

CASE STUDY ETHIOPIA

Reducing Disaster in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

Community managed disaster risk reduction in a river basin community

Flash floods occurred in urban Dire Dawa in Ethiopia in '45, '77, '81, '97, '01, '04, '05, and '06. The increase in frequency of the floods especially in the last decade can be caused by climate change. Rains are heavier than before. During the last flash flood in 2006, 256 people were killed, 244 disappeared and 10,000 were displaced. There was a large loss of houses, infrastructure and livelihoods.

After the flood of 2006, first relief was provided and after that the Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) process was started. This process in Dire Dawa is described below with the help of quotes of the two community members presented in the next paragraphs.

'The hills are changed, we are changed, too': Abdella Muse

Abdella Muse (45) has been participating in the CMDRR activities ever since our partner organization Jerusalem Children and Community Development Organization (JeCCDO) began implementing the project in 2008. The father of six children was born and has been living ever since in the village of Genda Ada. This village is located at the foot of Gara Babu/Hill Babu on the suburbs of Dire Dawa City Administration Council.

Abdella: 'Gara Babu used to be a means of our livelihood when I was younger. But we mercilessly cut the trees on the mountain and sold the wood in the town. When we had finished cutting and selling all the trees, we dug out the stones from the hill and sold these, too. Then, the hill started taking revenge on us - the offenders. Our actions exacerbated the flooding problem of the villages as well as the entire flood prone areas in and around Dire Dawa.'

'CMDRR for me is God send': Safo Alisho

Safo Alisho (50) lives in Genda Ada village in the upper stream of Dire Dawa town. The village is one of the four target communities of the CMDRR project. Safo: *'The devastating floods of August 5, 2006 that came at 3:00 in midnight, spared my children but took away our farm which was our only means of livelihood. We had nothing to feed our children let alone send them to school. My husband could not endure seeing his children go hungry and so he disappeared. This worsened my problem, but I resolutely decided to remain with my children until death does us part. Then, I began to sell vegetables in the nearby market for other traders but the profit from this could not feed me let alone my seven children.'*



Community risk assessment

CMDRR at community level

The CMDRR process in Dire Dawa consisted of several activities. First, there was capacity building of riverine communities, consisting of training them in CMDRR and making a risk assessment and action plans with them. Through this process, the communities' attitude changed. They now felt more joint responsibility for communal vegetation on hills. As Abdella Muse states: *'Previously, we thought that disasters are the results of the anger of God and cannot be prevented but now we have learnt that disasters can be the results of reckless human actions and can be prevented with knowledge, commitment and collective actions.'*

Self Help Groups Efforts were undertaken to conserve the environment and saving groups of women were established to improve the economical resilience of the community. Safo: *'CMDRR project helped us to organize ourselves into Self Help Groups (SHGs). In our saving group which has 20 members, we meet once a week, save money and take out loans.'*

Rehabilitation The hills were rehabilitated by the community, as Abdella describes: *'With the money allocated by CORDAID through JeCCDO implementation, we built stone bund terraces and planted seedlings and transferred them to the hill. And within two years, we managed to rehabilitate the*

hills that we had left ragged and barren. The terraces kept the water from running down the hills thereby preventing erosion and allowing water to percolate.'

Livelihoods The rehabilitation of the hills in its turn helped to diversify people's livelihoods to make them more resilient to the floods. Abdella: *'With the growing of plants including grass, the hills began to look green again. We then approached JECCDO to give us loan to buy improved breed cows so that we can take advantage of the grass that has grown on the hill. Our proposal was accepted and we got cows on loan from Addis-Alem CBO which JECCDO had organized earlier. Thirty of us were organized under a cooperative and we now have 20 cows. We sell the milk in the town to hotels and the town dwellers. We also grow vegetables and fruits such as oranges and papaya. We have a water point where members can collect water for drinking as well as for agricultural work. We charge minimal amount for the water the community collects from our water point.'*

Sofa has the same kind of experience: *'The CMDRR project gave me and 50 other victims of the flood a training on how to fatten sheep and goats and support our livelihood in the process. They also gave us four heads of sheep. I fattened the sheep and sold two of them for 1300 birr. With the money, I began to buy tomatoes in large boxes and sell at retail price right there in the market. I found this profitable; I could then feed my children and managed to send them to school.'*



Check dam construction

Early Warning Another risk reduction measure was the creation of a community based flood early warning system. This system consisted of mobile communication with upstream communities on information about rainfall or floods occurring upstream. Also, measures were taken to reduce the runoff water from the hills. The water was diverted to farms. Through this, vulnerability to flood was reduced.

The role of the government

Because the community now became more organized and more united, lobby with the government for support was more feasible. As Abdella says: *'Nobody would have listened to us poor people: as individuals we are like sand in the flood. But organized as a group we have power.'*

Municipality The government was invited and visited the areas in which the CMDRR process was going on to see how the communities had improved their situation through their own efforts. This motivated the government to discuss DRR plans and options with the community. As Abdella describes: *'Our success has attracted the attention of many, including the local government that has now become our supporter. In July 2008, we invited the mayor of the town to visit our rehabilitation work on Gara Babu Hill and he was so amazed by what he saw. Pointing to Gara Dalu, a hill in front of Gara Babu, the mayor asked us: 'what about that hill?' I said: 'this is poor hill; it has no father.' The mayor then replied, 'the government is the father of the poor' and he later allocated a huge sum of money for the rehabilitation of Gara Dalu Hill. Stone bund terraces have now been built on the hill and it is beginning to look green again like Gara Babu standing in front of it. Though it is the local government that financed the rehabilitation of Gara Dalu, we are the one in charge of protecting it.'*

Lobby This involvement of the municipality is a very strong point in this CMDRR process. For instance, the municipality supported the construction of a 420 m long flood retention wall to protect farms along the river. This was partly because of the lobby of the community, as Abdella says: *'When the government built 6 kilometers retention wall (in Dechatu dry sand stream bank to prevent the flash flooding in Dire Dawa), we discovered that there are more areas that needed a retention wall. So we approached them as organized people and they listened to us. As a result of our lobby to city administration, 420 meters extra walls have now been built for us.'* Also, land allocated for the construction of houses along river was canceled and left free, since the risk on a flood is too high in this area. This was a very important change in decision-making in the city administration.

Regional level Also on the regional level things were happening with regards to DRR and climate change adaptation. A regional conference on DRR and climate change adaptation with relevant regional Dire Dawa administration and four regions in the shared watershed area was organized. Further, a regional DRR/climate adaptation/environmental protection institution was legally established for interregional linkage in watershed area. This was done by community representatives and government officials. And last but not least, the approach used in Dire Dawa was considered by Ethiopian government as a useful model for the country as a whole.



Stone Bund constructed at Dima Hill

Conclusions

Achievements and lessons learned of the CMDRR process in Dire Dawa are the following:

- During the flood in 2010 no lives were lost;
- Participation of a broad spectrum of members in risk assessment and action planning strengthens positive long term results;
- Bottom up planning/community led/strong leaders are needed for positive long term results. This creates ownership and good possibilities for the community to link with the government;
- Demonstration of what is achieved is the best way to influence actors like the government. In this case financial support for the plans of the community was gained;
- Cooperation with the municipality can bear great results;
- Regional forum was established that works with upstream as well as downstream communities.



DRR Committee

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