

Online Forum Final Report: *Healthy families, healthy planet: Connecting population and climate change adaptation*

21-23 November 2011

The PHE Ethiopia Consortium held its first online forum from 21-23 November on *Healthy families, healthy planet: Connecting population and climate change adaptation*. The first topic was inspired by the Conference of the Parties (COP) 17 in Durban, South Africa, which occurred the week following the forum. As world leaders prepared to discuss the future of climate mitigation agreements, we discussed how climate change is impacting us here in Ethiopia and what we can do to adapt to climate change. Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) has laid out ambitious goals for Ethiopia to have zero emissions and to take aggressive measures to adapt to climate change. It also set a target to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) to 65% by 2015. The current CPR from the 2011 Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey is 28.6%, which is double the rate of 14.7% from 2005. So, much progress has been made and policies are in place to support a sustainable future; however, much still needs to be done to achieve these goals. In Ethiopia, climate change and high population growth interact to present challenges such as food insecurity and vulnerability to natural disasters such as drought and flood. The forum explored how we have each experienced climate change in our own lives and what we can do to adapt to climate change in a way that addresses the diverse needs of our communities while moving closer to the goals of the GTP.

Forum Participation

Over 180 people joined PHE Ethiopia Consortium's first online forum focused on the linkages between population and climate change adaptation. 18 different people plus the two facilitators posted 52 posts over the three days of the forum. 5 people qualified to receive certificates of participation from the forum. The requirement to receive a certificate was to post in at least one of the questions for each day of the forum. The highest number of posts for an individual was seven.

Discussion Summary

The following is the summary of the discussion held in the online forum conducted from November 21-23, 2011. Each day featured two discussion questions that related to the theme of day.

Day One

Theme: Making the connection between population issues and climate change

The questions were:

- What connections do you see between population issues and climate change?
- How can Ethiopia effectively adapt to climate change?

Day In response to the questions about the links between climate change and population, Gabi wrote, "In my opinion population and climate change has a direct link. When a population increases, resources will become more limited. Consequently, the burden on natural resources will increase."

Tegbarachamyelah added that "Population growth contributes to shortage of fresh water, scarcity of land, deforestation, migration as well as increased emissions and these all cumulate to climate change. Though growing population is not the only factor for climate change, it definitely exacerbates the impacts of climate change... In my opinion, we can achieve the planned MDGs through balancing population size and available natural resources."

In reflecting on how Ethiopia can adapt to climate change, Ybsra suggested that "Creating dialogue and understanding enables people with different culture and perspectives to work collectively for a shared vision. I think it is very critical to incorporate the views and challenges of those who are most affected by climate change in Ethiopia in the planning as well as the implementation phase." Serawit Lisanework shared that "In Ethiopia, adaptation of climate change can be realized through: Improving awareness of the dangers of climate change among the public and building the capacity of the society at large to cope with the effect of climate change, improving use of technologies in the society and improving productivity."

Yordanos added that, "One of the most important, and probably the most ignored, adaptation mechanism for climate change adaptation in Ethiopia is rural urban migration... A word of caution though is that I am not advocating for migration to the over-urbanized hustle and bustle primate city of Ethiopia - Addis Ababa. Rather, attention should be giving to emerging small towns throughout the country..." He also said that, "Family planning provision, no doubt will have a long run impact of mitigating the impact of climate change. The question, however, remains whether there is enough in-country funding to meet the huge unmet needs in Ethiopia, and mostly in rural Ethiopia."

Day Two

Theme: Adapting to climate change in our lives.

The questions were:

- What effects of climate change have you seen in your own life?
- How do you and other people you know adapt to climate change?

In response to the question about what climate impacts people are already seeing, Ybsra shared, "Although I live in Addis, the August 2006 flood in Dire Dawa due to the overflow of the Dechatu River came in as quite a shock to me. I think that, that was a wake-up call for all of us about how serious an effect climate change can have and how we cannot be dismissive of the issue." Serawit Lisanework said, "I think, I witnessed three phenomena of climate change effects, one is the drying of Lake Haromaya and the other is the current heat waves in most cities of Ethiopia including Addis Ababa. Moreover, I was able to witness El Nino some years ago in most parts of the globe." Have you experienced the same things? What other impacts have you seen?

The other question focused on what we can do ourselves to adapt to climate change. Mesfin KA shared from his research in the highlands of North Ethiopia, Menz Gera Midir District where farmers face frequent climate-induced disasters. He posted, "As a result of the effects, they do not produce good amount of production that can sustain their families for more months. These people try to adapt this change by reducing their daily food consumption into once a day or twice instead of having three or four times a day; they borrow some money from relatives and friends, with no interest, to purchase food for the family. Some of them travel for searching daily work to earn money... As a result of the rise in temperature, household water consumption rate is increasing and they recycle the water at family level. They have changed their dressing style-before few decades they used to wear thicker cloth but now they dress light clothes. Previously they go to farm after the sun set after the area is warmed but now they go early in the morning to escape from the scorching-sun and many more." As Betty says, "We should do something together!!!"

In the discussion about adapting to climate change in Ethiopia, Cteller challenged us to research climate change more and to share our data about the specifics of climate change in Ethiopia. He says, "Ethiopian climatologist have documented that there are at least three different types of climate change in different agro-ecological areas of Ethiopia. We need know what these are and how they affect people in these different areas, as well in the growing towns and cities." We also need research on local adaptation strategies. He says, "We need know why, for example, the strategies of West Gojjam youth are so different from Wolleita youth."

Day Three

Theme: Integrating population issues into climate change adaptation.

The questions were:

- What is your organization doing to support adaptation to climate change in Ethiopia?
- How can your organization integrate population and climate in your projects?

In the third day of our forum a lot of people participated. Many people shared their great ideas and what their organizations are doing to help people to adapt to climate change while providing family planning. Yordanos' organization is responding to the call for more research on climate change. He wrote "my organization is planning to establish an institute for climate change so that there would be a mechanism for data gathering and to produce skilled and trained personnel to do scientific research in linking issues of population, environment and climate change." Yonatandarie shared that his organization is "raising the awareness of the community about approaching the climate change prone problems via integrating issues of population pressure, health and environmental issues in every developmental programs/projects." Mohammed's organization "will actively work on the promotion of Reproductive Health program and the innovation of the new technology as an alternative. " Alebachew shares that "It is my strong belief that an integrated approach for climate change adaptation and mitigation, encompassing a diverse portfolio of policy and practical measures that include population issues and socio-demographic variables in the response equation is urgently needed. In my organization,

we consider socio-demographic variables (such as age, gender, disability, health) in all phases of idea formulation, project preparation and execution.”

In summary, from the participants’ comments, it’s clear that we are already seeing the impacts of climate change in Ethiopia. The experiences shared ranged from flood to drought to heat waves to varying rainfall. From participant’s comments, it is clear that we all agree that we need to connect population and climate change. As we work with communities to help them adapt to these impacts, we need to help people understand these connections and empower them to plan their families to ensure they are prosperous and happy.

Lessons Learned

On the technical side, we discovered that controlling spam membership and spam messages on the board is a challenge. To address this, it requires the active management of the forum by the PHE Ethiopia Consortium ICT officer as well as the facilitators.

Participants were able to have a stable enough internet connection to be able to regularly participate. Participants also shared insightful comments that were relevant to the questions posed and came from a wide variety of organizations such as NGOs, think tanks and universities. They also expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to have the discussion.

The most popular question in the forum asked people how organizations can link population and climate change. The least popular question asked people what they themselves were doing to adapt to climate change. This may suggest that people are more comfortable talking about their organizations than themselves; however, with only one forum’s worth of experience, it is too soon to tell if this is the case.

One of the biggest challenges was sending the daily summaries due to limitations of numbers of emails that can be sent from regular gmail accounts. This was resolved by establishing a business gmail account which allows a large number of emails to be sent; however, this service has a small annual cost.

Recommendations

Participants were requesting more research on climate change and related topics. This is an area where the PHE Ethiopia Consortium can provide expertise and possibly use the forum as a way to disseminate research findings.

PHE Ethiopia Consortium should explore options to effectively control spammers from joining and posting in the forum that are not time intensive for the ICT officer- neither in allowing members to join and to post nor delete spam members and posts.

PHE Ethiopia Consortium is committed to continuing online forums to build on the successes of this first effort. It suggests that forums be scheduled at a frequency of once per quarter (every three months). This will encourage regular participation without becoming a burden on participant’s time. Care needs to be given to select topics that are timely and relevant in order to stimulate the greatest amount of participation possible.

PHE Ethiopia Consortium should explore additional options for sending emails to large numbers of people to accommodate growth of membership and of the PHE Ethiopia Consortium contacts who will be invited to participate in the forum.