



FAIR Child Project saved us from competing with birds for wild fruits for food- Karamoja residents

ADRA is implementing a two-year Food Access and Income Resource for the Child (FAIR CHILD) project to create sustainable income resources targeted Karamojong households in Northern Karamoja (Abim, Kotido, and Kaabong district). The project is focusing on reducing hunger among children by empowering vulnerable/food insecure households based on the theory of change that, if households are supported with sustainable income resources (IGAs) and provided with skills to better manage the IGAs, and add value, then they will make profits, and also increase on their savings so that they use the proceeds (profits and savings) to provide food to their families more especially to children even during situations of food scarcity/drought in the region.



Esther Anyimo the ADRA Nutrition Community Support Officer explaining how the FAIR CHILD project works with households

The project's theory of change is implemented in two change areas.

1. Improved income among 900 households in Kotido, Abim and Kaabong to enable them contribute towards their children welfare.

Indicators

- 700 of targeted households using IGAs proceeds to access food at all times.
 - 30% of targeted household members with improved savings.
 - 2. Improve child care practices among 900 households in Kotido, Abim and Kaabong.
- Indicators**
- 10% decrease in children suffering from diseases resulting from poor child care practices among targeted households
 - % increase in number of households accessing health services for their children

The project targets 900 households (300 in each district). The selection of beneficiary households was dependent on the level of vulnerability to hunger and access to food. Priority was given to households with malnourished children, child or woman headed households, teenage mothers among others.

45 Selected Community Based Organizations (CBOs) (15 in each district) working with the Action for Social Change (ASC) serve as entry points through which FAIR CHILD reaches the targeted households. The CBO members were instrumental in selecting the households to benefit from the FAIR CHILD project. These CBOs also serve as meeting points for trainings, advocating for the projects issues and also following up and monitoring of FAIR project activities and they pass on practical knowledge and experience from the ASC program to FAIR child project beneficiaries.



Based on an assessment that was done by the project to determine the existing and viable IGAs for communities of northern Karamoja, an IGA basket was developed which included; Retail business, Produce buying and selling and crop production and goat rearing. Each household was required to select their IGA of Interest from the basket and those who chose other IGAs other than goat rearing were required to develop a proposal that showed exactly how they planned to implement their selected IGA and the initial budgetary requirement. These proposals were analyzed by the project Staff who also did an individual assessment of the households to determine their ability to implement and manage the funds requested. These assessments and analysis were the basis for determining the amounts of fund to be given to each household respectively.

500 households have therefore received funds for IGA; 188 in Kaabong, 164 in Abim and 128 in Kotido of these households, 68 are currently involved in produce buying, 98 from Kaabong and 87 for Abim. In retail business 60 in Kaabong, 34 Kotido, and 38

for Abim. On crop production 26 for kotido, 30 in Kaabong and 59 for Abim.

And 400 households have received 2 female goats each (112 in Kaabong, 116 in Abim and 172 in Kotido), both funds and goats provided by the project are rotational; for funds, households are to return 50% of the initial capital received to the CBO they are attached to. For the goats the households are to return 2 female kids to the CBO which selected them and are key implementers of the project activities. The CBO will then identify other vulnerable household that these funds and goats will be passed on to.

The project has also built the capacity of beneficiary households through the CBO members in different ways including back yard farming, making composite mature from goat droppings to be used as manure in back yard gardening, basics of child care and rights (with emphasis on proper breast feeding techniques, hygiene and sanitation and child rights among others), basic nutrition skills (with emphasis on prevention of malnutrition through feeding children with foods that contains the necessary nutrients required for growth/balanced diet) and basic food preservation methods. The project also oriented them on enterprise/IGA management, records keeping, basic financial literacy, goat rearing for business and Value addition with intentions of empowering them to successfully manage the, In come Generation Activities they are involved in.

The project also organized the beneficiary households into VSLA groups, supported them with VSLA kits for purposes of saving and also access finance to boost their IGAs and linked them to existing ASC-CBO VSLAs for mentorship. Using the ASC advocacy platforms, FAIR CHILD beneficiaries have been linked



Members of Atakenyutu Group picking some of the stored dried vegetables from the granary

to duty bearers where issues that affect communities targeted by this project (with a special focus on issues affecting food access at household level) are discussed and addressed with the duty bearers at village, parish, sub county and district levels.

The project has done a nutrition assessment to determine the nutrition status children under 5 and child care practices of beneficiary households the results of which will inform on the impact of project interventions. And a research on the amount of foods households need to preserve to in order to meet the households needs during the lean periods. The results of these are still underway to inform the projects programming and Reporting, at all levels.

Food was a rare commodity in our area and sleeping on an empty stomach was not news to many of us. We depended on wild fruits for food and had to compete with birds and wild animals in order to get something to survive the sword of hunger, said Maria Nyanga a resident of Nakoreto in Kotido district.

Suffering

Nyanga describes the scarcity of food in Karamoja region as a titanic and horror movie, saying that the monster hunger did not spare the innocent children as well. Nyanga said many parents including her were regular visitors to the already stressed health facilities in the area as their children were prone to any infection.

"We had many malnourished children in our community and they often fell sick as a result of poor feeding. The times we were lucky to take them to health facilities, we were told that our children's immunity was low. We actually thought that low immunity and malnutrition was a new disease like HIV that had invaded our communities. Little did we know that hunger was finishing our youngsters from our sights," she added.

Household income was a dream Nyanga further said besides the hunger, they did not have any income to support their families especially during the drought and famine period in Karamoja. "Maintaining our families was not easy because we did not have income at all," she said.

The coming of a Messiah

However all this changed following an intervention by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). ADRA is implementing a two-year Food Access and Income Resource for the Child (FAIR CHILD) project to create sustainable income resources for the targeted Karamojong households. With a smile of a satisfaction, Nyanga could not hide her joy which she says is a result of the FAIR Child project.



Some of the women who have been helped by ADRA showing some of the dried vegetables

"You have no idea what we used to go through. We used to work for food but since the project began supporting us, this has actually stopped and the time and energy we used to spend in other people's gardens we now use it to grow our own food for home consumption and sell some to get money for other home needs," she said.

To justify her claims, Nyanga immediately requested to visit her group garden and also her home to see what she called "total transformation". She said they have also resurrected the traditional granary where they store their food including dried vegetables for bad times. Nyanga said the food security situation in Karamoja used to be worsened by poor post-harvest handling which leads to poor quality and loss of food. "We have been trained in post-harvest handling issues. ADRA gave us a tarpaulin's which we use during harvesting and drying of our crops," she said.

Grace Sunday Adoch 20, and a resident of Loyoroti in Abim said getting sh700 to buy salt was through hard work.

Adoch who benefited from an income generating activities' component of FAIR Child project said she is able to sell beans and take care of her seven siblings. Adoch who started with sh100, 000 has grown her capital to sh500, 000 and has learned to save some money in their village savings and Loan Association groups(VSLA). "This saved my family from starving because I can get money to buy food and attend to the family's school fees and medical needs," she said.

Abraham Logwee one of the youth said when the FAIR CHILD project came; the youth were empowered and given skills



One of the beneficiaries in the green houses.

on modern ways of farming. Logwee who used to look after livestock, burning charcoal and hunting game for household consumption no longer has to worry on what to eat.

"We are a group of young people trained by ADRA to farm in a modern way. As you can see our tomatoes in the green house are ready for transplanting and we are not worried about the harsh conditions of Karamoja as we have learnt the methods of irrigation," he said.

Logwee a member of Lokocil group is happy that they will be able to have vegetables throughout the year and they will sell some to those that will be starving.

"Our goal is to feed our hungry brothers and sisters and we will not wait for World Food Programme again to feed us when we have the skills and technical knowledge to support ourselves and communities. After being empowered, surely climate changes related issues is not an excuse for us to keep dying of hunger and having one meal a day," he added.

Lonya Apararuth another group member said that unlike before when traditionally during dry spells some men used to move with cows to far distances looking for pasture, they are now sensitizing fellow elders to instead harvest water for their animals and engage in meaningful farming.

"We now know that children in households with livestock are less prone to malnutrition. Now we are adding food, which means that we will have a healthy community generation after generation," he said.

Balte Arook another community member said they are trying

to avoid a situation where food in Karamoja is always bought from neighboring regions leading to exorbitant food prices. "This money should be kept within our region to fight high poverty levels in Karamoja. After seeing what we are able to produce, I know this is possible for every household to have access to food all the time," he said.

Background

George William Kiberu the ADRA Regional Programmes Manager said, traditionally the Karimojong mainly depended on livestock rearing with minimal crop cultivation as their source of livelihoods. However, households in Karamoja are increasingly supplementing animal husbandry with crop cultivation.

"The semi-nomadic pastoralism, the traditional livelihood system of Karamoja, is well suited to the area's arid agro-ecological conditions. Some residents now produce some crops to access food and income after we intervened," he said. Kiberu said given the semi-arid conditions in the sub-region, the main staple food crops grown in Karamoja are sorghum, cassava, and maize while more fertile agricultural areas such as the western green belt and the northeast and southeast corners of Karamoja allow for cultivation of rice, maize, legumes, beans, cowpeas, pigeon peas, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, sesame, sunflower among other crops.



The Karamojongs have revived the traditional granaries in order to store food for dry periods to avoid famine.

According to Esther Anyimo the ADRA Nutrition Community Support Officer, the FAIR CHILD project is aiming at reducing hunger among severely malnourished children by empowering vulnerable and food insecure households. She said 900 people have benefited from the FAIR Child project in the districts of Kaabong, Abim and Kotido.

According to her, the benefiting households were given skills, in vegetable growing, savings, best children feeding techniques, post-harvest handling, irrigation, nutrition skills in order to eliminate hunger in the region.

Anyimo said the project also helped the communities with start-up capital to enable them start income generating activities. She added that ADRA worked with community based organisations in identifying the most pressing needs of the communities.

After identification, the households submitted proposals according to their needs of which the organisation supported. "Some of them were supported with goats which they sell to be able to purchase and put food on the table for their children even during the drought situations that are persistently experienced in the region," Esther said.

Anyimo said although the people of Karamoja are poor, reliance on food from the market, coupled with low incomes also limits the ability of mothers and care givers to provide meals of an adequate diversity and at an acceptable frequency.

"We for instance were alarmed by the Uganda Demographic Survey of 2016 which clearly stated that in Karamoja only 2.7% of the children 6- 23 months are having the minimum acceptable diet, 5.6% having the minimum diet diversity and 34.3% meeting the minimum meal frequency. In addition, poor food preparation methods by mothers/care givers also lead to loss of nutrients," she added.



Grace Sunday Adock who was supported by ADRA's FAIR Child project with a start-up capital attending to her customer.