

SHARE **Bale** Eco-region Project- **from** where to where?

Asaye Asnake is a project coordinator for Share Bale Eco-region project. According to him, the Share Bale Eco-region project is located in Bale and West Arsi zones of Oromia State financed by the European Union Delegation to Ethiopia. It is a three year and four months project towards which a total of 5.5 million Euro is earmarked. The cardinal objective of the project is conserving biodiversity potential on the natural resource and ensuring community livelihood improvement in the Eco-region. So, entailed in the project is the lofty task of conserving the natural resources, which will ensure economic benefit for the local community in general.

There are other areas which beg for the attention of stakeholders. What made you focus on Bale?

Bale is one of the gifted areas of Ethiopia marked for immense potential for biodiversity or natural resources. It is a house for a broad-array of endemic species of plants and animals. The Bale Mountain National Park is one of the world heritage sites located in that particular Eco-region. This makes the area peculiar and a center of attention for intervention.

The second largest intact forest that goes by the name the *Harena* forest is found there. Bale is also located in this particular Eco-region, where wild coffee sprouts. The Eco-region is also one of the 34 biodiversity hotspot areas in the world. So, with special attention we need to conserve this particular Eco-region in general as it is a source of water for more than 12 million people who are living in the downstream community. It includes cross boarder countries like northern Kenya and Somalia.

In terms of hydro-logical value, the Eco-region has more than 40 springs that feed Ethiopia's major five rivers that flow to Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean as well. The Eco-region is also a source of water for Genale Dawa river basin. Thus, it has immense value in terms of livelihood improvement. Subsequently, protecting this Eco-region means ensuring the well-being of 12 million people. Unless, this Eco-region is conserved in a sustainable way, we will commit a crime by omission by not salvaging numerous people who are living in the downstream communities as well as in the Eco-region in general. It is taking this into account, we just chose the Bale Eco-region for an intervention area in the execution of this particular project.

How come the various stakeholders acting independently failed to make holistic change possible in the Eco-region?

Previously, pertinent governmental organizations and different NGOs had been involved in conservation of the existing natural resources parallel to agriculture development activities. Though unstinting efforts had been exerted and a lot of success stories had been registered in this regard, the exertions lacked integration and coordination across sector. Most of the activities that had been accomplished in the area were sector and site specific. There were conservation projects which had been conducting preservation activities in the Eco-region without taking into account livelihood improvement issues. So, the issue of integration across sectors was an issue that needed much attention. The second reason lies in that, the Eco-region links the highland community with the lowland ones. But, the previous interventions failed to notice the significance of such linkage. This was also another issue that needed attention. The other reason lies in capacity gaps at different level of the government in terms of protecting the natural resource as well as ensuring a comprehensive development effort in that particular region. This was also another challenge that should be addressed. So, with SHARE Bale Eco-region project, we just considered those issues and introduced a kind of project that ensures the development, mindful of environmental as well as social impacts in that particular area.

Who are the partners involved in the project implementation? How do they decide to work as one?

We follow integrated multi-sectoral approach which focuses on undertaking the different intervention not in a sector specific manner but in a way that integrates different sectors across our interventions. And, we integrate and streamline our actions with different implementing partners. In so doing, we have managed to benefit from the different skills. We have common goals and objectives as well as plans that could lead to the overall implementation of the project.

The five consortia implementing partners are Farm Africa – which is the leading organization, International Water Management Institute, Frankfurt Zoological Society, SOS Sahel Ethiopia and Population Health and Environment Ethiopia Consortium. These implementing partners have been involved for more than ten years in the Eco-region. Now, these organizations have come together, organized themselves and designed SHARE Bale Eco-region project. They are striving to implement it together with the various government sectors from federal to kebele level.

Chief among the intervention areas are found building capacity of governmental institutions, conducting research for knowledge generation, conserving & managing natural resource , improving the livelihood of the community, seeing to the multi sectoral coordination for the dissemination of the project results and drawing lessons and practices from these five major intervention areas. We are also mainstreaming family planning and health in all proposed innovative intervention. Also the family planning as well as the gender issues are integrated in five intervention areas.

Why is that the integrated multisectoral approach preferred in implementing the project?

An integrated multisectoral approach, which is inclusive and/ or comprehensive, ensures sustainable development in that particular area. It ensures both environmental, economic and social benefits. These are the three factors at play when it comes to sustainable development. The Eco-region is very vast and a heterogeneous one. It needs a comprehensive intervention in that particular area due to shortage of resources in terms of budget, time and etc. We divide the Eco-region into homogeneous units so that intervention across the whole region is possible.

Accordingly, we did the division into sub units considering different criteria. Some of the criteria taken into consideration are the altitude, land use, land cover, human and livestock population. The different maps of these criteria overlay those maps and produce an Eco-regional intervention area. Therefore, the whole Eco -region is subdivided into three clusters.

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The three clusters include the highland, lowland and mid altitude clusters. Based on this, the whole Eco-region or the 16 woredas fall into highland, lowland and mid altitude. Whatever intervention we do in the highland of one or may be two woredas, we will scale it up to other similar highland woredas that work similarly with the lowland and mid altitude as well. After we subdivide the Eco-region into three clusters, we just undertake the participatory problem analysis in collaboration with the

community and the government. What are the major challenges in relation to natural resource management, livelihood improvement and social issues?

How did the project intervene in the area?

The project undertook participatory problem and solution analysis with the community. Traditional practices are also considered. Then different research institutions around Bale Eco-region were invited in the planning process whereby we can include modern technologies and techniques in the area and develop the plan. Based on the participatory analysis conducted, we prioritized different interventions. And we pilot selected innovative interventions in three agro-ecological zones.

We selected visible and innovative interventions that fitted to each clusters or agro-ecology. Then we piloted the different interventions. After piloting, we gained results and the final outputs are incorporated in an eco-regional developmental plan that can work for the Eco-region and the country at large. The country can use the results for similar agro-ecology for scaling up the different interventions. Following such an approach and process, we have come up with a very remarkable results and best practices in the areas of natural resource management, livelihood improvement, population health and environment, as well as generating different research findings and recommendations.

What are the major achievements registered so far?

One of the achievements is, building the capacity of governmental institutions and community-based institutions in the project area. To this effect, different capacity building training had been offered and experience-sharing forums held. Material support had been given to the community. And most of the trainings have been turned into practices at the project intervention areas. Hence, capacity building is already enhanced regarding natural resource management, park management, as well as overall agricultural and livestock productivity improvement. The capacity of the community, institutions and governmental staff has been enhanced.////////

See Part 2 next week. For further reading browse

[http://www.phe-ethiopia.org/pdf/Eco-Region_Final_24042017\[1\].pdf](http://www.phe-ethiopia.org/pdf/Eco-Region_Final_24042017[1].pdf)

