

PARES Case Study of Engagement & Involvement for Resilience

Case Study Title/ID: Ethiopia, Drought, Trusted Leaders & Intermediaries

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 (Trusted leaders and intermediaries): working with trusted elders and traditional leaders to develop & communicate messages.

Recommended Actions

For Communities: Listen to early warnings shared by trusted leaders and take early actions such as protecting assets and planning food and water use.

For Government: Work closely with traditional leaders in early warning systems and recognize their role in sharing and interpreting drought and health information.

For NGOs & health program implementers: Support elders, wise men, HEWs, and ADAs as trusted messengers.

Provide training and tools to communicate early warning messages clearly.

For Funders: Invest in community-based communication systems and support trusted local messengers and sustained engagement with communities.

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

Trusted leaders and communication – When drought and health information is communicated through trusted community leaders such as elders, wise men, and local leaders, communities are more likely to understand risks, trust the messages, and take timely action to protect livelihoods and health.

Case study summary

In drought-prone Borana Zone, communities experience recurrent climate shocks and maintain strong trust in traditional leadership structures. Elders, wise men, and local leaders hold significant social authority and are widely regarded as credible sources of guidance. When drought information is communicated through these trusted figures often alongside HEWs and ADAs, the messages are perceived as relevant and reliable. Through community meetings and informal discussions, trusted leaders interpret and share drought and preparedness information in culturally meaningful ways. Because the information is delivered by respected individuals who understand local realities, communities are more likely to believe the messages and act early. As a result, households and community leaders take preparatory actions such as protecting assets, adjusting livelihood practices, and coordinating collective responses, strengthening community resilience to drought.

Detailed explanation of engagement mechanisms

Context that provides the conditions in which the observed actions work

The context is characterized by strong traditional leadership systems and high community trust in elders and wise men. These leaders hold social legitimacy based on cultural norms, experience, and long-standing authority within the community. At the same time, government CHWs, ADAs, and local leaders operate at the village level and interact frequently with communities. Repeated exposure to drought has increased community awareness of climate risks and heightened sensitivity to early warning information. In this context, communication through trusted leaders creates conditions where messages about drought preparedness are more likely to be accepted and acted upon.

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

The pathway operates when drought information and preparedness guidance are communicated through trusted leaders and community intermediaries. Elders, wise men, and local leaders share information through community gatherings, informal discussions, and existing governance structures. Health extension workers and agricultural development agents also support the dissemination of information. These trusted actors translate technical information into locally understandable guidance and reinforce key

preparedness messages. Their credibility and social influence strengthen the acceptance of the information and encourage collective discussion and decision-making within the community.

Observed outcomes

Communities develop greater confidence in drought risk information and demonstrate increased willingness to act before impacts intensify. Households and community leaders take early preparatory actions such as protecting assets, adjusting livelihood strategies, and organizing community preparedness activities. These actions reduce delays in response, limit avoidable losses, and strengthen the community's capacity to anticipate and respond to drought.

Case Evidence

Vignettes #1 and #2 in Ethiopia – Drought – Supporting Evidence document

Related Case Studies

Social relations and structures

Ethiopia – Drought – Knowledge Integration

Ethiopia – Drought – Social Capital and Collective Action

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