

# Community driven endeavors

## through community organizations bear fruit

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### Drought exacerbates multiple problems

Like in most parts of Ethiopia, drought in Borena Zone of Oromia Region is occurring more frequently and lasting longer and the impact is becoming more devastating. Climate change, the nature of the dry land ecosystem, the gradual loss of the authority of traditional resource management institutions, population growth, and conflicts have exacerbated the drought's impact in the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist area of the zone.

The Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development with Partners for Resilience (ACORD/PfR) believes that the solution to the problem is to develop the existing capacity of the community to advocate for themselves.





## Efforts made to tackle the problems

At the beginning of the project, ACORD facilitated traditional coffee ceremonies known as '*Buna kala*' in eight *Kebeles* and received the traditional blessings of the community, which is most valued and a sign of recognition. On the occasion, the objective of the envisaged project was introduced. It was made clear to the community that the project was to be implemented based solely on the interests and priority needs of the community, with ACORD playing just a facilitating role in the process.

A series of training sessions on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment, resource mobilization, participatory monitoring & evaluation and learning process were held using methodologies that are appropriate for adults. The aim was to communicate the understanding, skills and practices of the Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) approach that would in turn enable communities to properly mobilize their resources to solve their own problems. A total of 1000 households from eight *kebeles* attended the training in their own respective localities.



After completing the community trainings, a comprehensive PDRA assessment was conducted on the fundamentals of the CMDRR approach. The training enabled the community to identify, analyze and propose solutions to their main hazards, and know the degree of vulnerability and the coping capacity. Then, the community came up with their own development and contingency plan. During the PDRA assessment, the community used participatory rural appraisal tools such as pairwise ranking, history telling, vulnerability ranks and community resource mapping which they found extremely interesting as the approach was friendly and valued their own knowledge and experiences.

To help communities take over the entire process in the course of solving the identified problems, PFR through ACORD in 2011 facilitated the establishment of a Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) committee in eight *Kebeles* in Miyo district of Borena Zone. The CMDRR committees had 10 members at each *Kebele* and 40 per cent of the members were women. The community selected CMDRR committee members including youths, traditional leaders, elders, *Kebele* administration and traditional forecasters.

To help the CMDRR committees achieve their objectives, capacity building trainings were conducted in various subjects such as organizational management, the CMDRR process, monitoring and evaluation, documentation, and community mobilization. They also made several exchange visits to other project areas doing similar work and shared experiences with them.

The committees then mobilized communities to contribute labor, sand, wood and land for constructing information centers that serve as documentation and knowledge sharing venues. ACORD supplied audio-visual materials to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing.

### CMDRR committees achieve remarkable results

Through four years of continuous hard work, the CMDRR community organizations have owned the project and achieved remarkable results. This was mainly because they had received a series of capacity building trainings on CMDRR and experience sharing visits. Some members initially did not believe that a project of their own choice would be implemented given past experiences, but they finally appreciated the new approach.

The tendency of communities to fully rely on support from either government or NGOs to solve their problems has changed. Now they have developed confidence about their own capacity to prioritize and solve or minimize the problems they face.

Community members previously believed that they were victims and had no resources to tackle their problems. They now have mobilized resources in the form of labor, local materials, indigenous knowledge and finance. The labor contribution of the community reached 20 percent in every public work. Communities in eight *kebeles* raised contingency funds amounting to 400,000 birr (USD 20,000) by contributing from their payment for public work. The contingency fund, which is managed by the committee, is deposited in a bank and will be used in times of emergency such as drought.

Traditional forecasters who are members of the committee are in charge of monitoring early warning information. The information that is collected from the *kebele* level early warning committee is disseminated by the traditional forecaster in monthly meetings so that the entire community gets the information and can put it into action.

The achievement of the CMDRR committee has been tremendous. For example, in the past, only one 3,000 m<sup>3</sup> pond was excavated in two months. With strong community mobilization, the community organization has now been able to mobilize community labor and excavate up to 12,000 m<sup>3</sup>. In this particular excavation work, the labor contribution of the community reached 30 percent. Moreover, an additional 800 hectares of rangelands have been developed fully the community. In 2013 and 2014, as part of effective rangeland utilization, they have also initiated pasture preservation in the form of hay and used it two times in times of drought.

The communities have developed a written by-law that governs the conservation and use of water schemes, rangelands, indigenous forests and conserved areas. In this way, the traditional resource management is linked to the legal system. The written by-law was reviewed and approved by district government and recognized in a legal system. The by-laws are a shift from the oral customary laws commonly practiced in the area.

Since 2011, the CMDRR committees have taken the initiative and facilitated cross-border rangeland and water resource utilization between communities of Ethiopia and Kenya. As a result of the negotiation through the CMDRR committees, the communities of the two countries are peacefully sharing the resources, with the community organization becoming a mediator of peace.

Motivated by the rewarding community mobilization work, the eight CMDRR committees are forming an umbrella of community organizations at the district level. The purpose is to consolidate the efforts for more resource mobilization and advocacy work. This organization has one representative from each *kebele* level community organization with an office at the district town.

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## Implementers and communities learn from the process

- In the process of the implementation, the communities and PfR have learnt that CMDRR committees are active in resource and community mobilization and help communities to help themselves with the resources they have.
- CMDRR committees are more effective as advocates and change agents than any external organization aimed at providing solutions. However, both external agents and local communities have to work together to achieve better results.