

Diversifying Agriculture

for Community Resilience in Ethiopia

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The livelihoods of 25,000 vulnerable communities from Ebinat, South Gondar zone, Amhara and Gorogutu, East Hererghe zone, Oromia have been diversified following the introduction of improved food production and animal husbandry. The vulnerable communities have increased their economic resilience to prolonged droughts and food insecurity arising from rapid environmental degradation. Both areas have mountainous land features, with a sub-humid climate, characterized by cultivation of the same crop varieties on similar land, with low yields. In the past, the communities faced major setbacks in their livelihoods and were unable to adapt to the situation.

In 2012, an integrated approach to risk management implemented by the Partners for Resilience (PfR) programme through Ethiopia Red Cross Society (ERCS) established the Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) groups to assist the vulnerable communities to adequately cope whenever disasters strike.

The local community conducted Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (VCA) to identify key drivers to vulnerability. Accordingly, droughts, floods, livestock diseases, crop pests, frosts/hails and environmental degradation were identified as major hazards.



In order to strengthen adaptive capacity, the communities prioritized work on improved agricultural practices, drought-resistant crops, soil and water conservation, irrigation and water harvesting, and early warning systems.

Through consultation with the local community, PfR and ERCS, and in collaboration with Fedis Agricultural Research Institute and Amhara region Meteorological Agency, they introduced early maturing and high yielding crop varieties using improved farming techniques for their smallholder farms to increase the production of sorghum, maize, wheat, beans and peas. These interventions strengthened the resilience of about 6,000 households against changes in the local agro-ecosystems and weather-related shocks.

Crop & livestock inputs distributed to 5,892 beneficiary households – 2013/2014

- 8,500 kg of improved crop seeds (Sorghum, Maize, Wheat, Haricot Beans and chickpeas) for 2,055 households,
- 31,870 hybrid Apple mango, Cassava, Guava, and Moringa seedlings for 3,187 households
- 195 Beehives with Bee colonies for 98 households
- 2,050 Goats for 410 households
- 1,000 chickens for 200 households

The 1,400 small holder farmers were trained on the use of improved seed varieties, improved agronomy practices, conservation farming, pest management, horticulture, livestock fodder production and agroforestry. They were also provided with goats through a Goat Revolving Scheme in order to build their household assets.

The beneficiaries of the intensive training implemented on-farm interventions and demonstrated improved crop production and livestock management skills with an overall increase in household income and assets.



The case of Kasash Shibesh Asaye

Kasash Shibesh Asaye, 45, looks into the horizon of the mountainous Ebinat area as her breeding goats return from the grazing fields. Her excitement is evident, as she prepares to milk her goats, a daily chore that also supplements her household income.

Today, Kasash is the proud owner of five breeding goats donated to her through a livestock revolving system implemented by the Partners for Resilience (PfR) program, through Ethiopia Red Cross Society.

In 2012, the death of Kasash's husband was devastating. It left her with 3 young children desperate for basic survival. Kasash was engaged in menial jobs and earned meagre labour wages. As her situation shifted from bad to worse, her children became delinquents and dropped out of school to provide cheap labour as herders.

In 2013, ERCS jointly with the local Community-based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) Committee, using set criteria identified Kasash, and her children, living on a 0.25 hectare rented land, as a most-at-risk female-headed household within the Ebinat community.

Kasash received five breeding goats, among 410 other beneficiaries in the locality. One year later, her livelihood improved. From the sale of the ewes, she was able to fend for herself and her family. Kasash's children, who had earlier dropped out of school, were readmitted to continue with their studies.

In 2014, she constructed her dream home. Kasash's previously dilapidated grass-thatched hut was transformed into a corrugated iron sheet roofed house. The grass thatched hut was left to shelter her increasing flock of goats.

Kasash's new home is now a safe haven where she lives and works. She has diversified her income generating activities and now trades in farm produce and the sale of refreshments. From her earnings, Kasash has joined a Savings and Credit Co-operative Society in order to access credit for the expansion of her business. By December 2014, her total savings were 5,000 Ethiopian Birr. Kasash says:

"God brought Red Cross to us, especially widows who are vulnerable. Thanks to their generosity, we are now respected community members. We have a purpose in life. Our children also have a bright future as they join schools to gain knowledge and skills"



Great achievements!

Through the coordination of the CBDRR committees, the local communities provided labour for planting and management the seedlings. In addition, a multipurpose tree nursery for fruits, cassava and moringa was established. A total of 28,000 seedlings were planted along conserved areas on 20 hectares of the gentle slopes.

The adoption of improved high-yielding varieties and early maturing crop seeds enabled the community to increase their productivity, while adapting to erratic rainfall and changing planting seasons. For example sorghum harvests increased from 6–8 tons per hectare to 15–18 tons per hectare. The practice of conservation farming has also improved soil organic matter and enhanced land productivity. The distribution of five breeding goats to 410 beneficiaries significantly increased the household income and asset base of the previously vulnerable community members. Overall, these initiatives improved food security and nutrition.

The target communities reached a consensus that their livelihoods could be diversified, while managing and restoring the ecosystem through soil and water conservation and agroforestry practices. The local communities are more aware that their efforts to increase agricultural production should not exacerbate or create new risks of environmental degradation.

