

Integrated approach builds food security



A neighborhood group meets for a community conversation, to raise awareness and build empowerment around key issues affecting them. Photo by Priyanka Jagtap/CRS

CRS' Development Food Security Activity, or DFSA, is helping improve the food security of 240,525 Productive Safety Net Programme clients in nine *woredas* (districts) in the Ethiopia's Oromia region and Dire Dawa. The activity is a 5-year (2016-2021), US\$106 million integrated food security program funded by the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Food for Peace, and managed by a consortium of nongovernmental organizations led by CRS Ethiopia. It includes a US\$9.7 million contribution by CRS. The Productive Safety Net Programme, or PSNP, is Ethiopia's rural safety net for food-insecure households.

The DFSA takes a strategic approach to addressing the various causes of community and household shocks and food insecurity in an integrated manner. The activity uses a phased approach to create demand, improve resources, strengthen capacity levels of and linkages between interdependent community service providers, and transition necessary program elements over to a more fully capable network of local government, program participants and local partners.

Tracking and mitigating the impact of climate change

The CRS information and communications technology for development, or ICT4D, team has designed a program to help strengthen environmental data collection and analysis. This tool allows communities to better identify and track local environmental changes, so they can quickly respond to those changes that may put them at greater risk during drought or unexpected weather patterns. The Government of Ethiopia can use this data to help prepare for and respond to potential food shortages caused by drought in specific areas.



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DFSA is managed by teams of subject-matter experts across four purpose levels:

Purpose 1: Government of Ethiopia (GoE) and community systems respond to reduce communities' and households' vulnerability to shocks. A team of environmental conservation experts lead program participants to ensure that the social and physical infrastructure of specific areas is protected from degradation. Systems specialists work closely with government partners to better serve PSNP participants in their *kebele* (neighborhood) by providing training, coaching and mentoring in critical operational areas.

Purpose 2: Households improve their sustainable economic well-being. Microfinance experts help program participants set up, maintain and grow savings and lending groups, preparing them for external borrowing opportunities. Agricultural extension technicians help participants plant crops that are climate-sensitive and increase dietary diversity. Livestock technicians advise participants on **livestock**.

Purpose 3: Pregnant and lactating women, and children under 5, have improved nutritional status. Dedicated outreach to women and children promotes optimal health and nutrition behaviors, and soft-conditional resource transfers support inputs necessary for improved health. Neighbors, family and religious leaders are trained to support efforts to achieve improved health outcomes. Health facility workers, health extension workers and health development assistants are trained and supported to create stronger health service provisions and a community information network.

Cross-cutting purpose: Women and youth have increased access to and control of community and household resources. A team of youth and gender specialists collaborate with each of the purpose teams as well as the monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning team to ensure the distinct needs of women and youth are incorporated into the project design, implementation and evaluation. Youth are targeted for employment-readiness trainings, and the focus for women is to strengthen their capacity to make decisions in their lives and take on leadership positions within their community.

Six approaches guide the DFSA implementation process, including:

- **Maternal and child health** Health specialists work to improve the capacity of medical outposts to provide educational health services and improve access to high-quality treatment. Pregnant and breastfeeding women and caregivers of children under 5 years are exposed to the benefits of pro-health behaviors, practices and regular check-ups before and after birth.
- **Nutrition** Participants are supported to increase dietary diversity and improve maternal and child undernutrition through soft-conditional cash transfers, increased seed varieties for keyhole home gardens, and educational social behavioral change communication events.
- **Agriculture** Participants are trained in conservation-based agriculture and post-harvest technologies to reduce crop losses, have access to new seed varieties through seed fairs, and are supported by extension agents that help them diversify their production and increase their yields.
- **Capacity building** DFSA staff work closely with the GoE to layer and sequence activities to improve systems and strengthen the GoE's ability to efficiently manage and deliver community services. An automated comment system helps participants provide feedback on their experiences.
- **Natural resources and biodiversity** To counter the impact of erosion, drought and other forms of land degradation, as well as to mitigate climate change, participants help to build improved watersheds and terraces, plant multipurpose trees, and improve land productivity and soil fertility.
- **Social assistance** In exchange for labor on public infrastructure projects or participation in informational sessions on health or social change conversations, participants receive a staple food or cash transfer to increase food security through the hunger season.

Economically empowering those at risk

Although the project is only at its midpoint, CRS has surpassed 90 percent of the project goal for livelihood group formation. Continuing to work with these groups will enable CRS to monitor, teach and learn from them, and helps solidify trainings and reinforce financial concepts. Over half of the members of these groups are women, opening additional avenues for the achievement of project gender goals.

