



Halfa Ayke (centre) with other members of the Berimel Listening Group. In our picture, they are listening to weather information via the solar radio provided by Christian Aid. Credit :Kim Morasse

Impact of climate information in Ethiopia

The Building Resilience and Adaption to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme is helping people become more resilient to climate extremes in South and Southeast Asia and in the African Sahel and its neighbouring countries.

In Ethiopia, Christian Aid is implementing BRACED through a three-year multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary initiative called Climate Information and Assets for Resilience in Ethiopia (CIARE). Working with the National Meteorological Agency (NMA), the UK Met Office, BBC Media Action and Action for Development (AFD), the project aims at bringing climate information services to vulnerable communities using 'woreda' or vernacular level weather forecasts.

Solar radios
To help community members to access scientific weather forecast information, Christian Aid and AFD supplied each listening group with a solar radio. The radios were to provide

regular updates on the weather patterns in Ethiopia. This information supplemented the traditional information gathered by the community through practices like reading the stars, looking at animal intestines and examining animal behaviour.

Mid-term survey data conducted in 300 households, showed that traditional practices were shown to discourage the use of scientific climate information. This could be the reason why one of the listening groups called Berimel took three months before being persuaded to embrace the weather information disseminated by the radio stations.

Interviews with the two listening groups - Berimel in Erboke kebele and Kilima Budu in Zegerma kebele - provided insightful information on the success of CIARE's climate information services work.

Kilimia Budu Listening Group

Halfa Ayke, 21, is a member of the Kilima Budu listening group.

He says: 'It is in our culture to talk about the weather. We observe the stars to tell the weather. Lately, we have begun to embrace scientific weather information.'

In the past, our traditional methods of weather forecasting told us when the drought season would come and when it would rain. When we now compare the two, the radio messages have proven to be more accurate than the traditional methods.

'Traditional methods deviated slightly from what is observed. Radio, on the other hand, is more specific in timing. The traditional weather [information] tells the general period of the month, but not exactly when, as opposed to the scientific [information].'

'We learned that the rainfall would come in small quantities and we were told to prepare our land, which we did accordingly. We would call a meeting of the Kilima Budu group in advance and inform the members to plough their lands.'

'We learned how water helps conserve lives and livelihood. We are now ready to prepare our land as early as possible. One of the ways we do so is by enclosing/allocating pasture lands and preserving grass for animals. We need to utilise grains properly without wasting them.'

'Those who can read would benefit (if climate information – per CIARE project plans – was distributed via text messaging), but we are benefiting more from the radio because everyone listens.'

Berimel Listening Group

Arkulo Tovochi, is a 60-year-old man and a member of Berimel listening group. He explains how members of his group are starting to apply techniques promoted in radio messages, including small-scale soil management, crop production and animal husbandry. It is evident that some members are beginning to challenge some cultural practices, but only to a small extent. Evidence shows a lack of sufficient attitude change when it comes to the value members place on the information they receive from the radio.

Another contributing factor is that over half of the surveyed households neither listen to scientific climate information services, nor find them interesting (88% combined men, women and wife-headed households). Focus group data confirms this is the case in Berimel - the group expected external groups to supply replacement batteries for the radio, as opposed to taking on the responsibility like the Kilima Budu listening group did. Kilima Budu took the initiative to pay for replacement batteries. This demonstrates the information the radio provides is valuable.

In Berimel, Arkulo demonstrates that these challenges can be overcome, as traditional forecasts have been unreliable. However, not all members feel the same about traditional forecasts and would not yet consider the radio to be 'better'.

'What we predict traditionally concerning the weather is different from what is observed. We are now experiencing dry weather as compared to what we anticipate,' Arkulo adds.

'My personal observations on the challenges of radio access and its application is a lack of power to recharge the radio. We are not clear on who is buying the batteries.

'We construct ponds if dry season is forecasted. On the other hand, we can't build a dam upstream because we shouldn't deny downstream communities access to water.'

Challenges and lessons learnt

Focus group interviews revealed that because of the climate information package supported by the project, community members are beginning to translate radio messages into action. However, progress is being hindered by a lack of sufficient technical and stakeholder support. For example, both groups have experienced challenges related to radio access, many people sharing one or two radios and having no central meeting place.

Kilima Budu members have specifically expressed their need for more support, wanting additional radios and more frequent visits from AFD project officers and other partners. Mid-term review data suggests a lack of access to scientific climate information as the greatest interference to members' interest and application (81% men, 65% women, 69% wife-headed households).

Additionally, to absorb the impacts of the severe drought, project inputs and government support needs to increase. While the government in 2016/17 financially invested in obtaining and bringing animal feed to South Omo from areas with surplus, the amount supplied was below demand and hindered the capacity of communities to benefit from the resilience actions they were using.

Lessons learned

Illiteracy is observed to be a key factor that inhibits access to and the greater reach of climate information services. Lack of documentation of radio messages in Erbole prevents the cascading of learning. Text messaging could be an inexpensive option to increase the reach of radio messages to communities. While providing basic Functional Adult Literacy training could be a more sustainable option than other ways of providing increased access.

The mid-term household survey showed that while no men cited lack of knowledge on how to apply scientific climate information as a challenge to decision making, 50% of women led households and 50% of wife-headed households did.



Above: members of the Kilima Budu Listening Group.
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Women are less represented in the listening groups and did not speak up as much as men. Increased training for women on the application of scientific climate information could be beneficial, as a large percentage of target community members are women whose primary role is to take care of the household.

For community resilience building to be effective, a degree of partnership and inclusive decision making from larger stakeholders, such as government officials is key. It is significant to note that Delo Shiferaw, a local development agent, was present during the focus group with the Berimel Listening Group. His participation in the project allows community members and other relevant stakeholders to engage in joint discussions and decision making so that the community can be better supported.

