



# Coping Strategies in Nyangatom, Ethiopia

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## Introduction

Infrastructure development and droughts are resulting in environmental change and serious challenges for Nyangatom communities, who reported disruption of traditional farming practices and are no longer able to guarantee enough food for the household consumption. As such, coping and adaptation are necessary to reduce the negative impacts on food supply.

The communities we spoke with have all been making adjustments in response to the stresses on their livelihood, but coping differs from a community to community based on the existing resource and support systems. This briefing note answers the research question: *“How are communities in Nyangatom, across a range of livelihood strategies, coping with change in their environment?”* The project was conducted in Nyangatom woreda, in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region, Ethiopia. Pastoralism is a main livelihood and cultural identity, but different communities practice a range of livelihood strategies including pastoralism and agriculture.

## Methodology

In order to understand how environmental change has affected availability of natural resources, and what these changes have meant for livelihoods, we carried out mapping workshops and focus group discussions in three communities in July 2018. Two groups, of ten men and ten women, were selected from Community A (historically more reliant on pastoralism with larger cattle herds), B (historically more reliant on agriculture), and C (resettled). We met for two three-hour sessions with each of the six groups, where the participants mapped current availability in natural resources (primarily related to food), determined the direction of change in availability of these resources, and discussed coping strategies enacted to deal with such change. Within the latter conversation, the groups outlined coping strategies they were already enacting and that they would enact if the situation worsened.

## Data Analysis

Each discussion was recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were mined to identify sources of livelihoods and food before and after the Gibe III hydro-



Prompts used during focus group discussions.

power dam become operational. Further text-mining was used to construct a descriptive summary of each discussion in a large table – in this case, the presence or absence of a particular livelihood strategy or food source.

## Results and Discussion

Communities reported five types of arable production: River cultivation, flood retreat; Lake cultivation, flood retreat before 2015, rainfed after 2015; Valley cultivation, rainfed; Pond cultivation, rainfed; Irrigated cultivation, river. All communities reported river cultivation (based on flood-retreat from the flooding of the Omo River) being the primary method of cultivation before 2015 and utilizing a mix of cultivation methods that differed slightly across the three communities and across the genders within communities. Generally, lake cultivation was the next most important method, and then irrigation. Only Community A did not report using irrigation pre-2015. In 2018, all communities reported that river cultivation was no longer feasible and that agriculture is now predominantly rain-fed, with some irrigated cultivation from the Omo but again, only in Communities B and C.

The Omo-Turkana Research Network is an international consortium of social and environmental scientists researching the impacts of hydrological, agricultural, and social change on the people and ecosystems surrounding the Lower Omo Valley and Lake Turkana. OTuRN affiliates collaborated on the research project SIDERA: Shifting In/equality Dynamics in Ethiopia: from Research to Application.

**Table 1. Implementation of coping strategies across the three communities.** Color codes reported below.

	Community A		Community B		Community C	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Change cultivation site						
Sell livestock						
Sell milk, meat						
Bleed animals						
Fishing				* *	/ / /	/ / /
Firewood sale						
Hunting						
Trapping		* *	* *	* *	/ / /	/ / /
Wild Fruits		* *	* *	* *	/ / /	/ / /
Honey		* *	* *	* *	/ / /	/ / /
Meal Reduction						
Jobs in Omo-V						
Jobs in nearby town						
Friends and Relatives						
Food Aid						
PSNP						
Migrate						
<b>Sub-total - current</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Total across genders - current</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>13</b>		<b>14</b>	

	No
	Not yet
* *	Yes, were already doing
/ / /	Yes, were already doing but availability decreasing
	Yes

**Finding #1: Across all communities, households are enacting multiple coping strategies to ensure food security.** When discussing coping strategies (CS) already being enacted, 17 were reported across the three communities, with a minimum of 8, and those including both food (i.e. reducing meals) and non-food (firewood sales) CS.

**Finding #2: There is some differentiation by gender.** The total number reported in each community (i.e. across both genders) was similar, but the types of CS differed more by gender in Community A, whereas they were relatively similar in Communities B and C. For example, in Community A, trapping, collecting wild fruits, and collecting honey were only reported by the women whilst hunting was reported only by the men. In Community C, women also reported hunting small animals like rabbits. This may be because there are more traditional gender roles in Community A, compared to more widowed female heads of house-

holds in Community C, who have taken on the roles of men.

**Finding #3: The resettled community is employing most CS.** Generally, in Community C, more coping strategies are being enacted by both men and women. We hypothesize that households in C have already been through a loss in assets and erosion of social networks, hence being resettled, and so households must implement a wider range of CS to achieve sufficiency. Community B can be seen to be more similar to C, but with some CS not yet implemented, but planned (firewood sales, jobs offsite, food aid). We hypothesize that distance from the nearest town may also be a factor, with C closest, then B, and A furthest.

**Finding #4: Livestock appear to be a buffer.** Community A have larger herd sizes than B and C, and are already reporting selling livestock, including cattle, whereas in B and C, selling livestock was limited to

shoats and chickens respectively. We hypothesize this is because their larger herd sizes create more flexibility with their assets in Community A, and as such do not need to implement such a wide range of CS.

**Finding #5: CS are also being affected by environmental change.** The majority of respondents reported that they had always used fishing, trapping, wild fruits, and honey seasonally and during times of need (indicated by the pale green with stars), but Community C reported all of these were harder to find now (indicated by the light orange with slashes).

**Finding #6: Social networks are important.** The moral economy of the Nyangatom was demonstrated to be a coping strategy itself, with access to land

and resources elsewhere through distributed family networks providing options to migrate for cultivation or grazing. Additionally, focus group participants regularly mentioned sharing of resources within a community - i.e. PSNP and food aid benefits being shared with those who were not receiving goods/cash directly.

## For Further Details

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