

## Ethiopia: Improving Household Nutrition and Food Security<sup>1</sup>

**What's innovative?** A wealth of gender-differentiated information on rural livelihoods in several ecological zones helped to identify gender-differentiated interventions to improve nutrition and food security for specific groups of beneficiaries. Through Community Action Planning, an estimated 100,000 rural households benefited from the interventions.

### Project Objectives and Description

Ethiopia's rural and urban populations continue to experience chronic and transitory food insecurity. In partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, the Household Food Security and Nutrition Project (GCP/ETH/060/BEL) was developed and implemented by the FAO Government Cooperative Programme and funded by the Belgium Survival Fund (BSF). The project covered Hintalo Wajerat and Enderta woredas (districts) in Southern Zone, Tigray Region, and Lalomama and Gerakeya woredas in Northern Shoa zone, Amhara region. The project focused on these areas because they are highly vulnerable to drought, and large segments of the population are food-insecure. In this highly challenging environment, the project's development objective was to improve nutritional status and household food security in selected communities by:

- Improving the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions to alleviate malnutrition and poverty through more active community participation in planning, implementing,

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monitoring, and evaluating those interventions, and through stronger institutional integration of the development processes.

- Improving the use of natural resources and providing opportunities for poor people to overcome constraints on food and nutritional security.
- Increasing the consumption and use of food, promoting health, and preventing disease by improving food, health, water, and sanitation.
- Improving access to food, health, and social care through increased income from skilled labor and activities to generate income off of the farm.

### Innovative Features

The project took a new perspective on existing problems by looking at them in a broader context rather than treating them as isolated issues. The harsh environment, for example, was regarded as just one of the range of factors that increase vulnerability in the broader social, technological, economic, environmental, political, and legal environment in which people try to make a living. From this perspective it becomes clear that the environment does not provide equal opportunities to everyone.

#### *Preparing the ground: Gender-responsive and participatory project development*

To develop the project, in 1999–2000 a thematic participatory rural appraisal (PRA) was done and analyzed according to the guiding principles of SEAGA (box 1). Key stakeholders were involved in this preparatory phase, from developing the PRA to formulating the project document.

At an initial **training and orientation workshop**, national and international participants selected the PRA tools, which were adapted to ensure that they were gender-sensitive and suited to the PRA theme, “to identify opportunities and constraints for improving nutrition and household food security within the broader context of peoples’ livelihoods.” The PRA was designed to address this them by assessing gender dynamics, local knowledge (including community perceptions of

the causes of malnutrition and food insecurity), and community institutions. Selected field methods included key informant interviews in the communities, case studies of households from different socioeconomic groups, and a range of PRA tools, including malnutrition mapping (box 2). A **logical framework for the field appraisal** outlined the objectives, activities, and the corresponding tools selected.

#### Box 1: The SEAGA approach

The three guiding principles of the SEAGA (Socio-economic and Gender Analysis) approach:

- Gender roles and relations are of key importance for understanding and improving the livelihoods of rural people.
- Disadvantaged people are a priority in development initiatives. The differential distribution of wealth affects the poorest and most disadvantaged in terms of their ability to access resources.
- Participation is essential for sustainable development, and all activities must address the needs, priorities, and capacities of communities, households, and individual household members.

*Source:* SEAGA pocket reference

#### Box 2: Mapping malnutrition

As part of the PRA exercise social maps were prepared of the village, on which all households and social facilities featured. Through wealth ranking the difference in wealth status of households was obtained and visualized on the map. Key informants, such as the local health worker or traditional birth attendant were asked to identify those households with specific nutrition-related problems. On a separate village map, the identified households were mapped. Comparison of the two maps lead to insight on the relation between wealth status and nutrition problems: do poverty and malnutrition coincide in the same households or not? Maps can be further enriched with the composition of the households and their livelihoods systems, to obtain further insight in the type of households affected by malnutrition. Malnutrition mapping also provided an opportunity to identify areas for further probing.

**Regional training and orientation workshops for PRA teams** were held in Tigray and Amhara. Local, gender-balanced, multidisciplinary teams of PRA facilitators, comprising district and field staff

(for example, health workers, agricultural extensionists, home agents, and representatives of women's associations) discussed and defined the project's key concepts and were introduced to the participatory methodology and the selected tools and methods.

**PRA**s were conducted in 20 villages in various agro-ecological zones in the project areas. Gender-sensitized PRA tools were used in separate focus groups for men and women as well as in mixed groups. To understand the many ways in which livelihoods could become vulnerable in the extremely degraded environment where the project would operate, several PRA tools were particularly helpful: a Venn diagram to analyze the support opportunities related to food security and nutrition provided by institutions; seasonal calendars (disaggregated by gender and age) covering tasks, food availability, illness, rainfall, and labor patterns; daily activity clocks for men, women, and children to assess the time expended on collecting water and firewood, preparing food, cultivating crops, and so forth; and resource cards and income and expenditure profiles to analyze the dynamics surrounding men's, women's, and children's access to and control over resources.

To gain a deeper understanding of the underlying problems, focus group discussions were held and household case studies were developed, using checklists based on problem tree and SWOT analyses. The work of the PRA teams was structured by the logical framework and by **daily evaluation and planning meetings**.

Based on the results of the PRA, village profiles were prepared, which formed the basis for regional profiles. SWOT analysis was used to further organize the data in terms of strengths and weaknesses within the community and opportunities and threats from outside.

The major findings and conclusions of the PRA were **verified by the communities** as well as the **participants of two regional analysis and planning workshops**. Workshop participants (stakeholders from the woreda, zonal, and regional levels) used problem tree analysis to identify the causes of the main problems. Based on this work and the SWOT analysis, objective trees were developed. These trees served as the starting point for strategy analysis and prioritization by the

multidisciplinary team that worked with major stakeholders to formulate the project.

### ***Participatory implementation through Community Action Planning***

Three intervention strategies were identified, based on the PRA results and subsequent livelihoods analysis. As the project began to be implemented, interventions were largely selected through community participation. **The Community Action Planning (CAP) process** allows groups of beneficiaries to identify, plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate activities under the three intervention strategies. In the CAP process, groups develop microprojects and apply for financial and technical help at the woreda level. Service providers involved in implementing the project in the woreda level evaluate the feasibility and relevance of each microproject with respect to the menu of interventions developed by the project and the expected impact. When approved at woreda level and by the Project Management Unit (PMU), the microprojects are funded through the **Community Development Fund**. Subsequently **Letters of Agreement (LOAs)** are signed with service providers at the woreda level to finance the implementation of the microprojects under their responsibility. Communities contribute 10 percent of estimated microproject costs in kind or labor. **Beneficiary committees** were formed to implement and monitor microprojects.

### **Benefits and Impacts**

#### ***From the preparatory phase***

The preparatory phase led to the development of a project document based on a wealth of gender-differentiated information on rural livelihoods in the various agro-ecological zones of Northern Shoa and Southern Zone. Major accomplishments of the detailed preparatory phase are described below:

*A detailed livelihood system analysis:* Livelihoods were examined in terms of each socioeconomic group's access to resources and taking into account the dynamics of poverty, gender, and environmental degradation at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The following example is taken from the project document:

Overgrazing and the collection of dung, in combination with heavy seasonal rain, severely deplete soils. The vicious cycle of poverty and natural resource depletion is exacerbated when households opt to possess more animals rather than fewer animals of good-quality breeds to reduce their vulnerability to disease and stress sales. At the same time, small land holdings (of one-quarter to one hectare) are becoming even more fragmented as the population grows, ultimately leading to an increasing number of landless young households. The human carrying capacity of the land has been exceeded—in other words, large numbers of people now depend periodically on food aid. Despite relocation opportunities, households are reluctant to move because of earlier unsuccessful policies and because current policies prohibit trading in land. This prohibition also prevents farmers from expanding their land holdings to a viable size.

*A clearer picture of the livelihood context of nutritional vulnerability and food insecurity:* Malnutrition mapping showed a much higher prevalence of malnutrition among the poor and poorest households, with 80 percent of malnutrition cases occurring in female-headed households. Better-off households were less vulnerable to seasonal food shortages, because they could sell livestock to purchase food. Poor households were forced to borrow grain or money from better-off households or became dependant on food aid.

Because the availability and access to resources differed in poor and better-off households, better-off children had more varied and energy-dense diets, which included cereals, milk, eggs, and honey. The monotonous diets of children in poor households were the same as that of the adults. These differences were also attributed to the time constraints in poor and especially female-headed households, which reduced the time available for feeding and proper childcare.

*Gender-differentiated opportunities and constraints for improving nutrition and food security were identified within the broader livelihoods context:* Opportunities and constraints were identified, taking into account gender dynamics, local knowledge (perceptions

and cultural beliefs), and local community institutions. The following example is drawn from the project document:

Female-headed households generally do not possess oxen, although the majority do have farmland. They are further disadvantaged by the cultural ban on plowing by women, which forces women to hire not only oxen but also labor to plow their fields. The other option they have is sharecropping, but in both modalities they lose half to two-thirds of their harvest as remuneration.

*The thorough gender sensitive livelihoods analysis allowed for a sound selection of beneficiaries and interventions.* Here again, SWOT analyses facilitated a useful interpretation of information from the livelihoods analysis. Female-headed households, households of landless young people, and male-headed households without oxen were selected as beneficiaries. Although various agricultural interventions would bring temporary improvements to poor households, they were not included in the menu for selection through the CAP because they would increase land degradation. Raising small livestock, keeping bees, and promoting the cultivation and consumption of leafy vegetables (which could also be a cash crop), were selected as having potential to raise women's and men's incomes and improve family meals without further degrading the environment. With a view to protecting the environment, the project also encouraged off-farm activities through skills training and the development of small enterprises.

### ***From the CAP process***

Benefits and impacts of the CAP process included:

- Beneficiaries gained a strong sense of project ownership.
- Selecting interventions through the CAP allowed the project to build on local strengths and opportunities and to address weaknesses and threats that the communities identified, which improved the targeting and effectiveness of the interventions.
- Disadvantaged community members were empowered through participation in the CAP, technical training, and beneficiary committees.
- According to the document developed for the project's exit phase, an estimated 100,000 rural households benefited from project interventions.
- Forty communities were enrolled in the CAP, which not only brought selected interventions to their villages and households but empowered local men and women to assess their own situations and opportunities for improving their livelihoods.
- Local service providers involved in the CAP increased their familiarity with gender analysis methodologies, which allows them to implement development processes in a gender-responsive way.
- The institutional capacity of extension and other local services to provide participatory, demand-oriented support to local men and women improved.

### **Lessons Learned and Issues for Wider Applicability**

- To effectively employ a participatory approach to project development and implementation, gender should be mainstreamed, from the assessment phase through implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
- For mainstreaming gender, a thorough gender-sensitive PRA is needed—either before the project is designed, or integrated when project implementation begins—to design meaningful intervention strategies.
- Livelihood analysis should avoid convenient statements (such as “lack of irrigation,” “lack of healthcare”) to bring out the actual threats and weaknesses facing the rural poor.
- Institutions need to adapt policies and procedures to foster a participatory manner of working. For example: donors could generally not approve funding before a thorough project document is available. For this project, the donor financed a separate project for the

preparatory phase, during which the specific details of the project could be developed.

- Decentralized decision making, especially regarding budget expenditures (“decision making where the action is”), enhances the implementation of participatory projects.
- Participatory project documents should allow maximum flexibility for the freedom and decision-making power to respond to the actual (and evolving) situations that arise during implementation. However, although the absence of workplans allows for flexibility, the provision of preliminary workplans, logframes, and terms of reference for the project’s first (half) year, which can be adapted and/or adopted at the start of the project, may provide essential guidance during the start-up phase.
- Aside from its truly participatory and gender-responsive focus, the project can attribute its success largely to the flexibility of the people involved.

### **Further reading**

Project documents for “Improving Nutrition and Household Food Security in Northern Shoa and Southern Zone of Tigray, Ethiopia,” GCP/ETH/060/BEL.

Report of the tripartite evaluation of GCP/ETH/060/BEL (2005).

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). 2003. Participatory Appraisal of Nutrition and Household Food Security Situations and Planning of Interventions from a Livelihoods Perspective—Methodological Guide.  
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/ad694e/ad694e00.htm>