

# Social impact of dam building projects in Ethiopia

*Climate change also has its impact on West and East Africa, where an increase in extreme weather conditions, weather variability and an extension of the dry seasons over the last decade can be observed. One of the adaptation strategies of the local population is building water reservoirs, which can provide water independently of rain availability. ZEF research in Ethiopia investigates the social and economic implications of, among others, dam building projects, for the local population.*



Building terraces is a climate change adaptation strategy of local population in Ethiopia.

**R**e-thinking Water Storage for Climate Change Adaptation in Sub-Saharan Africa is a project in which ZEF has been involved since April 2008. The overall project goal is to improve the situation of the rural populations in Ethiopia and Ghana affected by climate change. This is to be achieved by extending water storage options, improving investment strategies and enhancing institutional support. The ZEF project team has done research so far in the basin of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia.

Two months of fieldwork were conducted in the Abay river basin, investigating the social, economic and political impacts of water storage projects involving large and small dams, terraces, wells and ponds. The studies dealt with topics such as distributional conflicts over land and water in dam projects, gender relations, well construction and micro-irrigation in the regional states of Amhara and Oromiya.

Social anthropological research was conducted in the water catchment area of the river Koga, where a dam was built in 2001. Channels for irrigation will be completed in the next few years. One of the studies examined how the livelihoods of the around 400 farmers in the Koga catchment area, who were resettled in the context of the dam construction project, have changed. They had to be

resettled because their houses and fields were located in the area of the reservoir. A second field research study in Koga collected data about how organizations and institutions for managing irrigation systems had been set up.

The Koga dam project serves as a pilot project in the country. With its planned 7,000 ha of irrigation area and many potential users, it is going to be the country's first self-administered dam project. The project will be re-financed via water usage charges, which implies that the farmers will earn money to finance technical staff and the investment costs for the dam and canals retroactively. This undertaking, however, seems to be futile before it has even started.

At the moment a team of experts from the Ethiopian government is supervising the construction of the irrigation canals, the process of land redistribution as well as compensation payments to the 400 resettled households moving to the nearby town of Merawi. However, this is not sufficient, since the farmers have no experience with canal construction and irrigation agriculture.

Because of the delay in land distribution processes and the construction of irrigation canals, many of the resettled households could not cultivate their land for several years and had to sell their cattle, since no grassland was available. Moreover, they received insufficient compensation payments to secure their livelihoods in the meantime.

The settlers' social support networks changed while they were living in town. In particular, relations with solidary townspeople and neighbors from the old villages, rural Orthodox Church communities and religious associations are of crucial importance. Social integration in the city of Merawi is particularly successful in those cases where newcomers try to solve their problems together with city dwellers, such as when organizing security in residential areas.



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