

Droughts in the Horn of Africa have increased in frequency and intensity leaving communities more vulnerable and poorer.

In 2006, the European Commission through its partners, initiated a drought programme aimed at increasing community preparedness, preventing the occurrence of hazards whenever possible, and minimizing their catastrophic impact. The regional dimension of the drought hazard is also taken into consideration.

The programme showcases low-cost interventions such as protection of water sources and management of land for pasture; but also invests in better policies targeting herders.

With low development and minimal investment in infrastructure for the arid lands, herders are finding it increasingly difficult to continue their way of life.

Early warning systems help detect levels of stress at the community level, and trigger early response as MALIKA OGWAN of ACTED, one of the European Commission's partners in Uganda, explains:

*Early warning is composed of monitoring system whereby we monitor first the hazard, so the drought and as well monitor the vulnerability of the population while following some indicators directly monitored from the community. This gives an idea on if there is a drought coming, which part of the population and which sector would need more attention.*

The fact remains however that people are increasingly vulnerable as Adrian CALLIS of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization says: *Vulnerability in pastoralist communities have increased, I think for a number of reasons, some of the drivers of change are not just limited to increases in population for example. There is more pressure there for, on resources.*

*When people lose livestock in drought or through disease or through conflict, they tend to gather in small market towns and there has been a huge increase in the number of small market town in pastoral areas in the Horn of Africa and also the size of those towns. The people are poor. They try and diversify their livelihoods away from their livestock and in dry areas that is not easy.*

CARE is one of the European Union partners implementing activities aimed at helping communities outlive the impacts of droughts. Hassan HOLUFU describes some of CARE's interventions in northern Kenya:

*We work with communities to see how we can help them to make their assets, like livestock, to be more resilient to drought. We do this by developing water systems so that water is available during drought. We try also to work on issues of livestock health so that diseases, which break out during drought, can be attended to in a timely manner. we also link them to markets so that they can dispose, sell their livestock in a timely manner.*

In order to have lasting impact across the region, some of the projects are 'cross-border', in other words they cover more than one country. Abdirahim Gure is based in Somaliland for Oxfam: *Drought is a major impediment to the development of Somaliland, where 60 % of the people are pastoralists. The cross border communities along the Ethiopia, Somaliland border share many features. They are both Somalis. They speak the same language and many of them are from the*

*same tribes. They are interdependent in sharing resources, such as pasture. Boundaries do not sometimes mean anything for them. They even cross the border to seek water, pasture. So they are interdependent in sharing resources information on the drought, on livestock diseases, as well as on livestock marketing.*

Policies form the backbone of all interventions aimed at stimulating long-term development, including Disaster Risk Reduction. The Drought preparedness programme invests in policy formulation, implementation, and advocacy through the UNISDR, the UN agency for Disaster Reduction, and the REGLAP, the Regional Learning and Advocacy Programme.

The EU funds UNISDR for coordination. Rhea Karsanakis explains:

*EU funding under the drought decision for the three countries Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya to do regional coordination and support to the implementing partners to integrate DRR into their programs. We are also supporting IGAD, which is the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought with a DRR Advisor to push from a regional level the whole cross border problem that pastoralists are facing because they are not able to move freely. And to support the policy implementation of IGAD.*

MONICA NAGAGGA is a PROGRAM COORDINATOR with REGLAP:

*Our program is working with local civil society organizations to understand policy and to advocate for policies that are supporting pastoralism and pastoral development but also to be able to support communities that live in the dry lands who have dropped out of pastoralism.*

*The strength of having a good rangeland policy is the ability for pastoral communities that need to be mobile, to be moving for pasture and water, to be able to do this sustainably.*

Governments and development actors must be actively engaged in preparing communities to overcome the effects of natural disasters. The European Union drought preparedness programme demonstrates an effective approach that should be scaled up. In overcoming the effects of drought, humanitarian aid is not the ideal solution. It is just an emergency response.