis, 2000). Vulnerability adversely shapes livelihood activities, and it emerges when human beings have to

face harmful threat or shock with inadequate capacity to respond effectively. It is within the context of vulnerability that people have access to certain assets. The ability to pursue different livelihood strategies depends on the basic assets people possess. The assets are termed as ‘capitals’ (natural, physical, human, financial, and social) since goods and services for livelihood are derived from them (Abebe, 2008; Shumete, 2009). These assets or capitals gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social, institutional and organizational context. Social positioning of individuals and households within the society (social relations), the rules of the game in a society or, humanly devised constraints (institutions) and groups of individuals bound by some common purpose (organizations) shape a household’s access to productive resources (see Degefa, 2005; Shumete, 2009). This context decisively influences the livelihood strategies that are open to people in pursuits of their self-defined beneficial livelihood outcomes (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002).

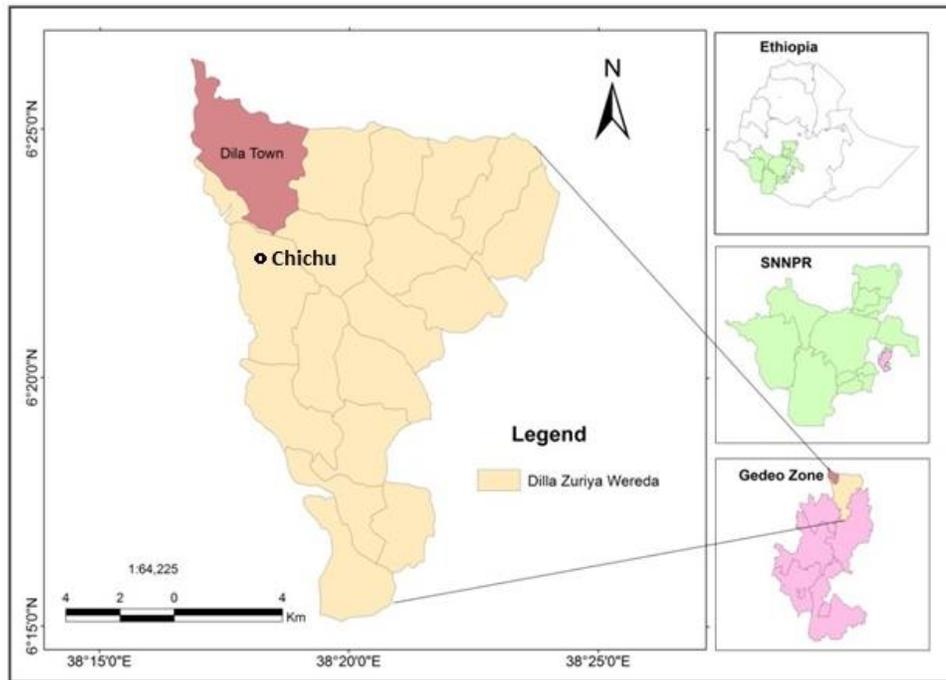
Livelihood is a multifaceted phenomenon. The classical definition developed by Chambers and Conway (1992) sees livelihoods as consisting of assets, activities, and entitlements, thus incorporating the means of gaining a living, including livelihood capabilities, tangible assets such as stores and resources, and intangible assets such as claims and access (Abebe, 2008, p. 42). Livelihood mainly points to the economic resource base people have at their disposal for making a living. However, the use of the concept has been changed over time. Since the last two decades, the concept of ‘livelihood’ has been used to look at how people develop resources to make changes for the better of their lives (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005). It is recognized that livelihood is a matter of both means and ways of living (Staples, 2007). The task of striving to make a living, attempting to meet various consumption and economic needs, responding to new opportunities, and choosing between different value positions are all crucial to livelihood (Long, 1997). It is clear that livelihood has both natural and social dimensions through which human life is constituted and reconstituted. In this study, the author has found the livelihood framework appropriate for understanding the natural and social dynamics of the study area, and how the interplay between them shapes farmers’ livelihoods. Whether a household livelihood is sustainable or vulnerable largely depends on the interplay between access to assets, the existing vulnerability context (history, trends, shocks, and seasonality), the mediating processes (institutions, organizations, and social relations at work), and the livelihood strategies that a household pursues (Ellis 2000).

3.0 Methods

Dilla Zuria, one of the *woreda zones* in Gedeo, was selected for this study. The purpose of the study and the selected methodology for addressing the problem have played a significant role in the decision as to whether the author should consider the whole territory of the *woreda* or concentrate on a specific community. Since the intention was to understand the livelihood challenges that rural households face, the author selected the Chichu community (see Figure 1) for in-depth investigation. It is a community with a high population density (over 1000 persons per square kilometer)—one of the highest rural population densities in Africa (Bogale, 2007; Negash, 2007). With a fast-growing population, land shortage has increasingly been a serious problem in the community with a serious concern about the farming households from the point of view of livelihoods. The author has chosen the qualitative case study research approach because it helps to conceptualize the farmers’ personal stories, experiences, and their way of looking at their livelihoods from insider perspectives shaped by the socio-economic conditions which are unique

to them. Thirty-six farmers were purposely selected to participate in the study. The farming households for the case study were selected in such a way that they represent different sex, age and livelihood activities. Of the 36 farmers, ten of them were females (a sufficient sample size as the goal was credibility, not representativeness). This was purposely done to highlight how the gender hierarchy shapes rural livelihoods. Consultations with the development agents were of much help in the selection of the farming households.

Figure 1. Map of the Study Area.



Source: Daniel, 2015

Farmers, elderly people, development agents, and administrators of the Chichu community participated in the study. Being inspired by rural ethnography (Hughes, Morris, & Seymour, 2000), the author used multiple research methods (semi-participant observation, in-depth interviews/dialogues, and focus group discussions) that increased the farmers' positions as research participants. Although ethnography refers to a variety of methods and involves different approaches in different disciplines (Abebe, 2008, p.42), the way the author applied it here resonates with the idea that it is contextual and interpretative (Berihun, 2004). For the author, ethnography is first-hand research *with* farmers in order to gain empirical material about their lives and livelihoods based on articulating their own realities. In-depth individual interviews were held with selected farming households regarding the likelihood challenges that farming households in the community were facing. The elderly people of the community, development agents, and administrators of Chichu community were interviewed as key informants who have firsthand knowledge about the community and identified through local extension workers. Four focus group discussions were held regarding environmental history, change in social, cultural and economic realities of the farmers, the constraints of crop and livestock production, and the ways out. Also, observation enabled the author to have a first-hand view of farmers' livelihoods or lifestyles. All the interviews were conducted in

Amharic, tape-recorded with the permission of the informants and then transcribed into English. During data analysis, paraphrasing, matching patterns of words and experiences of the participants, abstracting concepts, building stories, and interconnecting themes or categories, direct quotes of words and phrases of respondents were employed. Contextualizing and viewing cases holistically through the use of a plurality of methods, perspectives, and voices (Gasper, 2000) were essential to explore the challenges to rural livelihood in the Chichu community.

During fieldwork, consent was sought from the research participants. This was preceded by an explanation of the kind of research the author intended to do. The purpose was twofold: (1) to tell participants what the study was about, and (2) to ease the skepticism participants might have had about the research. Interviews/dialogues and focus group discussions were held in places where the participants felt safe and comfortable.

4.0 Results

4.1 Challenges to Rural Livelihoods

4.1.1 Climatic vulnerability. Climatic change has emerged as a livelihood challenge in the Chichu community. It has threatened the lives of farmers in recent decades. Small-scale agriculture is the main source of livelihood in the area. The community which has already been affected by rapid demographic growth is now vulnerable to the effects of climatic change. Farmers are struggling to cope with the burden of increasingly unpredictable weather. The continued loss of forests makes farmers more vulnerable to the consequences of climatic change, and deforestation and other environmental degradation continue to contribute to the problem, which goes in line with the observation of Shumate (2009). As one community elder indicated, “Variable temperature, erratic rainfall, and extreme events continue to erode the confidence farmers have in crop production.” It is getting more difficult for poor farmers to bounce back from changing weather affecting their livelihoods (Degefa, 2005). Drought and crop diseases aggravate the vulnerability to food shortages and erosion of assets making households more susceptible to future crises. Years of drought in the area that stunt crops and leave little to harvest have left farmers impoverished (Shumete, 2009, p. 843). As one community leader observed:

Climatic change is a challenge to farming households in the Chichu community. Temperature variability and erratic rainfall [too little or too much rain] continue to affect the production pattern, timing of land preparation, planting, traditional farm arrangements and farm inputs application. Coffee is a temperature- and moisture-sensitive crop, and its production is highly affected by climatic change. Climatic change is resulting in delays in ripening of coffee seeds. Droughts lead to the exposure of a coffee berry disease. *Enset* is also affected by recurrent frost and *enset* plant diseases known in the Chichu community as *woello* and *tette*. Climate change and the resultant challenges (drought, scarcity of forage, livestock

disease, crop failure, and food insecurity) are now the sources of risk to farmers' livelihoods.

Missing one season's harvest or having low production due to erratic rainfall can leave poor farmers in the Chichu community little to fall back on. As one of the elderly farmers argued, "It is becoming difficult to be certain regarding the amount and seasonal distribution of rainfall in our area." Frost is another climatic risk affecting *enset* production in the Chichu community. In fact, frost affects cash crops such as coffee and chat with varying degrees of damage. Gezahegn (2017) observed the same problem in Sidama, Southern Ethiopia. Associated with climatic change are the recurrent crop diseases that strike the community. These include *coffee cholera* (makes coffee beans fruitless), *woello* (rot the root of the *enset* plant) and *tette* (parches the stem of *enset* plant), *santo* (delays the proper growth of wheat and barley), and *doma* (attacks maize and make the crop fruitless). The farmers in the community perceived a decrease in the level of rainfall but an increase in the level of temperature. They indicated that, "Rainfall variability, excessive frost, and crop diseases have threatened their subsistence livelihoods over recent years."

4.1.2 Scarcity of land. Land is the most precious asset to the Chichu community. Every man considers a share of family land as a birthright because land ownership defines his status in the Chichu community (Tadesse, 2002). Women are excluded from inheriting family land. This is directly linked to the vital priority of protecting the life support structure of tribal lands. In the Chichu community, marriage within the tribe is prohibited and hence loss of tribal land through inheritance is avoided as the tribe follows male lines (Tadesse, 2002). Women farm their husbands' land. Today, there is no man in the Chichu community without a plot of land, called *tintto*. The way that farming households have access to this crucial asset, however, has contributed little to the transformation of the well-being of the community, who still relies on the land for its means of subsistence. The farmers that participated in this study have access to land at their disposal for various purposes. However, during the last ten years, the population has been growing fast, with an average annual growth rate of 3% (Shumete & Muluneh, 2013). As a farmer put it, "The population increase has resulted in a scarcity of land, and on average each farmer in the community works on less than half a hectare of land; a small holding size to sustain a household's livelihood." Land-poor farmers have limited capacity to produce their own food for consumption (Degefa, 2005) which the farmers in Chichu confirmed. Farmers problematize their failure to attain stable livelihoods due to what Shumete and Muluneh call "land starvation" (2013, p.109). As one farmer observed:

The farmers fail to attain sustainable livelihoods due to the lack of access to land. At present, farmland is scarce in the Chichu community. Family land holdings are generally very small and the problem has been exacerbated by the land inheritance system. The rural young people who came 'late' to the scene are at high risk of being landless. In Chichu, the average land holding size is about 0.3 hectares. Besides, there is no possibility for expanding farmland due to a high population pressure that induced a transition from

land abundance to scarcity. This creates a dire situation to the farmers with respect to livelihoods.

One farmer added:

Land as a safety net is increasingly eroded. Young people are unable to establish a meaningful livelihood. Some are forced to co-manage the land with their parents. Others are forced to leave the farm. I think, in this context, a high level of rural-urban migration of children and youth is unavoidable.

In the Chichu community, there is a shortage of farmland. There has been a rapid population growth against the static nature of the land, which has eliminated traditional no-man's lands and resulted in a shrinkage of land holdings. The presence of land fragmentation becomes obvious in the Chichu community. A high rate of fertility (due to the value of a large family size associated with labor, security, and social prestige) and poor family planning services at the community level have been factors of the rapid population growth in Chichu. As Abebe (2008) indicated, rapid population growth creates land shortage as more and more people are coming of age. Many farmers who work on small and degraded farms (due to the unavailability of fallow land and exhaustive tillage) are forced to live in poverty. As one development agent observed, “The livelihood status of farmers is poor, and this is partly explained by the scarcity of farmland.” The land holding size has already declined to the scale of being incapable to support farming households for normal livelihoods. There is limited room for sharecropping and renting by which farming households compensate for the paucity of one or more livelihood assets. Particularly young people suffer from land impoverishment because of the customary law embedded in the community that demands youth to remain silent (wait until they are given land by the head of the lineage); otherwise “they are regarded as deviants” (Gizaw & Woldetsadik, 2013, p. 103).

4.1.3 Limited livestock production. Farming households consider the various purposes for which livestock is used in the household; the need to gain cash for the purpose of acquiring basic necessities from the market, and their desire to accumulate wealth (Behnke, 2010; Kassahun, Snyman, & Smit, 2008; Halderman, 2004). Throughout its history, the Chichu community has partly relied on livestock in order to survive. Livestock has a wide variety of functions in the community from social to subsistence purposes. At the household level, livestock has been crucial to the lives of smallholder farming households; it has been helping farmers to cope with shocks, accumulate wealth, and has been serving as a store of value in the absence of formal financial institutions and other missing markets. Livestock has also been providing food, transportation, farm inputs and outputs, and fuel for cooking food (Negassa, Rashid, & Gebremedhin, 2011, p.1). For farming households, livestock has been an important asset that provides regular income and can be disposed of during hard times to provide a safety net. Nonetheless, in the Chichu community, the role livestock plays in the lives of farming households is very limited. One of the informants used the following words to explain the situation:

There are constraints that affect the role livestock could play in enhancing the livelihoods of farmers in Chichu. These include a shortage of land, a shortage of livestock feed in terms of quantity and quality, animal diseases, and poor veterinary services to minimize the problem. Because of the limited size of livestock, vaccination programs and cross-breeding practices are not common. In Chichu, the expansion of agricultural land use has resulted in a reduction of communal grazing fields, putting much stress on the farmers. Because of this, farmers cannot keep as many stocks as they wish. Livestock no longer serves as a buffer in times of need.

In the Chichu community, livestock is an integral component of *enset*-based agroforests. Crop and livestock production are complementary to one another, since the by-product of the one has been widely used as input to the other (manure as a source of fertilizer and crop residue as a source of fodder, locally called *Oki'a*). However, the role of livestock in the economic life of the Chichu community is not as important as expected. As farmers indicated, the community has less livestock today in response to the scarcity of grazing land. As a result, the important position of livestock is curtailed. During a focus group discussion, participants pointed out that:

In the past, crop residue was mainly used for livestock feed, but nowadays it has become a means for obtaining cash by selling it in local rural markets or in towns. Besides, crop residue serves as a source of energy or is used as construction material.

Keeping livestock, particularly by smallholder farmers, is now seen as a means of extending one's hand to the scarce resource of land (Tadesse, 2002). As a result, farmers are unable to move from subsistence to market-oriented livestock production. They prefer to keep a limited number of sheep because they can easily be restocked and sold at local markets in times of monetary needs. As one of the informants put it, "The Chichu community is not self-sufficient in livestock and it depends on trade with Guji."¹

4.1.4 Lack of access to financial credit. Lack of access to financial credit is one of the challenges facing smallholder farmers in the Chichu community. Smallholders need capital/ financial resources to buy inputs and invest in modern agricultural inputs for intensification of crop production. As the farmers indicated, obtaining loans from local money lenders has declined recently due to the inability of poor farming households to repay loans within the specified time frame. This constitutes a barrier to obtain loans from local money lenders, and the deteriorating situation of the previously better-off people from whom farmers take loans. Furthermore, "the unavailability of a credit supply from NGOs due to the government policy that led to NGOs fully withdrawing their credit supply activities" (Degefa, 2005, p.301) has contributed to the problem. As Douglas (2013) indicated, limited access to financial resources makes it hard for smallholders to make

¹ Neighbouring pastoral community.

investments that do not pay off immediately. Banks often find it very risky to provide credit to rural smallholder farmers because banks perceive agricultural credit as a risky venture (Rahji & Fakayode, 2009) and thus make available contracts that may be too expensive or too demanding on collateral. Apart from the situations where farmers may not have adequate collateral—even in situations where credit is available—farmers may find it too risky to borrow (Boucher, Carter, & Guirkingner, 2008). Farmers rarely obtain credit from formal credit sources because they cannot meet the minimum requirements and are perceived as ‘high-risk borrowers’ (Onumah, 2003). One farmer explained the challenges farmers face to access to credit:

Access to credit has been very limited in rural settings. Poor farmers lack sufficient assets to put up as collateral (prerequisite for borrowing from financial institutions). This makes it more difficult for farmers to obtain credit from formal credit sources. In earlier times, farmers obtain loans from local money lenders. Of late, the situation has changed. First, poor farmers are unable to repay loans they obtained from money lenders because of higher interest rates imposed on loans. Second, the conditions of many better-off households have deteriorated and this has reduced chances of securing loans. Obtaining loans from friends and relatives is also very difficult since loans to family and friends are mostly open-ended [lenders don’t know when their money will be returned].

Financial exclusion is more likely to occur when there is a lack of access to the location of the financial services, lack of credit, prohibitive fixed cost for transactions at the financial institution, legal and regulatory barriers, and low competition among financial institutions (Demirguc-Kunt & Klapper, 2012; World Bank, 2014). This study has identified the existence of these barriers to financial inclusion in the Chichu community. In early times, NGOs were involved in providing credit for the needy farmers. However, this form of credit does not exist anymore due to the government policy that gave the mandate to micro-finance institutions (Degefa, 2005). However; most of these financial institutions are not easily reachable. For farmers, obtaining loans from existing formal credit sources (banks and micro-finance institutions) is not straightforward. First, the farmers are supposed to pay the cost of transacting at the financial institutions, which is not easy for the poor. Second, poor farmers do not have assets to use as collateral to obtain loans. Third, loans are released with high interest rates. Fourth, loans have a short repayment period and poor farmers are unable to repay within the specified period and hence are unable to be risk-neutral farmers.

4.1.5 Limited non-farm income. “Today, very few people collect all their income from any one source, hold all their wealth in the form of any single asset, or use their assets in just one activity” (Barrett & Reardon, 2000, p.1). The livelihood approach recognizes the diversified nature of rural households’ assets and livelihood strategies (Ellis, 2000; Bryceson, 2002; Gezahegn, 2017). Non-farm activities have become an important component of rural livelihoods, and the literature has focused on diversification into non-farm activities as it allows more possibilities for substitution

between opportunities that are in decline and that are expanding (Ellis, 2000). In Chichu, farming is the primary source of livelihood, whereas the scope for engaging in non-farm activities is generally very restricted. Non-farm activities are often perceived as being unreliable and only having a survival value. Although generally limited in amount, non-farm economic activities play a role in providing additional income to farmers, particularly when their cash stocks decline. Farmers in Chichu attempt to obtain non-farm income. It is being done as steps towards making the best out of the circumstances in which farmers find themselves. However, farmers are unable to do what they wish to do, and one of the informants gave the reasons for it:

Many farmers want to make income from non-farm activities. But, they are unable to make it as they wish. First, many of these farmers have no knowledge and skills that fit the demands of profitable non-farm businesses they identified. Second, they have no or have limited access to financial credit to start the business they identified. In this context, many rural households rely on activities like petty trade, casual work, wage labor, selling food, *tella* [home-made beer], *araqi* [home-made alcohol], grass, timber, firewood, and others. These activities are associated with real desperation and have only survival value. Particularly, distilling *araqi* and brewing *tella* for sale constitute the main income generating activities for female-headed households in Chichu.

In Chichu, where farm land is scarce, farmers ought to rely on non-farm activities, but there is limited access to it. Involvement in non-farm activities requires a combination of capital which the farmers are mostly lacking. Obviously, finance is a major obstacle (Dercon & Krishnan, 1996). As one expert put it; “Lack of awareness is a barrier to livelihood diversification.” Besides, as focus group discussants pointed out, “Most non-farm activities are seasonal, and the income obtained from these activities is unreliable.” The availability of agricultural wage labor is very limited due to the relatively similar economic status and low productivity of farmers. One farmer indicated that, “the demand for wage laborers has been declining due to labor-sharing customs, locally called *gollo* (*wonfel*).” As observed, large numbers of households rely on selling firewood, trees, and charcoal. However, the prices of these supplies have gone down when many members of the Chichu community are involved in selling firewood, trees, and charcoal and, hence, farmers are unable to make an attractive income from it. Furthermore, charcoal burning is not easy, as tree resources dwindle over time. Handcrafting, weaving, traditional blacksmithing, basket, plate and rope making are among the subsidiary livelihood activities reported in the Chichu community (see Shumete, 2009). Even these subsidiary livelihood activities are not capital-free ventures. As scarce resources continue to stretch to the limit, more and more farmers involve in daily labor in towns, where competition is a norm.

4.1.6 Livelihood displacement. In Chichu, *enset* is a staple food (Abebe, 2008). As a growing area for *enset*, the community had been relatively self-sufficient. In the past couple of decades, however, there has been a transition in farming strategy from subsistence-oriented to market-oriented patterns of production. The Chichu

community is not new to the cash economy. Coffee as a cash crop has been with them for a long period of time. Although the influence of the cash economy has been increasing from Menelik's time to Emperor Haile Sellassie's, it was in the communist era of the *Derg* that extra emphasis began to be given towards cash cropping (Tadesse, 2002). This was done based on the ideal that the expansion of exportable products and competition in the global market is necessary for rapid economic development (Abebe, 2007). The Coffee Improvement Project (CIP) that was initiated during the *Derg* government sought to strategically replace *enset*. The plan turned a blind eye upon *enset* (Tadesse, 2002). Subsequently, the *enset* production was marginalized with a considerable impact on farmers' livelihoods. The seasonal pattern of coffee prices has been hurting poor farming households. In this regard, the experience of the farmers has been quite extensive:

There is one distinctive feature with regard to our crop production. Farmers integrate agro-forestry as part of their livelihood activity. Historically, *enset* has been in underproduction for a long period of time in the area. However, farmers who formerly produced this multi-purpose crop were made to concentrate on the production of coffee and *chat* [a mild stimulant leaf]. Particularly, the farmers switched to *chat* and sugarcane crops for two reasons. First, soil fertility was decreasing and second, the farmers were not allowed to sell their main crop, coffee, as they wished. Besides, the fluctuation of coffee prices has been a challenge. These situations have eroded the self-reliant subsistence economy and adversely affected the livelihoods of farmers.

In the Chichu community, perennial crops are grown in order to enhance farmers' income. As the historical account of Hamer (1987) indicated, in the area, income from commercial crops had simply supplemented the limited need for cash. Later on, farmers were made to concentrate on the production of coffee and *chat*. Rural livelihoods were trapped within the scaled-up production of coffee and *chat*, at the expense of the scaled-down production of *enset* (Abebe, 2007). But, as one farmer indicated, "Coffee growers have been exposed to price fluctuations and impacts of unpredictable shocks." The effect of these price fluctuations was manifested in increasing poverty among coffee growers, who previously were able to reap good benefits from their coffee sales (Gebreselassie & Ludit, 2008). Participants in focus group discussions pointed out that, "Those farmers who had used most of their land holdings for coffee production and who had a poor saving culture faced a serious problem when the income from cash crops ceased to be reliable." As Abebe (2007) indicated, a global liberalized coffee market in which the market fixes both demand and price greatly complicates the lives of small-scale coffee-producers. The impacts of dramatic price shocks are always considerable, leading to distress sales of livelihood assets.

4.1.8 Marginalization of women. As a patriarchal society that keeps women in a subordinate position (Elizabeth, 2008), Ethiopia is characterized by disparities in the economic, social, cultural, and political positions and conditions of women. While rural people suffer from marginalization, rural women suffer from double

marginalization—being in a rural area and being female. Given the patrilineal nature of the Chichu community, men are the sole authority figure of the society, and the norms governing the relations between men and women are respect and domination. Traditionally, women are excluded from inheriting family land. This is the historical extension of customary rules linked to the vital priority of protecting the life support structure of tribal lands (Tadesse, 2002). According to the Gedeo traditional law, the husband and his tribe are the owners of the land. Gedeo women are only little more than daily laborers, relying on their skills and knowledge in matters regarding the house as well as *enset* harvesting and processing (Tadesse, 2002). Women are excluded from economic, social, and political participation, and have limited power in allocating household labor and in making other important household decisions. One of the informants explained the challenges women are facing:

Women have less decision making power within the home, but at the same time, they bear a disproportionate burden of tasks and responsibilities. Women play a central role as farmers, livestock keepers, natural resource managers, income generators, and service providers. Nonetheless, these are clear intra-household inequalities in access to resources. Tasks and rights are influenced by gendered norms, values, and relations. The fundamental role of women in household livelihoods is still undervalued. There is still a reluctance to address the gender dimensions of peoples' lives in the Chichu community under the guise of interfering with culture.

Participants in the focus group discussions highlighted that, “The disadvantaged positions of women have had adverse implications for sustaining livelihoods at household level.” First, women are excluded from inheriting family land. This is directly linked to the priority of protecting tribal lands. Since daughters are married off outside their own tribe, loss of tribal land through inheritance is avoided, as the tribe follows male lines (Tadesse, 2002). The tribe of her husband would then acquire the land, not the wife. The husband and his tribe would become the owners of the land. Second, upon divorce, women have to leave the marital home and they are deprived of their rights to claim any form of assets and properties, which leads them to homelessness and destitution. Given a high rate of divorce in the area, many women are pushed into poverty. Third, unlike their male counterparts, women have limited opportunity to sharecrop land in order to overcome the problem of land scarcity, as they are greatly constrained by a shortage of labor. Fourth, the seasons of food shortage are more challenging for women than for men due to the reason that feeding household members is traditionally the responsibility of women. Fifth, women are not only deprived of taking part in decision making at home but also in various community affairs. As one woman indicated, “Qualities that are highly valued in women are shyness and respectfulness and girls who do not demonstrate these qualities are regarded as socially undesirable, and hence they do not want to challenge this old customary practice.” Men take this as well established culture in the community; something that should be preserved.

5.0 Conclusion

Livelihoods are challenged when climatic change hit vulnerable farmers hard. As this study has shown, the climatic change affects the livelihoods of farmers in the Chichu community, because they depend on rain-fed agriculture for survival. A lack of necessary assets is the other predicament that works against rural livelihoods. Near landlessness has been the main factor that challenges rural livelihoods at the household level. Farmers in the Chichu community have complained about lacking access to credit as being another challenging factor for their livelihoods. There is limited livestock production, hindering its potential contribution to farmers' livelihoods. Farmers who attempt to generate income from non-farm ventures face many challenges. These challenges/constraints are related to entry barriers, including the lack of start-up capital, limited knowledge and skills, and lack of markets for their products. Despite the rhetoric of 'free' and 'fair' trade, small coffee farmers are challenged by unstable and unfair coffee prices, which transform viable livelihoods into impoverishment. Rural areas are considered as domains of agriculture (Degefa, 2005), and because of this discourse, the development of a non-farm sub-sector has received little strategic attention. Women face double marginalization, for being in a rural area, and for being female, thereby reinforcing double marginalized livelihoods. All these conditions combine to create a spiral of vulnerability facing farmers in the Chichu community.

6.0 Recommendations

Challenges to rural livelihoods are both environmental and structural. These challenges should not be treated as 'either/or' groups into which they can be neatly divided but rather as 'more or less' dimensions along which the challenges to rural livelihoods can be properly understood. Thus, a holistic approach is necessary to mitigate the constraints that threatened farmers' livelihoods. The author recommends the following as possible way-outs:

- It is important to give farmers access to financial credit and promote their human capital. Having access to sufficient financial capital and knowledge and working skills in non-farm activities can help greatly in diversifying household earnings beyond growing subsistence crops. Rural policies should encourage livelihood diversification. It is very important in the face of a rapidly growing population, and the resultant decline in per capita land resources in the Chichu community.
- It is necessary to teach farming households about the effective use of income and saving as a means for upward mobility. Farmers are knowledgeable about the environment they live in. It is necessary to support farming households' efforts to conserve the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend.
- Empowering women and balancing the structure of gender in social, political, and economic participation should be among the major concerns towards improving the livelihood of rural households in the Chichu community. Rural households should have access to family planning to influence fertility regulation.

- Farmers should look for alternative means of survival (non-farm activities) elsewhere (through migration) instead of working on land that is too small to sustain a households' livelihood. Poor farming households should be able to develop access to diversification opportunities via social means or established social networks.

All these measures are of much help in sustaining rural livelihoods (making rural livelihood stable) and, hence, should be recognized as priority areas for policy. Further research needs to examine a nexus between migration and rural livelihoods in relation to political, social, economic, and historical realities relevant to Gedeo.

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