

Gillian Logie 2012

Can an integrated participatory approach effectively address the issue of livelihood resilience?

Introduction

The research was conducted over a 4 week period in Ethiopia, concentrating on the Goro Gutu Woreda. The aim was to explore the efficacy of an integrated community approach in identifying livelihood resilience opportunities. The approach involves consideration of disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation (CCA) and ecosystem management and restoration (EMR).

The findings show that an integrated participatory approach has the means to engage communities and facilitate the implementation of development actions. The majority of integrated development measures received popular support particularly when addressing DRR and EMR concerns, which are widely understood. However, limited knowledge of climate change has affected perceptions of risk and therefore decisions as to the appropriate adaptation measures to be adopted.

Efficacy of the integrated participatory approach to address livelihood resilience:

Communities embraced risk reduction strategies and have developed their own rules and regulations to maintain the measures. Participation, to an extent, has provided the tools for self-organisation as people have seen the value in actions implemented. This may be because prior to these interventions there had been few widespread coordinated preventative actions in the area; most assistance came in the form of relief aid. The participatory approach may be seen in this case as empowering as it provided a pathway away from dependency.

Ecosystem degradation is the hazard communities felt most warranted immediate attention as it affected both their security and livelihoods. All implemented actions addressed this environmental concern with a view to building livelihood resilience. Whilst this shows that community concerns are being addressed there is an inevitability regarding this point. Land in Goro Gutu was severely degraded and therefore it was impossible to adopt development actions which did not integrate ecosystem concerns. Government facilitators acknowledged that degradation was always their greatest concern; therefore, even without community support, it is likely that such measures would have been implemented.

Limitations of the integrated method:

Knowledge gaps

There were several difficulties in fully understanding the integration process. The belief that addressing one or two of the DRR, CCA and EMR strategies would automatically integrate all considerations into planning was relatively widespread and perhaps demonstrated the innovative nature of this project.

Climate change and CCA proved to be the most difficult concepts to understand, communicate and create contingencies for. This has several implications for livelihood resilience in Goro Gutu where ecosystem health determines survival. Omissions in climate change knowledge, reduces the overall preparedness of communities and facilitators to plan for uncertainty. Embarking on an integrated path with incomplete knowledge may result in the need to readdress some measures in the future as they prove to be inefficient as environmental conditions change. The choice of MYC may be such a measure given their water and fertiliser requirements. Though the promise of higher yields is attractive, the resulting soil degradation and need for increasing quantities of fertiliser and regular rainfall has the potential to prove detrimental to livelihood resilience.

Oversight

Given that this is a multi-site project the issue of oversight is salient. Retaining officers in the field for long periods of time is difficult given the Woreda's remote location. In order to advance projects and ensure that personal relations do not hamper the process, the research found that a single, permanent officer was not sufficient. Additional assistance is only provided when requested: for instance, when a new phase is to begin. It was suggested by an international facilitator that ERCS headquarters would benefit from assigning a responsible officer for the Woreda who could then visit for a few days at a time and on a more regular and frequent basis. This issue may become more relevant if some implemented measures prove unsustainable.