

Participatory and inclusive planning for adaptation to climate change in Northern Ghana



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Many families in the northern regions of Ghana live in poverty, with a high number of people experiencing hunger for three to five months each year. During this period between planting and harvest, many are only able to eat one meal of maize, millet or sorghum per day. They are striving to improve their lives, but environmental and other challenges are impeding their efforts to attain a more prosperous life.

The majority of people in northern Ghana are dependent on rain-fed farming for their livelihoods, and alternative income generating strategies are limited. Food and livelihood security are challenged by decreasing soil fertility, desertification, deforestation and inequitable access to and control over resources such as land. They are already experiencing the impacts of climate change in the form of shifting rainfall patterns and more frequent and extreme droughts and floods. This places further strains on food security and livelihoods, leading to dire consequences for already vulnerable people.

Local government and civil society organizations in the region are striving to support poor and vulnerable people in Northern Ghana, but they face many difficulties. For example, District authorities have been given the mandate to undertake local development planning. However, they have been provided with few resources or guidance, especially

concerning community involvement in decision-making. At the same time, local non-governmental and community-based organizations lack the capacity to effectively engage in local governance processes. As a result, District development plans that drive resource allocation from the central government are often out of touch with local realities.

In this context, through its Community Land Use Responses to Climate Change initiative, CARE has partnered with local organizations and communities to facilitate a participatory and inclusive approach to local development planning. This is expected to yield local plans that support adaptation efforts by communities, particularly those who are most vulnerable to climate change.

Building local understanding about climate change

Local communities in northern Ghana are well aware that their climate is changing, and they are beginning to understand that this may represent a trend that will continue in the future. With this knowledge, they are eager to access the information they need to better understand the risks they may face in future, and to plan appropriately. Finding the right solutions is vital to long-term adaptation. For example, some people are responding to current

climate variability and change by adopting alternative crops and income generating strategies. However, most are employing unsustainable coping strategies such as cutting firewood for sale in local markets.

Since 2007, CARE and its partners have been working with community members and other stakeholders to analyze local observations of climate change and communicate projected impacts. Separate dialogues were held with women and men to allow analysis of gender differences in the results and to understand how this affects vulnerability. During the dialogues, communities noted a number of changes that they had observed in their environment in recent years, including shifting rainfall patterns, increasing incidence of drought and reduced soil fertility. They also analysed the impact of different hazards on their lives. Not surprisingly, climate-related hazards such as droughts, floods and erratic rainfall were highlighted as having the most significant implications for food and livelihood security. This discussion provided openings for local stakeholders to learn about projected climate change impacts, potential consequences, and options for adaptation.

Inclusive planning

Having built understanding of how climate change is affecting livelihoods in target communities, and how these risks may evolve in the future, the CARE project team is now engaged in supporting community members, local non-government organisations (NGOs) and local government authorities to integrate this knowledge into development planning.

Project partners focused first at the community level, facilitating a participatory planning process to yield community action plans to reduce vulnerability to climate change. This included the identification of priority actions such as tree planting, establishing early warning systems for droughts and floods, and adopting agricultural practices that conserve soil moisture and nutrients (e.g. composting and using cover crops to create mulch).

Currently, the project team is working to link communities with local government authorities at District levels so they can communicate the priorities they identified in their



community action plans. This is expected to generate District development plans that are grounded in the local reality, and that reflect the community members' priority strategies to help them adapt to current and future changes in climate. These linkages are facilitated by the local NGO partners, who have received training in analysing climate vulnerability and in identifying appropriate strategies to adapt to climate change.

Focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment

Climate change impacts don't affect everyone equally. Men and women may have different levels of vulnerability due to cultural rules and norms that result in the inequitable distribution of rights and resources. During community discussions in Ghana, women highlighted their particular vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. For example, they discussed their role in the household where they are likely to be more responsible than men for securing food and water for domestic consumption, but have less power in decision-making on the use of family resources. Women's vulnerability also stems from their role in the community, where they have less voice in local governance. To address this, the project places significant emphasis on ensuring that the needs and priorities of both men and women are represented in community and District action plans. This is achieved by ensuring equal representation of women on planning committees and supporting women through training and mentoring to take on leadership roles in community and local government organisations.

- Community Land Use Responses to Climate Change (CLURCC) Project
- Implemented by CARE Canada through CARE Ghana
- Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and CARE Canada
- The project is in its second of four years
- It works in ten communities in two Districts in Northern Ghana – Bawku Municipal and East Mamprusi
- It is implemented through two local partner organisations: Zuuri Organic Vegetable Farmers Association (ZOVFA- Bawku) and the Presby Agricultural Station (PAS-Langbensi)