

DISASTER RESILIENCE IN HIIRAAN REGION

The Bulay Development Organisation (BUDO) shares a recipe for strengthening resilience amidst natural hazards, conflict, and weak economic development.

KEY INGREDIENTS



SUSTAINABILITY



Permanence

- Instil behaviour change to counteract negative actions and to promote a community of active agents of resilience



Ownership

- Map and utilise local capacities (including resources, material, knowledge)



Inclusion

- Create safe spaces for social groups to raise their voices and concerns



INSTITUTIONALISATION



Structures and Mechanisms

- Recognise informal structures (e.g. community leaders groups) as channels for effective engagement



Culture

- Promote and share evidence of the role of communities in DRM and good practices at national and regional events

The base of this dish is essential and requires careful attention in preparing it. Traditional knowledge is among the main ingredients, which necessitates community involvement and participation of all societal groups from the start. Once the base is ready, collaboration with local governments must be added, as well as linkages with national and local plans for development and conflict resolution.

This recipe was tested in Beledweyne district, in the Hiiraan region of south-central Somalia, north of Mogadishu. Communities in the district live mainly along the Shabelle river, and experience both floods and droughts, in addition to being subject to a long-standing conflict which has been impacting the region for more than 20 years. Drought and floods put a burden on already weak communities: the limited availability of water and pastures often gives rise to conflicts between groups whose livelihood is linked to pastoral and agricultural activities.

BUDO involved the communities in a project that aimed at identifying alternative sources of water, in an effort to tackle multiple issues at the same time: reducing the impact of droughts and the resurgence of conflict for competing resources.

To do this, BUDO engaged in conversations with community groups, especially older people, who brought their traditional knowledge on water resources availability that had been lost in younger generations. The elderly population was able to support the identification of water corridors, called helo in the local language: outlining the location of these water corridors was essential to identify additional sources of water to be tapped on in times of scarcity. By drawing on the traditional knowledge, in addition to surveys with households and farmers, communities were able to have a clear spatial definition of these corridors that are now used for animal and human needs.

BUDO undertook several awareness raising events, to improve communities' understanding of the issue of water availability and how to best utilize the helo identified (e.g. avoid completely closing a water corridor for one group's use, as it would leave other groups without water access). Farmers and pastoralists also worked with BUDO to identify areas where to build water channels and pumps to distribute water from the river to reach all communities.

One of the elements that highlighted the value of the activity was the creation of a space for community members to get together and resolve issues that would otherwise give rise to conflict: farmers and pastoral communities both compete for the same scarce resource (water), and this has often led to situations of violence between the groups. Through this water resources management exercise, BUDO set up community-led committees which served also as peace committees, where disputes around water access could be informally set.