



More powerful together: Bridging hunger gaps in Ethiopia



Etenesh Daniel. *Photo:*
©CARE Austria/Agnes
Otzelberger

APRIL 2011 - Etenesh Daniel from Muguja Village in Ethiopia has lived with hunger most of her life; it is nothing new. Every year during the dry season, she adjusts her eating habits along with other agro-pastoral families in her community until the rains bring relief. While this coping strategy works as food supplies dwindle, the situation is a struggle year after year. And it has become harder in recent times due to shifting rainfall patterns, more frequent drought, increasing food prices and decreasing land for farming and animal grazing.

'We should normally be planting our crops right now. But there is no rain. Under normal circumstances, we eat in June what we plant now,' Etenesh explained in late February this year, 'We are very scared. Four years ago, the same thing happened and there was a famine. We are afraid this might happen again. When there is a drought we cut the leaves of those banana plants over there and feed them to the animals. But it makes them sick because it does not nourish them well. And then they die.'

According to the World Food Programme, climate change, along with demographic, political and economic trends, has recently been identified as one of six major factors driving global food insecurity. It is expected to decrease food production by up to 7 percent by 2060, while population dynamics and economic disparities will greatly increase the number of hungry people, almost two thirds of whom are expected to be in Africa. The majority of the world's hungry and undernourished people will continue to be women and children. In Ethiopia, these trends are very visible. The country's ecosystems and people are already suffering from the effects of changing rainfall patterns and other climatic hazards, while the food price volatilities of the past few years have additionally weakened people's ability to sustain their livelihoods.

In communities like Muguja Village in the Southern Nations and Nationalities' People's Region where Etenesh lives with her four children and husband, the people are often able to feed themselves just after harvest, when they can eat and sell what they have grown. But as the dry season progresses, they run out of food and cash, and many of the animals they depend upon for food and income die. When it finally begins to rain, there is much work but little to eat, and people are weak and vulnerable to disease.

To survive, many destitute women take loans to provide short-term relief for their families. Long term, this strategy often leads to more debt and hardship, as well as the strain from the deeply humiliating process of pleading for money from a wealthy neighbour, or working on land with no pay while repaying the loan with an interest rate that is often as high as 100 percent. But when the rain doesn't come and the crops fail, there is less money for increasingly expensive food. In these times, there often is no other option for people like Etenesh. 'Our situation was terrible', she said about past times when her crops have failed. 'No one would give us a loan.'

In Ethiopia, the government seeks to help poor people facing food shortage problems like Etenesh through its nationwide Productive Safety Net Programme. To support this effort and expand its reach to more people, CARE Ethiopia and CARE Austria, in partnership with FARM Africa, are operating the 'Food Security through Increased Income, Assets and Protection from Grain Rises' (FS-IAP) project, with support of the European Union's Food Facility fund. Thus, instead of taking a high-interest loan last year, Etenesh had the opportunity to unite with other women to overcome hunger and provide food security for her family.

Since early 2010 in Muguja Village, the project has been establishing and strengthening Village Saving and Lending Associations, in which affected people are trained to collectively save small amounts of money. Over time, they accumulate funds for small investments, a buffer that helps them get through seasonal times of hunger.

Moreover they build a social fund which they can tap into when a group member faces an emergency, such as a sick child that needs cash for medical treatment.

The members of Etenesh's group call themselves 'Robot' to signal unbreakable willpower and hard work. The group is all women – the chairwoman, accountant and all other positions. It actively plans ahead and carefully uses the money it saves. Last year, they collectively invested 2,000 birr (approx. 80 euro) in cultivating and selling ginger. With the profit, some of the women could move from grass-thatched huts into houses with proper roofs. All of their families' diets have changed to the better, and they now have money to send their children to school.

Etenesh, through the CARE project, also joined another women's group that provides two goats to each woman in the group. Once the goats have offspring, another woman will receive the first two baby goats from each original goat. The positive effects multiply as the members of the 'first generation' groups are no longer mere recipients, but 'donors' themselves.

CARE and FARM Africa are also providing trainings for one woman per village to become a Community Animal Health Worker. In 2010, Etenesh was selected for the training. Her duties include monitoring the health status, birth and death of cattle and small ruminants, providing basic treatment and advice and reporting to local authorities. As such, she helps to ensure that fewer animals die as climate hazards intensify in the village. "I was provided with the equipment to clean and to treat the animals," she said. I help with very basic drugs to keep the small ruminants healthy. When I see they are in bad health and treating them is beyond my capacities, I let FARM Africa and the Woreda District authorities know so they take care of it.'



Etenesh Daniel receives equipment for her Community Animal Health Worker job. Photo: ©CARE Austria/ Agnes Otzelberger

Through the FS-IAP project, there will be more than 15,000 women like Etenesh who are becoming powerful together; uniting as agents of change in their communities. To these women, having their own income means empowerment within the family, and self-confidence as they demonstrate the great capacity they have to contribute to everyone's wellbeing in the household. It also means empowerment within the community, as these often previously excluded and marginalized women earn respect from others through the new roles they take on in business or as animal health workers. Importantly it also means that a delayed rainy season, drought or poor harvest no longer puts them at danger of losing everything they have; putting a stop to the downward cycles of poverty and hunger.

For more information on CARE International, Adaptation & Food Security, go to: www.careclimatechange.org/publications.

SOURCE:

Statistics: Parry, M., Evans, A., Rosegrant, M.W., & Wheeler, T. (2009). *Climate Change and Hunger: Responding to the Challenge*. World Food Programme (WFP), Rome, Italy.



Etenesh Daniel's VSLA group in Muguja, SNNPR Region, is called "Robot" to signal unbreakable willpower and hard work. Photo: ©CARE Austria/Agnes Otzelberger