



Photo: Mercy Corps

GENDER SENSITIVE PROGRAMMING STRENGTHENS RESILIENCE OUTCOMES IN DRYLANDS REGIONS OF NORTHERN UGANDA AND KENYA

JANUARY 2018

STARTING PLACE: RESILIENCE AND GENDER IN UGANDA AND KENYA

BRACED is a UKaid funded, multi-year initiative aimed at helping communities to become more resilient to climate-induced shocks and stresses. The Mercy Corps' BRACED program aims to contribute to household well-being by enhancing the resilience capacities of pastoralist communities in semi-arid and dryland regions of Karamoja, Uganda and Wajir, Kenya.

Pastoralism is the primary livelihoods in both Karamoja and Wajir, but recent climatic shocks and stresses have jeopardized this strategy. Chronic poverty and food insecurity are widespread, leaving communities in both regions dependent on support from the international aid community. As a result, communities have adopted sedentary lifestyles to access social services. However, this strategy brings its own challenges, including an increased dependency on rain-fed agriculture in Karamoja and reliance on limited water sources in Wajir, many of which are seasonal and cannot support populations throughout the year.

These lifestyle changes have had a significant impact on

gender dynamics. Women are experiencing increased workloads and lengthened work days now that they are taking on new productive tasks associated with a more settled lifestyle – such as farming, small business, and the sale of charcoal or local brew. During lean periods, girls are at risk of being pulled out of school to work in urban areas or to marry so their families can access extra income from paid employment or bride price payments. What's more, many men are struggling to accept alternative livelihoods, and find themselves idle and depressed. This has led to rising levels of alcoholism and incidences of gender-based violence. The rising inequality in workload, decision making, access to education and toxic masculinities, weaken the social fabric of families and communities, eroding the capacity of individuals and households to bounce back after a shock.

THE RESPONSE: THE BRACED PROGRAM

📍 Recognizing that it is impossible to build resilience without also addressing systemic gender inequality, BRACED integrated gender concerns throughout its program activities, including the need to advocate for women's participation in governance to ensure that their views are reflected in decisions on disaster risk reduction and natural resource management and

to target female-oriented markets, such as milk and agriculture, to improve women and girls' income generating capacities during challenging economic times.

📍 BRACED also designated gender equality as one of its primary program objectives, and initiated specific activities to achieve this goal, including promoting gender inclusive policy development, building the social capital of women, and reducing cultural practices that are harmful to women and girls.

THE IMPACT

Although achieving gender equality is an ongoing process, the BRACED team's intentional focus on gender had some important results:

Gender inclusive policy development

BRACED promoted gender inclusive policy development by engaging government officials in Gender Responsive Budgeting trainings to guide investment in the development of new services and opportunities that will support women and girls to face new economic and ecological challenges.

BRACED also supported the development of the first ever Gender and Resilience Strategy in Wajir County and lobbied the government to start a Gender Desk –a one-stop shop where people can go with gender specific grievances and interests. As a result, the Wajir County Government now has a functional Gender Desk staffed by government employees in perpetuity and a 24-hour hotline where women and girls can report cases of GBV. So far, the Gender Desk and hotline have led to numerous reports and over 13 convictions related to gender-based violence in the County. GBV tends to spike during periods of drought, when women and girls walk long distances to collect water.

Improved social capital

Safe Spaces Clubs for in-school boys and girls (aged 10-14) and for out-of-school girls (aged 15-19) were formed in both regions. A mid-term report in October 2016 indicated that over 6,000 boys and girls (both in and out of school) were participating in the clubs, and over 1,800 members graduated in Kenya alone in 2017. These clubs strengthened relationships among youth, improved hygiene and increased awareness of early marriage and the importance of girls staying in school. The BRACED mid-term evaluation indicated that the activities sponsored by the clubs, and the debates in particular, helped to improve the confidence of participants and extend their social networks.

Improved gender relations

The BRACED team also led discussions on important gender dynamics that undermine household resilience with all-male groups. Every two months, these groups met to discuss issues such as, livelihoods, workload imbalances, conflict management and ways to mitigate domestic violence. By October 2016, over 2,000 men in both regions had participated in these groups. One group member in Karamoja stated that, "This group has caused many changes in the lives of individuals. We have stopped drinking as a result of the knowledge gained from the group." In Wajir, the groups discussed issues of masculinity, girls' education, and the importance of a supportive household atmosphere to successful livelihoods. Some members reported that they have reduced miraa chewing and started to help their wives to look for firewood and to cook. The group also reported that husbands and wives are working closely together to support their families financially.

Reduced harmful cultural practices

The BRACED team aimed to reduce harmful cultural practices through community-led dialogues and community prevention and response plans. To do this, Gender Champions mobilized community members to attend meetings to discuss harmful cultural practices and to negotiate, new more positive norms. The BRACED team also participated in regular radio talk show events to increase awareness on GBV, Female Genital Mutilation, and early and forced marriage. In Wajir, male and female community members who participated in these dialogues reported that there has been a reduction in GBV and that women feel empowered to report incidences when they occur.



About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action—helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. **Now, and for the future.**