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The politics of distributing social transfers in Afar, Ethiopia:
The intertwining of party, state and clan in the periphery

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Abstract

This paper examines the politics of distributing social transfers in Ethiopia's Afar region. Two detailed case studies are used to examine the role of state infrastructural power and party politics in shaping distribution of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The paper emphasises the importance of situating the PSNP within the context of the expansion of a fused party-state alongside a process of economic 'modernisation' in Afar over recent decades. This process has contributed to food insecurity, which the PSNP is intended to address, as well as the limited nature of state infrastructural power, with the state reliant to a significant degree on clan structures for local governance. The result is that the PSNP – designed and financed by the federal government and donors – ultimately depends to a significant degree on the authority and territorial reach of the clan for implementation. While past evaluations have highlighted poor implementation, and particularly targeting, in Afar, the study finds that perceived legitimacy of the distribution of the PSNP varies considerably. Though past studies have pointed to the involvement of clan leaders as one of the main causes of poor implementation, this paper suggests that the more fundamental problem is, rather, the lack of infrastructural power of the state that necessitates the involvement of clan leaders.

1. Introduction

This paper is part of a study examining how long-term patterns of state formation, and more recent patterns of political competition and party legitimacy, shape distribution of social transfers. In doing so, the study uses social transfers as a lens through which to examine local state and state–society relations. The case studies examine the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP).[1] The PSNP was established in 2005 to provide food and cash transfers to chronically food insecure households, targeted both geographically and at the household level through 'community-based' targeting. Most households are required to engage in public works in exchange for support, with unconditional 'direct support' reserved for labour-constrained households. In this paper, the main focus is on the distributive elements of the programme, including the initial targeting process, the appeals process and re-certification.

To examine the politics of implementation, the analytical framework for the project builds on Mann's (1984: 113) concept of state infrastructural power, namely: 'the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm'. A focus on infrastructural power highlights not just the resources and competence of state officials, but also the relational nature of state implementation capacity. Decisions made by frontline officials regarding policy implementation are shaped by the relations between different state agencies (Soifer 2015) and the degree of control by higher-level officials over subordinates, as well as the relationship between state officials and societal actors (Migdal 2001). The starting hypothesis is that effective targeting requires particular forms of state infrastructural power, namely: autonomy from societal interests – in order to prevent powerful elites from co-opting the targeting process and ensuring resources are diverted to their favoured clientele; and a high degree of territorial reach – in the form of the state capacity required to generate information about individuals and assess who qualifies for support and who does not. As a result, variation in state infrastructural power and state–society relations within a country should result in variation in the distribution of transfers also. The project also examines the links between state infrastructural power and party politics. The common assumption is that the involvement of political parties in resource distribution is problematic and likely to lead to the capture of programmes and their use to reward supporters, rather than those most deserving of support. This study examines these assumed relationships, and the degree to which party politics shapes distribution of social transfers.

Existing evidence from impact evaluations provides some initial support for the hypothesis that low state infrastructural power presents a challenge to targeting in

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[1] The primary focus of this paper is to lay out the empirical findings of the Afar case study, making provisional links to the theoretical framework guiding the project. The main reflection on the significance of the Ethiopian cases for the framework will follow in a forthcoming comparative paper.

Ethiopia. Regular evaluations find that while the PSNP is relatively well targeted overall, Afar is among the worst performers, with the Ministry of Agriculture itself admitting that the programme is essentially untargeted in the lowland regions of Afar and Somali (MoA 2014, Hoddinott et al. 2015). Companion papers examining the distribution of the PSNP in Tigray and Oromiya highlight the centrality to PSNP implementation of party–state infrastructural power through the 'development teams' and 'one-to-five networks' – structures of community mobilisation for participation in political and developmental projects – that reach down to the household level (Lavers, Abrha and Bailey forthcoming, Lavers, Haile and Mesfin forthcoming).

The state faces particular challenges in Afar in relation to pastoral livelihoods and the mobility of the local population, as well as the vast territory and difficult terrain. Yet as a result of the particular and recent nature of state-building in the region, the state is far less well equipped to meet these challenges than in other regions studied. These limitations relate both to the shortage of resources, financial and human, but also the territorial reach of state structures, the absence of intra-state control mechanisms and the limited legitimacy of the state. As a result, the state has devolved significant responsibilities to clan structures, which have greater territorial reach and local legitimacy than the state itself. In terms of the PSNP, devolving responsibility for targeting and appeals to clan leaders compensates for the limitations of the state and enables the programme to operate. However, this comes at the cost of a lack of monitoring and oversight, contributing to considerable variation in programme outcomes, dependent on the specific interactions between party, state and clan leaders. While in one site, strong legitimacy of clan leaders has underpinned a distribution of the PSNP, which is widely seen as legitimate, in the other, the lack of accountability of individuals who are at once state, party and clan leaders, has led to a subversion of the programme's intended distribution. Though past studies have pointed to the involvement of clan leaders as one of the main causes of poor implementation, this paper suggests that the more fundamental problem is, rather, the lack of infrastructural power of the state that necessitates the involvement of clan leaders.

Fieldwork in Afar comprised key informant interviews with respondents from the federal and regional governments, and development partners, as well as two detailed case studies. The methodology involved application of the same research protocols across both case study sites during fieldwork between March and July 2018. Data generation in each site involved 15-20 key informant interviews with government officials from the wereda and kebele,[2] social elites in the community and individual residents, as well as six focus group discussions regarding people's experiences with the programme. Two male researchers with local language abilities and experience doing research in Afar conducted the village-level fieldwork.[3] Additional interviews

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[2] Ethiopian administrative structures are organised as follows: federal government; regional states; zones; wereda (districts); kebele (sub-districts).
[3] Unlike the other regions, where the research teams comprised one male and one female researcher, it was not possible to identify a female Afar researcher to carry out the study.

were conducted with federal and regional government officials and donor representatives (see annex for list of respondents).

An important limitation of the study is the influence of social desirability bias. Party-state structures constitute an important presence in Afar communities, albeit less than in the highland regions. In a context in which there is no opposition to the party-state, it can be particularly challenging to get respondents to talk openly about their experiences and opinions. This is even more challenging when gender and class relations are overlaid on political sensitivities. Women in conservative rural communities have historically played a limited role in social and political life, and social norms mean that many women find it difficult to speak out. Moreover, highly educated, male field researchers entering a community are inevitably perceived as outsiders from a very difficult background and social class to rural residents. Whatever reassurances are provided, the expectation – based on experience – is that these outsiders likely have ties to party-state or donor agencies. There is therefore a likely tendency for respondents to report what they believe to be the official position, rather than what actually happens in practice. To a degree, limitations can be addressed by attempting to gain respondents' trust, spending an extended period in the community or through triangulation. The familiarity of the field researchers with the local language, Afar-Af, is of particular importance in this respect. However, these strategies are imperfect and, particularly, in a time-bound and resource-constrained study such as this, some limitations are inevitable.

Following this introduction, Section 2 situates the Afar region within long-run processes of state formation and more recent national political dynamics. Section 3 then provides a brief overview of the wereda and kebele that were the focus of fieldwork. Section 4 analyses the main dimensions of state infrastructural power in the case study communities, before Section 5 builds on this analysis to trace the implementation of the PSNP itself. Section 6 concludes.

2. State-building, economic 'modernisation' and marginalisation in Afar

Located in the north of the Rift Valley, the majority of Afar comprises lowland areas, with extremely hot temperatures throughout the year and limited rainfall. Consequently, the Awash River constitutes the vital source of water for the region. In the past, the dominant livelihood was transhumant pastoralism, a flexible and highly adaptable livelihood strategy based on mixed herds of camels, cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys migrating between dry and wet season grazing land. Though livestock remain culturally and economically important, many now pursue mixed livelihood strategies involving crop cultivation and off-farm activities as a result of the pressure on pastoral livelihoods. Like most pastoralist societies, Afar society is relatively non-hierarchical, organised within patrilineal clan and lineage groupings. However, there is variation between the population of the north (Asahimarra), which was previously part of the more centralised Awsa Sultanate, and those in the south of the region (Adohimarra), which was historically more fragmented.

Afar territory has long been peripheral to Ethiopian economic and political power, while the Afar have been resistant to external intrusion (Yasin 2008). Agreements between Emperor Menelik II and European colonialists at the end of the 19th century left the majority of Afar territory within Ethiopian borders. Afar territory was divided up and administered from provincial capitals in the highlands (Figure 1). However, Ethiopian rulers saw little economic importance in Afar and made limited attempts to consolidate their authority until the Second World War (Yasin 2008). Indeed, an observer in the 1930s noted that 'Although the Danakil country [Afar] belongs to Abyssinia [Ethiopia], the agents of the Government are unable to penetrate its deserts, except at the fringes' (Nesbitt 1935: 71, cited in Markakis 2011: 136).

The Ethiopian state's attempts to promote economic 'modernisation' through agricultural development in the Imperial era and under the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) have helped consolidate the territorial control implied by Menelik II's sovereign claims (Harbeson 1978), but have also been 'an unmitigated disaster for Afar pastoralism' as a result of the loss of grazing land and access to the river (Markakis 2011: 139, Behnke and Kerven 2013). This pressure was reinforced by the designation of 35 percent of Afar as national parks and wildlife reserves, which further excluded pastoralists from grazing rights (Markakis 2011: 140). Access to grazing land is also under extreme pressure from *prosopsis juliflora* – a plant that was actively introduced by the Ethiopian government in the late 1980s (Müller-Mahn, Rettberg and Getachew 2010, Rettberg 2010), but which has rapidly expanded, threatening indigenous plants used for forage and leading to the loss of grazing land; up to one-third of land in southern Afar is affected (Ilukor et al. 2016, Rogers, Nunan and Fentie 2017). Grazing for pastoralists is also threatened by expansion of smallholder agriculture down the escarpment from the densely populated highlands and expansion of the Somali Issa clan from the south over a period of a century or more (Markakis 2011). Afar-Issa estimates tensions have led to frequent deadly confrontations between the two groups.[4]

Although the Derg regime (1974-91) expanded the reach of the state in Afar to a limited degree, including through some basic service delivery, its project of encadrement – or the incorporation of people into structures of control (Clapham 2002) – in pastoralist areas such as Afar lagged far behind that in the highland regions. Since coming to power, the EPRDF has sought to build state structures in Afar, as in the rest of the country. Ethnic federalism led to the creation of a unified Afar region (Figure 2), bringing together the northern, more politically centralised Asahimarra, who were previously part of Tigray Province, with the southern, more historically fragmented Adohimarra. Furthermore, federalism necessitated the promotion of ethnic Afar staff to take the reins of regional and sub-regional state structures. For Afar, in particular, this has been a major challenge, given the low levels of education. While this shortfall of human capacity is gradually being addressed, the result has been the rapid promotion of young, inexperienced Afar with

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[4] Including following the recent announcement by the Somali government of the cancelling of a previous deal over the border area (Gezahegn 2019).

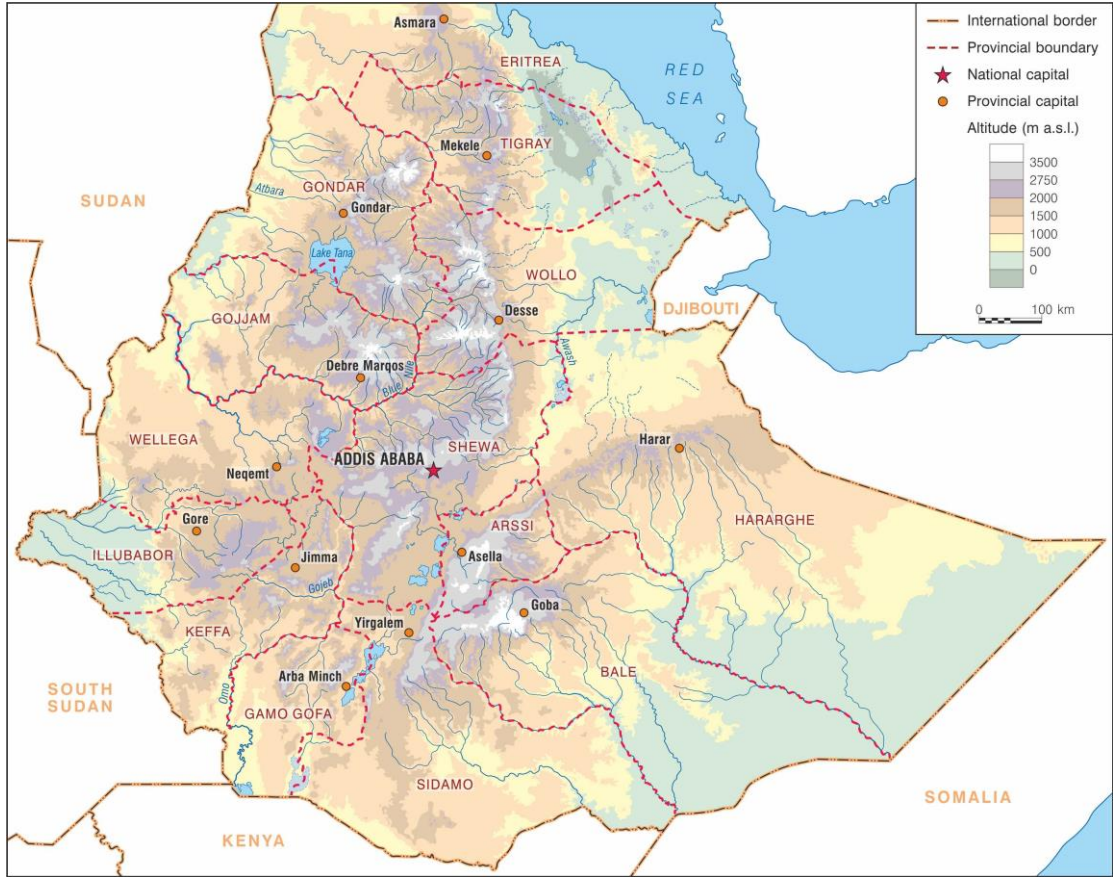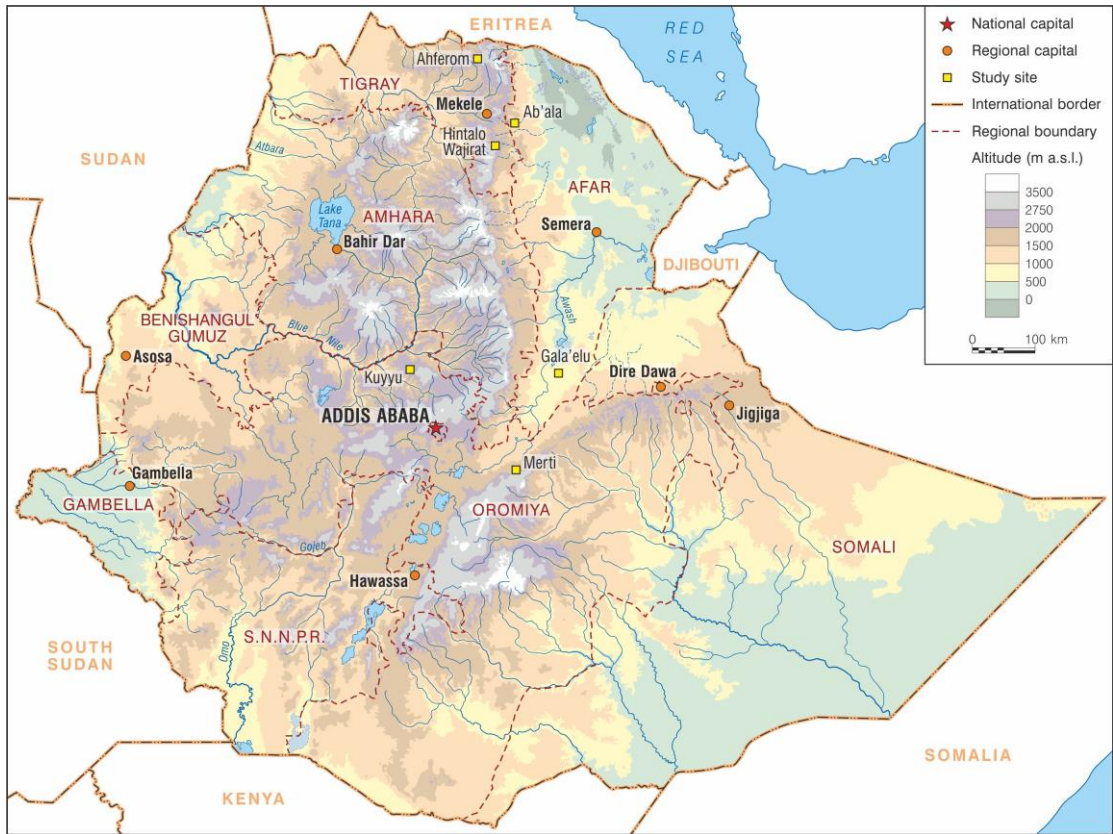## Figure 1: Late Imperial Ethiopian provinces

Figure 2: Ethiopia under the EPRDF with federal boundaries

basic education to relatively senior positions, frequently with highland Ethiopians retained in senior 'advisory' roles. At lower levels, the Afar state has expanded far beyond anything previously, with the establishment of administrative offices in every *kebele* centre, and the construction of schools and basic health facilities. Yet these state-building efforts have confronted more significant obstacles and have started from a more limited starting point than most other regions.

Afar has also been marginalised within the ruling party. The EPRDF was a coalition of four ethnic parties representing Amhara, Oromiya, SNNP and Tigray, while the parties ruling the remaining regions, including Afar, had mere 'affiliate' status.[5] In the context of EPRDF dominance at national level, this party structure effectively established 'a two-tier system of federalism' (Young 1999: 344), reducing Afar and other emerging regions to second-class status. For the EPRDF, a central concern has been to find a regional partner able and willing to maintain order within the region, in order to protect key national political economic priorities – notably the national lifeline that is the Addis-Djibouti road – and to acquiesce to federal development projects. Vitally, these objectives require the maintenance of stability in key areas such as the road, but not necessarily the expansion of 'the capacity of the state actually to penetrate civil society' (Mann 1984: 113) throughout the region. The result is that political priorities for the region focus on stability, rather than the extension of state infrastructural power that might underpin more effective service delivery.

In Afar, the EPRDF turned to a few trusted Afar individuals from the north of the region, which was previously part of Tigray province, and who joined the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) during the civil war (Yasin 2008, Markakis 2011). From the perspective of the regions, meanwhile, federalism entailed a huge inflow of resources and valuable patronage opportunities in the form of state employment. Competition over these regional resources between elite factions quickly became the main focus of regional politics, with EPRDF-formed affiliate parties mere 'shells inside which the lowlanders carried on with their clan and ethnic feuds' (Markakis 2011: 287). As a result, the federal government and their regional allies are not seen favourably by a significant proportion of the Afar population. The Ethiopian state under the EPRDF is considered to be a significant cause of the problems affecting the Afar, whether by turning a blind eye to Issa encroachment or by promoting development projects that have led to economic marginalisation (Rettberg 2010). Meanwhile, regional leaders are seen by many, particularly in urban areas, as subservient to the TPLF, acquiescing to federal directions and pursuing self-enrichment, all to the detriment of the Afar people. One indication of popular perceptions of the EPRDF in Afar is that the invasive weed *prosopsis* that has been so catastrophic for local livelihoods is known locally as *woyane*, a common nickname

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[5] In late 2019, all EPRDF members and affiliate parties, with the exception of the TPLF, were merged to form the Prosperity Party. In principle, this will give Afar a greater voice in the national government, though how this arrangement will work in practice remains to be seen.

for the TPLF, in memory of the 1943 *woyane* rebellion in Tigray against Haile Selassie (Rettberg 2010).

The expansion of the state in recent decades has taken place at a time of EPRDF dominance nationally and ANDP dominance regionally, with the result that state and party expansion are intertwined. Moreover, the party-state has built on and worked through existing clan structures, transforming both state and clan in the process. The clan (*kedo*) is widely considered to be the strongest social bond among the Afar, with all important decisions made collectively by clan leaders (Kassa 1997). Clans are further sub-divided into lineages (*mela*) and *dhalla* (extended families living in one compound), each with their own leader (Markakis 2011). During the Imperial era, clan leaders routinely acted as intermediaries between the state and the people (Harbeson 1978). This relationship has continued, with a key objective of clan leaders being to strengthen the position of the clan through building relations with the state (Kassa 1997).

In Afar, like other parts of Ethiopia, strong norms regarding the appropriate role for men and women in economic, social and political life remain influential. Nonetheless, these are being challenged as a result of state attempts to change customary practices such as early marriage, and as a result of economic changes within the communities. In general, men's roles are considered to entail taking livestock to pasture, crop cultivation and engaging in off-farm labour. In contrast, women are expected to play the main role in the household, caring for children and other family, preparing and serving food, washing and cleaning, as well as weeding, and milking animals. Increasingly, women are also engaging in economic activities outside the household, harvesting onions on agricultural investments, working in coffee houses and engaging in small trading activities and generating income. Yet, the norm is that men still play the main role in managing household finances, with women only administering a small amount of money given by their husbands to buy household items.

The PSNP within the Afar political economy

Successive Ethiopian governments have characterised Afar and the pastoralist livelihoods that are common in the lowlands as backward, unsustainable and in need of 'modernisation'. However, intertwined processes of state building and economic modernisation over the past 70 years have resulted in the loss of land and water resources for local populations, contributing to a significant degree to food insecurity. Nonetheless, successive Ethiopian governments have ignored these historical processes to frame pastoralism as inherently unsustainable, necessitating modernisation through the expansion of settled agriculture (Rettberg 2010). The first settlement schemes in Afar were launched under the Imperial government in the 1970s (Harbeson 1978) and were then expanded by the Derg (Kassa 1997, Markakis 2011). Despite the limited success of past initiatives, the EPRDF continues to prioritise villagisation (MoFA 2008). Viewed from this perspective, the PSNP in Afar constitutes a means of channelling support from international donors and the federal

government to enable the short-term reproduction of food insecure households, while the ongoing villagisation programme aims to transform livelihoods and bring them in line with the settled cultivation that is common in the highlands.

Emergency assistance has been regularly provided to Afar for several decades, while the PSNP began operation in Afar in 2006 and is now operating in every wereda in the region. As Markakis notes, the result is that pastoralism is increasingly unable to meet the livelihood requirements of the Afar population:

> 'Their economy is no longer self-sufficient even at subsistence level. Inputs of food aid that began during the famine of the 1970s have grown steadily and are now essential to meet the basic needs of the population' (Markakis 2011: 51, see also Rettberg 2010).

The decline of pastoralism in Afar and the vital importance of external support through the PSNP – for chronically food insecure households – and emergency relief – for transitory food insecure households – was acknowledged by a representative of the food security office in the Afar regional government,

> 'We say we are pastoralists, but we are not really. If you are pastoralists, you get more than 50 percent of your income from livestock, but here people do not. Most people are just waiting for aid.'[6]

This bleak assessment finds some support in Figure 3, which shows the increasing numbers of people receiving either the PSNP or emergency assistance in the region, regularly reaching 50 percent in recent years and peaking at 80 percent in 2002-03. External assistance has therefore become a key means by which communities and households reproduce themselves, rather than a mere supplement to livelihoods.

PSNP implementation in Afar, like neighbouring Somali region, has been beset with problems throughout. Evaluations have found that many of the programme committees intended to administer the programme have not been operating as intended in the programme guidelines, or are non-existent, and that delays in making PSNP transfers are common, albeit that performance has improved over time (Berhane et al. 2015). However, the principal concern is the performance of the targeting system. Evaluations in pastoral areas have focused on livestock ownership as the key proxy for wealth. This analysis finds that there is relatively little variation in livestock ownership amongst the poorest deciles, making identification of 'the poorest', as required by the PSNP, challenging. However, there is great inequality between the top decile, which holds 80 Topical Livestock Units, and the bottom decile, which only holds 0.2. Yet analysis shows that the two deciles with lowest livestock ownership are the *least likely* to be included in the PSNP, while participation

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[6] Interview respondent AR1.

Figure 3: PSNP and emergency assistance in Afar region
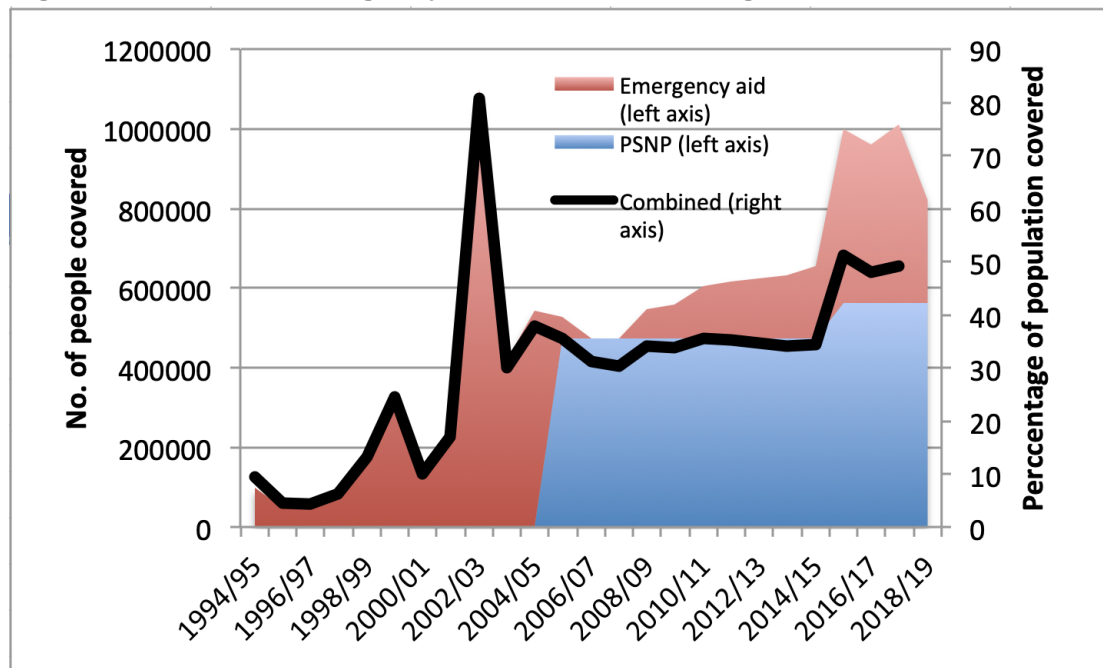
Source: DFID staff calculations, National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC), World Bank.

rates amongst the higher deciles is much higher (Berhane et al. 2015: 54-58). Moreover, this is a fairly uniform problem across all wereda studied in Afar and, despite a re-targeting exercise that took place in response to the 2012 evaluation, the 2014 evaluation showed no signs of improvement (Berhane et al. 2015: 67-68).

Past research has highlighted the involvement of clan leaders in selection, implying that clan leaders may favour their own family or clan members in the allocation of PSNP places (Sabates-Wheeler, Lind and Hoddinott 2013). An additional concern is that the narrowly targeted nature of the PSNP, which focuses on the poorest and most vulnerable people within a community, may clash with the strong social norms around sharing within pastoralist communities. The concern is that if PSNP participants share transfers with non-participants, this will lead to a reduction in the value of the transfer (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2013).

These findings have been highly influential amongst donors, who have repeatedly expressed concern about the poor performance of the targeting system. Under pressure from donors, the problems have been acknowledged by the federal government, which has accepted the findings of these studies:

> 'Targeting in Afar and Somali is very problematic, with significant inclusion errors … Taking livestock holdings as the measure of household wealth, it appears that participation in PSNP public works is equal across all wealth groups. Access to PSNP transfers in Afar and Somali is in effect not targeted' (MoA 2014: 13).

The debate about targeting in Afar and Somali reached a peak in 2015-16, with some donors threatening to pull the plug on the PSNP in those regions and return them to the emergency system. Donor concern evidently translated into strong federal pressure on the region to improve targeting. As noted by a regional government respondent,

> 'There was donor pressure and then the federal government forced the region to enhance regional implementation. The region formed an action plan. They issued a clear written instruction to the wereda.'[7]

Regional officials were keen to emphasise that following re-targeting all is now well, albeit that there has not been any systematic attempt to evaluate the re-targeting exercise.[8] Furthermore, there does not seem to have been any fundamental change to the targeting process, with the state continuing to rely on clan leaders and elders to compensate for the limited infrastructural power of the state:

> 'Elders are important for accurate targeting. The development agents and other outsiders may exclude the poorest, because they are not aware of them. The elders know more than anyone about the makafta … They know who is poor, they know the situation.'[9]

In contrast to the highland regions, for the time being there is no livelihoods component intended to raise household production and, consequently, there is no attempt to ensure that households graduate from PSNP support in Afar. This is partly related to the donor desire to get the targeting system working well first, before adding logistically complicated additional tasks, and recognition by some in the regional government and donors that livelihoods programmes cannot be straightforwardly transplanted from the highland to lowland regions and the very different livelihood systems that exist. Moreover, the central focus of the government's development strategy for the region is to address poverty through mass villagisation. Until villagisation has advanced, there is little expectation in government that graduation from support is feasible.

Case study selection

The selection of case studies within Afar was made with this historical context in mind. Overall, the expectation was that Afar would constitute an example of relatively low state infrastructural power, compared to the cases of Tigray and Oromiya. In turn, the expectation was that low infrastructural power would result in relatively poor implementation, particularly with respect to targeting. However, within Afar, the discussion above suggests variation between the north and south of the region. In the north, a relatively high level of past political centralisation and incorporation within Tigray Province before 1991 might be expected to underpin comparatively high levels

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[7] Interview respondent AR1.
[8] Interview respondent AR1.
[9] Interview respondent AR1.

of state infrastructural power and relatively weak influence of clan structures. In contrast, in the south of the region, a history of greater political fragmentation and stronger involvement of the clan would be expected to weaken state infrastructural power. As such, fieldwork focused on two sites: Dabal kebele, in Gala'elu wereda in the south of the region, near to the Awash River and the Addis-Djibouti road; and Ad-Kelu kebele, Ab'ala wereda in northwest Afar, near to the Tigrayan highlands and situated on the Mekele-Berhale road (see Figure 2). This section briefly situates these two sites with respect to livelihoods, causes of food insecurity and the relative importance of the PSNP.

The two sites differ in terms of livelihoods. In Dabal kebele, along the banks of the Awash, the main livelihoods are cultivation of crops such as maize and onions, and livestock rearing. Seasonal migration with livestock is common for many young men, while others migrate to towns in search of job and education. In Ad-kelu kebele, the dominant livelihood strategy is focused on livestock, with young men migrating with the herd on a seasonal basis in search of grazing land in the Tigrayan highlands.[10] (int. respondent AAK2). The only crop cultivation in the kebele is undertaken by 20 households on very small plots by diverting seasonal floodwaters. In Gala'elu wereda, there are several nearby agricultural investments growing cotton and onions, providing some day labour for kebele residents as well as migrants.[11] Many young people migrate out of the kebele, moving to the wereda capital, Gala'elu town, the regional capital, Semara, or further afield. In Ab'ala town, there are many investments in hotels, restaurants and other businesses. This town is the main destination for migrants leaving the Ad-kelu kebele in search of job opportunities.[12]

According to local government officials, the main causes of food insecurity in Gala'elu wereda relate to variability in rainfall in the highlands affecting the flow of the river, as well as the lack of water pumps with which to irrigate.[13] In addition, prosopis is a significant problem, making it impossible to plough land without a tractor. Though not mentioned directly by respondents, Gala'elu wereda is also situated in the area contested by the Issa and was the site of a battle between the Afar and Issa in the early 2000s (Markakis 2011). In Ab'ala wereda, there is no prosopis, rather the main challenge is related to drought, lack of water and grazing land. This has severely affected livestock holdings – the main source of livelihood – in the area.

Table 1 below shows PSNP participation compared to the population of the study wereda and kebele. The study sites have slightly lower rates of PSNP participation than for the region as a whole. Wereda and kebele offices were unable to provide a breakdown of PSNP participation by gender. In theory, the programme should favour female-headed households, which are considered more vulnerable and consequently it would be expected that women form a modest majority of participants. In Ad-kelu kebele, the selection process was problematic, as discussed later in the paper. One

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[10] Interview respondent AAK2.
[11] Interview respondent AGK1.
[12] Interview respondent AAK2.
[13] Interview respondents AGK1, AGW1.

consequence is that some respondents stated that the majority of participants are actually men.[14]

Villagisation is under way in each of the study wereda, but has not yet been implemented in the kebele that are the focus of the research. In Dabal kebele, the land for the village has been cleared and prepared, but as yet there is no construction, while in Ad-kelu kebele, the site has been identified, but no work has commenced.

Table 1: PSNP participation in study sites

	Ab'ala wereda	Ad-kelu kebele	Gala'elu wereda	Dabal kebele[15]
Kebele population	62,000	3,507	50,000	4,129
PSNP public works	22,704	1,430	10,769	870
PSNP direct support	1,700	0	849	270
PSNP total	24,404 (39%)	1,430 (41%)	11,618 (23%)	1,140 (28%)

Sources: respondents AGK1, AGK3, AGW2, AAW2, AAW3, AAZ4, AAZ5.

3. State infrastructural power: Party, state and clan in local governance

This section examines state infrastructural power in the case study sites, applying the framework developed for the project. Given the fusion between party and state, these are considered jointly in the discussion. The analysis focuses attention on: the resources and competence of state officials; the territorial reach of the state through establishment of state structures; intra-state control mechanisms which afford higher-level officials influence over lower levels; and state–society relations.

Resources and competence

In terms of staffing and education levels of kebele officials, the Afar sites are, unsurprisingly, at a much lower level than other regions. In Dabal kebele, the chairman and deputy chairman are both uneducated, while the kebele manager, development agents (DAs) and one health extension worker (HEW) have diplomas. The other two HEWs completed 10th and 8th grade, respectively. In Ad-kelu kebele, the kebele manager completed 10th grade and the HEWs 7th and 10th grade, respectively. However, none of the other officials, including the chairman, deputy and, most surprisingly, the development agent (DA) have any education. Indeed, despite the key role for DAs in implementing the PSNP, there is only this one uneducated DA in the entire kebele, rather than three, as should be the case. In Ad-

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[14] Interview respondent AAZ5.
[15] Dabal kebele only had data for PSNP participation by household, not individual. These figures are calculated by multiplying the number of households by the mean household size of five in Afar (Berhane et al. 2015, p. 60). Five is also the limit of PSNP support per household.

kelu, the same chairman has been in place for the entire 27 years of EPRDF rule, a remarkable degree of continuity.

In terms of the PSNP specifically, there has been relatively little training. In Gala'elu wereda, which oversees Dabal kebele, the food security officer has received no PSNP training since joining in 2014-15. As such, he depends solely on the programme manual.[16] Likewise, the Dabal kebele chairman received two days training on the PSNP and public works several years ago, but none of the DAs has been given any training on the programme, merely relying on their 'experience' to carry out their tasks.[17] There is a similar picture in Abala wereda, with one training on the PSNP when it was introduced to the wereda two years ago.[18] However, no one in Ad-kelu kebele has ever received any training on the PSNP.

Alongside the limited human resources available, local administrations in Afar face considerable challenges as a result of the lack of infrastructure and challenging environment. There is no electricity in either kebele and only unreliable mobile phone coverage in certain parts of the kebele. To communicate with community residents – whether a specific individual or to call the whole community for a meeting – the kebele administration usually relies on a traditional system of communication (*xaagu*) whereby a message is passed verbally from person to person.[19] Alternatively, officials in Dabal kebele sometimes send a messenger from village to village with a loudspeaker.

The territorial reach of the state: Sub-kebele and party structures

The Afar regional government has clearly made some attempt to create sub-kebele structures in line with those common in highland regions, but to date this has not progressed very far. The main sub-kebele structure is the makafta,[20] with Dabal kebele in Gala'elu divided into eight makafta and Ad-kelu kebele in Ab'ala divided into four. Unlike the kushet in Tigray, which has effectively been institutionalised as another level of state administration, the makafta is a forum bringing together a leader with neo-customary leaders to distribute food aid, maintain peace and stability and enact villagisation.[21] Makafta leaders are effectively an intermediary between the state and the clan:

> 'We don't have formal government recognised structure to administer this makafta. We use the customary laws to lead our people and manage the resources of the land. The clan leaders are the key people who jointly govern the community with me.'[22]

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[16] Interview respondent AGW2.
[17] Interview respondent AGK3.
[18] Interview respondent AAW3.
[19] Interview respondents AGK1, AAK2.
[20] Makafta originally appears to have signified a meeting place in rural Afar, with no link to state administration. However, currently the local government uses the term to signify a sub-kebele unit, roughly comparable to kushet and zones in Tigray and Oromiya, respectively.
[21] Interview respondents AGK1, AAZ1.
[22] Interview respondent AAZ1.

The ANDP is expected to organise the population of Afar into development teams and one-to-fives, as in other regions. However, these structures that are so important to service delivery and mobilisation in Tigray and Oromiya, are all but non-existent in both Afar sites.[23] One official in Dabal kebele noted that initial attempts to establish development teams met with resistance from the local community, which regards these structures as mechanisms for controlling the local population.[24] Indeed, their absence is hardly surprising. The state in Afar has never had the high levels of infrastructural power required to mobilise people down to the household level. As a makafta leader acknowledged, 'They [development teams and one-to-fives] are weak because the leadership of the local government itself is very weak'.[25]

The ruling party, the ANDP, meanwhile, is present in the two kebele and has established a women's league and association, and a youth league, federation and association. In Ad-kelu, the local party leader claimed that there are 450 party members in the kebele, of which 200 are women.[26] There are no opposition parties present in either site.

The result, in terms of party-state infrastructural power, is therefore a relatively limited penetration of society in both sites, as compared with the high level of control afforded by development teams, one-to-fives and party structures reaching down to the household and individual level in Tigray and, to a lesser degree, Oromiya (Lavers, Abrha, et al. forthcoming, Lavers, Haile, et al. forthcoming).

Planning and performance assessment

A similar story is evident with respect to planning and performance assessment: there have been half-hearted attempts to establish the same procedures for assessing performance in Afar, as exist in Tigray and Oromiya, yet in practice these are barely implemented. This starts from the regional level. The region assesses the performance of wereda according to basic available indicators, such as the submission of appropriate documentation and beneficiary lists. Based on this, wereda are ranked as high, medium or low, with Gala'elu wereda ranked as high performance, and Ab'ala as medium.[27] However, the region does not actually have any ability to punish wereda based on poor performance:

'If the wereda delay payments, then they have to be punished, but in actual fact we are not punishing them ... Our office is a coordination

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[23] Interview respondents AGK1, AGK3, AAK2, AAK4, AAZ1.
[24] Interview respondent AGK1.
[25] Interview respondent AAZ1.

[26] Interview respondent AAK3.
[27] Interview respondent AR1.

office, we have no mandate to punish them. We recommend, but the implementation is up to them.'[28]

Likewise, while the wereda sets targets for kebele officials, respondents were quite clear that there is no evaluation of performance and no pressure on officials in either site:

'There are no penalties for failing to meet our target. Nobody asks about our achievement or failure. We do as much as we can perform and leave the rest of the work.'[29]

Beyond assessment of kebele officials, Afar has also begun to implement the system of assessing individual community residents and households, and identifying 'models' to reward and demonstrate exemplary performance for others. This process has progressed furthest in Dabal kebele, where the system of model farmers and households was introduced two years previously.[30] In Ab'ala wereda, state officials state that they have identified and trained 225 models and that these are about to 'graduate'.[31]

Nonetheless, the implication is that the absence of systematic systems of performance assessment in Afar presents significant limitations on party-state infrastructural power. While in Tigray and, to a degree, Oromiya, well-established systems of target setting and evaluation have a strong influence on local implementation, in the Afar sites, while instructions are issued to lower-level officials, implementation is largely left to their own initiative.

Party-state legitimacy and relations with society

In the absence of strong sub-kebele structures that penetrate society, the relationship between local party-state officials and societal actors is of particular importance. The ANDP is the only political party present in either site and kebele officials in each site are party members, with close overlap between leaders of the kebele administration and party leadership. As in other sites, the ruling ANDP and the state are effectively fused.

In terms of local mobilisation, there are periodic community meetings, either kebele-wide or, more commonly, within makafta, to discuss community issues and new state initiatives. In both sites, respondents insisted that they are free to speak openly at these meetings and voice their opinions on policies and initiatives, yet nobody believes that this feedback has any effect on decision making. For example, a typical response was that:

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[28] Interview respondent AR1.

[29] Interview respondent AGK1, also AAK1.
[30] Interview respondents AGK1, AGK5.
[31] Interview respondents AAW1, AAK1, AAK2, AAK6.

'[we are] 100 percent free. Anyone can ask anything freely … [but] most of the time, the concerns of the kebele residents are not heard well by the leaders'.[32]

Nonetheless, the party-state plays a much more marginal role in the lives and livelihoods of the local population in Afar, compared to other regions. Service provision – health facilities, schools, agricultural extension, credit – are more limited or non-existent in Afar, while the contributions required from the local population are also less: there are, for example, no compulsory public works in Afar in addition to the PSNP, unlike in Tigray and (theoretically) in Oromiya.

Clan and lineage leaders emerge as key figures in local administration in both sites, with variation between the sites in line with prior expectations. In Ad-kelu, in the north of the region, where clan structures tend to be weaker, the heads of two lineages within the dominant clan are the chairman and vice chairman of the kebele.[33] Despite both figures being uneducated, they have been in position for many years, with the chairman taking office in 1991, when the EPRDF came to national power, and remaining ever since. As such, the clan has little independent authority, but has been merged with local state administration. In Ad-kelu, a clan leader and prominent kebele official highlighted the impossibility of separating clan leaders and their responsibilities from those of the party-state, in a context in which party-state expansion has been built on the existing authority of the clan:

'The society, including the kebele officials, is drawn from clan, and clan systems. Thus, the [clan] system is one important part of the society's life.' [34]

In Dabal kebele, in the south, the relationship between the kebele administration and the powerful clans is less direct. Clan leaders in the kebele are acknowledged as the key figures of authority, albeit they do not hold formal state positions locally. One of the main clan leaders is the local ANDP leader,[35] while another is an advisor to the regional government and a representative of the community in relations with the kebele administration.[36] More importantly, kebele officials are subordinate members of the same clans and defer decision-making on key issues to clan leaders, in recognition of their authority in the community. As acknowledged by the kebele administration,

'The two systems are complementary to each other. To make a state run without customary laws is like to ask a person walk with only one foot'.[37]

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[32] Interview respondent AGI1.
[33] Interview respondents AAC1, AAC2.
[34] Interview respondent AAC2.
[35] Interview respondent AGC1.
[36] Interview respondent AGC1.
[37] Interview respondent AGK1.

The clan leaders were even more forthright:

> 'I don't think the state will be able to function on its own without our support ... The people have much trust in us and always wants us to be involved in any leadership activities of the kebele'.[38]

Synthesis

The state in Afar has expanded during a period of complete ANDP/ERPDF dominance, with the result that little distinction is possible between the expanded kebele structures and the ruling party. While this fusion of party and state is comparable with other regions, the Afar case studies differ markedly from those in Tigray and Oromiya regarding local governance structures and the nature of party–state–society relations. While the regional government has clearly made some effort to establish similar kebele and sub-kebele structures and systems of performance evaluation in Afar, as in other regions, these have barely taken root. The kebele structure in contrast is well established, but it continues to rely in important ways on the clan structure for its authority and capacity. As the state has expanded under the ERPDF, it has built upon the existing clan structure. As a result, the clan structure is embedded within the local state administration, both through individuals, and in Ad-kelu through key clan leaders automatically taking key kebele and party roles. State infrastructural power in Afar continues to lag far behind that of other regions, not just as a result of the lack of financial and human resources – undoubtedly a major constraint – but also because of the comparative lack of state authority and legitimacy.

4. State infrastructural power and the distribution of the PSNP

This section integrates insights from the preceding sections regarding the infrastructural power of the party-state and turns the focus specifically to the PSNP. Given the limitations of party-state infrastructural power, the clan emerges as an important actor in PSNP implementation, with the specific relations between state, party and clan combining to produce variation between the two sites.

Administrative structures and state capacity

PSNP administration in Afar mirrors the pattern of governance discussed above. There is some attempt to adhere to the basic structure of committees and responsibilities, as outlined in the PSNP Programme Implementation Manual, but many of these structures are absent or dysfunctional in practice, while formal state processes are supplemented by a reliance on clan structures to implement the programme.

In Dabal kebele, the key committees – the Kebele Food Security Task Force responsible for overall administration in the programme, the Community Food Security Task Force responsible for selecting participants at makafta level and the

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[38] Interview respondent AGC1.

Kebele Appeals Committee – all exist and meet on a fairly regular basis. Contrary to the programme regulations, however, several members of the appeals committee, including a health extension worker and the head of the women's league, also sit on the Kebele Food Security Task Force. This is contrary to the idea that the appeals committee should have distinct membership, as its role is to correct any mistakes that may have been made by other committees.

In Ad-kelu, the committee structure is more dysfunctional. There is no Community Food Security Task Force at makafta level,[39] just the Kebele Food Security Task Force. Not only are several kebele officials, on both this and the appeals committee, potentially undermining the independence of the appeals process, but community representatives on the task force are all illiterate. In order to carry out their responsibilities they are entirely dependent on the kebele chairman, who 'reads to us and we listen to the directions from him',[40] severely undermining independence of the appeals process.

Given that development teams and one-to-fives are not functional in either site, they play no role in PSNP implementation, as in other regions. In both sites, party officials, such as the heads of women's and youth leagues, are however routinely included as community representatives on the various committees,[41] bringing party structures into the implementation process. However, as with administration in general, the formal structure only forms part of the real decision-making process.

In Ad-kelu clan leaders are also key figures in the kebele administration, with the result that the clan by default has some representation in PSNP administration. In contrast, in Gala'elu wereda, according to a wereda food security official, clan leaders 'are the key ones' in PSNP targeting.[42] This is because clan and lineage leaders bring knowledge of the communities that the state does not have:

> 'They [clan leaders] are very much aware of the economic status of their community members. That knowledge is very much helpful in targeting the right beneficiaries'.[43]

Clan leaders were approached by the kebele administration and the local population to play roles in PSNP implementation, assisting the targeting process and hearing appeals, both as members of the appeals committee and informally.[44] In Dabal kebele, where clan leaders have no formal state responsibilities, the clan system is effectively used by the PSNP to compensate for limited state infrastructural power. While in Tigray, detailed local knowledge can be mobilised through well-functioning

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[39] Interview respondent AAZ1.
[40] Interview respondent AAZ2.
[41] Interview respondents AGW2, AGK3, AAZ1, AAZ4.
[42] Interview respondent AGW3.
[43] Interview respondent AGK1.
[44] Interview respondent AGC1.

development teams and one-to-fives that reach down to the household level, in Afar, the clan is the only structure with comparable penetration of society.

Targeting and quotas

This study – based on a qualitative case study methodology – is not in a position to assess whether PSNP targeting is accurate in the study sites, though, as discussed above, past studies show that targeting in Afar is generally problematic. Instead, this study traces the implementation process, to see how selection is conducted and to what degree this is shaped by state infrastructural power. Indeed, the case studies reveal stark differences between the two sites.

In Dabal kebele, the PSNP quota for the kebele is first distributed between the makafta in the kebele, based on discussions between makafta leaders, clan leaders and kebele officials.[45] However, within the makafta, the makafta leaders use the clan structures to compensate for the absence of the party-state infrastructural power provided by development teams and one-to-fives in other regions, using these clan structures to allocate PSNP support. Of particular importance is the *dhalla* (literally a compound in Afar-Af), a lineage-based group that live together and trace their origins back several generations. The leader is known as the *Dhalla Aba*. As noted by a wereda official,

> 'The only one-to-fives we use in implementation of PSNP are the traditional ones [dhalla] ... in PSNP, we use the dhalla leaders to communicate with the beneficiaries living in one dhalla.'[46]

A local clan leader describes this process in detail:

> 'Dhalla aba are the key players to provide specific information and economic status of each community member living in their makafta … PSNP quotas within the dhalla are distributed by the dhalla aba. Each dhalla aba selects and identifies the list of poor people living in their dhalla in consultation with the dhalla residents.'[47]

One of the main reasons for involvement of the clan leaders and clan structures in PSNP distribution is that the clan is perceived to have greater legitimacy than the state and consequently the targeting process itself is seen as more legitimate amongst the local population with clan involvement. As noted by a wereda food security expert in Gala'elu,

> 'They [clan leaders] are very important to the targeting process, as they have [a] higher level of acceptance within the community. Our decisions

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[45] Interview respondents AAZ4, AGC1.
[46] Interview respondent AGW2.
[47] Interview respondent AGC1; see also AGZ2, AGF2, AGF3.

regarding PSNP get easily accepted by the community when they are communicated by those leaders'.[48]

In Dabal kebele, respondents insisted that the main concern in distributing PSNP quotas between makafta, between dhalla and within dhalla was to identify the poorest and most in need, though the criteria used to do so varied. The distribution between makafta is a negotiated process between makafta, clan and kebele leaders, taking into account a combination of population and level of poverty in each makafta. When pushed to be specific, respondents noted access to land, livestock and employment, old age and single parents were singled out, broadly speaking in line with the criteria stipulated in the PIM.[49]. Importantly, and regardless of the actual criteria used to make decisions, focus groups and individual interviews suggest that both PSNP participants and those excluded generally regard the distribution as fair, given the limited resources available.

In Ad-kelu kebele, the process is very different, with the makafta leader taking the central role in distributing PSNP places.[50] Moreover, the wereda and kebele leadership claim to have completely misunderstood the focus of the PSNP on targeting the poorest. Instead, in Ab'ala wereda, officials only selected able-bodied individuals capable of carrying out labour-intensive public works and, as noted previously, there is some suggestion that the majority of participants may be men. In this wereda, there is no direct support and many of the most vulnerable people in the community have no access to support as a result. The kebele administration insisted that this was the instruction that they received from the wereda:

> 'Both male and female members of the community who are able to carry out labour work are included in the PSNP, and the targeting in this manner is specified from above, from the wereda as it is so throughout the country.'[51]

Yet other officials in the kebele are well aware that this selection process was incorrect. While the original error might plausibly have been made out of ignorance, no action has been taken to address it, despite acknowledgement of the problem.[52] Rather than being included in PSNP direct support, those who are unable to work are provided support through emergency relief, as and when it is available. Despite the requirement that people carry out public works in exchange for emergency relief, this appears to have been waived locally:

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[48] Interview respondent AGW2.
[49] Interview respondent AGK1.
[50] Interview respondent AAZ1.
[51] Interview respondent AAK2,
[52] Interview respondent AAK1.

'The ones who are capable to carry out the labour work are addressed by
the PSNP; those who are unable to work the physical work are supported
by the emergency response.'[53]

Unsurprisingly and in sharp contrast to the widely accepted distribution in Dabal
kebele, the process of allocating PSNP places was opaque in Ad-kelu kebele,
conducted by kebele and makafta leaders, with little public involvement or
discussion. Indeed, respondents were largely unaware as to what the selection
process was and why they were included or not. [54] In terms of this project's
framework, this variation in cases suggests two main points. First, in the absence of
meaningful oversight of programme implementation or pressure for performance from
above, serious failings of PSNP distribution in Ad-kelu do not seem to have been
identified by higher-level officials or singled out for correction. Second, the fusion of
state, party and clan leaders in Ad-kelu, with the same individuals in power for
several decades, means that key officials have a great deal of discretion over the
allocation of resources, with little need to negotiate with state or social actors. In
contrast, in Dabal kebele, while clan leaders and state officials work closely together,
they are different individuals, with distinct sources of authority, providing at least
some balance and limiting the authority of any one individual. As a result, the initial
hypothesis that implementation would be better in the northern site – Ad-kelu kebele
– where authority is more politically centralised and the clan plays less of a role
compared to Dabal kebele in the south, appears to be incorrect.

One area of similarity across the two sites was a fairly uniform view that the PSNP
quota was insufficient, given the number of people who needed support, with the
result that many in need were left out. Clearly, this was exacerbated in Ad-kelu
kebele, by the intentional exclusion of the most vulnerable, who were unable to work.
Complaints also focused on the limit of five PSNP places per household, which was
recently imposed by the federal government and which has been applied for all
respondents taking part in interviews and focus groups. Many respondents view
these five places as insufficient, given the large size of many Afar households. In
response to resource shortages, those involved in the distribution process report
being under continual pressure from those excluded from the programme and from
lower levels of government to expand access to support.[55] A makafta leader in Ad-
kelu reported the highly personal nature of the complaints he receives from those
excluded: 'Some of them are difficult to deal with. They even go to the extent of
cursing me saying "May Allah make you hungry as you left us hungry"'.[56]

As in other regions, the response locally is to spread the limited available resources
as wide as possible to ensure that as many people as possible receive some form of
support. Consequently, emergency support, when available, and the wereda
contingency fund are used to provide additional places to those not already in the

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[53] Kebele manager, interview respondent AAK2
[54] Interview respondents AAF1, AAF2, AAF3, AAF4.
[55] Interview respondents AGW2, AAK2, AAW3, AAZ1, AAZ2.
[56] Interview respondent AAZ1.

PSNP, with no household receiving multiple forms of support, as intended in times of crisis.[57] Yet, even in this way, according to a makafta leader, 'with all the different forms of supports put together, still the number of poor are much greater than what those supports can cover'.[58]

Appeals and grievance mechanisms

In both sites, a kebele appeals committee does exist, with clan leaders taking prominent positions on these committees, in acknowledgement of their role and skill in dispute resolution. However, this committee is not necessarily the most important venue for resolving complaints, which are frequently handled by kebele, makafta or clan leaders. In Dabal kebele, documentary records of complaints are only available for the last year, in which time there have been seven cases. These relate to eligibility claims for inclusion in the PSNP and women's return to work after pregnancy and the temporary interruption of public works requirements. Just one appeal was successful and one was passed to the wereda for resolution, while the others were rejected. In Ad-kelu there are no records of appeals whatsoever.

In both sites, respondents argue that appeals and grievances are dealt with primarily or exclusively outside the appeals process, frequently raising issues in informal conversations over coffee with clan, kebele or makafta leaders.[59] In Dabal kebele, given the legitimacy of clan leaders, those with problems often rely on clan leaders to represent them to kebele officials:

> 'we often share our problems with our clan leaders or local elders. They talk to the responsible body, be it the administrator or other clan members, and solve it … I think there is such a [Kebele Appeals] committee, but our elders are like fathers for all and work for the good of all. Thus, we go to our leaders [clan] and elders'. [60]

Meanwhile, in Ad-kelu kebele, respondents report that they tend to go to the makafta leader first, before turning to the kebele administration if required, but not a separate appeals committee. As the makafta explained,

> 'First they approach me … I usually try to resolve them all by myself. I usually negotiate with the appeal applicants on some terms and try to put an end to their claims before it reaches the kebele leadership'.[61]

Indeed, given the multiple responsibilities that kebele and clan leaders have in Ad-kelu kebele, it is not always entirely clear in which capacity those with complaints approach leaders with appeals. As one official noted, 'I am a local elder and clan

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[57] Interview respondents AGW2, AGZ1, AAW3.
[58] Interview respondent AGZ1.
[59] Interview respondents AGK3, AGI1, AGF2, AGF3.
[60] Interview respondent AGF4.
[61] Interview respondent AAZ1.

leader. I am also a chair of appeal committee and the vice chair [of the kebele]. Thus, people share their appeals with me for all these reasons'.[62]

Clearly this process is inconsistent with the rationale of the appeals process as outlined in the PIM, which proposes an entirely separate appeals committee that can check and, if necessary, correct decisions made by those involved in the original targeting process. As with the initial targeting processes, this informal appeals process depends greatly on the individuals involved, leaving open the possibility that personal relations and favouritism could enter into decision making. There is also little possibility of recourse for those who believe that they have been mistreated in the targeting process, since the same people also handle their appeals. Consequently, in Ad-kelu kebele, despite the serious problems in the initial selection, those excluded have had little success with appeals. People reported a lack of accountability from officials: 'We complain to everyone … but it is an endless process, as everyone keeps transferring you to the next person'.[63]

Public works

The decision in Ab'ala wereda to focus support on the able-bodied has direct implications for the public works component of the programme. It is possible that this decision was the result of a misunderstanding of the programme's objectives at the wereda and kebele level, as state officials claim. However, another possible explanation lies with the ongoing villagisation programme that is the main focus of local state activity in the region and which places particular importance on labour requirements. This raises the somewhat controversial issue of links between the donor-supported PSNP and villagisation, which donors have tried to leave well alone, given the deeply problematic history of forced resettlement in the country (Lavers 2019).[64] The potential for PSNP public works to contribute to villagisation efforts was acknowledged by the regional government food security office:

> 'Indirectly there is a contribution ... The villagisation programme may build a school with three rooms, but if the PSNP can add another two rooms, then it is a school with five rooms … We align with the local plan. If the local community has a plan to build a school for villagisation then we ask, "what contribution can the PSNP make?" The PSNP recommends this integration with local development plans, especially in resettlement areas.'[65]

Setting aside for a moment the question as to whether villagisation is truly the wish of Afar communities or merely a programme imposed by the federal government, it is perhaps unsurprising that the PSNP public works may be used to build resettlement sites. In theory, public works priorities should be selected by the community and

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[62] Interview respondent AAC1.
[63] Interview respondent AAF3.
[64] On earlier villagisation programmes see (Cohen and Isaksson 1987, Clapham 1988, Scott 1998).
[65] Interview respondent AR1.

should address what are seen locally as key objectives. Where villagisation is the key local priority and focus of local state activity, it can hardly be a surprise if PSNP public works are mobilised to that end. In Gala'elu, villagisation has not yet begun in earnest in the kebele in question, with the result that the limit of PSNP contribution has been to clear the future settlement site of vegetation, including prosopsis, to enable future construction. It would not be a surprise, however, if public works are used in the future to build village infrastructure.

In Ab'ala, however, villagisation has begun throughout the wereda and wereda respondents acknowledge that the PSNP is being used to build water points, schools and health posts as a contribution to new settlements.[66] Within Ad-kelu kebele, villagisation began in the year in which fieldwork took place. The wereda set the kebele a target of 160 households to resettle, yet the kebele, in a rare instance of ambition, set themselves the target of resettling 300 households. Nonetheless, the resettlement took longer than expected and no households have yet moved. Within this process, the kebele administration considers that the:

> 'PNSP is the main provider of labour to build social services and natural resource services and so has significant contribution to villagisation. Through the labour contribution of the PSNP, rural feeder roads are built, there is protection of trees by flood water and shade work of schools. Through the PSNP, people bring local materials and the labour work is done by them.'[67]

As such, it may well be that the villagisation plans, and the labour requirements they presented, were among the reasons why the PSNP selection process focused on young, able-bodied men and women. Indeed, the importance of public works and physical strength was repeatedly mentioned as an important issue by the wereda, kebele and makafta leaders involved in the selection process:[68]

> 'PSNP benefits those young men and women who are physically capable of undertaking laborious activities like break[ing] stones, digging wells, constructing roads'.[69]

This focus on able-bodied labour also has implications for some of the provisions included in the PSNP to cater to the specific challenges that women face in engaging in public works. In particular, there is a provision that pregnant women should temporarily transfer from public works to direct support during their pregnancy and for a period post-partum. In Dabal kebele, this provision is well known and apparently implemented, though women often stop work after four months of pregnancy and return sooner than one year after giving birth,[70] as required in programme guidelines.

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[66] Interview respondent AAW4.
[67] Interview respondent AAK2.
[68] Interview respondent AAW4, AAC2, AAZ4.
[69] Interview respondent AAC2.
[70] Interview respondents AGK3, AGF4.

This reflects a common pattern in Afar, where women are moved to direct support late and return to public works early (Berhane et al. 2015: 95). In contrast, focus group respondents in Ad-kelu kebele – where all participants engage in public works as a result of the misinterpretation of the programme – reported that women have to find a relative to replace them for the duration of their pregnancy or they will not be paid.[71]

Other provisions to address gender inequality – such as a reduced workload in acknowledgement of women's work burden within the household, and providing access to childcare to enable those with childcare responsibilities to participate in public works – do not seem to be implemented in either site. There is no workplace crèche in either site and any reduced workload for women is based on local initiative and ad hoc, rather than institutionalised. When carrying out public works, men and women tend to work in gendered teams, with the tasks requiring particularly heavy lifting apparently carried out by men. For example, in Dabal kebele, when clearing prosopsis, the men cut the thorny weed and the women burn it.[72] When building roads in Ad-kelu kebele, the men break up large stones and the women carry the smaller stones.[73] In both cases, however, there is no difference in working hours.

The PSNP within party–state–society relations

Respondents expressed a range of views regarding their perception of the motivation of the government in providing the PSNP and what was expected of them in return. The most common response was that the PSNP was seen straightforwardly as work in exchange for grain: 'for us, PSNP is a work, food and development for the country. We work and get grain'.[74] While, for others, support was part of a more general exchange, according to which the community is expected to work for the development of the region and country, reflecting the government's dominant narrative regarding the programme:

> 'A lot is expected of us. When government provides us with this support, this community has to work hard for its development, rather than always waiting for the government to help'.[75]

In a few cases, PSNP support comes closer to being framed as a sort of right, especially once participants have been given their PSNP ID card, which is seen as a commitment to ongoing support.[76] This is despite respondents being largely unaware of their 'rights and responsibilities', as articulated on their ID cards. In a few cases, respondents went as far as framing the PSNP receipt in relation to their status as citizens:

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[71] Focus group AAF1.
[72] Interview respondents AGK3, AGF2.
[73] Interview respondent AAZ2.
[74] Interview respondent AAF2.
[75] Interview respondent AAF2.
[76] Interview respondents AGK3, AGI1.

'A father takes care of his child. We are children of our government. There is no rain for long time and hence, our animals are dying … helping its citizens is duty of good government. That is why we get PSNP'.[77]

In no case, however, did any respondent indicate any form of political conditionality, such as party membership or voting for the ruling party, with many respondents expressing surprise at being asked the question.[78] A participant in a focus group of men excluded from the PSNP was quite clear:

'We don't believe this is a support related to voting or any political gain. Honestly speaking, we don't know why they provide us this support. We think this is a support given by the government simply because we are citizens and they don't want us to go hungry … we don't believe this has anything to do with political gain such as voting'.[79]

5. Conclusion

In line with the broad hypothesis guiding the case study, analysis of governance in Afar, and implementation of the PSNP in particular, highlights the limitations of the infrastructural power of the fused party-state and the significant role of clan structures in compensating for the limitations of the state. In terms of the PSNP implementation process, the result is that there is little oversight of local implementation by higher-level officials, key committees do not function as intended, the state lacks the material resources and territorial reach in order to be able to carry out key functions, such as selecting programme participants, and key tasks, such as participant selection and appeals, are largely devolved to clan leaders. This would appear to provide a plausible explanation for impact evaluations, which highlight the poor performance of the programme in Afar, notably with respect to targeting.

That said, however, the two cases represent two very different manifestations of this broad pattern. Indeed, the devolution of responsibility from state committees to clan leaders, alongside the limited oversight within the state hierarchy in general and limited attempts at performance evaluation, leaves considerable space for variation in implementation. In Dabal kebele, distribution of the PSNP is conducted through clan, lineage and dhalla leaders and is widely regarded as fair and legitimate within the community (whether or not it is objectively 'accurate'). In contrast, in Ad-kelu, the PSNP excluded most vulnerable people within the community, with no attempt to correct the initial mistake by the kebele administration. Unsurprisingly, the selection is widely questioned in the kebele, though there has been little response to appeals to date. This subversion of the poverty-targeting rationale of the PSNP appears to be the result of a combination of: a lack of training and education of state officials; an opaque selection process; the centralisation of power within individuals who hold

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[77] Interview respondent AAF2.
[78] Interview respondents AAI1, AAF1, AAF2, AAF3.
[79] Interview respondent AGF3.

power simultaneously as state, party and clan leaders; and, perhaps, the willful misuse of the PSNP to pursue other targets related to villagisation. One possibility that would require further research in additional cases to test, is that the particular combination of the expansion of party-state power and relative clan weakness in the north of Afar contributed to a situation in which local state officials enjoyed relatively unchecked power

Past donor-funded evaluations of the PSNP in Afar have highlighted problems with targeting, suggesting that the involvement of clan leaders is at the root of the problem. While the case studies presented here provide some support for this, the two cases suggest a slightly different interpretation. Programme failings have at least as much to do with the weakness of state infrastructural power as the involvement of clan leaders. Indeed, the selection process in Dabal kebele that was largely conducted through clan structures was widely considered legitimate within the community, whether or not it was accurate. In contrast, in Ad-kelu the problems appear less to do with clan involvement as such, but more to do with the concentration of decision-making power amongst a few individuals with leadership positions in the state, party and clan. The result is that there are few, if any, actors with the power to contest the decisions made by these individuals. Nonetheless, the response from at least some donor officials has consequently been to propose removing clan leaders from programme administration or even local government in general. The preceding analysis highlights, regardless of whether clan involvement is a good or bad thing, the impossibility of merely removing the clan from decision making. The local party-state in Afar has been built on pre-existing clan structures, which continue to enjoy considerable legitimacy, with the result that the limited state infrastructural power that exists is based on working with and through the clan system. Any attempt to simply remove the clan from PSNP implementation would likely be fruitless and could even have a detrimental impact on limited local state capacity.

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Annex: Interview respondents

EG3, Head of food security directorate, Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, 5October 2015, 1 March 2018, 8 June 2018, 7 June 2019.

AR1, Expert, Afar Disaster Prevention and Food Security Programme Coordination Office, Semera, 10ᵗ July 2018.

AAW1, Expert, Wereda Health Bureau, Ab'ala, May 2018.

AAW2, Wereda Administrator, Ab'ala, May 2018.

AAW3, Wereda Villagisation Office, Ab'ala, June 2018.

AAW4, Wereda Deputy Administrator, Ab'ala, June 2018.

AAK1, Health Extension Worker, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAK2, Kebele chairman and manager, Ad-Kelu kebele, May and June 2018.

AAK3, Cabinet information officer, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAK4, ANDP leader, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAK6, Health Extension Worker, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAZ1, Makafta leader, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAZ2, CFSTF member, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAZ3, Female development team leader, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAZ4, CFSTF member, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAZ5, Makafta leader, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAI1, Male resident, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAC1, Clan leader and deputy kebele chair, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAC2, Clan leader, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAF1, Focus group discussion with female PSNP participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAF2, Focus group discussion with male PSNP participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAF3, Focus group discussion with male PSNP non-participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAF4, Focus group discussion with female PSNP non-participants, Ad-Kelu kebele, May 2018.

AAF5, Focus group discussion with women, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AAF5, Focus group discussion with men, Ad-Kelu kebele, June 2018.

AGW1, Wereda administrator, Gala'elu wereda, March and June 2018.

AGW2, Expert, Food Security Desk, Gala'elu wereda, March 2018.

AGW3, Expert, Health Bureau, Gala'elu wereda, March 2018.

AGK1, Kebele chair and manager, Dabal kebele, March and June 2018.

AGK2, Cabinet information officer, Dabal kebele, March 2018.

AGK3, Development agents, Dabal kebele, March and June 2018.

AGK4, Female development agent, Dabal kebele, June 2018.

AGK5, Health extension workers, Dabal kebele, March and June 2018.

AGK6, Local party leader, Dabal kebele, June 2018.

AGC1, Customary leaders, Dabal kebele, March and June 2018.

AGZ1, Makafta leader, Dabal kebele, June 2018.

AGZ2, Male CFSTF member, Dabal kebele, June 2018.

AGI1, Male resident, Dabal kebele, June 2018.

AGF1, Focus group discussion with men, Dabal kebele, June 2018.

AGF2, Focus group discussion with male PSNP participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018.

AGF3, Focus group discussion with male PSNP non-participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018.

AGF4, Focus group discussion with female PSNP participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018.

AGF5, Focus group discussion with female PSNP non-participants, Dabal kebele, March 2018

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