Community-Based Scenario Planning for Disasters and Conflict

AUTHORS
Erickson Bisetsa and James Okot Ochaya

ACTIVITY/PROGRAM
The Accelerating Recovery and Resilience in South Sudan (ACCESS)

ORGANIZATION
World Vision

COUNTRY
South Sudan

CONTEXT

The Accelerating Recovery and Resilience in South Sudan (ACCESS) activity is an emergency food security project funded by USAID through the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and implemented by World Vision in collaboration with two sub-recipient partners, Nile Hope (NH) and Humanitarian & Development Consortium (HDC), in the Upper Nile State region of South Sudan. In a region where at least 50% of the population is facing acute or crisis-level food insecurity, the activity aims to accelerate recovery and bolster resilience by strengthening household livelihoods, agricultural productivity, and nutrition; community cohesion through improved disaster risk management, protection, and mental health psycho-social support services; and coordination, systems, and learning on recovery and resilience.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT IN ACTION

Describe your adaptive management example. What is the problem you were trying to solve? Why did you choose to implement it this way?

The ACCESS activity serves regions that are heavily affected by flooding and intercommunal violence. As a result, the activity prioritized support to community members and local government not only in planning for these risks but also in ensuring that communities had the tools to appropriately respond to disruptions when they occur. As many of the risks and dangers that participant communities face can arise suddenly, scenario planning for responses to these risks is critical to communities' ability to rapidly respond to crises once they materialize. To do so, ACCESS supported community members in organizing themselves into committees focused on different risk areas. For instance, peace committees respond to risks related to revenge killings, cattle raiding, and conflict over resources; community-managed disaster risk reduction committees (CMDRR) respond to environmental risks; and community protection committees respond to issues of gender-based violence.

These committees primarily met monthly (with some meeting up to three times per month) and were subdivided into smaller identity-based groups, such as women's committees, youth committees, and community leaders' committees, to ensure full participation by members and leverage each group's interests and priorities. To start, ACCESS raised awareness of the role that committees could play in improving

Meeting with the Peace Committee in Jikmir Payam, Nasir County in 2021. Photo Credit: World Vision.

social cohesion and mitigating risks. The activity then worked with community leaders to identify volunteers to join the committees. Once the committees were created, ACCESS facilitated the process to help members identify their committees' priorities and develop participatory community action plans to address the main risks faced by their communities. The activity provided committees with technical support, funding, and/or materials necessary to carry out their community action plans, and it tracked the committees' progress in implementing these actions through regular check-ins.

For example, given that recurrent flooding is an issue across this region, CMDRR committees were supported and trained in understanding how they can forecast and plan responses to flooding scenarios. More specifically, the ACCESS activity worked with the community to understand flooding forecasts, examine specific vulnerabilities within a community, implement actions to reduce the likelihood of flooding (including seed planning and dyke construction), and develop a plan for responding to flooding scenarios. These scenario plans largely centered around implementing flood early warning systems, like trumpets, that could alert the community of impending flooding and ensure rapid evacuation to high ground areas, as needed.

IMPACT

Describe the impact your adaptive management approach has had on your activity and its objectives. If it is too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

One of the main positive impacts of ACCESS's work supporting the committees in forecasting and planning for risks was the awareness that this process raised within communities themselves. As ACCESS continued to meet with the committees, the conversations started to move beyond the narrow focus of specific activities envisioned in the community action plans to a broader, ongoing dialogue around planning for disaster scenarios within the community. The activity saw community engagement with these topics grow larger and larger, and staff noted that people are starting to discuss these topics even outside of ACCESS's activities. This shift shows an increased awareness of the benefits of planning for conflict and climate-related risks and the potential for these community-based committees to continue planning and forecasting independently.

Additionally, the committees have already improved their communities' responses to current risks. The identification of youth across two counties tasked with flood response in their communities, the issuance of a preliminary early flooding warning during a recent rainy period, and the successful arbitrage response to a recent natural resource management conflict show that communities are effectively identifying the risks they face and mobilizing to address them. For example, the CMDRR committee in Ulang County used their community action plan to identify a potential risk of intercommunal violence (i.e., revenge attack) that was being planned because of cattle raiding by youth from a neighboring county and responded by alerting local leaders to mediate.

REFLECTION

What enabled your adaptive management approach? What might you do differently next time?

Two of the elements that enabled ACCESS's approach to be successful were local personnel and bottom-up collaboration. The staff hired to support the committees were largely from the communities in which the activity was working and had in-depth knowledge of the unique social and environmental characteristics of these communities. This allowed for the action plans to be better tailored to local risk dynamics and therefore more relevant. Regarding collaboration, ACCESS created strong buy-in at all levels by engaging participant community members through the committees and working closely with county and Payam-level officials to involve them in all aspects of the planning process. Strong relationships with local leaders allowed staff to gain more information on what was happening in the communities and their surroundings, which in turn helped the activity more accurately forecast scenarios relating to conflict and community violence.

While the community-based committees are now formed and operational, the activity doesn't yet know the extent to which forecasting and planning activities will continue after the end of ACCESS. If staff were to implement this activity again, an earlier phase-out period for program support would allow committees to operate more independently prior to the program's

end. Additionally, it could be beneficial to experiment with other ways of increasing the sustainability of committees, including reducing the direct cash support to planned activities in favor of more funding for training committee members. Overall, local government support of this type of committee, both financially and technically, is critical to the long-term continued effectiveness of these bodies and ACCESS staff recommends future programs prioritize local government leadership early on in these activities.

TOOLS

What tools enabled or resulted from your adaptive management approach? Please describe them and link to or attach, if possible.

ACCESS used a report for tracking the progress of committees across the communities in which the activity was operating. This report compiled a list of each subcommittee present within the community, the key points of their established action plan, their meeting frequency, and their achievements to date. This tool allowed for easy monitoring of progress across all committees and can be downloaded here. A completed example of a community action plan, illustrating the main tasks and achievements of Peace Committees in Nasir and Ulang counties can be downloaded here.

CBDRM Committee members of Thulup Boma, Ulang County, planning the activation of their conflict and flood early warning response system, 2022. Photo Credit: World Vision.

CONTACT

Website: www.FSNNetwork.org/IDEAL

Contact: info@fsnnetwork.org