

Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction centers

pave the way for disaster preparedness

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The problems

Ethiopia has a long history of disasters that originate from both natural and man-made hazards. In Ethiopia, drought affects more people, more frequently than any other type of disaster.

Like other pastoralists in the country, the Borana pastoral community in the South of Ethiopia bordering Kenya, suffered from these recurring and self-perpetuating disasters over the last century, seriously affecting the livestock based livelihood. The communities lived in a fragile, resource-poor environment where basic social services and infrastructure were lacking. The absence of a market for livestock was a big concern as intermediaries in the chain exploited pastoralists. There were frequent outbreaks of human and livestock diseases as well as man-made calamities such as sporadic conflicts over dwindling resources.



In the past, the pastoralists had the capacity to respond to threats of drought through their traditional risk information and communication system. The system that was embedded in the traditional culture facilitated the exchange of knowledge and information on early warning, land use planning and resource management strategies. However, the traditional institutions and cultural assets of the community that facilitated the exchange of such useful information have gradually been eroded, if not fully lost.

Even though the traditional information exchange system still existed in some localities, such information was usually poorly organized, overlooked, not appreciated, and poorly or never used by development planners as well as the community. This has made the pastoralists even more vulnerable to drought-induced disaster for decades. The Hidi Babo pastoral community in Miyo Woreda of Borena Zone had been suffering from this limited or inexistent access to information on factors contributing to risk.

Significant efforts to reduce disasters

To try and solve the problem, Cordaid/ACORD started the PfR program that implemented a Community Managed Drought Risk Reduction (CMDRR) project. The project carried out a community disaster risk analyses, which revealed that droughts, human and livestock disease outbreaks, and resource based conflict were the most frequent hazards affecting the target communities of the district. The situation was exacerbated by limited access to information as well as weak organization and management of the existing information.

During the inception meeting held in Hidi Babo Kebele in 2011, the community underlined the importance of free and open access to risk information and emphasized the need for early warning information for preparedness and response. They also agreed on the need to organize themselves and to play an important role in the dissemination of disaster risk information, because they believed this would strongly enhance effective risk reduction, preparedness and response measures at the local level. To reduce the negative impact of drought hazard, the community prioritized and planned preparedness measures, such as providing early warning and market information and reactivating the contingency plan.

Hidi Babo, was one of the eight information centers identified for the establishment of a Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction Center as part of the preparedness plan. A series of meetings and discussions were conducted in the Kebele with community members and relevant government offices. During the implementation process, the project supported the construction of the Center and provided materials and equipment. The facilities are being used to strengthen the community's own indigenous knowledge on early warning systems, natural resource management system, traditional leadership and other traditional assets.

The community organized a DRR committee consisting of ten members drawn from various constituencies. The committee members included women and youths, traditional leaders, elders, traditionally respected and influential persons and representatives of the government at the grassroots level. The committee is in charge of the Center and other DRR activities.

The Center was equipped and supplied with furniture, solar power, a television set and accessories, tape recorders, players as well as films made in the local language on various issues such as disaster risk management, climate change adaptation, sustainable environment and natural resource management and conflict management. The Center also has well drawn resource maps, a vision map, and a hazard map for their locality. Traditional seasonal calendars show the seasons of the year and the availability of water and pasture. The community draws the maps. The Center also has lists of common hazards that were identified, prioritized and visualized by the Hidi Babo community. Eye catching, annually updated, seasonal calendars for each of the hazards are also found in the Center. Almost all the information in the Center is tailored to the language and priorities of their community.

Efforts bear fruit

The Center is currently serving as an information hub as well as learning and sharing center for the community. As the result of the PfR program, 3440 members of the community now have easy access to up-to-date information everyday from TV programs broadcast at the national level. Maps are being used to educate the community about the efforts to prepare for the various hazards. The use of the seasonal calendars in the Center has helped the community to easily understand when a given hazard is most likely to occur and what measures are needed in advance. The vision map is found to be of paramount importance for the community as it inspires them to work hard and prepare themselves in response to the common shocks in the areas.



"The center has empowered us, developed the culture of resilience"

Boru Gonjobo

42 year old Boru Gonjobo has been participating in the CMDRR activities in his Hidi Babu kebele since CORDAID/ACORD began implementing the PfR project in 2011. The father of five children had the following to say about the center:

Urfolee explained that he and others like him were selected to participate in the Cash for Work program based on the set criteria which were the ability to engage in a labor force as well as being in need of cash for immediate consumption. Women were given priority in the cash for work program and constituted 40% of the total work force.

"Like the eight project Kebeles in Miyo Woreda, we organized ourselves into a DRR Committee. I am a member DRR committee in our Kebele. We have acquired knowledge and skills on local risks, factors contributing to the risks, good practices on early warning system, natural resource management as well as conservation based livelihood options through books, brochures, video films, maps, pictures and posters.

As most of us are illiterate, we used to share information only orally, but we can now also see our efforts through the visual medium. We are getting recent information on market and weather from the television. The information we present in our drawings such as various maps are very interesting and attract the attention of our community. They convince us to take some important actions locally such as arranging settlements and mobility, enclosing dry season grazing reserves and so on.

The center is also serving as a venue for community dialogue, early warning information gathering, sharing and planning. It has created a wonderful opportunity for us to partner with other agencies and government sectors on matters concerning us. Indeed, the audio visual media and center is empowering us and developing the culture of resilience in our community. We strongly believe that the centre will help us a lot in making us resilient to distresses.”

The Center gets indigenous and conventional early warning information from the *Kebele* early warning committee. The information collected from the Center is used to take decisions such as reserving strategic water sources, pastures, rehabilitating ponds and giving information to the community to sell their livestock ahead of an anticipated drought. During the 2011 drought, the DRR committee leading the Center provided information to the community and facilitated the purchase of animal feed from the highland areas as part of fodder reserve.

The establishment and operation of DRR centers has given timely, open and reliable access to early warning and disaster risk information to the communities. The information they get from the Centers has enabled them to take measures that would safeguard themselves and their livelihoods both in the short and the long-term.

The attitude of the community towards disaster is also changing. The communities have now become more proactive to hazard induced disaster risk reduction initiatives and this has fostered the development of a “culture of resilience”. The project has laid down important system and process where the community takes a leading role in monitoring and managing information that is relevant to their context. Based on the drought early warning information system received from the Center, the community could prepare themselves to reduce the negative impact of the anticipated hazard.

Some factors make replicability easier

Cordaid/ACORD firmly believe that timely, reliable and comprehensive information on risk factors is a prerequisite for any meaningful risk reduction plan. It believes that this innovative approach should be shared, scaled up and replicated by other development actors. In this connection, DRR committee members are already disseminating the information and sharing the lessons they have learnt from the center. Many organizations such as Dire Dawa CMDRR Association, the Ethiopian Catholic Church Social Development Commission and other organizations have replicated the project in their respective project areas after CORDAID/PfR partners jointly conducted organizational capacity development that includes trainings and institutional support.

The project is easy to replicate elsewhere as it can be implemented with minimal cost. The fact that the Centers’ building can be constructed with locally available materials such as wood and mud makes the implementation of the project relatively easy.