

PARES Case Study of Engagement & Involvement for Resilience

Case Study Title/ID: Ethiopia, Drought, Social Capital & Collective Action

Country/location: Ethiopia – Dubluk, Elwaye & Gomole Districts, Borana Zone

Crisis/challenge type: Drought

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PARES Domain illustrated by this case study:

Social Relations & Structures (Social capital & collective action): Pre-existing social networks and mutual support systems that provide the foundation for coordinated community responses.

Recommended Actions

For Communities: Uphold shared rules and responsibilities agreed through elders and traditional courts

Participate consistently in meetings and collective preparedness actions

For Government: Formally engage traditional courts and elders in local governance and disaster risk management processes

For NGOs: Use culturally accepted accountability mechanisms to improve participation

For Funders: Recognize and support social and governance mechanisms that enable accountability

Data for this case analysis

Primary data from three districts/villages – 18 key informant interviews; 9 focus group discussions; 20 validation workshops. All collected in 2023.

Key Message

Social capital and collective action: When culturally legitimate leadership and indigenous social protection systems such as elders' councils, traditional courts, and the '*Buusaa Gonofaa*' mutual support culture guide community engagement,

participation and compliance increase, enabling coordinated collective action that strengthens drought preparedness and resilience.

Case study summary

In Borana communities, strong customary governance systems and indigenous social protection traditions shape how people organize and respond to drought. Elders and traditional courts provide culturally legitimate authority and serve as key platforms for sharing information and guiding community decisions. Through regular village meetings, elders discuss community wellbeing, share seasonal forecasts or warnings, and encourage households to prepare for anticipated drought conditions. At the same time, the indigenous mutual support system known as '*Buusaa Gonofaa*' promotes solidarity and collective responsibility, ensuring that households support one another during difficult times. Together, these cultural institutions foster accountability, participation, and cooperation. As a result, communities coordinate preparedness actions, support vulnerable households, and strengthen their collective capacity to cope with recurring drought.

Detailed explanation of engagement mechanisms

Context that provides the conditions in which the observed actions work

In drought-prone areas of Borana Zone, communities face recurrent climate shocks alongside geographic dispersion and logistical barriers that can limit consistent participation in formal coordination meetings. At the same time, Borana society is characterized by strong customary governance systems and deeply embedded cultural norms of mutual assistance. Elders and traditional courts hold significant social authority and legitimacy, while community meetings organized by elders serve as important forums for discussing local issues and sharing information. A key element of this social fabric is the indigenous support system known as '*Buusaa Gonofaa*', through which community members provide assistance to those in need by sharing livestock, food, or other resources. These traditions create a strong sense of solidarity and shared responsibility that shapes how communities respond to drought and other hardships.

The actions (mechanisms) that were observed to lead to resilience outcomes

The pathway is activated when elders and traditional institutions mobilize communities through culturally legitimate platforms and reinforce norms of collective responsibility. Elders organize village meetings where they share information about community wellbeing, seasonal forecasts, and emerging drought risks. These gatherings encourage discussion and motivate households to prepare for potential challenges. At the same time, cultural norms such as '*Buusaa Gonofaa*' promote mutual assistance among community members, encouraging households to support those facing hardship through resource sharing and collective effort. Elders reinforce expectations of participation and responsible behaviour, strengthening social accountability within the community. Through these mechanisms, trusted leadership, shared information, and cultural norms of solidarity work together to motivate participation and coordinated action.

Observed outcomes

As a result of these mechanisms, community participation in meetings and preparedness activities increases despite logistical challenges. Information about drought risks and preparedness spreads widely through trusted local forums, enabling communities to develop a shared understanding of emerging threats. Households are more likely to support one another through the '*Buusaa Gonofaa*' system, ensuring that vulnerable members receive assistance during difficult periods. These processes strengthen collective coordination, reinforce social accountability, and enable more timely preparedness actions. Ultimately, this contributes to reduced drought-related losses and enhances the community's capacity to organize and sustain collective responses to recurring climate shocks.

Case Evidence

Vignettes #3, #4, #5, and #6 in Ethiopia – Drought – Supporting Evidence document

Related Case Studies

Social relations and structures

Ethiopia – Drought – Trusted Leaders and Communication

Ethiopia – Drought – Knowledge Integration

Learning and capabilities

Ethiopia – Drought – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships

Other relevant case studies

Ethiopia

Ethiopia – Covid19 – Resource Mobilization and Management

Ethiopia – Covid19 – Multi-sectoral Collaboration

Drought

Uganda – Drought – Trusted Leaders and Intermediaries

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Social Capital and Collective Action

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Multi-stakeholder Coordination

Uganda – Flood – Drought – Embedded and Equitable Partnerships