

LEARNING NOTE:

Supporting sub-national disaster risk management: lessons from the BRE-TA programme in Ethiopia

**Prepared for the BRE-TA Learning Event
held on 8 December 2023**

Summary of lessons learnt by the Building Resilience in Ethiopia – Technical Assistance (BRE-TA) programme in strengthening sub-national disaster risk management (DRM)



Tailor the programme to the needs and capacities of the regional government hosts, but ensure a good working relationship with the federal counterpart.



Extend support to lower levels of government after strengthening the regional core, particularly zones.



Focus on regional governments with well-established systems in the first instance, but involve other regions at a lower level of intensity from the start.



Organise a formal launch of the new programme.



Strengthen coordination across government and beyond it.



Improve the targeting of DRM services by strengthening community participation, vulnerability and risk assessments, and data systems, including early warning.



Prioritise gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in DRM.



Ensure the managing agent develops theories of change that are aligned with government policies, undertakes regular political economy and institutional analysis, selects credible and trusted staff, and invests in peer learning.



Consider whether to attach capital funds to technical assistance (TA), and use multi-party memorandums of understanding to manage expectations and define obligations.



Plan for the TA to be provided for a minimum of 10 years.

01 Introduction

This learning note reflects on BRE-TA's experience of supporting five regional governments in Ethiopia between mid-2020 and end-2023 on DRM and shock-responsive safety nets (SRSNs).¹ It draws on the findings

of a regional assessment conducted in September and October 2023, shortly before the end of BRE-TA's implementation in December 2023.² The assessment explored two questions:

1. BRE-TA started a six-month design phase at the federal level in March 2019, and in mid-2020 expanded work to the regional level, through the DRM and SRSN workstreams, in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, and the former Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNPR).

1. **What are the main lessons from BRE-TA's work at the sub-national level** that can inform future DRM programmes working in the regions?
 2. **What are the views of regional government stakeholders** and the BRE-TA regional technical advisers (RTAs) on how to enhance the effectiveness of DRM support at the sub-national level? What are the needs and challenges facing regions?
- BRE-TA's objective was to support the Government of Ethiopia to '*lead and deliver an effective, more self-financed and accountable response to climate and humanitarian shocks*'. Its TA was structured into four workstreams (Table 1). The regional assessment and this learning note focus primarily on the DRM and SRSN workstreams because these two had specialist advisers embedded in the regional governments for the longest periods.

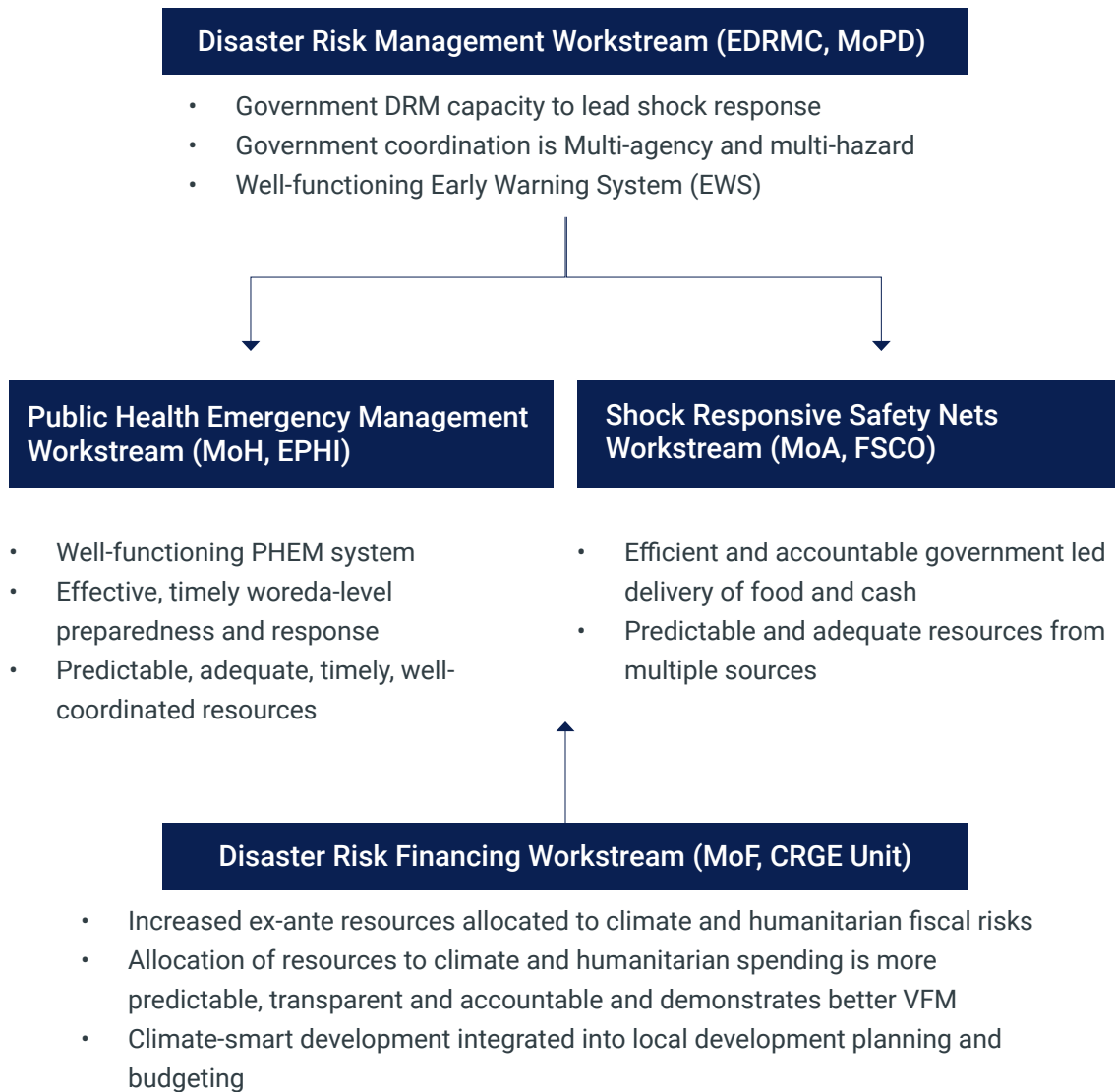
Table 1: BRE-TA workstreams

| Workstream | Principal partners | Focus |
|------------|---|--|
| DRM | Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the DRM system • Reform the national DRM policy and legal framework • Mainstream DRM in sectors and regions • Improve government and donor coordination |
| SRSN | Ministry of Agriculture EDRMC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up the new SRSN component of the rural Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) • Strengthen shock-responsive coordination and delivery systems managed by PSNP and humanitarian food assistance |
| PHEM | Ethiopian Public Health Institute Ministry of Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the shock-responsiveness of health systems and nutrition in emergencies |
| DRF | Ministry of Finance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve government budgeting and financial mechanisms to make public finances more resilient to climate and humanitarian shocks • Support the Ministry of Finance to attract more climate finance and mainstream climate change and disaster risk in public financial management, including through woreda-level local development planning |

2. The assessment included 24 interviews, mainly with government partners (Heads of DRM Bureaus and Food Security Coordination Offices, monitoring and evaluation experts (Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)), gender advisers, Directors of Early Warning and Response Directorates), and BRE-TA's regional advisers.

Figure 1: The programmatic ambitions of the four workstreams

Govt to lead and deliver an effective, more self-financed and accountable response to climate and humanitarian shocks



This note has four further sections: the second section covers the programme design choices we recommend that sub-national DRM programmes think through, outlining some of the issues to be considered by government and donors; the third section looks at the specific issue of GESI and argues

that it should feature more prominently in DRM system-strengthening programmes; the fourth section shares a number of insights about how best to intervene in the selected regions; and the fifth section draws the recommendations together.

02 Sub-national DRM programme design considerations

It is recommended the following four issues be considered in future programme design. These issues were concerns throughout the

BRE-TA implementation phase and were raised in interviews with stakeholders.

2.1 Balancing a federal and a regional focus

BRE-TA's work at the regional level evolved outwards from the centre and was an extension of federal initiatives: for example, mainstreaming DRM into regional plans started with mainstreaming DRM into the national Ten-Year Development Plan, setting up regional structures to implement the SRSN component of the PSNP, piloting 'climate-smart woreda development planning' under the Ministry of Finance's agreement with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and adapting the national PHEM strategy to the regions.³

An overarching lesson from this experience is **that future programmes should take the time to tailor federally driven DRM interventions to the interests and objectives of their regional counterparts in government**, which will increase the likelihood of programmes being accepted and sustainable. There is an argument for going further and for tilting the balance of programme leadership more towards the regions: regional stakeholders consistently argued that external TA should focus on regionally defined and led programmes, rather than the execution of generic federally led programmes like BRE-TA. This is based on two general criticisms of programmes that are led from the centre:

- **They are not sufficiently adapted to regional circumstances** and they lack the flexibility and resources to address the

specific challenges regions face – noting, for example, the desperate situation for those displaced in Amhara or affected by flooding in the Somali region. Regional interviewees also want future sub-national DRM assistance to focus more on the zonal and woreda levels, and on food security, shock response, community-based early warning, digitalisation, and data quality assurance.

- **They are bureaucratic and slow to execute.** Interviewees consistently said that sub-nationally designed DRM programmes would be much more effective than federally led ones.

The two interwoven issues raised by these assertions – slow and bureaucratic federal programmes versus nimble and effective regional ones – need disentangling.

Federally designed programmes and activities, cascaded to the regions, are certainly more distant and rule-bound since they are designed to foster a consistent approach in a country that is geographically and socio-politically diverse. At the same time, regionally led programming promises considerably more operational control (of activities and budgets) and a greater chance of extending DRM assistance to strengthen zonal and woreda DRM structures, and thereby address locally specific challenges.

3. There is a separate learning note on the OPM website about the PHEM workstream's experience of extending federal initiatives to the regions: www.opml.co.uk/projects/building-resilience-in-ethiopia

However, this assessment into the lessons learnt from BRE-TA also revealed that the demand for a sharper regional focus should not be entirely at the expense of the federal level: the comments were more of a latent plea to **re-balance the focus and to strengthen sub-national institutional capacity to address the priority DRM issues that regions are struggling to manage.**

Any sub-national DRM programme will still require complementary interventions at the federal level, given the importance of ensuring alignment with, and accountability for, federal policies and programmes. Nevertheless, a stronger regional focus should have several benefits:

- **National/sub-national relations that are negotiated on a more equal or complementary basis**, potentially leading to more resources being allocated for regional preparation and response.
- **More effective intra-governmental mechanisms** that improve the relevance

and implementation of federal programmes conducted in cooperation with regional administrations.

- **Closer harmonisation among regional DRM programmes** through direct collaboration between regional governments, multilateral partners, and regionally based NGOs.
- **Enhanced capacity in regions to manage the decentralisation of DRM responsibilities** to zonal and woreda administrations and to start to address technical inadequacies on the ground (Box 1).

Undoubtedly, the same dynamics that shape the relationship between federal and regional governments play out between regional governments and the authorities at zonal and woreda level. Regional administrations should therefore apply the same principles of contextualisation and flexibility in their dealings with zonal and woreda administrations that they require for themselves.

BOX 1: Strengthening early warning systems should be a key part of any future DRM programme

Addressing data quality deficiencies in any future DRM programme will be critically important as a national early warning system is contingent upon effective regional and sub-regional data collection and quality assurance. Currently, poor information systems lead to sub-optimal implementation on the ground, highlighting the need for better collaboration between the federal and regional levels. This was illustrated by BRE-TA's support in Oromia, where errors in the collection and analysis of market data in two zones generated a more positive impression of their food security status than ground observations suggested. With support from BRE-TA, the regional government was able to correct its procedures, thus revealing the gravity of the drought and activating emergency response.

2.2 Balancing effectiveness and equity: where to focus scarce resources

One of the regional assessment's main lines of enquiry was whether a future programme should focus on the well-established regional administrations or, if resources are very limited, assist the newer regions (some of which are only a few months old).⁴ The assessment revealed deep concerns among the newly constituted regions, which have severe resource constraints, limited physical and institutional infrastructure, and shortages of professional and administrative expertise. Indeed, BRE-TA's work was far more challenging in regions with weaker capacity: DRM requires coordinated action by many actors and is most effective when it is supported by a sound institutional architecture, clear political leadership, and coherent regional policies. However, no two regions are alike, and all regions face constraints of different kinds. Furthermore, the federal government is likely to insist that all regions benefit from a new DRM programme, in one form or another.

Given this context, and in light of what BRE-TA has learned, the following strategies may be helpful for programmes seeking to strengthen DRM systems in situations of variable institutional capacity.

1. **Explicitly acknowledge the diversity of regional capacity**, and recognise that every region has strengths that can be built on, and constraints that need to be addressed.
2. **Develop a theory of change that guides the process of strengthening sub-national DRM systems**, which ensures a consistent

approach in all regions but that is applied in ways that respond to the specific context in each. Common principles, outcomes, and indicators may help provide coherence and determine progress.⁵

3. **Phase or layer TA according to context:** for example, by involving regions with less well-established systems at a lower level of intensity from the start and building up from there; and, conversely, by phasing down TA in regions which subsequently demonstrate a higher degree of effectiveness. Two further strategies flow from this:
 - **Manage human and financial resources as flexibly as possible**, so that they can be deployed in support of a phased/layered approach and as new opportunities open up.
 - **Invest in a robust engagement and communication strategy**, led by the federal government, which ensures that all regions, whatever the intensity of their involvement in a programme at a particular point in time, understand what is happening, when, and why.
4. **Ensure that system strengthening addresses functional capacity – i.e. the enabling environment for DRM** – not just technical capacity. A key government priority should be to strengthen the political and administrative capacity of regional institutions by establishing and consolidating effective governance systems to manage regional and federally supported public services, including DRM.

4. This is a pertinent issue in Ethiopia where, for example, the former SNNPR was recently subdivided into four regions, and where, until recently, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali were described as 'developing regional states'. <https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/ETH/UNDP%20Ethiopia%20Fast%20Facts%20-%20Developing%20Regional%20States%20-%202013-12-04.pdf>

5. A number of tools, frameworks, and checklists exist; for example: <https://www.opml.co.uk/files/Publications/8429-disaster-risk-management/strategic-research-report.pdf?noredirect=1>, and <https://www.preventionweb.net/sendai-framework/capacity-development>

5. **Build in measures that promote learning and exchange between regions**, whatever their level of capacity and throughout the life of the programme: for example, through peer review exercises or invitations to major events, such as validation exercises.
6. **Ensure that all interventions in all regions include an element of reflection and documentation** so that a body of knowledge on strengthening sub-national DRM in different contexts is gradually built. TA in regions where effectiveness is stronger may generate early results and lessons, which can then be applied elsewhere. These reflective processes must be planned and budgeted for.

2.3 TA alone versus technical and financial assistance combined

Regional governments are critically short of funds for both capital items⁶ and operational activities (field research, monitoring, stakeholder consultations, and feedback sessions). BRE-TA was designed to offer only TA, with a modest operational budget: it was able to finance some activities which typically required relatively small amounts of money that were accessed quickly and flexibly through the BRE-TA programme office. However, there were no accompanying funds for government capital items.

Regional stakeholders recommended that future programmes should combine the provision of TA with financial assistance for technology and infrastructure. In the event of another TA-only programme with limited activity budgets approved, they further argued that these budgets should be larger and more flexible, and devolved to the regional TAs and their partners in government.⁷

However, the **decision on whether to combine TA and capital funds needs careful consideration**. On the one hand, it acknowledges the acute financial constraints of all regional governments, even the longer-established ones, which often translate into severe shortages of infrastructure and equipment. Furthermore, as interviewees noted, a programme with funds attached will quite naturally attract more political attention.⁸ On the other hand, TA combined with donor funding (whether operational or capital) not only increases the risk of dependence on aid but also risks a drawn out negotiation around what the programme can fund – which could potentially present a major distraction from discussions around sustainable, locally-driven DRM systems reform. A further consideration is that TA itself can alleviate resource constraints by positioning governments to secure additional funding as external confidence in DRM systems grows, or by ensuring more effective use of existing funds (Box 2).

6. For a definition of capital expenditure items see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/613225c6d3bf7f05b166a4df/Programme_Expenditure_Eligible_Cost_Guidance_for_August_2021.pdf

7. Interviewees from Oromia and SNNPR mentioned insufficient BRE-TA funding for regional/zonal officials to participate in programme oversight, which weakened ownership. However, BRE-TA management was often frustrated in 2020–22 that the RTAs were not utilising the budgets set aside for them. The modest size of these budgets, and the cool reception many RTAs received when they arrived 'empty handed', could explain why they initially struggled to spend.

8. A point made strongly in interviews in Hawassa and Sidama about the support to SNNPR.



BOX 2: Strengthening regional governments' ability to raise funds for shock response

The regional government in the former SNNPR was able to secure funds for emergency drought response in Konso in May 2023 as a result of BRE-TA's support to planning, reporting, and resource mobilisation – specifically, improvements in the assessment templates being used and training in fundraising techniques. Similarly, in Somali region, BRE-TA assisted the government to complete a mapping of partners' activities. This revealed that certain woredas in Liben zone received significantly more external assistance than others, and led to the re-direction of a multi-purpose cash programme to other woredas that were severely drought-affected but had previously been neglected.

The key lesson, particularly in a context of budgetary constraint, is **to take time to establish a clear understanding of the modalities of aid that are expected and those that are being offered**, encapsulated in a multi-party memorandum of understanding between the selected regions and the donor/federal government. This ensures that the expectations and commitments of all parties are aired and formalised early and transparently.

BRE-TA's disaster risk finance workstream developed a separate learning note on its

experience.⁹ Although this workstream primarily focused at the federal level, as befits public financial management, it did engage directly with regions and woredas on project activities funded through external climate finance (specifically the GCF). One key lesson was **the need for a more structured way of working between federal and regional levels**, echoing the point in Section 2.1 about the urgent need for more effective intra-governmental mechanisms for DRM that acknowledge and address the various weak linkages between federal agencies such as EDRMC and communities that are at risk.

9. www.opml.co.uk/projects/building-resilience-in-ethiopia

2.4 Timeframe

The implications of the approach outlined above, which is both more gradual (phasing assistance to different regions over time) and more substantive (addressing broader governance and institutional challenges), need to be considered in light of BRE-TA's experience. As the mid-term review of BRE-TA noted, the operating environment was far more challenging than was anticipated at the start. Only three of the programme's five years were focused on the regional level. The first 18 months were spent developing a programme of work with federal government partners and getting these ideas approved by donors; only then did the process of actively engaging the regions on programme parameters begin.

Actual regional support came later, as the programme became established, and grew incrementally. Even now, as BRE-TA ends, it has only started to 'scratch the surface' of what the regions require and how they can best be supported.

Given this context, and in line with common sense and guidance published by donors, including Sida and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office,¹⁰ there are valid grounds for recommending **a 10-year timeframe for a multi-sectoral programme of institutional strengthening**, which also aligns with the government's own Ten-Year Development Planning process.¹¹

03 GESI

Given extensive evidence that women and children face greater disadvantages in accessing resources before, during and after disasters¹², both the regional assessment and a separate GESI learning note examined the place of GESI in DRM programming at the sub-national level.¹³ The findings of the two studies were generally consistent, noting **considerable demand for GESI support and a need for more focus on this issue in DRM systems-building work**. Since regional DRM planning and delivery systems vary significantly,

given differing contexts and risks, **contextual analysis and a tailored approach to delivery are critical**, particularly the sequencing of activities, which should start with a period of collaborative action planning and applied policy research with the host regional government.

The following reform initiatives supported by BRE-TA could be extended and tailored to help regions address existing gaps and weaknesses in integrating GESI in DRM systems.

10. For example, guidance for Department for International Development advisers on conducting institutional appraisal and development, published in 2002, notes that: 'Institutional development is often a long-term process, requiring a willingness to maintain involvement over a decade or more. It thus lends itself to a process approach where, within agreed overall objectives for institutional change, outputs and the activities and inputs required to achieve them are defined more clearly as development proceeds.'

Similar findings from SIDA Studies in Evaluation by Lage Bergströmin 04/05, 'Development of Institutions is Created from the Inside – Lessons Learned from Consultants' Experiences of Supporting Formal and Informal Rules', SIDA Studies in Evaluation, 05/04 - <https://www.oecd.org/derec/sweden/37327051.pdf> - 'Inevitably institutional change takes time. It can be a rapid and simple process – through external pressure and formal decisions – to achieve changes in new formal laws and ordinances. However, for these new rules to be institutionalised and accepted by those who are affected by them, it is usually the case that all stakeholders have to be involved in the process of change over a long period of time. Therefore, for those who are the driving forces behind the process of change, perseverance is required – and the donors also need to show perseverance in their support.'

11. www.lawethiopia.com/images/Policy_documents/10_year_plan_english_final.pdf

12. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/publication/gender-dynamics-of-disaster-risk-and-resilience>

13. www.opml.co.uk/projects/building-resilience-in-ethiopia

1. **Risk-informed planning** involves identifying and mapping regional hazards and vulnerabilities and was used effectively by the PHEM and DRM workstreams (the latter in training on ‘disaster risk-informed planning’)¹⁴. It helps to comprehend potential risks, understand vulnerabilities, and assess capacities and coping mechanisms.
2. **Integrating GESI-responsive DRM considerations in development planning, policies, and budgets** at regional and national levels ensures that disaster risk reduction becomes an integral part of overall development efforts and furthers GESI goals. Continuing support to the government’s GESI Community of Practice would be a good start.¹⁵
3. **Early warning systems** deliver timely alerts and information to at-risk communities and must disaggregate information by factors such as sex, age, and other social determinants.
4. **Community participation and empowerment**, particularly of women and marginalised groups, improves the effectiveness of DRM planning and decision-making. For example, the inclusion of GESI representatives from diverse groups in Kebele Appeals Committees results in more targeted support and addressing of grievances, including in relation to gender-based violence.
5. **Institutional capacity building**, specifically strengthening the GESI capacity of regional and local government agencies responsible for DRM, is vital. In this context, integrating climate change adaptation strategies into regional and woreda-level planning is key to addressing the long-term risks to women and socially marginalised groups.¹⁶

04 Intervention strategy

BRE-TA has learned that there is a need for a **more measured and coherent approach when intervening in a particular region**: one that is rooted in local ownership and understanding of the context. This is based on BRE-TA’s early experience of extending its work to the regions. Essentially, BRE-TA was instructed by its donors to work in certain ‘priority’ regions, went to these locales with introductory letters from the federal government, and offered TA

to support the implementation of federally initiated and managed DRM programmes. Regional stakeholders said that this approach was disrespectful and clumsy, and reportedly made it slower and more difficult for the RTAs to ultimately establish themselves in their roles within the regional governments. Furthermore, the RTAs arrived ‘empty handed’, without large operational budgets or funds for capital expenditure, which added to the

14. One activity under the PHEM workstream on GESI and emergency preparedness and response planning at federal, regional, and woreda levels can be found here: www.rebuildconsortium.com/public-health-emergency-management/

15. This was supported by BRE-TA and launched after a GESI learning workshop with gender directorates from the federal and regional governments. Its purpose is to facilitate communication, document sharing, and professional development among gender experts.

16. This is the subject of an existing GCF project in Ethiopia (www.greenclimate.fund/document/2022-annual-performance-report-fp058responding-increasing-risk-drought-building-gender) and will be complemented by a BRE-TA-supported US\$ 25 million proposal from the Ministry of Finance to the GCF: www.greenclimate.fund/document/building-climate-change-resilience-vulnerable-households-selected-localities-ethiopia

coolness of their reception. A formal launch of the BRE-TA programme in 2019, to manage expectations, could have gone some way towards avoiding these mistakes. However, notwithstanding these challenges, and over time, the RTAs established themselves as valuable resources in regard to improving the effectiveness of existing systems within the limitations regions faced. They did so through personal endeavour, technical competence, and having the flexibility to help out where asked, which eventually won over their initially reticent hosts.

The following lessons come from BRE-TA's experience and from stakeholders' comments captured during the regional assessment and may help ensure that any future programme starts from a strong foundation.

- 1. Officially introduce the programme.** An official introduction, such as a launch, underscores the legitimacy of the programme in the eyes of the regional authorities and strengthens understanding among stakeholders of what it will deliver and how it will work. **Take time to discuss and agree activities with the regional government.** This could easily take six to 12 months but will provide the basis for a formal launch of the new programme in the region. A launch may help ensure that incoming experts are welcomed into TA roles with the endorsement of political and administrative leaders, and are not burdened with unrealistic demands and expectations.



2. Co-create a scope of work and theory of change. Regional and federal stakeholders who are familiar with BRE-TA suggested that its use of a theory of change (effectively an outcome mapping exercise) should be replicated in any future sub-national programme. This approach is fundamentally demand-led/needs-driven (subject to the approval of interventions by the donor) in that government is central in directing the TA. BRE-TA explicitly sought to align with and support sector priorities at both national and regional levels, and the RTAs were placed to help deliver those policies.

Aligning any programme with the regional government's workplans helps reaffirm the centrality of government and avoids the criticism that embedded advisers are responsible (and responsive) to remote organisations, rather than to their government host. At the federal level, BRE-TA built ownership by taking time to prepare together the workstream theory of change and by holding regular technical working group meetings to review progress.

3. Carry out rigorous political economy and institutional analysis. This is key to understanding the operating context in each region and informs the theory of change and scope of work. BRE-TA's experience of applying this analysis at the federal level could be useful at the regional level in assessing the political and economic factors that shape decision-making and policy implementation, giving valuable insights into a region's power dynamics, resource allocation priorities, institutional capacities, and reform challenges.

As regional informants noted, effective DRM requires that attention be given to the political and administrative capacity of regional institutions. Political economy and institutional analysis will lead to a better understanding of the prevailing governance challenges in regional administrations, as well as the coordination and oversight mechanisms necessary to deliver the multi-sectoral and multi-level collaboration that is so essential for DRM to succeed. Taking time to understand and programme activities around the different incentives, priorities, and constraints of stakeholders is important.

4. Select credible and trusted TAs together with the host. The RTAs were competent technical staff, many with considerable local/regional experience, whose appointment was always approved by the host partner, often together with the federal partner during a selective recruitment process (Box 3). Their familiarity with the technical content, the sector's political economy, and the institutional landscape of the regional bureau ensured that they were alert to the risks and opportunities in any fresh crisis. This combination of technical, political, and socio-cultural capital meant that the RTAs had access to senior levels of government in their sectors.

5. Be flexible and responsive. Federal government partners consistently noted that one of BRE-TA's strengths was that it was relatively flexible and dynamic¹⁷, but this was not the feedback that was received from all at the regional level, who typically wanted a large programme of support tailored to their specific needs. However, regional respondents did report that the individual RTAs, whom they often

17. In annual reviews: <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-GOV-1-300363/documents>

helped recruit in interview panels, were responsive to their concerns and needs (and primarily reported to them, as well as to BRE-TA). In general, the RTAs were often filling capacity gaps and were not always able to adequately transfer skills to their counterparts.

6. Manage and plan for high turnover of counterparts in government. Regional respondents all noted that the high turnover of officials, both political and technical, is a common problem and undermines the sustainability of donor-supported DRM interventions. Thus, they said that any TA programme should introduce strategies that accept and provide for this reality. Their suggestions included more frequent training of trainers sessions, involving a broader range of participants, as well as a rolling induction programme combined with video handover messages from departing officials.

The techniques used by BRE-TA to build capacity despite the turnover of counterparts included the following:

- preparing high-quality curricula and guidance notes with the host (in multiple languages);
- conducting training of trainers programmes and running practice

sessions with them before helping them deliver the courses;

- following this up with a mentoring programme;
- getting the training materials certified by an academic institution to ensure quality and to give them greater standing; and
- once qualified, capturing contact information on the trainees in a federally managed roster.

7. Peer learning. Regional stakeholders identified inter-regional learning as a key opportunity and something that the DRM and SRSN workstreams could have done more of.¹⁸ They cited a lack of knowledge of what other regions were doing on DRM, and the need to engage other regional experts and officials. Regional participants at a programme-wide outcome-harvesting workshop concurred, suggesting that future programmes should facilitate peer learning in order to disseminate best practices from one region to another, and should create peer-support mechanisms to do so, such as the GESI community of practice. As noted above, peer learning may be one way to involve the less well-established regions at an earlier stage of implementation.

BOX 3: Learning from our mistakes

During the interviews conducted for this learning note, regional officials in Afar appreciated BRE-TA's inclusive recruitment process, noting that: 'Other projects recruit in Addis and send the officers to Semera. These officers usually do not understand the local context, language, and challenges of the region.' This was a very charitable comment as initial BRE-TA recruitments for RTAs to Afar (and elsewhere) had indeed made this exact mistake, partly because of difficulties in scheduling interviews with regional partners.

18. The PHEM workstream was able to work with the established national and regional PHEM forums.

05 Conclusions

This section draws together the principal recommendations for government and donors interested in deploying TA to strengthen sub-

national DRM systems, recognising that the specific interventions and approaches will be contingent upon the context.

5.1 Programme design



As much as possible tailor the programme to the needs and capacities of the regional government hosts. At the same time, ensure a good working relationship with the federal counterpart, in the interests of ensuring policy alignment and accountability.



Focus on regional governments with well-established systems in the first instance, using this to build up a body of knowledge on sub-national DRM reform, but **involve other regions at a lower level of intensity from the start:** for example, through awareness-raising and collaborative applied research.



Extend support to lower levels of government after strengthening the regional core, applying the same principles of contextualisation, responsiveness, and flexibility at all levels of governance. This phased strategy will allow time to understand and tailor approaches to the differences in zones and wordas, which vary dramatically between regions.



Prioritise GESI in DRM; for example, by:

- appointing dedicated gender leads;
- supporting mechanisms that try to enforce compliance with gender rights and government policy, such as the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs' 'Levelling Tool' – a mechanism used to rank and rate ministries, departments, and agencies across a 'gender continuum'; and
- providing training to enhance the participation of women and vulnerable groups in DRM structures.



Consider whether to attach capital funds to TA, and whether to use multi-party memorandums of understanding to manage expectations and define agreed obligations.



Commit TA for a minimum of 10 years, given the time required for sustainable institutional strengthening and multi-sectoral development to occur.

5.2 Programme Implementation

The lead federal government partner and donor should ensure that TA remains demanded and contextually relevant, in the following ways:



Organise a formal launch of the new programme to reinforce sub-national ownership and stakeholder awareness.



Ensure the managing agent:

- develops theories of change that are aligned with government policies;
- undertakes regular political economy and institutional analysis in selected regions;
- selects credible and trusted staff who have the ability to respond flexibly as needs change; and



Strengthen coordination across government (vertical and horizontal), and risk-informed planning by key sectors, as well as **collaboration beyond government**, particularly with representatives of community groups (ethnolinguistic, religious, and other identity groups) and technical experts (including regional media outlets and universities).



Improve the targeting of DRM services by strengthening community participation, vulnerability and risk assessments, and data systems, including early warning.



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