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Improving Community Response to Droughts

ANDREAS JENET, EUNICE OBALA, YUSUF LORIKA

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Germany (VSFG), Kenya

Abstract

Assessing decades of humanitarian action for pastoralist communities in East Africa, major actors appraised their intervention as predominantly ineffective. In recurrent droughts, each year more people in arid lands got affected by malnutrition, loss of livestock assets, and subsequently, loss of their livelihood system. VSF developed a framework for community drought preparedness in East Africa that is essentially community based and considers driving forces in pastoralist communities. The programme carried out since beginning of 2008 in Karamoja (Uganda, Kenya), Oromiya (Ethiopia, Kenya), and in the Somali ecosystems aims to enable the pastoralist communities to respond effectively and in an integrated manner to recurrent droughts. Pillars of the ECHO funded programme contain:

1) Elaboration and endorsement of community based preparedness plans by area authorities and the establishment of effective early warning networks to ensure an increased ability of communities to respond to droughts

2) Increased livelihood security through decreased conflict and increased sustainable access to dry season grazing and water

3) Protection of key livelihood assets through the establishment of private support systems and alternative sources of income for direct beneficiaries.

4) Compilation and dissemination of lessons learned to development partners and communities.

VSFG uses a participatory approach in designing and implementing its interventions in the areas of operation. Communities are engaged directly through open forums and committees in which all members are given the opportunity to decide on the support and intervention.

The communities elaborate resource maps in which essential features as seasonal fluctuation of resources, conflict prone areas, migration routes, settlements, etc are indicated. With assistance of these maps, the community based knowledge, but as well the technical expertise of the team, strategic and holistic interventions are planned and conducted. This results in more efficient use of grazing and water resources.

Recently developed tools such as reciprocal grazing agreements, pastoral field schools (PFS) and village community banking (VICOBA) have been evaluated as successful media for drought preparedness options.

We observed strong ownership by the communities of established water points, livestock pharmacies, community based animal health services, VICOBA initiatives, PFS, early warning systems and peace committees.

Keywords: Community based animal health services, pastoral field schools, reciprocal grazing agreements, village community banking

Contact Address: Andreas Jenet, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Germany (VSFG), Programmes East Africa, P.O. Box 25653, 00603 Nairobi, Kenya, e-mail: jenet@vsfg.org