Africa
ETHIOPIA

TURNING ADVERSITY INTO OPPORTUNITY

CORDAID Ethiopia are masters in reverse cooking, where disasters are turned into opportunities for improving a community's resilience.

KEY INGREDIENTS

SUSTAINABILITY

Permanence
– Strengthen the community's abilities to mobilise and manage financial resources

Effectiveness
– Map and utilise local capacities (including resources, material, knowledge)

INSTITUTIONALISATION

Policy environment
– Decentralise DRM frameworks by promoting local DRM strategies that are owned by the local government and informed by local actors

Structures and mechanisms
– Recognise informal structures (e.g. community leader groups) as channels for effective engagement

Funding
– Allocate specific budget for CBDRM activities in local and national plans
– Use existing community structures for resource mobilisation so as to increase trust

Accountability
– Create local bodies (watchdogs) to monitor government policies, planning and budgeting around CBDRM

This recipe uses the method of reverse cooking, where the impact of a disaster is turned into an opportunity for improving agricultural practices and increased community awareness and participation in DRM activities.

To successfully make this dish, it is important to consider some key ingredients, without which this reverse cooking exercise will not give the expected results. These include community and multi-stakeholders' involvement in participatory disaster risk assessment (PDRA), development of action and contingency plans, community self-funding (contributions), Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. Income-generating mechanisms, as well as recognition of the role of informal structures and their contributions, are also vital.

Despite the fact that the community of Diredawa in Eastern Ethiopia receives less than average rainfall, it has been experiencing heavy floods from the river nearby: this is a result of sudden and heavy rains upstream, which resulted in loss of livelihood and lives also downstream. During the flood emergency response activities, CordAid, together with a local community-based organisation (JECCDO), engaged the communities in conducting a hazard, vulnerability and capacity risk assessment, which supported the development of action plans to leverage this flooding and turn it into an opportunity: channels and barriers were created to divert the excess water into agriculture fields and thus use the water for irrigation purposes to increase the area's moisture. By engaging the communities in the risk assessments, it was possible to combine the local knowledge of past disaster events with the present needs, and experiences of different groups (including people with disabilities, youth and women) were identified. This inclusive participatory approach ensured the implementation of mitigation and prevention activities that attracted the attention of the local government to receive further support and recognition. Furthermore, local government's involvement and support resulted in the recognition of the community structure by the authorities and inclusion of risk reduction activities in the local government's annual plans and budget.

JECCDO and the community continued managing the CBDRM activities through this recognised community structure, which has eventually resulted in it becoming a registered local NGO with the possibility to access to financial support to continue the activities after CordAid support was over. The community's engagement went further to include the establishment of a savings and credits association managed mainly by groups of women in support of vulnerable groups. Planting fruit trees was an additional income generating activity, which also supported environmental rehabilitation efforts: trees also support flood impact mitigation, as they slow the water flow in the hilly and sloppy grounds surrounding Diredawa town.

The creation of community-based early warning systems helped to a greater extent to alert the downstream communities to get immediate information on a potential flood that may harm them. The use of mobile phones is one of the fastest means that people have to receive alerts from the highlands.

The community and the local government have also started undertaking periodical joint field monitoring of the activities, to gauge the progress and reflect on potential improvements: this contributed to establishing a strong collaboration between government and non-government organisations. The presence of DRM policies and structures at various levels (national to local) has played a vital role in ensuring this initiative's success, although further intervention and support is needed.