

Adaptation Learning Programme in Ghana

Empowered women lead on community-based adaptation to climate change



Ndebilla Abanga sells her goods in a community market at Garu, Northern Ghana.

ALP Community Stories

“Fifteen years ago, my family was able to produce enough food to feed us all year round and sell some for income. However, for some years now, we have been experiencing reductions in crop yields,” said Ndebilla Abanga, a business woman from Kugri community in Garu Tempane District, Upper East Region, Ghana. “What we harvest now cannot even feed the family for half-a-year. We experience floods and droughts every year. This used not to be the case. Floods used to occur every 10 years when I was growing up as a child. With all these occurrences we have become poor.”

In response, Ndebilla decided to go into petty trade to support her family’s ability to pay school fees and hospital bills and buy food when the harvest yields have been exhausted. Her initial capital came from the sale of farm produce and shea nuts. “This serves as a relief to my poor family,” Ndebilla shared during an August 2010 CARE Adaptation Learning Project (ALP) meeting. The meeting was designed to assess the community’s vulnerability to climate change, and their capacity to adapt. Ndebilla’s story illustrates the challenges people are facing in Kugri due to the increasing floods and droughts, and the way her family dealt with the changes to stay out of poverty.

Ndebilla has been married for 39 years, looking after her husband and seven dependants. Her husband is a farmer, who cultivates millet, sorghum, groundnuts and rice for home consumption. Ndebilla gives him a helping hand, especially during the farming season. In 2008, Ndebilla became concerned about the difficulty in making ends meet and the long periods of ‘hunger gap’ in the family as a result of low crop yields caused by recent droughts and floods. She discussed with her husband how they could make more income through non-climate dependent activities. With the support of her husband, she decided to sell food items, and engage in petty trade of assorted items including salt, pepper, salt-petre, dried fish, dawadawa (a local tree product), groundnuts, okra, maggi cubes and more.

Ndebilla started her business by observing how other market women in the community go about their daily sales. And now that her business is up and running, she relies on help from her family. Her children support her by performing the household chores while she goes from market to market to sell her goods. She buys the food items wholesale and retails them at the local community markets. The profits gained support her in meeting her family’s

basic needs, such as purchasing food, soap and clothes. With the same income, she is able to pay school fees for her children and any hospital bills. Since she started her new livelihood, she no longer has food shortage as there is enough for her to prepare all meals for her family. She has also joined a women savings group to accumulate capital and expand her business.

Ndebilla is among a few fortunate people whose awareness has been raised about the realities and long-term effects of climate change, and the need to adapt to it.

Ndebilla recounts that though she is doing well in her trade now, it did not come easy; there were challenges. For example, there is a low demand of her goods during the rainy season. As well, she incurs high costs when purchasing and transporting the goods from wholesale to local markets. There is also the physical demand of walking 7-10 km daily to and from community markets to sell her goods, which she says is exhausting. "I am still operating on a small scale because my capital is small," she said. "I am compelled to buy goods in smaller quantities and this is not helpful. Due to the limited capital, I am not able to get a table to display my goods. I must spread them on polythene sheets on the ground."

Despite the challenges, Ndebilla is doing well in supporting her family. Her pro-active response to a changing climate is an example for women in Northern Ghana who feel forced to address the challenges of economic hardship by changing their livelihoods, and for those looking for financial support to enter and expand their businesses. These women have realized that the traditional livelihood of farming suffers increasingly from both floods and drought, making diversification – especially to non-climate dependent livelihoods – critical to the welfare of the household and the entire community. This was what inspired Ndebilla to act fast.

Ndebilla's initiative complements to a great extent the family's income generated from agriculture. She and her family have moved up to the next level in the social ladder. She is an inspiration to her fellow women in the community. She is now a point of call for those who need support in terms of food for their families and she gives interest free loans to friends and relations in need. She says her new status has strengthened her voice and recognition within her family, community and among her friends. She is often consulted by the other women in her community for advice on how to emulate her efforts. Ndebilla's existing enterprising spirit, knowledge and expertise are therefore both an important and valuable asset for the development of her family and an example of success in the face of adversity for the wider community.

Ndebilla is among a few fortunate people whose awareness has been raised about the realities and long-term effects of climate change, and the need to adapt to it. She has learned not only from her own experience, but also through ALP meetings that help analyse vulnerabilities and capacities within the community. Through ALP, Ndebilla says she hopes that she will gain a better understanding of how to access and use information on climate change to better plan her business, improve the family's farm yields each season and reduce risks they face from climate events.

ALP aims to strengthen the confidence and further empower women like Ndebilla and communities like Kugri to gain adaptive capacity and make wise choices for adaptation to the impacts of climate change and climate variability.

For more information on the ALP in Ghana, please contact alp@careclimatechange.org or Romanus Gyang Romanus.Gyang@co.care.org or visit www.careclimatechange.org/adaptation-initiatives/alp.

Story by Evelyn Ngaanuma, April 2011



Tariganga women discussing the effectiveness and sustainability of their climate change coping strategies.

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