



VULNERABILITY OF FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS TO LIVELIHOOD INSECURITY IN RURAL ETHIOPIA

A CASE STUDY OF ADDA DISTRICT

Martha Oumer

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**Department of Agricultural Development Theory and
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Supervisors:

**PD Dr. Gertrud Buchenrieder
Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Franz Heidhues**

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Executive Summary

By all estimates and available definitions, Ethiopia's poverty is strikingly **widespread** and pervasive. It is more a rural phenomenon in Ethiopia with **almost 90%** of poor people found in rural areas. Furthermore, this extreme **poverty** is aggravated by the high level of vulnerability and the large variance in levels of essential food consumption. Women and men experience poverty **differently**, and different aspects of poverty like deprivation, powerlessness, vulnerability, seasonally etc. have gender dimensions. This study investigates the relationship between vulnerability to livelihood insecurity and gender in Ethiopia and identifies the major determinants of household's vulnerability and their coping strategies.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied and a variety of research techniques, ranging from participant observations and key informant interviews to semi-structured and structured interviews are combined to better understand the concept of vulnerability and its covariates factors. Seventy households, half of them female-headed, have been selected from Adda district which is in Oromiya regional state of Ethiopia. Descriptive analysis, statistical tests, as well as logistic regression have been used to analyze the data.

Results indicate that though there are no significant differences between female headed households and male headed households in terms of access to resources (notably: land, labor and livestock), the majority of the female headed households were food insecure. It is therefore concluded that female and male-headed households have equal access to productive resources in Adda district. Findings from the logistic regression show that the gender of the household's head and the household size are two major determinants of household's vulnerability. A household headed by a woman has a higher chance of being vulnerable. Likewise, the larger the household size, the higher the probability that this household is vulnerable. The fact that vulnerability encompasses many factors explains why female headed households are more vulnerable even if they have equal access to resource. Additionally management of the resource is also a determining factor.

Further results suggest the surveyed households make use of diverse strategies to cope with different risks and reduce the effects on hardship. The most important coping strategies are found to be 'Reduction of food consumption', 'Consumption of savings', 'Borrowing from relatives or friends', 'Withdrawal of children from school', and 'Migration in quest of employment'. The effectiveness of these strategies is however, questionable, as they threaten the long-term stability of the households.

To reduce the vulnerability of female headed households, it is recommended that interventions should aim at improving or initiating alternative income-generating activities or strengthening coping strategies that are economically and environmentally sustainable. Potential areas are handy craft and small ruminant production. Furthermore, an extensive extension programme is necessary to strengthen the impact of these interventions and provide female headed households with necessary managerial and technical skills.