

# 04 Ethiopian Droughts: Reducing The Risk To Livelihoods Through Cash Transfers

## BACKGROUND

Ethiopia suffers from recurrent drought and famine. In 1984-85, war and drought caused a food crisis during which around one million people died - a disaster from which Ethiopia never fully recovered. In 1999-2000, rains failed again, affecting eight million people. By mid-2003, an insidious combination of sporadic seasonal rains, poverty and HIV/AIDS has conspired to leave over 12 million Ethiopians dependent on relief.

The majority of Ethiopia's people are agriculturalists, dependent on rain-fed crops or pastoralists, earning a living through livestock. However, recurrent droughts have eroded their assets - crops have failed and farmers, too desperate to leave land fallow and let it recover, are forced to keep degrading their soils. In the mountainous north, soil erosion is a serious problem. Falling crop yields and shortage of water mean livestock are dying in droves - or being sold off in a last-ditch attempt to survive.

## OBJECTIVES

But over the past year, grain prices have doubled and livestock prices have halved, driving the already destitute further into debt. Humanitarian organizations have realized that simply providing millions of tons of food aid every few years - while life-saving in the short term - is doing nothing to address the deeper causes of this chronic disaster.

They have experimented successfully with distributing cash for work instead of food aid. This has several effects: it provides the most vulnerable with desperately needed money, reducing the need to sell off precious assets such as livestock or tools; it enables the poorest to buy food, stimulating the local economy and encouraging farmers to produce more; and the work for which they are paid is focused on measures which reduce disaster risk.

## ACTIVITIES

South Wollo, in northern Ethiopia, is one of the zones hit by food insecurity. The population

depends on agriculture and livestock for its livelihood. But recurrent drought has forced them to sell many assets and plunged them into destitution. As mountainous soils erode, the increasing pressure on available land makes matters worse.

In October 2000, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) initiated a program to reduce vulnerability to drought. They distributed cash totaling US\$ 760,000 to 62,000 people in Ambassel and Kutaber districts of South Wollo. In return, recipients had to work on 'employment generation schemes' (EGS), which focused on road construction and environmental protection (e.g. terracing fields, building check-dams, protecting springs). Food distributions continued to those unable to take part in EGS.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

■ **Improved access to food:** Providing cash rather than food aid enabled households to choose which food to purchase, when and how much.

■ **Better long-term food security:** Building 143 ha of terraces and 50 check-dams reduced soil erosion and increased soil depth, moisture and fertility, which in turn increased crop yields.

■ **Stronger livelihoods:** Constructing 96 km of roads improved the access of farmers and pastoralists to local markets, enabling them to buy and sell their produce.

■ **Healthier lives:** Better roads mean quicker journey times to health centres in district capitals. Cleaner springs ensure a healthier drinking water supply, reducing disease.

■ **Healthier livestock:** Better crop yields and water quality ensure healthier animals. Beneficiaries were also able to use the cash they earned to purchase goats.

■ **Preventing sale of assets:** The intervention has prevented target households from selling any more vital assets - such as tools or livestock.

## LESSONS

■ The ERCS has a strong, community-based network of volunteers who can mobilize and monitor the activities of vulnerable people in often-inaccessible communities. This complemented the role of the Ethiopian government which provided technical expertise but lacked access at community level.

■ The presence of Red Cross volunteers among communities means that they are well placed to understand the risks facing vulnerable communities. Volunteers used this knowledge to help villagers design appropriate risk reduction measures.

■ Distributing money rather than food enabled households to choose how to spend the cash – whether on food or on longer-term food security strategies (e.g. investing in tools or livestock). Nearly 100 per cent of households said they preferred cash to food aid.

■ Concerns that distributing cash could lead to higher food prices proved unfounded. However, weekly market price monitoring is needed to check on inflation. If inflation occurs, the program should be converted into food for work.

■ However, the average cash distribution of US\$ 12 per beneficiary was not sufficient for most people to invest in buying new assets – it simply prevented them from selling any more assets. Future programs should therefore increase the wage rate.

■ Program participants were not provided with enough tools or cement to complete construction projects to a high standard. Future employment generation schemes should include such non-wage costs in their calculations.

■ While cash is easier and quicker to distribute than food, there were concerns over handling of cash because of security implications. However, there were no reports of cash being misused for unintended purposes (e.g. alcohol).

■ Cash-based employment generation schemes are best implemented when the main constraint to food security is access to food, not availability of food.

## CONCLUSION

Distributing cash instead of food allowed the ERCS to help those affected by drought to protect their livelihoods. Households could choose what they invested their money on in order to cope with the disaster. Their participation in community work helped to prevent long-term threats to their livelihoods.

posed by soil erosion and future droughts. The ERCS is now implementing a similar program in response to the 2003 food crisis, which incorporates lessons learned from 2000.



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# 05 Modelling And Deciding With Stakeholders: Lessons On How Project Success And Sustainability May Improve

## BACKGROUND

The decision-making process of NGO project development in Kenya has shifted from 'being delivered' by NGOs to participatory development. Previously NGO staff and/or Northern donors identified a project and area and went ahead to implement the project. However, since the 1980s NGO staff and donors involve potential beneficiaries and other experts in the development of projects. They achieve this through the use of participatory methodologies like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). As a result, project performance improved.

Nonetheless, the involvement has been limited by variations of perceptions, particularly of the concept of participation by the NGOs, and shortcomings in the methodologies in use. The approaches are said not to have fully assisted participants and NGOs in unearthing the real causes of poverty. Together with these, they lack the rigour and dynamism that may lead to integrated analyses and shared understanding of the complexities, dynamics and interrelationships involved in development issues. Consequently project success and sustainability has been affected. Together with these, the author's observations say that though NGOs are doing a good job in Kenya, their projects are not as effective as expected.

## OBJECTIVES

It is the above background that inspired the action-research (investigated and the investigator influence each other in a study). The aim of the study was to come up with an approach that would improve project development by NGOs in Kenya. Specifically the purpose was to develop and apply a new systematic decision-making process, enhanced by real-time modelling and facilitation. Such a process was expected to improve the impact of NGO projects.

## ACTIVITIES

A combination is made from bits of PRA, decision conferencing, requisite decision modelling and new concepts guided by decision theory, multi-criteria decision analysis and local values. The concepts are on participation, modelling, facilitation, use of local tools and values, and their systematic application in all stages of project development. This new systematic process is termed as *Kushauriana*. The author worked with NGOs in Kenya and later applied a similar process with NGOs in Eastern

Africa. *Kushauriana* involves the following stages

(i) Identification of an NGO's primary stakeholders and other key players. Each category of primary stakeholders then chose/elected people to represent them whenever the whole group was not allowed to attend:

(ii) Each category of primary stakeholders was requested to go through a self-understanding session. They thought through their lives and expectations along with and about their beliefs and values. The aim was to unearth their issues of concern, beyond the symptomatic ones.

(iii) Strategic thinking and planning by a group of representatives of primary stakeholders plus all NGO staff and members of the NGO's governing body. The fundamental objective was to identify purposes that overlapped, to be pursued instead of an NGO pursuing its own purposes

(iv) Feedback and accountability - again this was participative

At the end of the exercise each group came up with a shared vision, mission and strategies for achieving them (this is where broad issues relating to projects were identified) and implementation strategy. The last item usually included the organisational issues requiring strengthening by the lead NGO and its primary partners. The process was facilitated by a person sensitive to the participants values but without stakes in the outcome of the process. A content catalyst was also part of the group of participants. His/her role was to introduce new ideas or awaken the participants to ideas. Choices were made by the group of participants on a consensus (not a give-and-take tactic) basis, (iii) Project development - projects developed were on the basis of the strategic issues identified above, as opposed to what a certain group wants.

It involves four stages

■ **Preparations** - the process is similar to (i) above except that the participants are limited to the project.

■ **Project design** - participants went through a process similar to (ii) above. In addition, during the exercise, extensive on-the-spot modelling and sensitivity, resource-flow analyses were carried out by the group. Since in a majority of cases both literate and non-literate people participated, we utilized written and visual modelling through the use of local tools and items. In all cases a group of projects was chosen for implementation. Therefore, project portfolio analyses were carried out.

■ **Implementation of the chosen projects** - all primary stakeholders and key players played roles identified during the planning exercise and modified as new issues emerged, and

■ **Participatory monitoring, mentoring and evaluation**



## ACHIEVEMENTS

The process brought a new lease of life to the NGO concerned, the project and primary stakeholders. Additionally, participants' wealth of ideas increased and so they pursued issues they would ordinarily not have. It also increased their independence. With an informed community, project performance improved. Therefore, projects developed were consistently better and more acceptable compared to those developed through the use of other approaches. Going by the results of the two years we worked with each organisation, then the projects success will be sustained into the long-term.

*Kushauriana*, had impact on outputs and outcomes, including behavioural ones. It increased participants' confidences, vigilance, awareness, sense of ownership and control, patience, maturity and exposure. As a result, relationships of those involved improved, networking and understanding increased, and conflicts reduced. Consequently, it helped to increase their abilities as individuals and as groups. These were the foundation for courage to changing attitudes, beliefs, values, aspirations and expectations.

## LESSONS

■ The importance of genuine involvement of all primary stakeholders and other key players in setting project boundaries plus in all other stages of project development

■ Peace at home and in the community was considered a pre-requisite to developing successful and sustainable projects - even where a locality was not in conflict. This means that development endeavours can become conflict early-warning platforms

■ Project portfolios - whether in conflict or at peace, issues in developing countries come in groups and therefore need to be solved in groups

■ NGOs may want to always start helping the poor of the poor first. These are mostly affiliated to religious and/or traditional African groups. If these are assisted first, the rest of the community will almost automatically improve their own material status.

■ Training alone does not work in building capacities. To help the poor out of their poverty there is need to provide them with the space for self-understanding, cushioning and mentoring so that they think about themselves and their states

■ The need for appropriate support from (i) Relevant and functioning organisational systems of the lead NGO or agency and its primary

partners, (ii) Institutions of importance to the success of new projects, (iii) The larger local community, and (iv) General environment.

■ Use of a hybrid of approaches and interventions. A blend of recognised and respected African traditional systems with modern ones

While developing projects, the following questions may need to be on one's finger tips:

■ Do I make beneficiaries feel like they need aid forever?

■ Do I assist them while changing their world views, and belief-systems about their states - to those possible, for they themselves to change things for the better?

■ Do I ever pursue the institutionalisation of the successful processes?

■ Is my work a passion or just a job like any other?

Above all, the NGOs/agencies and the supporting institutions should first and foremost have the will towards such ends, including the will to appropriately apply such promising and liberating processes like *Kushauriana*

## FUTURE

It may be useful to identify people (call them *philanthropic entrepreneurs*) who are patient and consistent, ready to learn from the locals and whose primary motivating factor is to develop ideas with the people and then leave the people to go on with their long-term implementation while the entrepreneurs move on. They are to play a helping role and not become directors of the process. These are people who derive satisfaction from creativity, innovation and helping others with ideas for free



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