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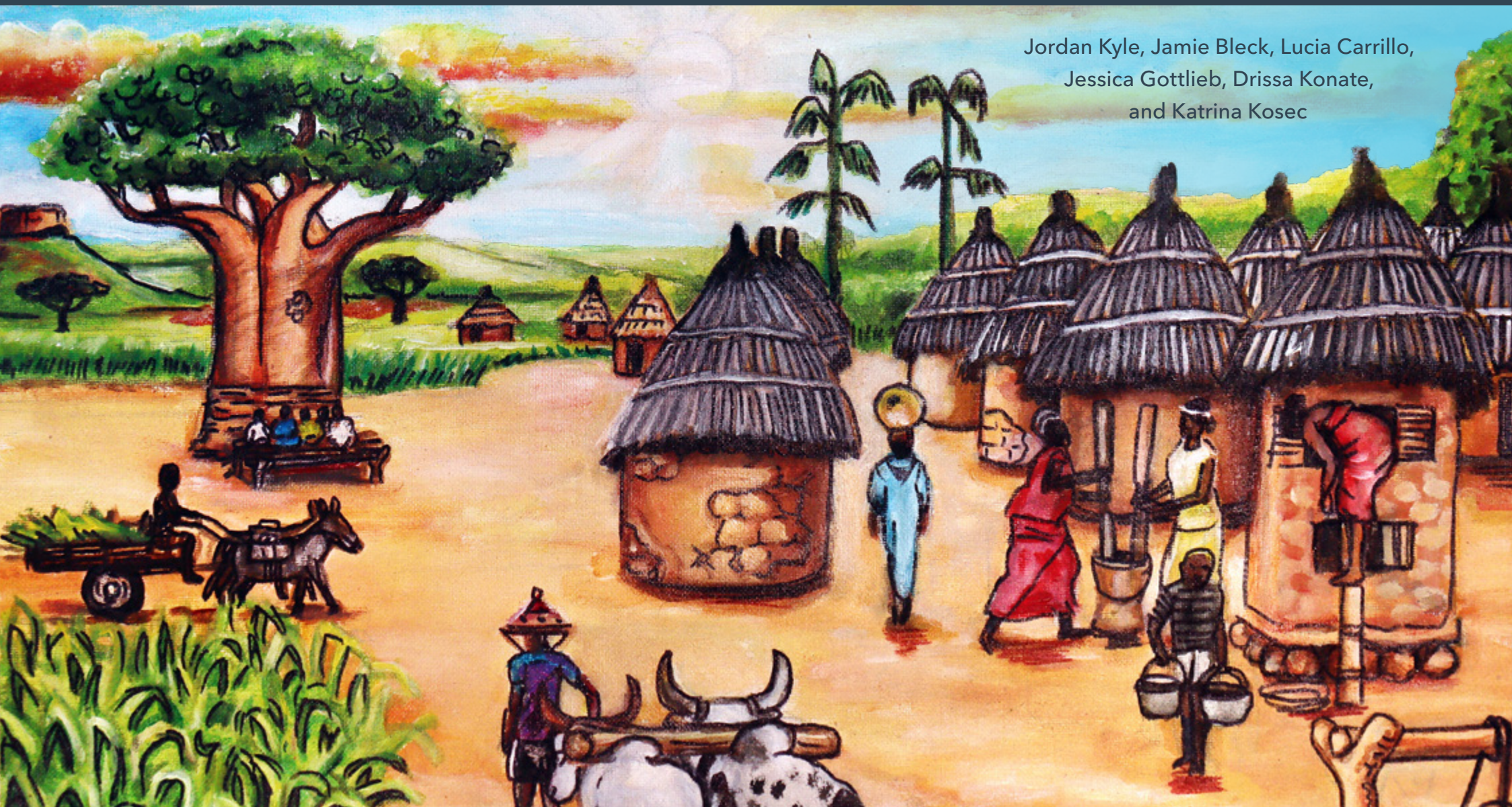


CGIAR
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AND SECURITY

Anticipatory Action and Early Warning Systems

A Community Engagement Toolkit for the Sahel

Jordan Kyle, Jamie Bleck, Lucia Carrillo,
Jessica Gottlieb, Drissa Konate,
and Katrina Kosec







Introduction

This storyboard tool was developed collaboratively by IFPRI (with support from the CGIAR Food Frontiers and Security Science Program), Lehigh University, University of Houston, and Malian partners including the University Kurukan Fuga (Bamako), GISSE (Groupement d'Intérêts Scientifiques des Statisticiens Economistes), and World Food Programme – Mali. It reflects a multi-year research process grounded in the lived realities of rural Malian communities affected by climate change. It began with a large-scale survey of approximately 3,000 community leaders across nearly every region of Mali, designed to understand what types of shocks hit and how often, how crises unfold, how early warnings are received and interpreted, what types of support are given, and what leaders already know about anticipatory action programming – that is, pre-financed, pre-planned actions taken before shocks to reduce harm and losses.

A key finding from this work was that community leaders expressed strong demand for training and concrete guidance on how to act before disasters arrive. Leaders understood the value of early action and were eager for practical tools that could help their communities move from awareness to preparation. There was also significant appetite for understanding how anticipatory action programming could complement and strengthen the preventative efforts communities were already undertaking on their own. This motivated developing the following field-ready storyboard tool – designed to introduce anticipatory action to leaders and community members in concrete, accessible terms and to support community leaders in building the shared understanding and buy-in needed to put early action plans in place before the next crisis arrives.

This storyboard tool was illustrated by Malian artist Drissa Konaté, whose work specializes in community-based visual communication. Every image was designed to be legible to rural and low-literacy audiences while remaining recognizable and relatable. The baobab tree appears in every scene, anchoring the story in a single village and making visible how the choice to invest in anticipatory action can transform that village's trajectory when crisis arrives. The story that follows shows what anticipatory action looks like when communities, governments, and humanitarian partners are prepared together. This tool is designed to help all sides build that preparedness.

This tool is intended for use by policymakers, NGOs, and international organizations working to socialize anticipatory action programming and build community understanding of early warning systems across the Sahel. While this tool aims for broad applicability, in practice, specific programming varies across countries and contexts. The tool is therefore designed to be adaptable, and implementing partners should feel enabled and encouraged to tailor the narrative and facilitation to reflect their particular programming models and operational realities.

Scene # 1

Life in the village

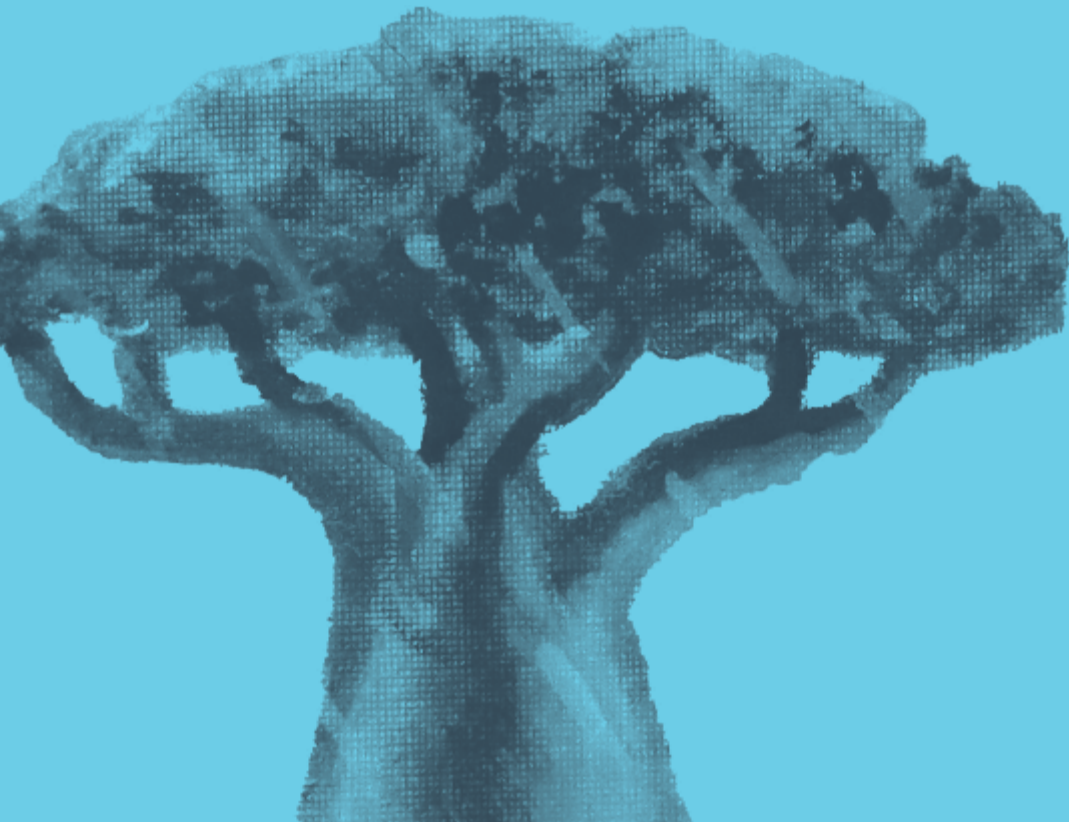


This is an example of a village in Mali, on an ordinary day. Families farm, tend their animals, collect water, and care for their families in their homes. Everything you see - houses, crops, livestock, and water sources - are what a family needs to survive and to thrive.



Scene #2

A flood arrives



Then more rain than expected comes. The river rises and overflows. Crops are destroyed. Animals drown. Homes collapse. Families watch helplessly as everything they worked for is swept away. There is little they can do. After the flood, the village faces great losses, and it takes a long time to recover.



Scene #3

Waiting for aid



Days pass, then weeks. Families try to survive on what remains. The children are hungry. Fields are bare. Help has not yet arrived.



Scene #4

Aid arrives late



Finally, aid workers arrive with food and supplies. Families line up to receive assistance. The help is real but look at the ground. There is cracked earth, empty fields, and damaged homes. The aid came after the damage was done, and it will be difficult to replace the losses. Recovery will take a long time.

What if a different type of support came before the flood? What if communities had known the flood was coming and had the time to act? With the right warning and support, people can take action early and protect their homes, animals, and livelihoods to prevent some damages from happening in the first place. This is anticipatory action. Let us see what it looks like.



Scene #5

The community makes a plan



Before any warning arrives, the community comes together. With support from NGOs, village leaders convene their community members and work with them to make a plan. A community can meet again as often as they find useful to adjust or improve their plan. What matters is that they have one, and the community agrees with it. If a flood warning comes, who will do what? Where will the animals go? What needs to be moved? What supplies are needed? What can we do to protect crops and fields? The plan is made while the skies are still clear – so that when a warning comes, the village is ready to act immediately. Humanitarian organizations and NGOs can participate by committing to support the village by providing tools and materials needed based on the community plan. In this village, the community decides on shovels and sandbags to be delivered before floods come, and the community plans to work together to dig trenches and build barriers to protect community assets. The community meeting in advance of early warnings can also ensure that the community understands which support is coming and to which families if an early warning is received. Different organizations may offer different types of support depending on their resources and programs. The shovels, sandbags, and trenches shown here are one example. Your community's plan should reflect what is most useful for your situation, and what your partner organization is able to provide.

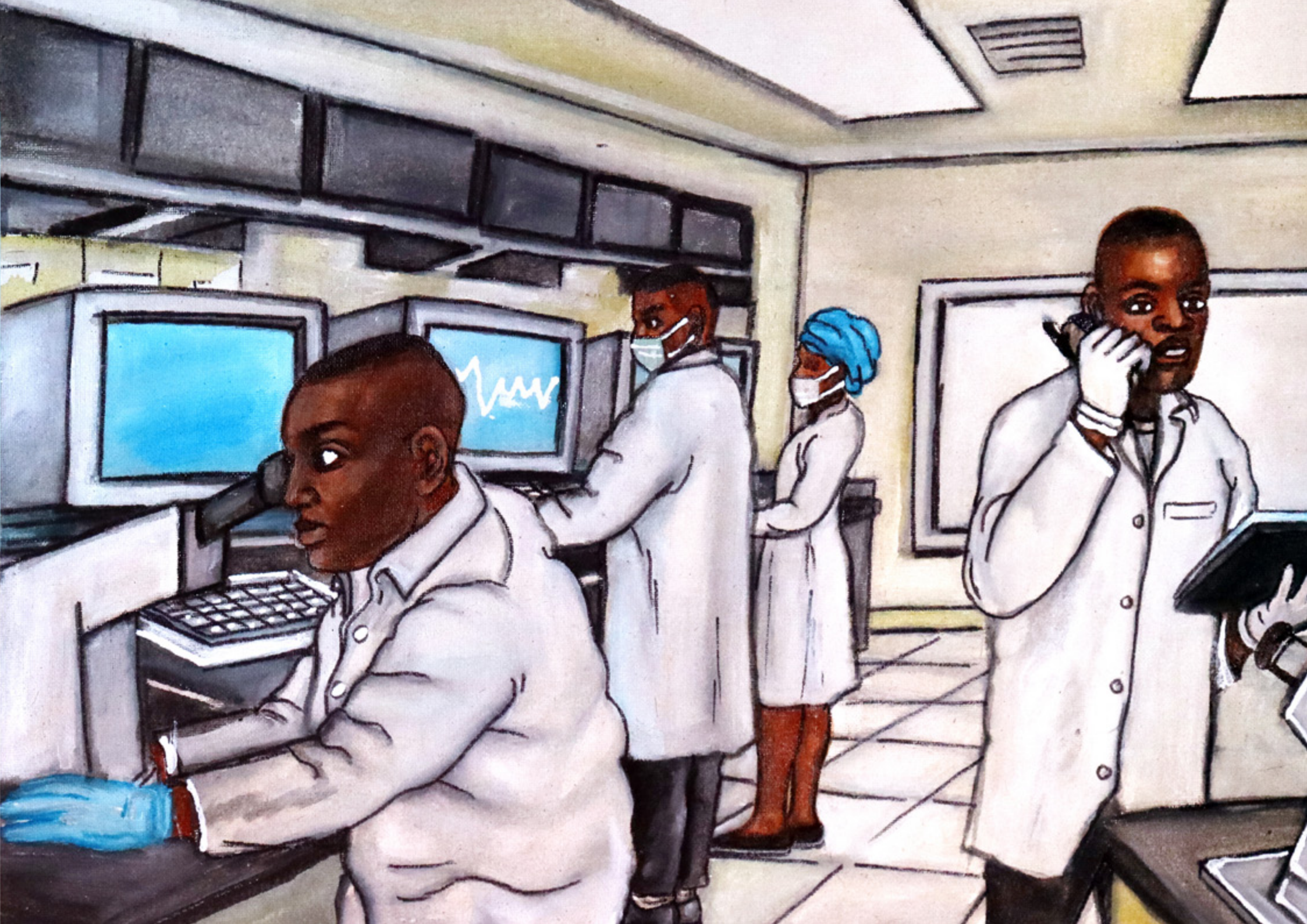


Scene # 6

Scientists issue a warning

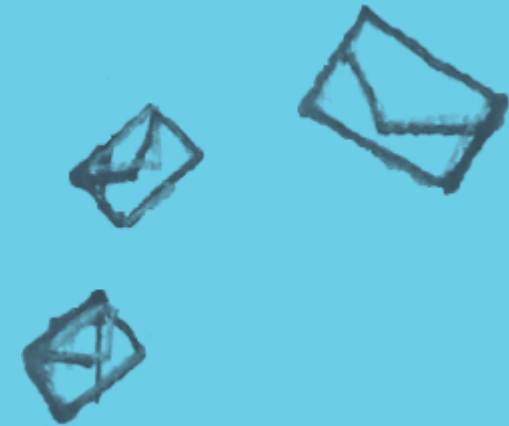


Scientists watch the sky and the rivers every day. They study information carefully and can often track when dangerous rains and floods are coming. When they see these warning signs, they can quickly share this information with authorities and communities. In this way, a forecast becomes a warning. Forecasts are not always right. Sometimes a warning is issued, and the flood does not come or is smaller than expected. This can be frustrating. However, preparing for a flood that does not arrive is often less costly than being unprepared for one that does. Over time, communities and scientists learn together, and forecasts improve.

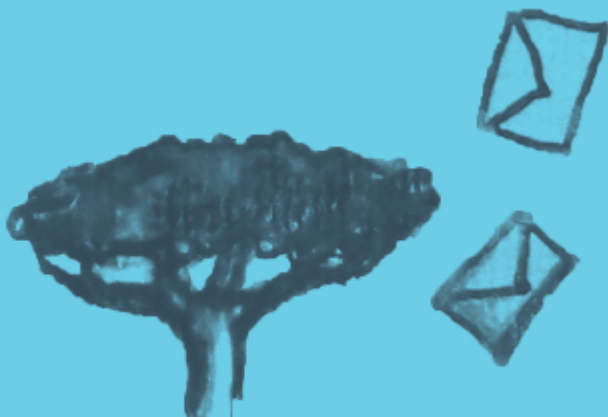


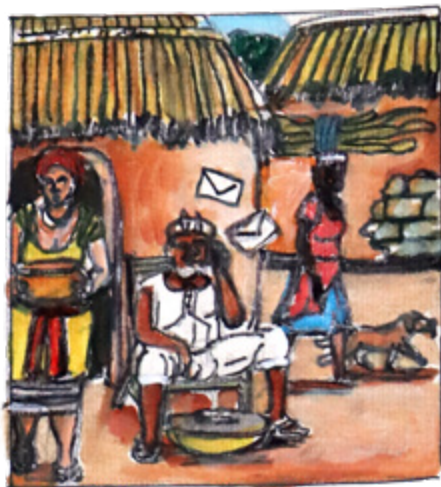
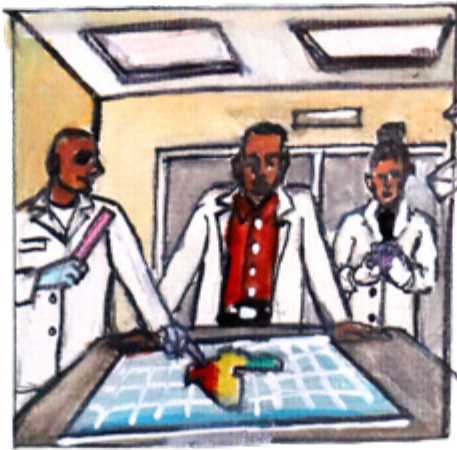
Scene #7

The warning spreads



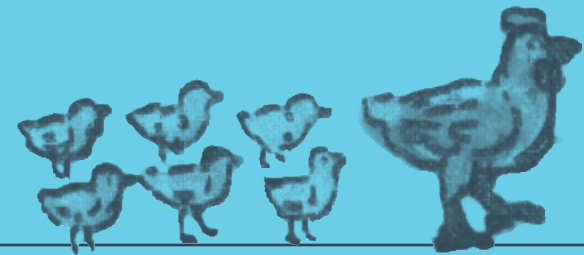
Once scientists make a forecast, warnings can travel fast. Scientists can inform government officials and humanitarian organizations. These government officials and humanitarian organizations call local leaders. Phones ring and messages arrive in towns and fields. The information spreads: a dangerous flood may be coming soon. There is time to prepare. Communities that have a plan in place and partners who know their plan are best positioned to receive support quickly when it is needed most. Sometimes warnings will come only a few days in advance, and sometimes a few weeks. The more notice a warning gives, the more a community can do to prepare. Even a few days can make a difference.



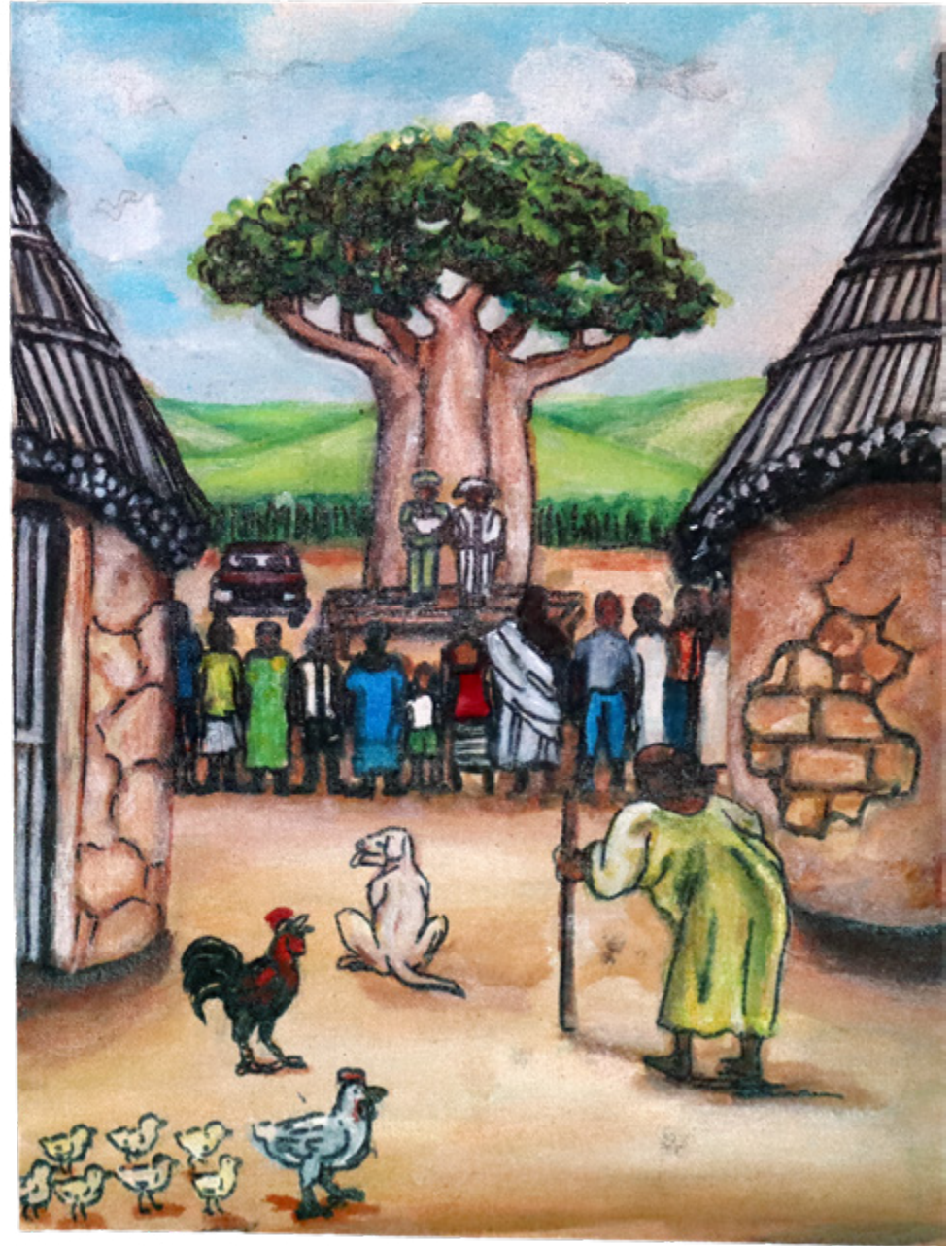


Scene #8

Partners arrive before the flood



When the warning reaches the village, community leaders, government officials, and humanitarian workers can communicate with each other to confirm that the plan the community made is being rapidly implemented. They can gather the community again to ensure that families who may not have heard the warning hear the news and are ready. Because the community has a plan and partners know it, they are in a better place to mobilize support quickly than communities without a plan.



Scene #9

The community acts



Before the heavy rains arrive, an NGO truck pulls up with supplies and tools. In this village, the community plan to prepare for a heavy flood calls for shovels and sandbags to dig trenches and create barriers, and this is what the NGO truck brings. Community members dig trenches, build barriers, reinforce homes, move animals, carry grain to higher ground, and ensure everyone knows what is coming. The village is not waiting for disaster. By taking these actions early, the community comes together and can reduce damage and better protect their lives and livelihoods.



Scene #10

The flood comes – but the village is ready

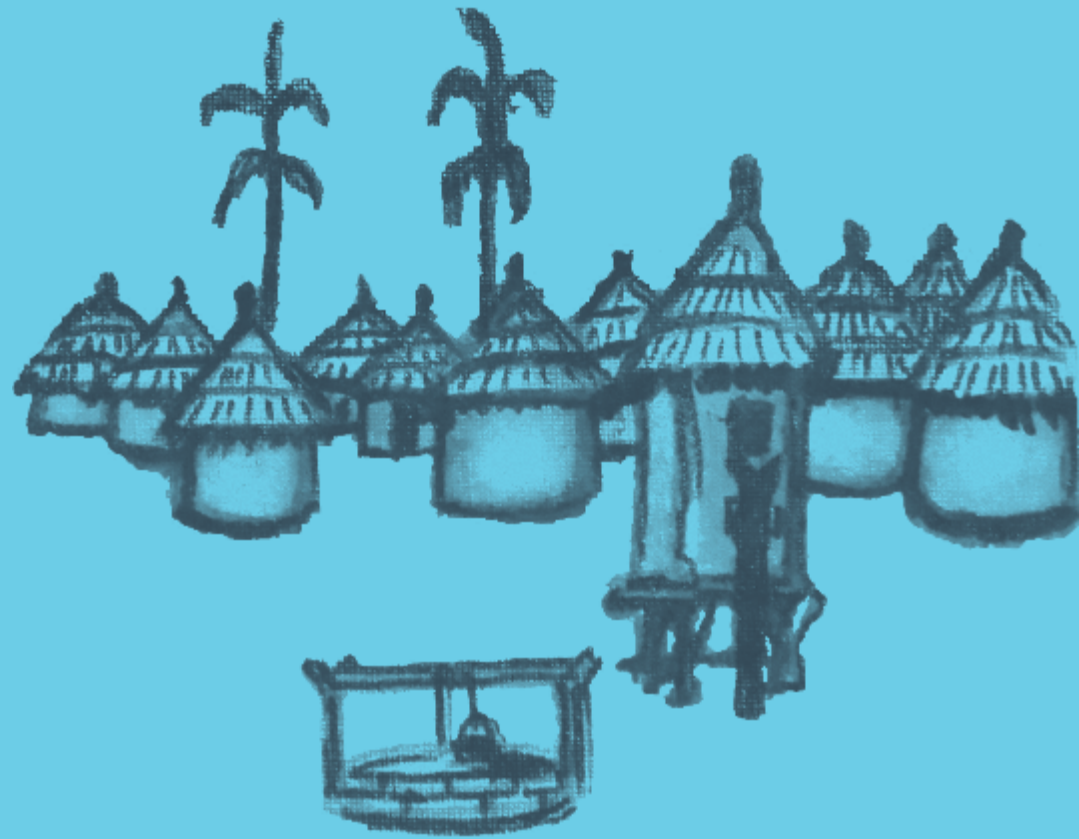
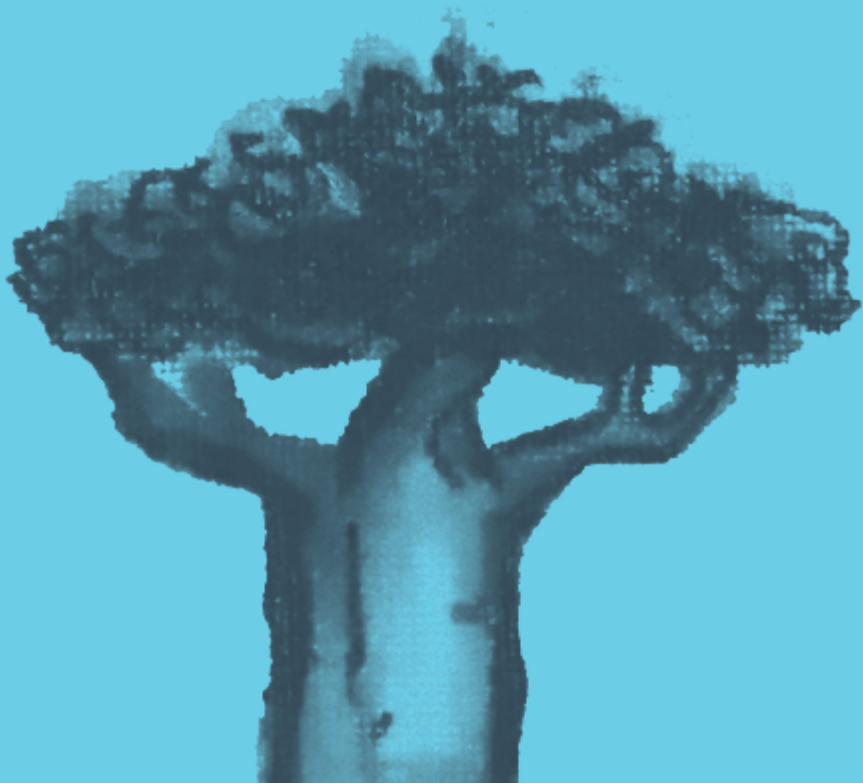


Heavy rain comes. The water rises. But this time, look carefully. The village is still standing. The crops are protected. The animals are safe. Because the community prepared, the flood does not take everything.

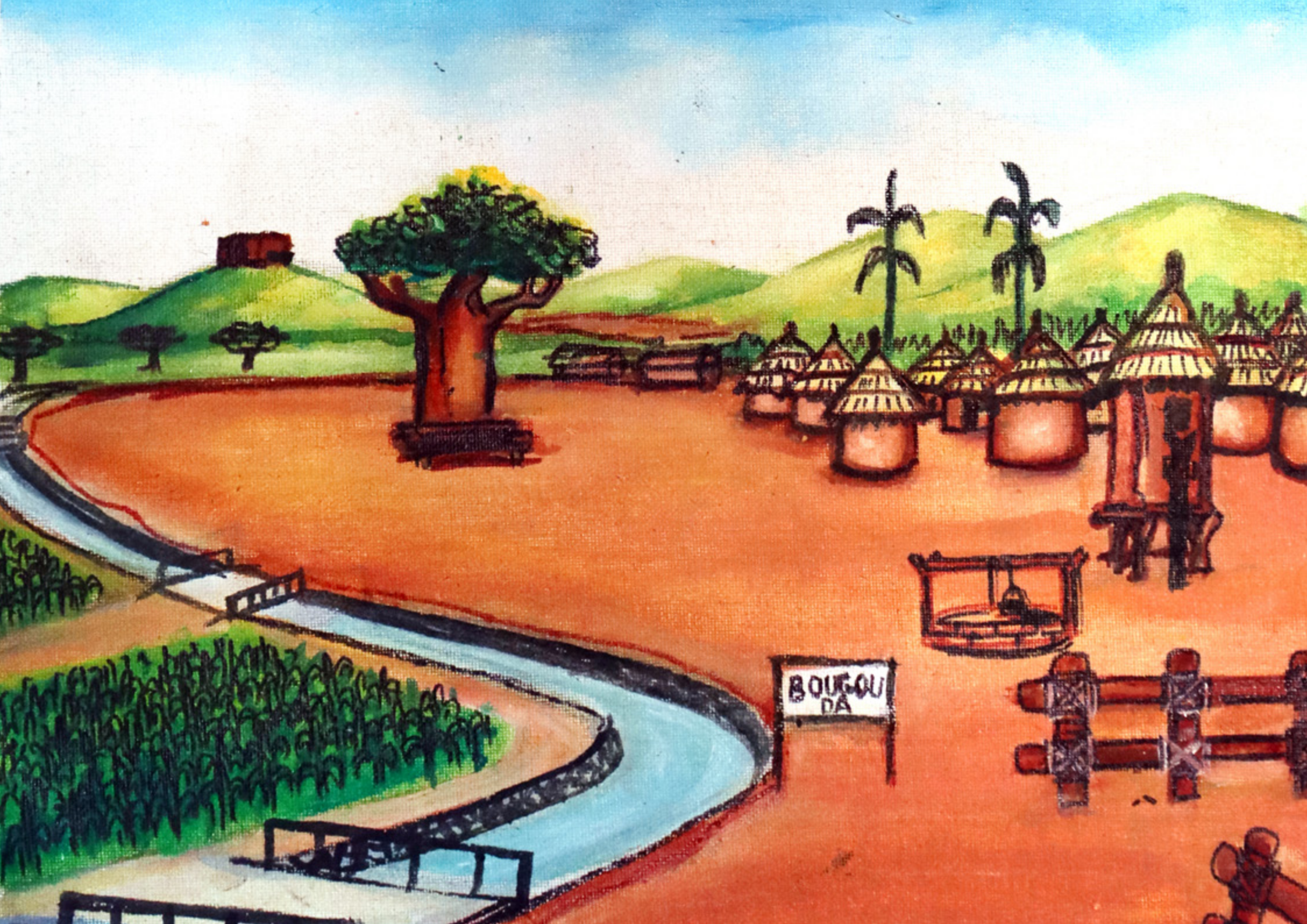


Scene # 1 1

The water recedes



After some time, the rains stop and the floodwater slowly goes down. The village is here. The fields are here. What was protected before the flood is still standing after it.



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Scene #12

Life continues



Life returns to normal in the village. Children play. Cattle graze. Farmers work. This is the same village we saw at the beginning, but it now has something new: the knowledge that when a warning comes, the community can act and receive the support it needs to do so. Anticipatory action helped protect the village, and it can protect your community, too.



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1201 Eye St, NW, Washington, DC 20005 USA | T. +1-202-862-5600 | F. +1-202-862-5606 | Email: ifpri@cgiar.org | www.ifpri.org | www.ifpri.info

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