CASE STUDY

All voices matter:

Strengthening Protection and Community Resilience Through Inclusive Early Warning Systems



Engagement with youths, both females and males, in Musas.
Photo credit: Uganda Red Cross Society

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All voices matter: Strengthening Protection and Community Resilience Through Inclusive Early Warning Systems

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CLARE is a flagship research programme on climate adaptation and resilience, funded mostly (about 90%) by UK Aid through the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and co-funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada. CLARE is bridging critical gaps between science and action by championing Southern leadership to enable socially inclusive and sustainable action to build resilience to climate change and natural hazards.

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Background

Why inclusive, timely information matters

Before PASSAGE, forecast information often reached Musas Parish too late to be useful. Young mothers depended on elders' predictions, which were often inaccurate, leading many to plant too early or too late and lose their crops. Women largely did not have a voice in community meetings, which elders and men convened and led; their input was routinely dismissed. During dry seasons, increased cattle raids left single mothers especially exposed, and when children went missing, the community had no fast way to alert itself and search.

Uganda Red Cross Society, through the Climate Adaptation and Resilience (CLARE) Initiative, introduced the PASSAGE Project to strengthen community resilience to climate-related risks while promoting protection, gender equality and inclusion, improving access to early warning information and encouraging equal participation in community leadership and decision-making.



Regina, a community radio member, cofacilitating a womens group engagement with URCS & IFRC staff

Who was Supported and How

The role of community leadership and inclusive participation

PASSAGE supported the whole Musas community: women, men, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities. Its most visible contribution was the village radio, which now carries early warning information from local leaders, elders and district authorities directly to households, giving families like young mothers, time to prepare and plant at the right moment.

The project has also created new opportunities for women to participate in community leadership and decision-making. Women are now represented alongside men on the village radio management committee, while community dialogue meetings provide a platform for broader participation, ensuring that voices beyond those of traditional elders are heard. Regina, a member of the committee and a community radio presenter, exemplifies this growing inclusion. Beyond sharing weather forecasts and early warning information, Regina who is also a local advocate against female genital mutilation (FGM) uses the radio to advocate against FGM, extending the reach of her advocacy beyond what was previously possible. Persons with disabilities are also represented on the committee, marking an important step towards more inclusive community decision-making.



Committee members for village radio in Katikekile subcounty, where Regina is representing young women

> ***The project has shown us that women can also lead, we now sit together with men, discuss community issues and make decisions together.***
>
> REGINA / Community Radio Management Committee

The village radio

Reach, representation and protection functions

~150	3	2×	3,000+
households directly covered	villages in radio coverage	scheduled broadcasts weekly	weekly market visitors

Reported figures of market visitors is an estimated number of market attendees and not a verified radio audience count.

HOW THE VILLAGE RADIO CONNECTS INFORMATION TO ACTION

INFORMATION	VILLAGE RADIO	COMMUNITY ACTION
Local leaders, elders, authorities and extension workers	Scheduled broadcasts and community alerts	Planning, livestock protection and emergency coordination

The village radio's reach extends well beyond individual households. It covers a radius of about one mile, taking in roughly three villages and some 150 households directly, and on market days, once a week, over 3,000 people travel to Musas to trade and carry what they hear back to their own villages, so a single broadcast ripples out across the wider community rather than stopping with whoever owns a radio. Weather and other One Health information airs twice a week on a set schedule, and community members can bring additional announcements to broadcast on other days.

The management committee itself is broad-based, drawing one representative each from elders, kraal leaders, women, persons with disabilities, youth, URCS volunteers, the Village Health Team, and the Village and Sub-county Disaster Management Committees, with the District Disaster Management Committee providing oversight. On average three of these seats are held by women: the women's representative, the Village Health Team representative, and the Sub-county Disaster Management Committee representative, usually the area's Community Development Officer. The committee also relays information from extension workers, including alerts on livestock disease outbreaks and cattle raid threats, which Regina says has made a meaningful difference in how quickly households protect their animals.

Beyond weather alerts, the radio has become a protection tool. During potential threats of cattle raids, neighbours are alerted in real time and can respond together; for instance, when a child goes missing, a radio announcement mobilises the whole community to search. Regina notes that missing children are sometimes found to have gone to nearby mining areas looking to earn money, or simply lost track time while playing but whatever the reason, the radio means the community can act immediately rather than waiting and worrying.

Successes

Community voices and documented changes

With timely weather information, community members can now come together, interpret forecasts, and collectively decide how best to prepare for what lies ahead; an approach the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS) refers to as participatory scenario planning. Women now hold a recognised place on the village radio committee and in community meetings, and speak in public without the fear that once kept them silent.

> ***We feel that our voices matter.***
>
> ***Before, people thought women could not lead, but today they listen to us and we make decisions together.***
>
> REGINA



URCS youth volunteer documenting the voices of the youth on the cascading imapct on climate related events

> *And now it easy for me to communicate information about the illegal practices of female circumsition for which im an advocate. The community radio enables me to have a platform on which I continue to advocate for women's rights ontop of sharing climate related information*
>
> REGINA

Challenges and Difficulties

The issues that still need sustained attention

Persons with disabilities are represented on the committee, but Regina says the avenues to address the specific challenges they face are still limited. She observe that the needs of PWDs are not clearly integrated into EW dissemination, AA and response plans. For Regina, closing this gap represents one of the project's most important unfinished priorities in achieving meaningful and inclusive community resilience.

Climate change pressures still exist but information about them is now readily available: long dry seasons continue to strain farming, and cattle theft persists, though the radio now lets the community respond faster when it happens. And while attitudes toward women's leadership have shifted markedly, some residents still hold on to earlier cultural beliefs. Regina believes sustained community dialogue and sensitisation, not a one-time change, will be what carries this shift forward.

LESSONS LEARNED

Four lessons from the experience in Musas

01	The experience from Musas has shown that when communities receive early warning information in time, they are better prepared for changing weather conditions. Families can make better decisions about farming and protect their livelihoods.
02	The project has also shown that when women are given the opportunity to participate in leadership, the whole community benefits. Bringing women and men together to discuss community issues has helped change attitudes and increased respect for women's ideas and contributions.
03	Another important lesson is that a simple village radio can do much more than share weather information. It has become a trusted way for the community to respond to emergencies such as cattle theft and missing children, bringing people together to protect one another.
04	Finally, Regina believes every community member should have a chance to participate. Looking ahead, future activities should move beyond simply seating persons with disabilities on the committee, and instead ensure they are actively integrated into early warning information and anticipatory action and response, so no one is left behind.

Acknowledgements

Recognising the partners and communities behind the case study

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