

**Community Consultation
to inform FAO-WFP-UNICEF Resilience Strategy**



*Surgudud
2nd October 2012*

Surgudud community

Under a shade tree, a group of men and women of varying ages gathered on mats with visitors. No youth were present, we were told this was because they were looking for an income, and for food. The deputy DC, an elder in this village, introduced the meeting and invited a prayer by an elder, as is customary before any local meeting. Thanks were given to the agencies who were visiting and consulting the community, who promised to speak openly and make local realities clear. Ladies as well as men were asked to speak freely without fear of anyone. The meeting was then declared open. Zoe from FAO explained the purpose of the visit, then introductions were given by the visitors (UN and NGO agencies) and by key community members present. The format of responses and translations were explained.

Themes raised included the following

- **Drought and floods** are worsening and make both farmers and pastoralists vulnerable, in different ways and in different seasons
- **Social support** is vital and more consistent and reliable than outside aid
- **Farming or providing casual labour on farms** is increasingly important to people who were once more pastoralist in livelihood
- **Livestock** are relatively unsupported in terms of health, and **farms** too are unprotected against floods and other shocks
- **Migration** is an important coping mechanism
- The **local school** is currently closed, its existence is fragile and dependent on outsiders
- **Health care** exists in various forms, though it appears uncoordinated and under-resourced – poor hygiene and disease (e.g. a recent outbreak of measles) concern the community

People accustomed to setting out their needs and vulnerabilities to outside agencies were reluctant to change direction and focus on resilience (or unwilling to miss the opportunity to make very plain their needs and wishes in terms of aid). At one point an elder spoke against this by saying that people should be honest about the presence of good seasons, rather than suggesting all seasons were bad, since honesty about local realities would help outside agencies understand.

What follows is as close as possible a transcript of what was said, based on translation from Somali to English.

Recent shocks

Older man

One was the drought that affected all of us, both humans and livestock. There were also floods that destroyed all our crops. Today's problems are different from those of the past, they are worse. The last drought finished everything, it left almost nothing.

Woman

It is like the elder has said: the greatest shock is the drought. But the other one is the war conflict in Somalia now. We face both drought and war. Both animals and human beings are affected, weakened or finished. We await assistance from God or any other agencies who can help.

Older woman

The last drought affected the weak people, both elderly and young. Many were finished by the drought. The weak were worst affected. People are different, some have wealth and resources and those were reduced to a weaker level but not completely destroyed like the weak people.

Coping

Man

God helps and saves people, and so do humanitarian agencies.

Older man

We assist ourselves by giving animals as gifts to each other. Weaker animals can be sold. As it has been said, there are two types of people, those well off and those weak. The weaker ones were finished in terms of their animals and the better off ones helped them with whatever resources they had, either animals or things they had brought from town. That's how the weaker people are helped. In remote areas it's the very old and the very young people who are worst affected.

Old man

If a person's leg gets broken, we will provide a cast and a walking stick for that person to be supported, and we provide camel meat for them to get stronger. When the broken leg is better he can join the rest of his people and walk, look after livestock, or go to farms to work. He might still need a stick but he will be able to stand up and work. This community is now like that person who broke his leg, we have been assisted to stand up but support is still needed.

Some people in this community are limping more than others, that is they are weaker – the elderly, women, children, and especially those who animals died in the drought. There are different categories of people here, those who herd camels and livestock and those who have farms or work on farms. Many of those who herded livestock are now weaker because their animals died; we need them to be supported and maybe helped with farming tools and ways to work on farms now that they have no animals. There was so much loss and damage that we would like repaired, like animals that died in the drought or pumps that were destroyed in the floods. Then the weak people can stand on their own and be part of the rest, part of a strong community.

Man

Many people are struggling hard on their farms, but many have nothing to start with – either they lost their animals or they never had animals, so they have nothing to start from. A few are struggling with their farms in terms of irrigation, tilling the land. Those who have farms and can afford to get money for fuel for pumps [to irrigate with] are struggling to farm their land, but those who lost their animals have nothing. They do casual labour for the ones who own the farms, that's how they get their daily bread.

Old man

The past ten years have been the worst we can remember. We were in war, continuous war. We also faced droughts. We faced so many problems over the past years! Before that we never had wars on this scale, or droughts on this scale, but over the past years we've nearly been finished! So many people have died. Most part of Somalia have seen people die in greater numbers over the past years.

Middle-aged woman

[Steered back from making a plea for cash and food relief] The last year was the worst year when some people didn't even light their fire [to cook food].

Man

Some people even migrated away from here to refugee and IDP camps. So many people moved away from here to the refugee camps in Ethiopia. Women and children and the elderly mostly moved to the refugee camps in Ethiopia, to different places. Hundreds of people from here left, maybe 300 people. We have about 400 households here now, in this village and around.

Old man

The past ten years were the worst. There were some good years within it but there were some terrible years where we had droughts and wars. The last drought was the worst, all our animals died. Relief organisations came and helped us. When they came, the weaker ones got better. They stopped giving

relief food, we are not receiving any now, but now we foresee that a problem is coming. We request that you see that our struggle is like before and we would like relief to assist us.

Man

A vulnerable person is someone who needs food, they are hungry. Maybe when the drought came a person who had animals lost all of them. Maybe when the drought came a person who had a farm lost his crops. When relief agencies assist they should assist the person who lost his animals by giving him animals, and they should assist the person with the farm with bush clearing. The person who had a business should be assisted with business support. There are so many different types of people.

Man

Weaker people are the elderly, and women, and handicapped people. If a household has nothing – no animals, no farm, no money, no relatives who can send remittances – then that household will be unable to eat, they will have nothing to put on the fire.

Older man

People here are like the animals you can see, the animals who go out for grazing but mostly come back hungry. The people are like that too now, and mostly all of the same level. All are very poor and have very little. When it rains we get a little, but we don't have a lot of rain.

Man

We have good times and bad times, seasons, but war and lack of peace can be there at all times.

Man

When it rains it is good, and people with animals and farmers get milk and crops and it is a good time.

We should tell everything to these visitors. It's not that if we say there were some good times they will reduce assistance to us. We shouldn't tell them that everything has been bad for the last ten years. And anyway they are asking about the past, and the past can't change, so if there was a good year in the past we should tell them.

Old man

We had good times and bad times. We've had so many droughts and wars, but we've also had good times. When we've come out of droughts we've had rainy seasons, and all the animals reproduced, and there were weddings. We've had

NGOs come and give us food, and medicines. Life has improved, and as I told you before about the person with the broken leg, we've been supported and gotten out of the drought. It has got better, and animals bred, and good times have returned.

Man

Mostly it's people who herd livestock who are worst affected, but farmers get very badly affected by floods which destroy all their crops. People with animals can recover less quickly than farmers; the river will carry water for six months, and then for six months it will be dry. If we plant our crops, then three months later we can harvest. But a goat will carry a baby in the womb for six months, so that's a longer wait.

At the moment there is not good pasture for the animals, but we can plant in the riverine areas and then feed that to the animals. Not everyone has a farm, but those who don't depend on those who do – they work on their farms, or they buy this fodder from the farmers, or sometimes they are given it for free. There are problems like a very hot wind that burns the crops, and an insect that eats our crop, so we have had bad harvests like only the stalks of maize. We give these stalks to the animals, and the animals now depend on these as their pasture. Some are taken to town and sold, we don't get much money from these stalks but we buy some fuel for the pumps from the profits. Then after buying fuel for pumps we can buy other basic goods.

Man

Some people don't have farms *and* they don't have animals. Those people cut firewood and sisal and sell those things, but that's not enough for them to meet their daily needs. After that they depend on relief food and humanitarian agencies. There is also assistance from people within the community, like farmers, that's how they survive in the absence of relief food.

Woman [in response to question about daily meals]

We usually eat in the morning and in the evening, but it changes. For example if we have money or have had a good harvest we might cook three times a day. Children are prioritized, they won't miss these two meals but other groups like the elderly might miss them if necessary.

Woman

Farmers can mostly afford to eat three times a day, even if they *don't* eat three times a day. Livestock keepers can't usually afford three times a day, especially not during drought, but maybe in rainy season they can afford more meals. During drought livestock keepers also struggle to feed their animals, animals also need to eat something.

Flour is cooked in the morning and githeri, maize or rice in the evening – depending on what’s available. Milk is hard to get. We normally get sugar, depending on the strength of the person. After selling sisal and firewood, that’s when we can get sugar.

Man

There are more farmers here than livestock-keepers. Most people are farmers. Farmers, if the harvest is good, will take good to market while leaving some at home. But for the last few years we never had a good harvest! Most farmers also do well when humanitarian organisations contribute in terms of seeds and pest control. A lot of us here are not educated or trained in farming. This village was only recently started, as a result of war. It was started in 1964, when there was a war between Somalia and Ethiopia. People never had training in terms of farming or animal keeping.

Humanitarian agencies give seeds for planting, we would also like to be taught to increase productivity and how to do farming better. Ninety percent of us along this river have planted nothing this year, because of pests that would destroy our crops. We never had any assistance to deal with those pests, and we don’t know anything ourselves about how to deal with them. We burn some smokey materials and the smoke keeps the pests away.

Man

Most farms are bush now, some have been cleared but most are bushy and need to be cleared. We don’t have the strength or ability to do it ourselves because of the hunger we have. We are weak, and the people who own the farms cannot clear the bush themselves. Some casual labourers are strong and can do it.

Warnings of drought or flood

Man

We know nothing about when drought is coming, only God really knows. How can we say that the coming *Dehr* will not be good, only God knows. But according to the Somalis we have a tradition, although it is simple. There is something called *fal*, something people do. They put drawings on the ground and ask if the season will be good or bad. For example there was a time when we said that if we heard the sound of a hyena we’d say, this season will not be good, it will be a drought season.

Old man

There are people who slaughter a goat and look at the intestines of that animal. They look at those intestines and at an empty space within them; if they see that empty space they say the coming season will be a bad one. There are people who live along the river and look at the crocodiles; they normally come out from the

river at night and roam around the land, and then return to the river the next day. Looking at how far they reach will tell us where the flood will reach in the next season – that’s how we predict it.

We listen for the frogs, and if we hear them in a certain place we know that that place will be filled with water, there will be a lot of water. They make totally different sounds when they are in a place where this is water or where there will be water. *[Did demonstration of the different sounds]*

Drought preparedness

Man

We normally pray to God with a special rainy season prayer. We slaughter animals and we pray to god.

Man

If drought is coming we move the animals to a place where there will be no drought. When it comes to humans, we normally put whatever resources we have into our stores and keep them there – like our harvest from the farms we put in our granaries. Or we sell the animals in good condition to prepare ourselves for the drought that is coming.

Assistance to vulnerable

Man

We make contributions among ourselves called *ayutah* [sp?]. We normally assist among ourselves, give assistance to relatives and clan members and neighbours. If you go to anyone related to you and they’ll assist you.

Man

For example here in Surgudud there might be 20 people with nothing, and 50 with farms or livestock. To those with animals, we ask them to bring any animals they can to those with nothing, and we ask the farmers to bring whatever they harvest to help those who have nothing. Then we collect these things and give it to the needy person, that’s how we help them.

Old man

We help in two different ways. Some people need food, they want something to cook. Some can afford food for that day, and for those kinds of people we collect cash and animals and start a collection of resources for that person. Maybe fifty households contribute a goat, that will be fifty goats. The proverb we have is,

“Drought is a continual starting point”. Usually after every two years we have a drought, or you have a good year followed by a bad year.

Old man

There are two kinds of resources. Those from God, like this river, and those that you started on your own. Using and sharing the two is different. Water from the river is used for animals – animals can come from 20km away. Sisals are also found along the river, and we don’t have permanent structures so we make them from sisals. Along the river we have people with no irrigation pumps, they plant along the river and harvest there. Whoever can get a pump can irrigate and plant a very big land. The sticks we use in our houses usually come from trees along the river, they’re used for shelter. When drought comes we are the lucky people because we can go to the river and benefit from the shade there, and the other resources – that river is so important to us.

Credit

Man

Some people can get a credit from somewhere, in terms of cash or food – that helps them. The ones that can be trusted can access credit. They might have a business, or they might have animals, or they might have farms. You can pay back in cash, or in animals, or in harvest. People who own shops within towns give credit, depending on what that person has – someone with a lot of camels for example will be able to get credit easily. When drought comes people go to towns like Dolow and get credit, then they pay it back after the rainy season. Today there is a lot of debt here from the credit taken in the last drought.

Man

Some people have even been jailed because of debt. I am responsible for one of these, trying to pay back a debt.

Man

When we harvest, we don’t usually make more than our family needs, but if we do we take it to Dolow, that’s our closest town. And if you have money, you can buy whatever you want in Dolow.

Man

For the last few years the price of food in Dolow has been quite stable; because of relief food distribution, the price actually fell.

Children’s health

Woman

There are doctors who come to us with vehicles. We also have a health post around, in that structure there. That's where we take our children.

Woman

Every person does things like clean utensils, sleeping mats, and other things we use to keep them clean. You take care of health and hygiene in your own home, it's your own responsibility and not the community's.

Man

Right now there's an outbreak of measles.

Woman

There aren't enough drugs in that health post.

Man

There is one community health worker and one midwife working from that health facility.

School

Man

We have a school here. It takes three classes. There are four teachers there. We don't have desks or chairs but we have books. Nabad [NGO] constructed that school but it's now closed.

Man

There are two problems which made the school close. One is that there is a lack of money for the teachers' salary; the teachers were local but they couldn't be paid. The other problem is that there was a measles outbreak and so children are not sent to school in case they catch it. The school closed in August.

Man

Nabad was financing the school, they were financed by UNICEF, but now that programme has closed. The school we had for three years.

Man

You ask what we as a community could do to re-open the school. We had meetings about raising the money in the community so we could pay the

teachers' salary ourselves. We have a committee for the school, we come together and we have three functions: first, we go to houses and bring children to school; second, we resolve whatever conflicts come out within that school; and thirdly, we normally contribute in terms of finance, we collect money for whatever's needed within the school. The committee is seven of which three are women.

Questions

Man

The livelihoods of Surgudud depend on farms, and on the river. The river is dry for three months a year and for nine months it has water in it. In general, when the river is dry our livelihood is totally grounded. The kind of vegetation we normally plant, like mangoes and oranges, they dry when the river is dry. This is a question that has a request, I am making a request in terms of our need. We are requesting wells so that we can have water when the river is dry. If we get those wells maybe we can maintain our livelihoods better when the river is dry.

During the flood seasons, all our canals are washed away by the floods. There are so many places that release this water and we don't have the strength to block them to avoid the washing away of the canals. My request is for assistance in embankments as well as wells construction. And those who don't have water pumps, we are asking for assistance in terms of pumps. And those whose farms have been filled up with bushes, we are asking for assistance in terms of bush clearing.

Man

Different NGOs assist us from different perspectives. Why did you join up today as one organisation?

Man

We are very grateful and thank you again. Whatever assistance we normally get, sometimes we get it partially; please give us it completely so we can be independent.

Zoe

We are three organisations, we came because we want to set up one programme to help you comprehensively and over the long term. We asked a lot of questions about how you help yourselves because that is how we want to help you, not by doing it for you and then leaving. We want to thank you very very much for your time. Tomorrow we'd like to meet smaller groups if this is possible, but thank you for sharing your time with us today.

Thanks on behalf of FAO, WFP, UNICEF and partners we thank you very much for your time today, it's been a great pleasure.

Applause and more thanks and farewells. Meeting formally closed and some plans made for tomorrow's smaller meetings with men and women separately.