BREAKING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

Benishangul Gumuz
Food Security and Economic Growth Project
BACKGROUND

Despite significant natural resource endowments, a large proportion of the people living in Ethiopia struggle to produce or buy enough nutritious food to feed their families. Crop and livestock productivity is plagued by erratic rainfall, crop and livestock diseases, poor infrastructure, limited access to markets, and lack of skilled human resources. These interrelated vulnerabilities contribute to Ethiopia being one of the poorest countries in the world. Without progressive interventions these conditions are reinforced generation to generation – perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

ACTION

The Benishangul Gumuz Food Security and Economic Growth Project (BSG FSEG) (2010 – 2015) supports communities in Ethiopia to diversify food choices, improve agricultural productivity and engage in sustainable income-generating activities. This project aims to improve the food security and economic well-being of vulnerable people and will directly benefit 127,000 individuals in the Benishangul Gumuz Region (BSG). With financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the project is a unique partnership between the Government of Ethiopia and six NGOs: The Canadian Hunger Foundation, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, Food for the Hungry, the International Network of Bamboo and Rattan, Oxfam Canada, Save the Children Canada and World Vision Canada.

The Regional Government, Local and International NGOs, Research Centers, and Academia are collaborating with the residents of the region -- especially women -- to address food security and connect some of the poorest families to markets to break the cycle of rural poverty. This innovative approach builds on best practices and integrates agricultural development, natural resource management, nutrition, gender, capacity building, disaster risk management, as well as value-chain and market-led development.
OVERVIEW

- **80,550** beneficiaries have been reached by the project.

- A total of **12,085 women and men** have been trained on appropriate agricultural technologies. The productivity of these farmers has increased, both in terms of quantity produced and also productivity per hectare. **1,386 community members** participated in community conversations addressing attitudinal issues affecting agriculture and natural resource management.

- **851 farmers** have been trained on the importance of diversified and nutrient rich foods, and **1,050 children under 5** were monitored for signs of malnutrition in order to accelerate improved nutritional status among children who need it most. Mothers have learned skills on how to prepare nutritious food for their children using locally available food sources.

- **7,189 farmers and 244 government staff** received training on wild fire and suppression, and **1,421,888 seedlings** have been raised allowing for **143 hectares of land** to be newly covered throughout the region.

- **52 primary cooperative, 27 commercial groups and 4 unions** were strengthened, resulting in **1,806 farmers** now having better access to market information and engaging in collective marketing, so far earning a gross profit of 530,000 Ethiopian Birr ($30,000 CDN).

PROMISING RESULTS

“**My neighbors have learned new farming skills from me and are now producing by themselves and selling at the local market.**”

- Asheh Abdulahi, Pumkin Farmer
  Sherkole District, Benishangul Gumuz
  Regional State, Ethiopia
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT
Agriculture is the main source of livelihoods for the people in the program intervention areas. Low yields resulting from unskilled and traditional agricultural practices are compounded by inefficient extension services and poor safeguards against pests and disease. As a consequence, the communities’ most basic needs are not being met.

STRATEGY
- Increasing knowledge and skills of farmers and government staff in appropriate agricultural technology utilization (modern and indigenous)
- Designing and delivering practical trainings, manuals, demonstrations, and experience-sharing visits on best practices
- Conducting trainings and facilitating community conversation groups on gender, and harmful traditional practices and attitudinal issues affecting agricultural productivity
- Orientating, training and providing physical and technical support for agricultural extension and animal health outreach to remote areas
- Developing and promoting irrigation agriculture through small-scale water harvesting and irrigation schemes

PROGRESS
- A total of 12,085 men and women have been trained on appropriate agricultural technologies. The productivity of these farmers has increased, both in terms of quantity produced and also productivity per hectare.
- Developed, published and disseminated contextualized community conversation manuals to guide facilitators’ day-to-day community meetings.
- 1,386 community members (680 women) participated in community conversations addressing attitudinal issues affecting agriculture and natural resource management.
- A total of 47 facilities have been made available to communities which comprise 18 Animal Health Posts, 20 Farmer Training Centers and 9 Irrigation schemes.
- 3,460 farmers have received medical services for their livestock.
NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

“Slowly people are beginning to understand the positive relationship they have with the forest. Trees are a great source of livelihoods – cash crops like coffee, mango and eucalyptus can be turned into income generating activities that produce returns almost immediately”

Assemamaw Zegeye, World Vision Project Development Facilitator

Photo: Mandura Nursery Site

CONTEXT

Natural resources are not sustainably managed in the region -- the consequences of which are manifested in deforestation, exhausted farmlands, overgrazed fields and natural disasters such as forest fires. These factors often interact with one another resulting in a cycle of poverty, food insecurity and further degradation of natural resources.

STRATEGY

- Forming and strengthening environmental clubs in schools to raise awareness of Natural Resource Management (NRM) issues among youth
- Collaboratively, developing and conducting community natural resource management programs, including watershed management
- Promoting adherence to recently introduced environmental protection law
- Providing technical and physical support to government and communities for conservation techniques including constructing and managing area closures, plantation of bamboo and other economic trees, programming on wild fire prevention and control, introducing fuel-saving stoves, and providing seeds and seedlings for agro-forestry

PROGRESS

- The project conducted two studies that report the natural resource coverage status, causes for degradation and strategies to address them
- 2,233 community members (458 female) and 372 government staff (44 female) received NRM training
- 52 school environmental clubs and 69 forest protection committees have been established and/or strengthened
- A total of 1,056 community members (386 female) were reached through awareness raising campaigns on natural resource use
- 1,421,888 seedlings have been raised and distributed to farmers, schools, sector offices and churches
- 390 beneficiaries (95% female) were trained on the use of fuel efficient stoves and were provided with stoves; 99 households were also provided with solar batteries (delight)
- 143 hectares of land have been covered by plantations as a result of the material support provided by the project
CONTEXT

Despite the central role that women play in all aspects of agriculture and food production, processing, marketing, and other daily activities, gender inequality continues to be one of the critical factors contributing to the perpetuation of poverty in the BSG region.

STRATEGY

- Developing gender-sensitive training and communication tools that will be used to improve household food and nutrition security, especially among women-headed households
- Increasing capacity among different sectors of government offices to collect gender disaggregated data; and conduct gender analysis that informs coordinated planning with a gender lens
- Assessing and providing entrepreneurial skills development opportunities especially for women
- Improving extension services for women in agriculture and health, in particular as they relate to food security, nutrition and income generation
- Developing and supporting an informal network of gender champions and gender outreach workers in the region
- Developing training methodologies to improve outreach to women, and improve understanding of the links between culture, leadership and decision-making
- Organizing systematic gender learning and experience sharing forums in order to create awareness about the impact of gender inequality
GENDER MAINSTREAMING

PROGRESS

✓ Reached 5,014 (2,469 female) community members with educational programs on gender issues and approaches
✓ 400 (142 female) men and women participated in gender awareness raising and mainstreaming efforts
✓ Over 70 Government Offices have started integrating gender issues into project implementation
✓ Provided various inputs that have improved the food security and livelihood conditions of 4,465 women, thereby increasing their access to productive resources and assets and empowering them economically

Case Study

Boge Guk, a mother of five from Mandura, Ethiopia, received five goats as well as training on semi-intensive management of goats through the BSG FSEG Project. Three of Boge’s goats are already pregnant, while the fourth is being bred and is expected to produce offspring in the next six months.

In addition to working towards improving livelihoods, a large focus of the project is on education, awareness-raising and capacity building. The Project supports women like Boge to participate in community conversations in their villages, where they have a chance to discuss important issues as a group.

According to Enatnesh Asfaw, the CHF Project Manager in Sherkole, it’s extremely important to raise community awareness on issues related to women and gender equality. “Men control all aspects of life in these communities,” says Enatnesh. “To address male dominance and gender imbalances, we have been holding community conversations to explain to men that they can help ease the burden on women by sharing some of the household responsibilities.” Tiruneh Tesema, one of the Community Elders in Boge’s village, has observed many positive changes as a result of community conversations. He says, “In the past, community members used herbs from the bush when they were sick, whereas now they go to the local medical clinic. People believed that women would die if they ate eggs or pork during pregnancy. Through community conversations, the Project has helped to address some of these beliefs.”

Together with Project staff as well as local government Development Agents, Tiruneh’s community has identified a number of harmful traditional practices, including girl abduction, marriage exchange, underage marriage, isolation during menstruation and women being forced into the bush to give birth. The community has since then established local rules and regulations, similar to by-laws, to ensure that these types of practices are eliminated. A Community Social Council has been established – of which Tiruneh is a member – to ensure that rules are followed; each offense carries a specific consequence or punishment. “The impact of community conversations is that people are now seeking treatment at the clinic, women are no longer isolated during menstruation, and exchange marriage has decreased,” says Tiruneh. Boge adds, “My sons’ wives now give birth at home, not in the bush – same with my daughters. And their husbands are now much more supportive with the housework.”
**CONTEXT**

The 2005 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) showed that, in the region, 39.7 and 16% of children under five were stunted and wasted respectively and 3.9% were in a state of severe acute malnutrition. The weight for age indicator shows that 44.6% of children under five were underweight.

**STRATEGY**

- Ensure that food security and economic development activities contribute towards improved nutritional status of mothers and children
- Build the capacity of the community and government ministries to prevent and treat malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women and among children
- Promote behavioural change of the community on harmful traditional practices related to health and nutrition, unhealthy dietary patterns and lifestyle that may negatively affect their health/nutritional status
- Promote adequate micronutrient (Vitamin A, Iron) intake by introducing and promoting the production and consumption of nutrient rich food sources (both animal and plant sources such as meat, eggs, fruits and vegetables)

**PROGRESS**

- A total of 1,571 (678 female) farmers and 337 (164 female) Government Staff were trained on the importance of diversified and nutrient rich foods
- Trained Health Extension Workers (HEWs) have counseled 250 care givers on maternal and child health and nutrition issues
- 37 HEWs and 4 volunteers were trained on how to conduct Timed and Targeted Counseling (TTC) of households on maternal and child nutrition
- 1,819 (795 female) participants attended community conversation sessions on food security and nutrition
- A total of 1,050 (531 female) children received growth monitoring and promotion services
The Benishangul Gumuz Region faces recurring disasters both natural and human-made. Wild fires, deforestation, droughts, pest infestations, unpredictable rainfalls, and diseases affecting animals and humans alike have negatively impacted the livelihoods and food security of semi-pastoralists and farmers who represent the vast majority of the population in the region.

**STRATEGY**

- Increasing the awareness of communities on hazardous risks, vulnerabilities and actions for risk management

- Building the knowledge base and commitment of government counterparts to engage in disaster risk management (DRM) and commit to necessary conditions (legal, financial, policy related and human resources)

- Fostering better understanding and knowledge of the underlying causes of food insecurity and vulnerability

- Supporting communities’ collective actions and strengthening resilience to risks through community led risk management interventions

**PROGRESS**

- 7,189 (2,734 female) farmers and 244 experts (78 female) received training on wild fire control and suppression

- 66 taskforces in 50 villages (327-92 female) were mobilized communities in collaboration with forest protection committees to map out fire protection areas and construct fire breaks before fire breakout seasons

- Constructed 893 kms of forest fire breaks around forests, farms and grazing lands, and homesteads.

- Partners at the district level have started triangulating predicted rainfalls and planting information for major crops in order to forecast yields and identify potential risks.
Capacity building is essential for fostering local ownership beyond the life of any project. The project targets the regional government, enriching valid endogenous strategies and geared towards building knowledge and stronger systems.

**STRATEGY**

- Conducting training workshops for stakeholders in gender sensitive data collection, planning and analysis
- Developing guidelines for working with an integrated approach that uses both a cultural (including community) and a gender lens
- Conducting participatory project cycle management with stakeholders
- Organizing systematic learning and experience sharing opportunities

**PROGRESS**

- Conducted an Annual Participatory Capacity Assessment which identified partner gaps and opportunities
- A total of 23 government offices are better equipped to conduct gender-sensitive data collection
- 47 community members received training on project design and implementation
- Village experts have committed to use livelihood analysis and participatory rural appraisal tools to actively engage communities in planning and project development process
- Districts that received computers have demonstrated improved capacity in data management and the dissemination of information
MARKET LED DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT
Agriculture and the natural resource base provides a strong foundation for increased economic development to improve the well-being of the rural poor. This project provides an opportunity to capitalize on that potential.

STRATEGY
- Value chain development and the scaling up of Income-Generating Activities
- Capacity building for different market actors
- Increasing community access to financial services and market linkages
- Developing market information systems and community organizations that promote market development

PROGRESS
- The project has trained 1,667 community members (384 female) on different value chains
- Provided a number of financial and in-kind inputs for 2,950 community members (782 female) as supports for various types of value chains including: 133 kilograms of improved seeds of sesame, ground nut and soya-bean; 665 modern beehives; 200 incense tapping hand tools and collection materials
- 9 walking tractors and 1,800,000 birr (Ethiopian currency) as seed money including 600,000 birr provided to unions
- 37 primary cooperatives and 4 unions have been established and/or strengthened
- Households in two districts (Kurmuk and Sherkole) have been able to sell eggs for about 23,000 birr in addition to using the eggs for household consumption
- Trained 273 operators (54 female) of micro/small enterprises on market development and improving service delivery in the region
- Trained a total 203 farmers (29 female) as community value chain facilitators
This update is aimed at sharing information and promoting learning.

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