

Session DP FR 4.3: Strengthening resilience of delta communities

Date and Time of Session: Thursday, 30 September 2010, 09.30-11.45

Short description of the session topic and the objective of the session

Topic: The 'Partners for Resilience' is a new Alliance between five Dutch organizations from development, humanitarian and environment sector, collaborating with the aim to reduce the vulnerability and strengthening the resilience of local communities worldwide exposed to the impacts of disasters, such as floods. In this session experiences and lessons learned of community-based disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration and management activities in river deltas and coastal areas in Africa and Latin-America have been presented and discussed.

Objective: Giving insight in the way knowledge and collaboration between practitioners, scientists and policy makers can be effective.

Session Agenda and Main Speakers

Session chair: Bruno Haghebaert, Netherlands Red Cross

Main speakers:

- Surviving on a landstrip: communities fighting coastal erosion and lagoon flooding in Pueblo Viejo (Colombia), Bruno Haghebaert, Netherlands Red Cross.
- Adapting to climate change in an uncertain context (Inner Niger Delta, Mali), Marie-José Vervest, Wetlands International, the Netherlands.
- Strengthening resilience of riverine communities in Dire Dawa (Ethiopia), Sasja Kamil, Cordaid, the Netherlands.

Panellists: same

Main conclusions, themes, insights or messages

Bruno Haghebaert:

- Mission of Partners for Resilience Alliance: strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities. 3 intervention strategies: strengthening community resilience, civil society capacity building, policy dialogue.
- Problem in Colombia: increasing sea level in combination with water threat from a large lagoon after heavy rainfall; prediction: village disappears in 2030. In Pueblo Viejo already 28 extreme weather events in 2010 (floods, wind, swell/tide, heavy rain).
- Action: awareness raising by capacity building on disaster response, training disaster preparedness with school teachers and children, solid waste management, early warning systems, micro adaptation project (water storage above flooding level).
- There is a gap between science and practice: a regular dialogue between researchers and villagers is needed to get useful results from research and give researchers insight in local issues.

Sasja Kamil:

- The approach for Dire Dawa (Ethiopia) consists of mitigation, prevention, preparing for disasters and resilience building.

- There was not a proper early warning system nor a policy for acting when a disasters occur (flooding). Working closely together with other stakeholders, such as the municipal county and upstream communities, Jeccco (a small NGO) developed an approach.
- The communities played an important role by taking responsibility: the communities worked on risk reduction measures to safeguard their lives and livelihoods, they restored their environment/ ecosystem, a flood early warning system was developed and discussions with the government were held about government plans and community ideas.
- Special: the government considered the approach of Dire Dawa a usefull model for the whole country. The people felled it as a joint responsibility, they took action. The munipality started supporting after seeing action of people.

Marie-José Vervest:

- In Inner Niger Delta in Mali over 1 million people depend for their livelihoods (fisheries, agriculture and cattle herding) on annual flooding of the Niger river. However, 10 years of drought in the years '90 has led to land degradation and overexploitation of natural resources and upstream developments such as large dams have major impact on downstream beneficial flooding of the area.
- The major climate impacts are: severe droughts and uncertain future projections. How to adapt to this uncertainty?
- Under Partners for Water Initiative, WI together with some consultancy and knowledge institutes (led by Haskoning) has developed a Flood prediction tool to supports government authorities and communities in predicting height and duration of flood for a single year. Extrapolation to other places and times is possible.
- The flood prediction tool for communities (OPIDIN) links knowledge on floodregimes and modelpredictions. Model results are confronted with people in the villages to identify local needs and see what the effects of measures will be. After successful piloting in two villages, OPIDIN will now be further developed for large scale implementation.
- Wetlands International is also providing support to communities for more longterm adaptation to climate change: ecosystem rehabilitation: replanting flood forest by communities using micro-credits as incentive (this approach is called 'bio-rights'). When survival rate is more than 75% people don't have to pay back their loan.
- Conclusion: flood prediction in a single year can help communities to adapt; community knowledge is linked with scientific insights. Long term adaptation by communities is successfully piloted by WI.

What can be concluded about the role of the government and/or knowledge institutes in these different cases?

- Colombia: governments have different priorities for specific regions or specific villages; start to discuss with them from the beginning.
- Ethiopia: attitude government changed through the actions of the people; try to involve them from the beginning.
- Mali: difficult to analyse what the role of the government has to be (whats in for them?); in Mali technological information from knowledge institutes was needed.

Key phrases or quotes

Community building has to be combined with help/information from knowledge institutes, the government and/or experts form outside. This can lead to effective measures.