

LEARNING NOTE:

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) workstream

**Final version of the DRM workstream Learning
Note following the BRE-TA Learning Event on 8
December 2023**

01 Introduction

Since the El Niño-induced drought of 2015–16, Ethiopians have faced an unparalleled combination of shocks and hazards: severe and prolonged drought, floods, desert locusts, ethnic unrest, civil war, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a succession of market shocks. The impact of these shocks and hazards has been worsened by high inflation (above 30% in 2022 and much of the first half of 2023) and the temporary suspension of international food assistance. With more than 20 million people in need of emergency relief and an additional 8 million people receiving social

protection transfers, at least 28 million people in Ethiopia require assistance of some kind. From October 2019, the Building Resilience in Ethiopia – Technical Assistance (BRE-TA) programme’s Disaster Risk Management (DRM) workstream supported the Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC), alongside other institutions. It developed a theory of change (ToC), structured around three building blocks for strengthening DRM systems: DRM coordination, DRM mainstreaming, and DRM information and knowledge.

This learning note is organised around these building blocks, with each sub-section further sub-divided to tease out the lessons at federal and regional levels.

1

Early and continuous investment in building relationships and developing trust were critical to later achievements. This included ensuring the timely delivery of quality outputs and ad hoc support when requested by the government. It also involved patiently building a shared understanding of problems and consensus on the way forward.

2

Developing a solid evidence base was a critical step in making the case for reform. In the case of helping prepare the new DRM Policy and legal framework, it took considerable time and effort to build the evidence base around the need for reform, and some observers expressed frustration at the initial slow pace of reform. However, this paid off by providing a solid foundation for the way forward, while also helping to deepen the relationship with the EDRMC and establishing a shared understanding of what reforms were needed and their relevance to others (in particular the Ministry of Finance and sectoral ministries).

3

Working simultaneously at federal and regional level strengthened the results at both levels. Support to federally initiated reform processes was strengthened by inputs from the regions, with some regional DRM bureaus appreciating being engaged in the reform process when informed early on of what it involved. This multi-level approach also helped BRE-TA understand the differences between regional administrations and their in-house DRM capacity, and recognise the need for different policy and strategy processes at regional and federal levels.

4

It was important to work organically and opportunistically, and wait for the right moment to capitalise on earlier successes. For example, the EDRMC was more open to attempt early warning system (EWS) reform – which had been much contested and fraught with setbacks over a number of years – after the progress made on DRM reform and the EDRMC's repositioning in the Office of the Prime Minister, both achieved with BRE-TA support.

5

The frequency of natural disasters built a strong case for DRM reforms, while the fact that BRE-TA was available for the government when they needed it most helped build trust, including in the affected regions. For example, BRE-TA's assistance to the government's COVID-19 response, and then to the La Niña drought response, was quickly put in place to address problems arising in key regions.

02 Workstream approach

The ToC was structured around an iterative approach that included building a shared understanding with the government of the problem at hand, agreeing the outputs of technical assistance (TA), providing support for the adoption and implementation of those outputs, and finally reporting on progress towards the main programme outcome: ‘the Government of Ethiopia to lead and deliver an effective, more self-financed and accountable response to climate and humanitarian shocks’.

In the early phase of the programme, the workstream’s priority was to build its credibility as a useful partner, through its technical and policy competence around the timely delivery of quality outputs requested by the former National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC). In 2019, the NDRMC was accountable to the Ministry of Peace, before moving to the Office of the Deputy

Prime Minister and changing its name to the EDRMC.

The workstream did not anticipate the sheer number and complexity of shocks that would affect Ethiopia in the years ahead. These shocks, and their associated demands on national and regional DRM offices and staff, slowed planned progress towards the programme’s outcome. However, this loss of pace also reinforced the value of the BRE-TA approach and its emphasis on the quality of relationships between the DRM workstream and its counterparts in the EDRMC. Only when these relationships were established and functional was it possible to build levels of trust that then informed the EDRMC’s increasingly strategic requests for TA. The higher-level focus of these requests helped the workstream move forward towards the delivery of planned outcomes.



03

Building block 1: DRM coordination and leadership

These lessons come from the experience of supporting amendments to the DRM Policy and wider reform process to put a supporting legal framework in place, and providing TA to regions affected by the 2020–22 La Niña drought.

The workstream learnt a myriad of lessons through its engagement with, and support to, the EDRMC's DRM reform process. However,

perhaps the most important lesson was the benefit of developing a solid evidence base of applied policy research to support wider policy reform. Building this evidence base took considerable time and effort, and at times many felt frustrated by the pace of progress. But the investment also helped deepen understanding and trust between the EDRMC and BRE-TA, providing a solid foundation for the duration of the programme.

Federal-level support

The EDRMC asked for support in preparing four studies, as follows:



a review of good practice in DRM¹



a review of DRM mainstreaming gains in key ministries in Ethiopia²



a study of development partners' disaster risk reduction investment support in Ethiopia's rural areas



an assessment of the effectiveness of NDRMC's coordination role in recent disasters in Ethiopia³

The DRM workstream then collated the findings of this applied policy research in a 'DRM Synthesis Report' that was presented to the EDRMC and BRE-TA's donors in June 2021.⁴ The report's main findings included the need to do the following: (1) update the 2013 National Policy and Strategy on Disaster Risk Management (NPSDRM); (2) develop a supportive legal DRM framework; (3) address institutional arrangements; and (4) align the NPSDRM and Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) policies and strategies. The

report's findings were shared with senior policymakers in the National Planning and Development Commission (NPDC), which was reviewing government architecture for a planned restructuring.'

The recommendations were endorsed by the NPDC. The NDRMC received the go-ahead to update the 2013 NPSDRM; the Commission was also re-located in the Office of the Prime Minister and renamed the EDRMC in 2022. The development of a DRM legal framework was

1. <https://edrmc.gov.et/risk-reduction-and-rehabilitation/study-document/2021/review-good-international-disaster-risk-management-practice>
2. <https://edrmc.gov.et/risk-reduction-and-rehabilitation/study-document/2021/drm-mainstreaming-gains-key-ministries-ethiopia>
3. <https://edrmc.gov.et/risk-reduction-and-rehabilitation/study-document/2021/study-assess-effectiveness-national-disaster-risk-management-commission%E2%80%99s-coordination-role-recent>
4. <https://edrmc.gov.et/risk-reduction-and-rehabilitation/study-document/2021/synthesis-bre-ta-reports-strengthening-drm-system-ethiopia-chapeau-study>

also agreed on, and work was commissioned to align the NPSDRM and CRGE policies and strategies, and to mainstream both in national planning processes.

To support these processes, the workstream organised awareness-raising workshops with key government partners and recruited legal and DRM experts to support the drafting of the new NPSDRM and legal framework. At the time of writing, the new NPSDRM is in

the process of being approved by the Council of Ministers and the legal framework is set to go to Parliament for approval. Once this is secured, the EDRMC and regional DRM bureaus will become accountable for the delivery of more effective, self-financed, and accountable response to climate and humanitarian shocks, representing a significant step towards delivery of BRE-TA's programme outcome.

Regional-level support

The DRM workstream deployed Regional Technical Advisers (RTAs) to help strengthen DRM leadership and coordination at regional level. At different times in the life of the programme, the workstream deployed RTAs in Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, and Somali regions. These deployments helped the workstream's analysis and understanding of different regional perspectives, priorities, and capacities

– and communicated this to the EDRMC. In return, the DRM workstream updated the RTAs on DRM reform progress and challenges that were shared with regional DRM bureaus and counterparts. Consequently, some regions have become better informed and engaged in federal-level DRM reform processes, which will be a great advantage when it comes to implementing the new DRM Policy and legal framework.

04 Building block 2: DRM mainstreaming

BRE-TA has learnt a great deal about the practicalities of DRM mainstreaming in Ethiopia but perhaps the most important lesson is the lack of DRM inclusion in national planning processes. Consequently, development plans focus solely on growth-related indicators and targets, as if shocks and hazards are of no consequence to economic growth (or indeed to people's lives).

While BRE-TA started to address this issue from the perspective of all of its workstreams,

with notable success with the Disaster Risk Finance workstream's support to the Ministry of Finance, there is nevertheless far more to be done to ensure that adequate resources are available at community, woreda, zonal, and regional levels to plan for, prepare for, mitigate, and manage disasters. More work is also needed to provide the necessary leadership and guidance to pivot development resources for DRM purposes, in the form of timely deployment of surge support to address foreseen shocks and hazards.

Federal-level support

In 2021, the government issued guidance on drafting a Ten-Year Development Plan (TYDP). Following a request for assistance from the EDRMC, the DRM workstream commissioned a review of draft sectoral and regional TYDP plans to assess how well they had addressed key DRM issues. The findings were presented at a TYDP workshop that included representatives from the Ministry of Planning

and Development. As a result of these inputs, the ministry established DRM as an additional pillar in the TYDP planning process. The addition of this pillar was significant as it was the first time the importance of shocks and hazards, and their effective management, was recognised and thus needed to be captured in national planning processes in Ethiopia.

Regional-level support

In support of the work to make national planning processes more DRM-informed, the workstream helped EDRMC develop, pilot, and deliver training on disaster risk-informed planning (DRIP) at regional level. The primary purpose was to help regional DRM and planning officers integrate DRM in regional development plans and strengthen regional understanding of the importance of pivoting resources in the early phases of the disaster

cycle. If the latter is done well, there are proven cost benefits in protecting lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure. The DRIP training also helped DRM staff in sectoral ministries understand the roles and responsibilities of regional finance bureaus, and how to approach them for additional DRM funding to prevent, mitigate, and prepare for emergencies that can be anticipated.



05

Building block 3: DRM information and knowledge

The lessons highlighted below, on DRM information and knowledge, primarily come from efforts to strengthen the national EWS and the experience of RTAs in helping the response to the 2020–22 La Niña drought.

So poor were the relations between different EWS stakeholders that it was not until 2022 that the DRM workstream felt able to engage with this building block; indeed, it only did so because of the trust and confidence created by previous successful engagements around DRM reform. One of the primary lessons from this building block is the need to work organically and opportunistically to capitalise on ideas that are ‘right for the moment’.

Buoyed by the progress made in DRM reform and its repositioning in the Office of the Prime Minister, the EDRMC was more open to, and confident about, attempting EWS reform through the DRM workstream’s ‘synthesis report’ approach.

The other major lesson is the importance of the workstream’s dual approach, through which it operated simultaneously at federal and regional levels. In this way, it was possible to seize on opportunities to support national-level EWS reform, on the one hand, while also supporting improved coordination and management of La Niña-induced drought conditions, on the other.

Federal-level support

In response to the famines of the 1970s and 1980s, Ethiopia developed significant EWS capacity and resources. As the country focused on becoming one of the world’s fastest growing economies – with double-digit growth rates – some policymakers began to regard hunger-related disasters as belonging to a bygone era. Hence, Ethiopia failed to invest adequately in the periodic review and improvement of its national and regional EWS. Little progress was made, for example, to benefit from developments in information technology and to explore the opportunities that could be offered by instituting a fully digitalised system, which could introduce a range of new services, products, and operational efficiencies. This delay in the transition to a more automated EWS encouraged other humanitarian providers to try to fill gaps. While this was done with good intentions, the result was to fragment early

warning communication and analysis, which at times undermined government-led coordinated responsibilities and action.

To start to unpack the failures in EWS policy and practice, in what had become a very contested space, the DRM workstream supported the EDRMC to undertake a ‘synthesis review’ of four recent EWS assessments. The review findings were presented at an EWS stakeholder workshop in October 2022. As a result of this workshop, the EDRMC was able to gain stakeholder agreement for the development of a roadmap for EWS reform by December 2022. More recently, the DRM workstream has supported the development of this roadmap by co-creating an implementation plan for use from 2024. It has also completed a diagnostic study to understand better the challenges, opportunities, capacity gaps, and detailed

technical support needs, informing the workstream's support to the delivery of the roadmap.

The workstream also provided the EDRMC with IT support to improve its data

management and dashboard for coordinating and managing drought response planning, including the sharing of information on the number and location of shock-response beneficiaries.

Enhancing the early warning bulletin

The DRM workstream assisted the EDRMC to review and revamp its monthly early warning bulletin. New and alternative data sources were identified, the layout was improved, and changes were incorporated in the bulletins from May and August 2023. Similar support was given to the preparation of weekly situation updates and fortnightly early warning bulletins.

The workstream also produced several El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) technical

briefs that describe the current transition from La Niña to El Niño conditions. As this is mirrored by a similar negative to positive transition in the Indian Ocean (the Indian Ocean Dipole), there is an increased likelihood of erratic and poor belg spring and kiremt summer rains in 2024, and hence potentially reduced agricultural and livestock production in the central and northern highlands and the north-eastern rangelands (of Afar and northern Somali region).

Regional-level support

As previously noted, RTAs were deployed to support regions grappling with disasters. The first round of deployments was implemented to help regions develop COVID-19 coordination and response plans, while the second and larger deployment was made to support the La Niña drought response. This

second round also included the secondment of DRM workstream staff to the Early Warning Response Directorate of the EDRMC. The contributions of the RTAs, and their response to a diverse range of requests, including information management, were widely appreciated.

5. <https://edrmc.gov.et/early-warning-response/bulletins/monthly-english-bulletin>



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