FAO Kenya Newsletter

April – May – June 2012 | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations | Kenya

Welcome to the newsletter of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO) Office in Kenya.

FAO works closely with the Government of Kenya to help build a food-secure country, free of hunger and malnutrition, where food and agriculture contribute to improving the living standards of all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

Last year, Kenya and other countries in the Horn of Africa suffered through a serious drought while still recovering from the severe drought of 2009. Thanks to timely and generous donor funding, FAO was able to implement a comprehensive and innovative drought response programme.

In this quarter's newsletter, we look at some of our drought response activities in Kenya. Given recent climatic predictions for poor rains in 2012, FAO and partners will have to redouble their efforts in order to protect the livelihoods of farmers and pastoralists who have yet to recover from last year's drought.

Mr. Dan Rugabira
FAO Representative in Kenya

2012 may prove to be another dry year for many areas of Kenya still recovering from the recent drought.

Funds needed to prepare for below-average rains in 2012

Livelihoods of millions at risk

Based on recent climatic outlooks, Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) are likely to receive below-normal rainfall over the next rainy season (April – June). FAO and partners will therefore have to ramp up emergency programmes in order to protect the livelihoods of vulnerable pastoralists and agro-pastoralists yet to recover from the recent drought.

Priorities will include protecting livestock, supporting crop production, and improving small-holder irrigation. Cash-for-work schemes will be used where appropriate, including for soil and water conservation initiatives.

FAO's plan targets 3.2 million beneficiaries with priority interventions through the end of the year. An estimated US$13 million in funding is required. Investing in preparedness activities now will reduce the need for far costlier emergency interventions later. ■

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Responding to drought in Kenya

FAO activities focus on building resilience

Late and erratic rainfall in 2011, particularly in arid and semi-arid lands, proved detrimental to both livestock and crop production in Kenya. While still recovering from the severe drought of 2009, the country was faced yet again with a serious crisis.

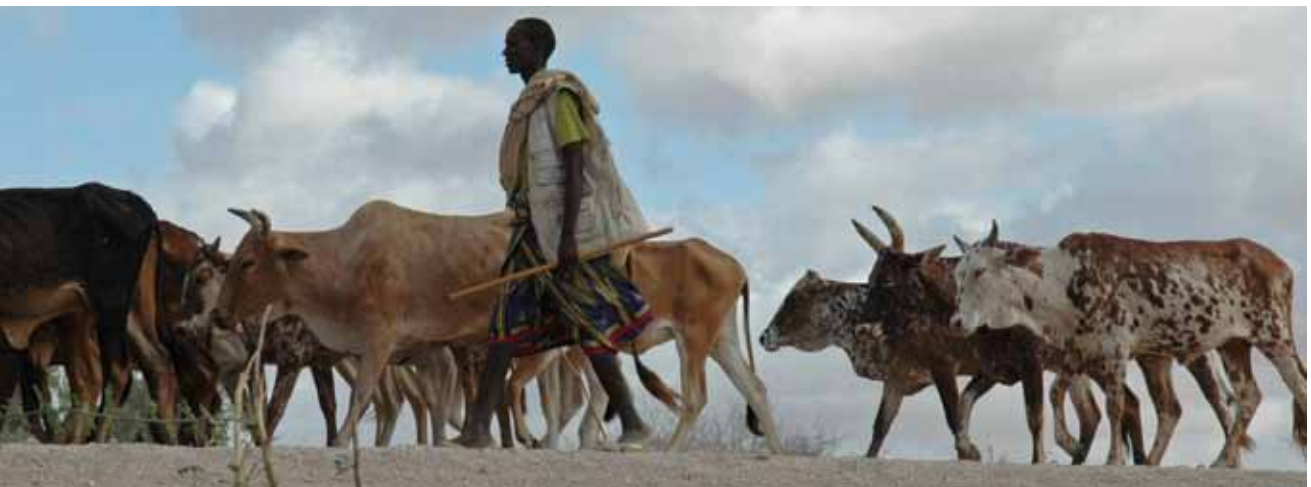
As pastoral and farming livelihoods can take several years to recover from a severe drought, many of those affected by drought conditions in 2011 were placed in an extremely precarious position, at risk of losing their way of life.

FAO responded with a set of drought preparedness, response and resilience-building activities targeting vulnerable communities whose livelihoods were in danger, reaching areas predominantly in the northern and northeastern parts of the country.

Voucher-for-work schemes, for example, have been implemented for soil and water conservation activities. Farmers have been trained to terrace their fields to conserve rain water for crop use and prevent the soils from being washed away, as well as to build simple dams for better harvesting of rainwater. In return for their labour, the farmers have received vouchers they can exchange for food or other basic household items while at the same time building vital infrastructure to improve their resilience.

Farmers faced with depleted seed stocks have received seeds of improved, drought-tolerant crop varieties. Crops such as sorghum and millet are adapted to dry conditions, expressing better yields. Furthermore, FAO's community-based seed production approach has included training in seed multiplication to increase the scope and impact of the programme.

To support pastoralists who depend on livestock for their living, FAO animal health activities have targeted vaccination and disease monitoring. Fodder production and livestock waterhole monitoring have also been key activities. FAO has also supported rural livestock markets, ensuring their functionality to enable pastoralists to sell their livestock and inject significant revenue into rural economies at a critical time. Overall,



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FAO has reached some 1.5 million pastoralists and farmers through its comprehensive drought preparedness and response programme in Kenya.

Activities continue today, including training government personnel in emergency preparedness and reaching out to farming communities through farmer field schools to better prepare them for future emergencies.

The predicted shortfall of rain in the coming season threatens the livelihoods of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists who have not yet recovered from previous successive droughts. FAO is therefore seeking immediate additional funding to scale up its drought preparedness and response programmes in order to better prepare communities, ensure their continued recovery and build their resilience to respond to future shocks. ■

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A beneficiary of an FAO voucher-for-work project in eastern Kenya. FAO helps farmers terrace their fields and build water harvesting structures. Terracing saves both soil and water.

Waterhole monitoring

High-tech drought preparedness and response

Pastoral communities in Kenya depend on watering holes for their livestock. Water shortages have led to conflict among communities and for some pastoralists to give up their livelihood entirely. Waterholes are therefore critical for survival.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is working with the University of Nairobi and Texas A&M University (United States) to expand a program that monitors waterhole levels in order to help pastoralist communities.

The project builds on work begun four years ago by Texas A&M University and the United States Geological Survey in northeastern Kenya. The monitoring system uses satellite imaging and remote sensing to show trends in water levels, the health and availability of pasture, rainfall amounts, and how much water has evaporated into the atmosphere.

With funding from the European Union, FAO is piloting the programme in Turkana County, northwestern Kenya. FAO has added smart phone technology to improve the monitoring system. Community monitors are trained to use smart phones to send real-time data on water levels, which is uploaded immediately to a central database, allowing for rapid analysis and response.

"The problem is that there are no meteorological stations in Turkana to gauge rainfall, so this will fill the gap in a highly cost-effective way," said Joseph Matere, Geographic Information Systems Officer for FAO in Kenya.

"It will allow us to do projections of both forage and water levels at waterholes several months into the future, which will enable us to respond in a timely and appropriate way to avert losses of livestock."

Pastoralists are warned when water levels are low in one area so that they can move to areas that have sufficient water and pasture, mitigating potential conflict and overuse of natural resources.

Taking data at a waterhole. Waterholes are critical for the survival of pastoral communities in Kenya.

The system links early warning to response, allowing pastoral communities to plan ahead for the availability of water and other resources. It will also help humanitarian actors intervene to offset a major crisis in cases of extreme drought.

The early warning system will provide data in planning for pasture production, the establishment of new water sources and other risk reduction measures. Furthermore, the database allows for the studying of drought trends, which is useful in adapting to climate change.

FAO is currently seeking funding for a five-year, US$10 million program to expand the monitoring system nationwide in an effort to increase drought resilience and preparedness in Kenya. ■

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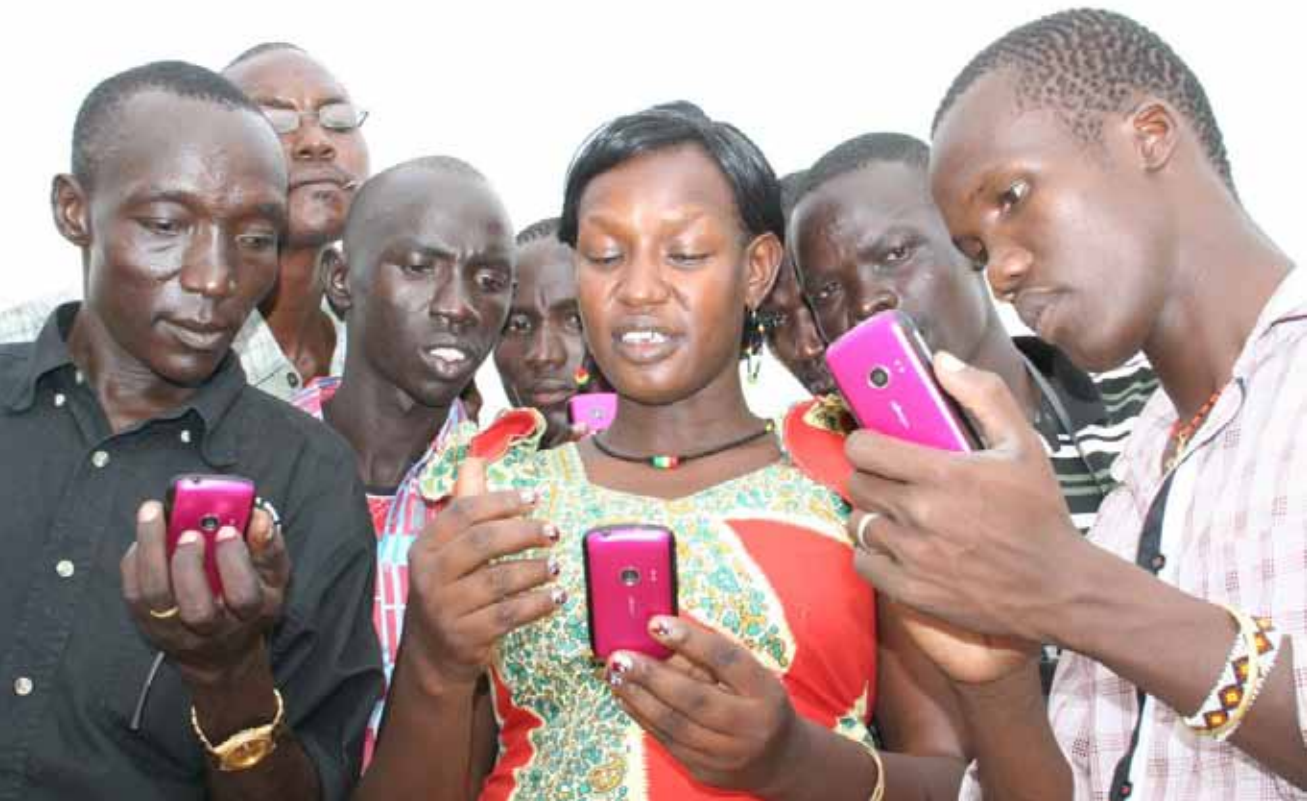

Community monitors using smart phones to send real-time data on water levels. Rapid information gathering allows for rapid analysis and response.