

Climate Smart Initiative Story of Change: Hassna

Elidar woreda, Afar, Ethiopia

Hassna with her trees
Photograph by Faisal Omer

The Climate Smart Initiative (CSI) was launched in July 2013, as an adjunct to the existing Government of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and Household Asset Building Programme (HABP); two of the key mechanisms of the Government to tackle food security issues and related rural livelihoods strengthening.

CSI was designed to pilot approaches that consider climate change within this larger, established context, working within existing Government approaches and cycles. This Story of Change provides an example of how CSI has affected an individual or a household.



Story
One

Who is Hassna?

She is a 56-year-old resident of Suula kebele in Elidar woreda, Afar, who has headed up her household since her husband passed away two years ago. She has five children – three boys and two girls. She has a kiosk, owns a few goats and is a beneficiary of the PSNP. Under the CSI she was engaged in the Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) process¹.

What are the climate and environmental problems that Hassna faces?

Hassna and her pastoralist community face drought leading to severe water shortages and lack of pasture. At other times they face flooding and soil erosion.

Summary:

Hassna tells us of the positive changes she has seen since the CSI has come to her community: woreda officials are shifting away from a short-term focus on food aid in their approach to PSNP public works (PW) planning; the community is being encouraged to identify and prioritise the problems they face; and the community's understanding of the causes of their environmental problems is shifting, away from blaming Allah. Hassna has finally succeeded in growing trees in this harsh climatic environment, with benefits to her business.

¹ The Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA) is a tool developed by CARE to analyse the implications of climate change for lives and livelihoods. CSI has carried out two rounds of CVCA within the programme, adapting and amending from one round to the next, and then extracting learning from these processes to produce suggestions for "climate smarting" the annual PSNP planning process.

CSI has been implemented by a consortium of organisations, led by CARE Ethiopia, and including Cornell University, Dadimos, FARM Africa, IDS, IICD, Itad Ltd, Jimma University, MMA Consulting, Mercy Corps, ORDA, REST, and SNV. In late 2015, CSI is closing down; leaving a legacy of learning and insights about "climate smart" and what it means, from the household reality to the highest level of policy making.



Shifting planning from a short-term focus on food aid

Hassna has seen a shift from a short-term focus on food aid, to a longer-term focus: ‘When the woreda officials and DAs [development agents] called us for a meeting at the Health Post compound in March 2014, to plan PSNP-PW [this planning process is CVCA], we were talking about the problem of recurrent drought, shortage of grasses and water in the area.’ Instrumental to this shift is the CSI-provided training to the woreda experts and DAs on planning and natural resource management. This equipped them with ideas to mobilise the community to take up climate resilient activities.

Engaging the community in identifying problems

During the CVCA process, the community identified that the new deep wells constructed to capture the floodwater in the rainy season, powered by diesel pumps, were too expensive to run. According to Hassna: ‘During the CVCA we mentioned this problem and the CSI has a plan that will involve installing a solar panel to remove the problem once and for all with an environmental friendly technology.’

Shifting community’s understanding of drought

‘The woreda experts and DAs told us that the problem is caused by the mismanagement of the natural resources by our forefathers and ourselves. They told us different stories to stop thinking that “we have the drought as a punishment from Allah”.’ Hassna listened attentively to the experts about what kind of actions the community could take in order to collect water and grow grasses, plant trees and reduce the hot and dry air. She wondered whether growing trees in her area was possible given she had failed so many times.

Succeeding with Hassna’s tree planting

In July 2014, Hassna approached one of the DAs based in her kebele, who had talked at the CVCA meeting and been trained by CSI. Hassna shared the story of her previous unsuccessful attempts in planting trees. In response, the DA provided hands-on skills training on how to prepare the planting bed, how to plant the tree, how to water it and how to protect it from animals. Not only that, the DA provided tree seedlings from the woreda pastoral agricultural office, something not seen before.



Hassna's little shop
Photograph by Faisal Omer

Hassna proudly talks of her success of growing trees in a very harsh climatic environment: ‘Then, I started seeing the tree growing every day, and being happy at my success, I planted more trees. I have now trees in front of my kiosk. On top of a cool breath I get from the trees, the shade of the trees attracted more people to come and rest under the shade. That brings about more customers to my kiosk’s business and I have also started selling teas.’

