

# Building the resilience of women to climate extremes and disasters



Experiences of HUNDEE's women self-help groups in Yabelo and Arero districts in Ethiopia

June 2016



A cattle market in Yabelo.

## Overview

Among the Borena people in Southern Ethiopia, the physical and mental burden on women and girls is significantly greater than that on men. Their daily work includes the management of livestock, raising children, collecting water and preparing food for their families.

A participatory assessment conducted by Christian Aid showed that the impact of climate extremes such as drought and flooding directly affected the livelihoods of women and girls. The assessment showed that women and girls fared particularly badly when family food supply and water availability dwindle during times of drought. A low level of food consumption relative to other members in their households, long-distance travel in search of water and firewood, and the particular vulnerability of pregnant and breast-feeding women were some of the key risks.

**'We have to travel far to find water and pasture for our livestock and our family. This creates extra, very heavy work for women,'** said Tume Yarco Deeda, who took part in the assessment.

Initial discussions helped to establish the need for groups to be formed in order to provide a safe space for women. These would enable them to exchange views on how best to manage their finances to prepare for and mitigate risks associated with climate change.

Since March 2015, HUNDEE, Christian Aid's local partner in Yabelo and Arero, has helped 1,541 women to organise themselves into 91 self-help groups.

This section provides a snapshot of the key outcomes of this project and reflects on how best to roll out resilience activities such as these on a larger scale.

## Context

The women's self-help groups are focused in the south of the country in the Oromia Region, which contains two of the seven high-intensity intervention districts in which BRACED Ethiopia operates.

The primary challenge for communities in these areas is sporadic rainfall, making it difficult for farmers to decide when and how to sow and harvest their crops. Agro-pastoral groups such as the Borena rely heavily on their livestock, and climate extremes have a direct

impact on their ability to find water and pasture for their herds, sell their cattle and preserve fodder. This in turn leads to the mortality of livestock, low livestock prices, high grain prices, poor nutrition, health issues, migration and inter-tribal conflict.



Women discuss the reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed in recent flooding.

### The groups

The main aim of the self-help groups is to support women to empower themselves socially and economically. They do this, in part, by developing a culture of saving, creating easy access to loans and promoting women's engagement in income-generating activities to enhance their social and economic status.

The groups were established following a vulnerability assessment designed to identify the poorest and most vulnerable women in each community.

The groups provide women with a forum in which to discuss common social issues including how to eradicate harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation.

Rotational leadership is exercised to allow each woman the opportunity to chair meetings and make final decisions.

Members have developed strong social bonds and are supporting each other in various schemes such as house construction and renovation, building grain stores and extra support for particularly vulnerable members of the group.

Participating women say things have improved for them since they established the self-help groups.

**'Now we are confident we can manage our money and we have the opportunity to make decisions about how we use it,'** said Kula Taro Wariyo.

Marima Mohammed says the work has given her independence: **'We are not expecting income to come only through our husbands. With our income, we are planning to buy educational material, soap and clothes for our children.'**

Tume Yarco Deeda welcomes the 'very big change' that the project has made to her life. **'Before we came together, we had no chance to gather and discuss the issues that affect our lives. Now we have savings and we have strong unity,'** she said.

### Results

- Despite frequent droughts that significantly affected livestock in Yabelo and Arero districts, animal feed preservation was not noticeably practised until recently. Women have now started to collect and store large amounts of grass for use during periods of pasture scarcity.
- Women are now more involved in the rehabilitation of ponds through their own initiative, rather than waiting for support from external agencies.
- The groups have saved 224,216 birr (£7,250) through weekly collections, interest gathered from loans and small fines for delayed repayments, with an average saving of 2,464 birr (£80) per group.
- Anecdotal evidence found that conflicts have reduced significantly due to increased solidarity and understanding between clans.
- Groups have been particularly successful in setting up internal control systems such as attendance records, managing savings, loans, fines and better use of resources. HUNDEE will continue to build on these skills through training.



Women gather wood for house construction (top) and collect grass for fodder preservation (below).



# Adapting to climate extremes in northern Burkina Faso



In Yaro, northern Burkina Faso, desert communities survive in temperatures of up to 49 degrees Celsius, walking and cycling for hours to reach the market.

## Overview

In the desert expanses of northern Burkina Faso, where temperatures soar to 49 degrees Celsius in the midday sun, communities are exposed either to severe drought or flooding for the majority of the year. While many traditional methods exist for adapting to these climate-related events, malnutrition is a constant threat.

## Context

In the hot season, the communities in and around Yako in the north of the country are exposed to strong sunlight, with little shade. This makes working in the middle of the day and sleeping at night very difficult, directly affecting the livelihoods and health of the most vulnerable people.

Suzanne Koalaga said: **'We don't have a fridge, so our food decomposes, sometimes within a few hours.'**

The repetitive cycles of climate extremes have pushed younger generations to migrate to the cities, where they have more chance of earning a living.

Suzanne's husband Victor described the difficulties for he and his children, who have been forced to move to the capital city Ouagadougou in search of work.

**'Last year, our wall collapsed in the floods. I tried to repair it with my sons, but it collapsed again. There's nothing we can do to stop the rains – all we can do is try to cope with what remains,'** he said.

## The impact on women and girls

In Burkinabé culture, men leave home to search for food, travelling for days at a time. Women, however, remain at home and are required to walk for hours to find water.

Justin Bonhoungo acknowledged that this is particularly hard for women during the hot season.

**'Sometimes they have to walk four or five times a day, carrying their children, to find water,'** he says.



Women and children bear a significant burden in Burkina Faso. Looking after their families, fetching water and providing food is particularly difficult during seasonal peaks.

Women and children are also required to resolve low-level intertribal conflicts. During seasonal peaks, when resources are particularly low, rivalries can be exacerbated.

Rasmata Pagbelguem described the difficulties for women during these times.

**'Sometimes people from other villages come and take our resources. This makes feeding our families much more difficult. We rely on the water and the crops that we have – we have no other source of revenue.'**



Women and girls suffer disproportionately to men, particularly during seasonal peaks.

### What we are doing

Christian Aid's partner ODE has set up classes for the most isolated desert communities, teaching mothers how to provide a nutritious diet for their children.



Nutrition classes.

Using the resources that are available, ODE is now organising fortnightly *bouillies* – classes at which organisers teach local women how to prepare

large vats of nutritious porridge made from flour, groundnuts and water.

Sylvie, a mother of two young children, told us:

**'I would like to provide better meals for my children but it's difficult with the resources we have. We need to share the knowledge we gain from classes like these with our neighbours so that everyone can provide good food for their families.'**



ODE and Christian Aid staff sampling the porridge.