MELCA-Ethiopia



Story of Change and Best Practice



Children, Youth and Women Empowerment



Environmental Governance



Eco-friendly Livelihoods Improvement



Agroecology

Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

EMBASSY OF SWEDEN

Brot für die Welt

Karl Kübel Stiftung für Kind und Familie

the David & Lucile Packard FOUNDATION

MELCA-Ethiopia



Vision

To see healthy and prosperous people that conserves their bio-cultural diversity.

Mission

To work for healthy ecosystems, resilient communities and critical young generation through developing and institutionalizing innovative approaches and experiences.

Goal

To increase the adaptive capacity to social and ecological shocks of communities and contribute to the creation of a healthy ecosystem and resilient community.

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About MELCA-Ethiopia

MELCA-Ethiopia was founded in 2004 as a non-profit making non-governmental organization. Its formation was initiated by a few concerned citizens who were closely observing the trend of the country's increasingly worrying environmental degradation and disregard for cultural values in ecological safeguards. As a terminology, MELCA means ford (i.e. a shallow stream crossing structure) both in Amharic and Oromiffa- two most widely spoken languages of Ethiopia. Also, as an abbreviation, MELCA stands for Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action. Therefore, the name is crafted to symbolically indicate the organization's commitment as a means of connection between environment and culture, youth and elders, conventional and scientific ecological knowledge, etc.

With this spirit, the original MELCA-Mahiber evolved into MELCA-Ethiopia and was registered in October 2013 with Registration No 0348 in the category of Ethiopian Resident Charity under the former Charities and Societies Proclamation No 621/2009. MELCA has been re-registered on the 14th of November 2019 by the Agency for Civil Society Organizations in accordance with the new Civil Society Organizations Proclamation No 1113/2019.

How and Why the Compilation was Initiated

For any entity (individual or institution) holistically assessing its operational attributes, as well as its pitfalls, and learning from them is a good culture and strategy to be nurtured for growth. Along this line, although it already understands that it has a lot more to do in the realization of 'good practices' in the true sense of the term, MELCA-Ethiopia had a desire to know how much its programmatic initiatives undertaken in the past years are supporting the targeted communities and the surrounding ecosystems. To this effect, with the financial support of david and lucile packard foundation MELCA-Ethiopia hired an external consultant to independently assess and compile some of its interventions that are showing good results in its four geographic operational areas in the country.

The overall aim or purpose of this compilation is to promote MELCA's strategic goals and enhance its institutional visibility through some of its useful accomplishments. More specifically, the document is intended:

- To show to different stakeholders some of the good works and tangible results attributed to MELCA's programmatic interventions undertaken in some parts of the country;
- To facilitate learning from, capitalize on and scale up the good practices as appropriate and as much as possible; and
- To share successful and replicable experiences with other likeminded users.

Acknowledgment

MELCA-Ethiopia is grateful and overjoyed by Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) Bale Project, Swedish Embassy (SIDA) Majang Project, Bread for the World (BfW) Wereilu Project, karl kubel stiftung (KKS) Adaba Project and the David and Lucile Packard foundation General Supports and Donations. And we want to show our appreciation. By your financial support we could serve our communities and conserves our environments and make our work possible.

The support that we are getting from the Oromia regional State Bale zone, Dinsho, Goba and Sinana Woreda, West Arsi Zone Adaba Woreda, Gambella Peoples Regional State and Majang Zone, Amhara regional governments South Wolo Zone and Wereilu Woreda is immense. We would like to extend our uttermost appreciation to the local communities for their trust, drive, commitment and understanding of project activities.

SEGNI PROGRAMME





SEGNI Programme Participants in the forest

What is SEGNI conceptually, its origin and purpose? SEGNI in Oromiffa, one of the widely spoken languages of Ethiopia, means seed. Also, as an acronym, it stands for Social Empowerment through Nature and Group Interaction. The experience was taken from a similar environmental practice called 'Imbewu' in South Africa, which also means seed in the country's Zulu language. Fundamentally, SEGNI Programme is a combination of three initiatives: the Cultural Biodiversity Programme (previously started in Ethiopia); the Imbewu Programme from South Africa; and the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) experience from Botswana which involves a deeper cultural exploration. It also benefited from relevant concepts and practices drawn from the literary sources.

MELCA initiated and introduced SEGNI programme to Ethiopia cognizant of the ongoing massive environmental degradation and cultural erosion in the preservation of eco-systems or natural resources. It was convinced that SEGNI approach would be instrumental to sensitize and mobilize young people to play an active role in reversing these alarming trends.
If done properly, SEGNI is a mind-expanding and soul-enriching practice about nature for the young generation and for others as well. It is in recognition of this promising reality that UNESCO has selected SEGNI in 2011 as one of the best learning experiences in its 'Education for Sustainable Development' motto.

SEGNI programme is designed to:

- serve as a platform where mainly children and youth get in touch with, deeply feel about and understand nature and local traditional values, inspiring them to be the future guardians of ecological and cultural diversity and connectivity;
- motivate the young generation for natural resource conservation and to respect cultural heritages; and
- facilitate lively interaction between the young and the natural environment through learning from and promoting ancestral ecological knowledge.

Strategically, if they are properly motivated and supported, young people are the most crucial part of the society to become future environmental protectors or eco-advocates (defenders of nature) no matter what career path they may follow in the course of their future. Moreover, the youth, if well equipped with the knowledge of preserving natural resources and related cultural assets of their communities, can develop a holistic outlook about their surrounding environment and eventually have a peaceful and harmonious relationship and co-existence with it. Hence, they would always stand up to question or say "NO" to any move that may threaten the local natural resources and eco-cultures.

How is SEGNI Practiced?

SEGNI is learned upholding and applying the following key approaches and principles:

- Children and youth empowerment, which emphasizes the need for working on the young generation to ensure the future of the currently increasingly at-risk or vulnerable
local eco-systems;
- Realignment and mobilization of the school communities (students and teachers)
towards the goal of environmental protection and echo-cultural promotion;
- Understanding and respect for traditional wisdom, as well as the local ecology; and
- Intergenerational cultural knowledge transfer from the elders to the youngsters.

In practice, SEGNI involves taking young people, mostly students, numbering up to 20, into a forest on a voluntary basis through a process accompanied or facilitated by local elders in order to help the students connect themselves with nature and culture. Subsequently, the young forest 'visitors' disseminate what they saw, felt and learned (physically, naturally, emotionally, and spiritually) from their stay in the forest to their fellow students; they also form SEGNI clubs and carry out a range of awareness creation activities related to nature, the environment and culture in their respective schools.

Specific SEGNI Cases

This sub-section outlines SEGNI activities at three selected schools in Bale Zone as case stories. These are: Dinsho Primary School (Dinsho town), Ali Bira Primary School (Robe town) and Urgi Berissa Elementary School (Goba town).

The clubs have been performing the following important tasks:

- Carrying out environmental awareness creation and sensitization activities using different techniques including dramas, songs and poems at major public events and annual school days;
- Conducting regular mini-media programmes in the school to keep the wider students abreast of environmental and other related issues;
- Participation in seasonal local tree/seedling plantation campaigns and in related environmental commemorations, e.g. 'Bio-diversity Day', 'Nayala Day', etc.;
- Undertaking occasional environmental sanitation activities which involve cleaning plastic and other harmful wastes in the surrounding urban centers (Dinsho, Robe, and Goba towns);
- Collection of indigenous tree seeds from old trees with the aim of preserving endangered plant species and biodiversity in their capacity;
- Collection and preservation of local traditional antiques in the schools symbolically for demonstration to the students and to other visitors as well; and
- Participation in fighting wild fires which occasionally erupt inside the surrounding forest reserves.

The students said that, through SEGNI exercise, they have all the more learned that elders are human libraries or archives of past records and oral traditions to be carried on from generation to generation. They also explained that self-understanding and admiring/


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Teach A Man To Fish is pleased to award MELCA with $1000 as a Country Winner in the EDUCATING AFRICA Pan African Awards For Entrepreneurship in Education. This organisation has been recognised for its innovative, entrepreneurial, scalable and sustainable approach to education in Ethiopia.

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Education that pays for itself

EDUCATING AFRICA

Nik Kafka
Director
Teach a Man to Fish UK
1st May 2013



Dinsho Primary School SEGNI club members performing art

loving nature are one of the legacies of the 2 to 4 day 'adventurous'/educational tours they made into the surrounding ecosystems (notably Dinsho, Harenna, Sanetti). All of them emphasized the eternal memories they have been left with especially during their nights in the forests.

They said that they have acquired unforgettable and lasting lessons about Mother Nature and created strong communication and attachment with her. They have felt, among other things, the immensity of the power of nature in providing peace of mind and tranquility to humankind. During the visits, each student was encouraged to write a memoir or diary about their stay inside the forests, which are compiled and kept as a record in SEGNI club room set up inside their schools for the collection and display of local cultural items.

Moreover, when asked about the sustainability status of SEGNI, the participants of the three meetings, mainly the teachers and officials who are coordinating SEGNI in the respective schools invariably explained that SEGNI is already planted on a strong foundation and rooted into the society and, therefore, it is unlikely for it to backslide; instead, it will sustain even without much external support. And, they claimed selfresponsibility to ensure the continuation of the initiative as it has already showed immense impact in positively changing and shaping the outlooks and behaviors of the students towards nature, culture, social relationship, and the environment. To this effect, the officials disclosed that they are incorporating SEGNI activities into their annual plans, like all other regular activities of the schools. This is indicative of a gradual move towards the incorporation or mainstreaming of SEGNI initiative in the school curriculums and programmes.





SEGNI Club member students met at Ali Bira Primary School, Robe town



A few members of SEGNI Club met at Urgi Primary School, Goba Town



Mr Tadesse W/Michael, Principal of Urgi Primary School, Goba Town

On the other hand, the school officials met also indicated that they are well aware that the SEGNI programme cannot always exist relying on external supports; hence, they are making all efforts for the programme to stand on its own feet ultimately. However, although this is generally the case, they still reiterated the importance of continuing occasional supervisory visits on SEGNI clubs by concerned actors (including MELCA) as it would further motivate them to perform even better and show more results in the future.

MELCA provided basic supports for the establishment of the clubs. These include a set of mini-media equipment and related supplies, computers, hand tools used for seedling production and planting.



Mr Yemisrakwerk H/Meskel, Teacher and Coordinator of SEGNI Club explaining about the Club at Ali Bira Primary School



Mr Teshome Muleta from Goba District Education Office met at Urgi Pr. School, talking about SEGNI initiative



Mr Kuma Tilahun Teacher and Coordinator of SEGNI Club at Urgi Primary School explaining about the Club

Sumeya Tahir is a grade twelve student at Dinsho Secondary School. She is one of the leading actors of school's SEGNI club.

Sumeya talks about the SEGNI club:
"It's been five years since I joined the club; I have known the club since 2008; Before I joined the club, I had no knowledge of the benefits of the forest, but after I joined the club, I was able to understand the benefits of plants to human beings, and the club also helped us to make a behavioral change in my life."

"It has also helped me to boldly present a variety of literary works by standing in front of people at various events organized by the club and has boosted my self-confidence.Before I joined the club, I had little knowledge of plants; I didn't care if people were cutting down trees and clearing the area; but now, when people cut down trees, I think they are killing people, It bothers me to cut flowers myself. During our five days in the forest, we were able to meet and spend time with students from other schools."

"There is a stick relay program held once a year at the club. This ceremony is taken from the Geda system and in the Geda system one Aba Gada will hand over the baton for eight years and in the same as SEGNI club system, one SEGNI club leader will hand over the baton to his successor in two years. When a club leader moves from eighth to ninth grade, from tenth grade to eleventh grade, and from twelfth grade to university, he assigns responsibilities to his successor in the form of a relay."



Sumeya Tahir Reading a poem

"In addition, the club has helped us learn about our culture and identity; the club has helped us see our future dreams; It has helped many of our club members to develop their talents. I now want to be a journalist, for example, and the club is helping me to achieve my dream. We participate in various events organized by the club by performing dramas about nature, presenting poems and performing various plays and music."

"Our families also attend SEGNI Club programs to express their support and encouragement; In addition, our club has set up a park on our school grounds and planted seedlings. In addition, our club has been involved in cleaning up the inside and outside of the school grounds. We teach our little ones to take care of the environment, because we understand that conservation and the existence of forests are the reason for human existence."



Dinsho Pr. School SEGNI Club Members and A mini museum of traditional items

Sead Mohammed is a grade eight student at Dinsho Primary School. He is one of the leading actors of school's SEGNI club.

Sead talks about the SEGNI club
"I was joining SEGNI club when I was grade four students. And when I went to Sanete forest, which is located in Bale Mountains National Park it was with my two friends for five days. One of our friends was a disruptive student at school, however during our five days forest experience in the jungle, he learned how to respect our younger and elders, and when we returned after five days from the jungle, our friend's behavior was changed and we also learned a lot during the forest experience. He increased the respect for teachers, he began to focus on his education, he began to do various literary works, and his attitude towards forests and plants is changed and he took care of the environment."

"Before I joined the club and I went to the Sanete forest for five days to learn about the benefits of forests, my view was insignificant to forests and environment; however, after returning from Sanete forest, I learned a lot of things about the benefits of forest, If the forests not conserved well it will affects all human beings for now and the next generation, I began to see trees as living things. When I see cutting down tree I feel sad and angry. We teach our little ones what we learned from our fathers in the forest."



Sead Mohammed

"In our school's mini-media, we will present local literary works such as fairy tales and poems through mini media equipment which is provided by MELCA-Ethiopia to our SEGNI club. Presenting literary works in Mini Media has helped us to gradually speak in public and express our opinions."

"The club is my life because there is no life without forests. I will do my part to restore the declining forests. We are working to keep our club in the school; when the eighth graders move to the ninth grade, we transfer the club to the seventh graders. Also, when the twelfth graders go to university, they delegate the responsibility of the club to the eleventh graders."



Dinsho Primary School SEGNI club members performing art and dressing like Bale Community Elders and blessing Participants of the program

ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME



A partial inside section of Munamuno forest Sacred Natural Site

This initiative is set with the conviction that the sustainable functioning of ecosystem requires putting good environmental governance mechanism/system in place, among others. One of the key factors needed to realize this is empowering the communities, local governments and other actors to conserve and protect the environment, as a common intergenerational good, through the application of a combination of conventional and traditional governance approaches including biosphere reserves, community conserved areas, sacred natural sites (SNS), etc. This in turn demands supporting the communities in different ways to exercise proper biosphere reserve management activities in their localities.

Also, it is necessary to widen the concept of biosphere reserve in and out of the school environment and to adopt workable strategies and guidelines on how the local communities can harmoniously and sustainably benefit from the surrounding biosphere reserves, e.g. in the form of non-timber forest products. This programme also relates to enhancing awareness about existing environmental/natural resource laws and sustainable development principles for key stakeholders and concerned environmental actors.

Three sample cases of sacred natural sites (SNS) have been covered in the study as elaborated as follows. Recognizing the environmental and cultural values of the sites, MELCA initiated and supported their protection through re-organizing the communities for the stewardship or management of the sites. More specifically, MELCA's support in this regard included the following:

- Technical assistance to interested members of each of the respective communities residing around the sites to get legally organized as an association;
- Provision of limited materials (such as nails and barbed wires) necessary to put protective fences around the sites;
- Provision of some livelihood inputs to selected households living around the sacred natural sites. This particular support has a two-pronged strategic purpose. The first one is to help the targeted households generate some additional incomes besides what they eke out from their regular occupations; and the second purpose is to minimize human pressure on the surrounding environment or natural resources, which the local disadvantaged communities put while they try to make ends meet.

Jarso Heto Sacred Natural Site Association

Covering approximately 11 hectares of land, this is an indigenous forest site found in Abakera Kebelle (locality), Dinsho District in Bale Zone of Oromia Region. According to some residents met for the study who are executive committee members of the Jarso Heto Sacred Natural Site Association, namely Mr Taju Husman (chairman), Mr Menur Adem (vice chairman), and Mr Tolla Degefa (member), the site is legally registered with the Culture & Tourism Office of Dinsho District as an association with 40 volunteer members having its own executive committee and bylaw.

Historically, as the members of the Association indicated, the site is attributed to and named after a local leader called Sheik Jarso and used to be a meeting place of the local residents during the Italian occupation. Its community service was discontinued for a long time during the previous successive administrations. Since 2012 (E.C.), however, the site has been conserved, protected and reconstituted as a memorial of Sheik Jarso, whose grave yard or burial place is still found inside the forest.

Resuming its original service, the forest site is now serving as a communal congregation place where the local people of different religious backgrounds gather occasionally to exercise their worships and prayers to their respective Gods- and hence the name sacred natural site. Here is the logical and symbiotic relationship between cultural preservation and ecological protection coming into play, reinforcing one another.



Members of Jarso Heto SNS Association met around the forest, Abakera Kebelle, Dinsho District,

The members of the Association have protected the site with a live fence (from cactus) to avoid illicit human and livestock interferences. The association has adopted a local norm that fines a person who is caught sending their cattle into the site with Birr 50 per animal. Moreover, the members of the Association patrol the site each night in turns (in a small group) against potential intruders who may cut and steal trees, grass or fruits. The members also share the grass grown inside the site to feed their cattle using cut-and-carry method.





The outside and inside section of Jarso Heto SNS, Dinsho District, Bale Zone

Munamuno Sacred Natural Site Association



A partial inside section of Munamuno SNS forest

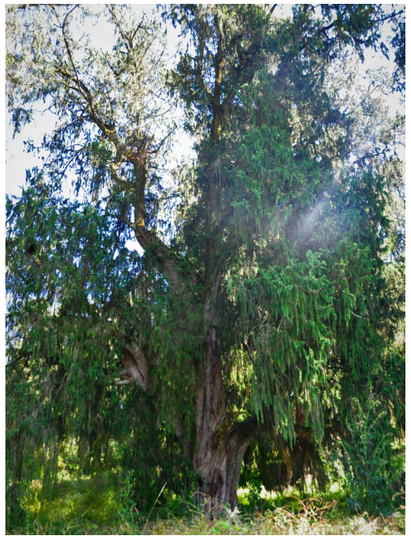
Covering about 12 hectares of forest land, Munamuno SNS is located at Zallo Ababo Kebelle, Dinsho District, in Bale Zone. Munamuno and Dinsho District in general are known for their high altitude climate, about 4,000 meters above sea level. The Association was reestablished in 2018 with 27 voluntary members (22 men and 5 women).

Three members of the executive committee of the Association were met during the assessment. They are: Mr Ahmed Ummer (chairman), Mr Mamme Hussein (secretary), and Mr Abdurahman Amman (member).

It was learned that the Association protects and uses the site for the same cultural purpose and in the same way as the case of Jarso Heto SNS discussed above.

Some income generating activities supported by MELCA were observed around Munamuno SNS in an effort to support poor households residing around the SNS and, hence, to protect the biodiversity of the site.





Some members of Munamuno SNS Association met at their village with the forest behind, and partial inside section of Munamuno forest with old trees

Haji Nur Jawi Sacred Natural Site Association

Located in Buko Kebelle of Goba District, Bale Zone, Haji Nur Jawi SNS covers about 5 to 6 hectares of forest land. The SNS had been established in about 2015 (2007 E.C.) through MELCA's initiation and support. Currently, it consists of 26 members (16 M and 10 F) and has an executive committee with Mr Kassim Kedir, Mr Abdella Mohammed, and Mr Beshir Aman as its members.

Seven members of the Association were met on the site for group discussion. These are Mr Abdella Mohammed (44 years old, with 13 children from two wives); Mr Abubeker Ibrahim (44 years old, with 8 children); Mrs. Genno Kassim (27 years old, 10 children); Mrs. Rabia Abduro (50 years old, having 3 children); Mrs. Rabia Mame (60 years old, with 3 children); Mr Aman Bilao (40 years old, with 7 children), and Mr Aliyu Mohammed.

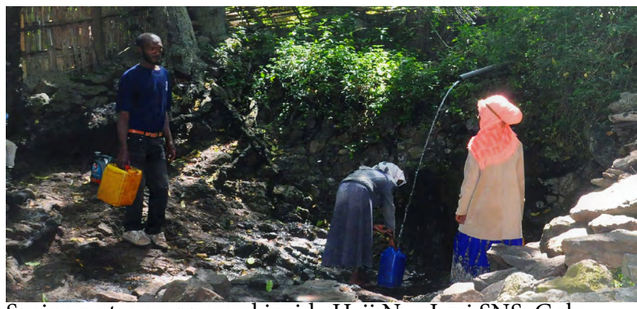
According to the participants of the meeting, the site had been abandoned and degraded before the Association was formed. Now, it is getting well rehabilitated and restored mainly as a result of the areal closure measure as well as some conservation and replantation works undertaken. As a live example, the reclamation work was observed causing the reappearance of a spring water source inside the forest which once had been lost as a result of the degradation taking place on the site. As a testimony, a few of the community residents were met fetching water from the flowing spring, which they said is very clean and safe for drinking.



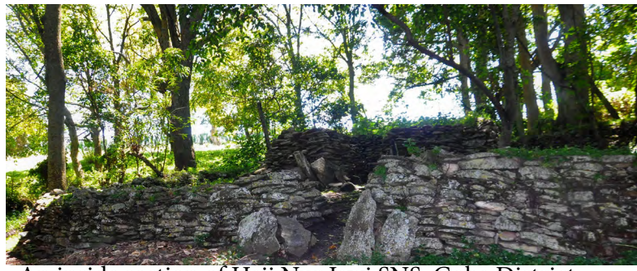
An inside section of Haji Nur Jawi SNS, Goba District



Some of Haji Nur Jawi SNS Association members



Spring water reappeared inside Haji Nur Jawi SNS, Goba.

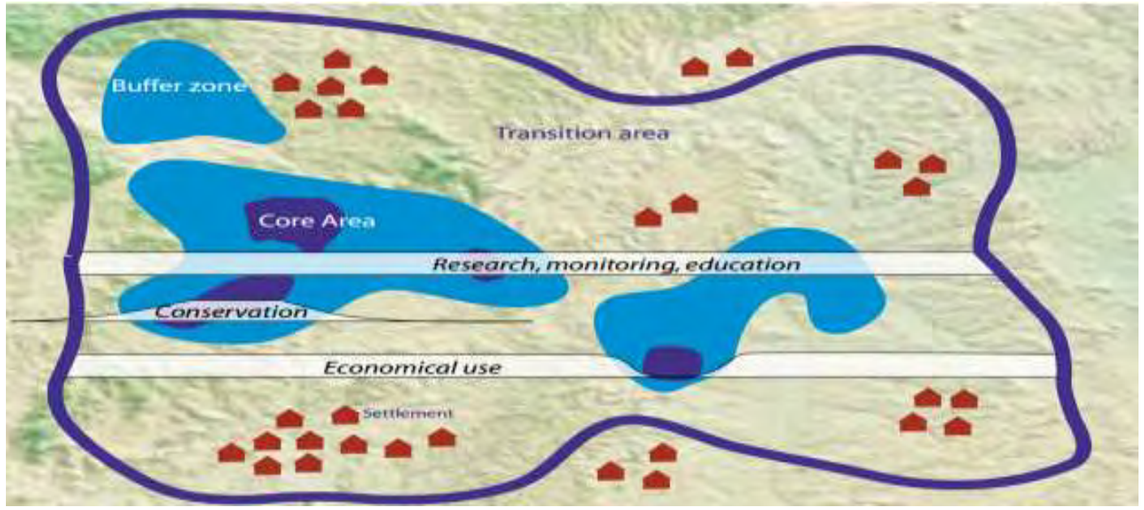


An inside section of Haji Nur Jawi SNS, Goba District



The outside section of Haji Nur Jawi SNS, Goba District

Biosphere Reserve and Participatory Forest Management



Sketch of a typical biosphere reserve with three component parts
(German Commission for UNESCO, 2015)

From the definitions of some pertinent sources, a biosphere reserve can be stated as a protected area consisting of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems meant for the conservation and rational/ sustainable use of the natural resources (waters, soils, plants and animals) and biodiversity of the area. Biosphere reserves are internationally recognized, nominated by national governments and remain under the sovereign jurisdiction of the states where they are located.

As defined by the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) under UNESCO, in order for a biosphere reserve to be fully operational, it shall fulfill three inter-related functions:

- **Conservation:** contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- **Development:** foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable;
- **Logistic support:** support for demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, regional national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

To fulfill these functions, each biosphere reserve shall have appropriate zonation, which includes the following three legally constituted parts:

- **Core Zone(s),** which are securely protected sites for conserving biological diversity, monitoring ecosystems and habitats and undertaking researches and other low-impact activities which are not harmful to the environment;
- **Buffer Zone(s),** which surrounds or adjoins the core areas, and is used for cooperative activities compatible with sound ecological practices, including environmental education, recreation, ecotourism, and applied and basic research; and
- **Transition Zone(s),** which may contain a variety of agricultural activities, settlements and other uses and in which stakeholders work together to promote and develop sustainable resource management practices.

These days, the concepts of biosphere reserve and participatory forest management (PFM) are emerging among the national natural resources conservation and management approaches/strategies adopted by the Government and other actors in Ethiopia. MELCA has been one of the forefront advocates and actors in this regard.

Some of MELCA's contributions with respect to biosphere



A partial view of the Majang Forest Biosphere Reserve

Taking the above mentioned and other related biosphere requirements into consideration, MELCA had initiated and spearheaded the painstaking nomination and approval process of two major forest biosphere reserves (FBRs), namely Sheka and Majang, which had been endorsed by UNESCO in July 2012 and April 2017, respectively. And, they have added up the number of biosphere reserves in the country to five together with Tana Aquatic Biosphere Reserve, and Keffa and Yayu Coffee Forest Biosphere Reserves. Once endorsed, they are now part of the WNBR.

In both Sheka and Majang biospheres, MELCA also facilitated and supported the establishment, legalization and operation of several participatory forest management cooperatives (PFMCs), among other things. PFMCs are community based organizations tasked with the sustainable protection and management of the forest resources, while at the same time having the right to collect or develop and use non-timber forest products (NTFPs) mainly from the transition and buffer zones of the biosphere they protect. NTFPs that can be harvested from the biospheres include natural spices, honey production, forest residues (fallen woods, branches), etc.

The Majang Forest Biosphere Reserve is further discussed as an illustration case. This forest is located in Majang Zone of Gambella Region. The Biosphere covers an area of 224,925 hectares with the core, buffer, and transition zones taking 19.5%, 32.5%, and 48% proportions, respectively. According to a study conducted by Metu University, this Biosphere Reserve is understood to have harbored a total of 188 plant species belonging to 144 genera and 70 families.



Mr Nega Ashagre, Head of the Environment, Forest, Climate Change and Biosphere Reserve Department

Mr Nega Ashagre was met for discussion about the Majang Forest Biosphere Reserve. He applauded the remarkable role MELCA had played in the certification of Majang Forest Biosphere Reserve as one of the world heritage sites. According to him, MELCA had also played a pivotal role in mainstreaming and institutionalization of Majang Biosphere in the Zone's government structure.



Majang Forest Biosphere Reserve Information Center, Meti, Majang

The Zone's Administration Council had decided the merger of biosphere with environment and climate change affairs under one institution, thereby creating "Environment, Forest, Climate Change and Biosphere Reserve Department", which is a member of the Cabinet of the Zonal Government, currently headed by Mr Nega. Mr Nega also indicated that such a proper biosphere institutionalization experience is so far unique to Magang Zone as it has not yet been observed in the other biosphere reserves of the country.

The department team leader also disclosed that MELCA had constructed an information centre for the storage management and dissemination of appropriate data on the biosphere reserve and handed it over to the Zone Administration. The centre is supplied with necessary basic materials (equipment and furniture) and consists of a meeting hall, data processing unit and office rooms. Obviously, this is an important capacity building asset for the Zone that would significantly strengthen the management of the biosphere reserve.



A small portion of Burai Lake located at buffer zone in the Majang forest biospher reserve

Participatory Forest Management Associations (PFMAs):

PFMCs were learned to be one of MELCA's good attributes in its environmental governance programme. Fundamentally, these are tools that empower and entrust local communities to play most active role in the management of local ecosystems, under the banner of conservation, protection and utilization principles adopted by the WNBR. MELCA practices PFM approach in the Majang Forest Biosphere Reserves Majang project area. Participatory forest management cooperatives (PFMCs) in Majang Project areas regarded.

In Majang zone there are 31 kebelles and out of the total 31 kebelles 13 PFMCs have been established in 13 kebelles, with the support of the project. The great majority, some 12, of the PFMCs are located in Mengesh District, while only one is in Godere District. Eleven of the 13 PFMCs are licensed or registered as legal entities, while the other two are still under process. The office had also helped three PFMCs established in Agnuwa Zone for the same purpose. Two particular PFMCs case stories of Gubeti PFMCs and Maki PFMCs presents as follow.

Gubeti PFMCs: Three members, out of seven, of the executive committee of the Association were met for discussion. They were Mr Ahmed Endris, chairman; Mr Ibrahim Hussein, treasury; and Mr Alemayehu Kassa, control. The PFMCs is currently housed in the premise of Gubeti Kebelle Administration. According to the persons met, the Association was legalized in June 2020) and has 158 members with 150 men and 8 widowed women. The Coopratives is governed by a bylaw issued in line with the existing forest management proclamation of the country. It had secured the map and certificate of holding of the site, covering 380.24 hectares.

From the discussants met, the Coopratives was learned to be vigilantly preventing the forest from any harmful practices coming from individual residents and, mainly, from investment/development projects. For instance, at the time of the fieldwork, the Association was at loggerheads especially with a coffee development company extensively operating in the area and also with a road construction project both of which, the members met believe, were threatening the wellbeing of the forest. According to them, they were taking their cases as far as they could and to any stage accessible to them, even including the Deputy Prime Minister's Office. Obviously, this, by itself, irrespective of what the outcome of their contest may be, is indicative of the level of determination the Coopratives has in protecting the biosphere they have been in charge of. However, the members of the Coopratives have so far not been getting any concrete benefit in return for their struggle in protecting the forest. Basically, PFMCs are supposed to benefit from non-timber forest products (NTFPs) which they are allowed to collect from or produce in the buffer or transitional parts of the forest like



Mr Ahmed Endris, Chairman of Gubeti PFMA, Mengesh District



Executive members of Gubeti PFMA met at Gubeti Kebelle, Mengesh

spices and other crops naturally available or producing honey in the forest. But, while the members of the Association are involved in traditional honey production activity, other NFTPs like spices and other crops are not commonly practiced in the Majang Forest. In the near future, though, they are expecting to plant and produce suitable spices and also to produce honey using improved beehives in the forest as promised and planned by MELCA.

Maki PFMCs: Three members were met from Maki PFMC including Mr Markos Gnogniro (chairman), Mr Ibrawiyan Gnogniro (control), and Mr Yonas Gnogniro (member), all of whom are brothers from the indigenous Majang community. The Coopratives had been formally established around 2019. It is legalized and issued with the map and holding certificate of the site, which covers 375 hectares. Currently, it has 51 members, increasing from the previous 21.

As their normal practice, the members of the Coopratives produce honey using traditional beehives hang inside the forest. They said that they are keeping the forest because it is their life. They do not think life without the forest. It is everything to their community, from food to shelter and cloth to medicine, etc. In the future, they would like to get external support to provide them modern beehive for more honey production and income generation. The Coopratives was sharing office space with Maki Kebelle Administration.



Mr Markos Gnogniro, Chairman of Maki PFMA, Maki Kebelle, Mengesh District



Members of Maki PFMA met at Maki Kebelle, Mengesh District



A partial view of the Majang Forest Biosphere Reserve

AGRO-ECOLOGY PROGRAMME

MELCA conceived the agro-ecology programme with a view to encouraging and promoting the production of healthy and nutritious food in the agricultural sector without significant negative impacts on the surrounding ecosystem. This is intended to be attained through appropriate biological and physical soil and water conservation methods, supply of ecofriendly agricultural inputs (such as organic fertilizers), technologies and energy sources as well as farmland conservation and integrated animal and crop husbandry practices, including landrace seed conservation. Also, such a production requires the knowledge of local communities and introduction of appropriate techniques that would replenish the soil with what was extracted from it. MELCA seeks to apply the experience and expertise it has in this regard in different socio-economic and agro-ecological circumstances as much as its capacity allows.

Soil and Water Conservation in Wereillu District

MELCA's field office located at a small town called Segno-Gebeya of Wereillu District, South Wello Zone, is learned to have undertaken some good soil and water conservation works, among other interventions. The project area is quite rugged and mountainous, prone to sever land degradation and, therefore, requiring massive conservation efforts. The gulley reclamation works the office had carried out at 011 and 06 Kebelles are found to be worth telling. The two gullies are treated with different conservation methods, i.e. physical/ structural and vegetative/biological, respectively.







A section of the Abakerie degraded land before vegetated and recovered, and during recovery work







Mr Suleman standing on a gabion retaining wall built at the middle section of the gulley, explaining the story of the reclamation work and a section of the Abakerie gulley reclamation work, the site being well vegetated and recovered

Mr Suleman Hassen, vice chairman of the Watershed Committee at a village called Abakerie Ager, 011 Kebelle, Wereillu District, was met for interview. According to him, the village consists of about 60 households and the gulley had been badly incised turning to a deep gorge because of heavy seasonal runoffs cascading from the mountain flank standing just behind the village.

The size of the gulley was estimated at about 700 meter long, 1.5 meter deep and 10 meter wide on the average. The conservation work of this particular gulley involved reshaping the hanging/unsettled gulley walls, building gabion check dams, piling up soil-filled sacks at successive intervals and critical sections across the gulley floor, and putting protective wooden fence along the gulley. The project provided material support for the work, including hand tools, cement, sand, sacks, and transporting stone to the worksite.

Similarly, three Watershed Committee members of 011 Kebelle, specifically Yebello village, were contacted to explain about the gulley treatment work undertaken at their locality. They are: Mr Derib Hassen (chairman), Mrs. Zeritu Shiferaw (cashier), and Mr Ashebir Ahmed (member). They estimated the residents of the village to be about 160 households.

Community mobilization was the main success story of the arduous work where community residents at both sites actively involved with great sense of ownership and contributed large amount of labour needed for the works for three to four months. The local agriculture office was also reported to have played important role in the mobilization of the community residents and provision of wooden poles needed for making wooden fences used in the gulley reclamation works at both sites.

About two years after their treatment, both of the gullies were observed getting well stabilized and reclaimed with soil/silt formation and vegetation cover along their floors and walls. Moreover, the Watershed Committees at both kebelles/localities were understood playing important role in conserving and protecting the sites. The village residents at both sites were said to have agreed to maintain what has already been achieved. More specifically, all community members are expected and obliged to refrain from cutting plants from the conserved sites or sending their livestock into the sites for grazing. If anyone breaches or infringes upon the agreed upon norm, they will be fined. The fine may involve cash or any other measure as determined by the Watershed Committees of the respective localities.





Gullied waterway before recovering with vegetative conservation measure at 011 Kebelle, Wereillu District





Three Watershed Committee members met at previously gullied waterway now recovering mainly with vegetative conservation measure at 011 Kebelle, Wereillu District

Landrace Seed Preservation in Wereillu District

This initiative was triggered by MELCA for the revitalization of landrace or indigenous variety of grain seeds and other native plants which have been on the verge of disappearance from the project area, as well as other parts of the country.

To this effect, an association, called Endelibe Landrace Seed and Plant Preservation Association, has been established in 06 Kebelle in 2019 (2011 E.C.) engaging 72 voluntary farmers as its members (48 men and 24 women) at the time of the visit. It is legally organized, licensed and supervised by the Cooperative Promotion Office of Wereillu District, while MELCA supports and facilitates its day-to-day activities technically as well as financially. The Association has a formal structure consisting of an executive committee with a chairperson, secretary, cashier, and controlling subcommittee.

The chairman of the Association, Mr Tilahun Abebe, who is entitled as 'a model farmer' in the Kebelle, was met for discussion. The preservation work involves collection of the seeds from different sources including markets, demonstration sites and farmers' fields and storing and administering them appropriately.

Promotion of organic fertilizer or compost preparation and utilization by farmers is an integral part of the landrace initiative and farmers are advised to minimize or avoid the use of artificial, commercial or inorganic fertilizer as much as possible. They are encouraged to take this activity seriously.

The Association is collecting and keeping indigenous crop seeds for distribution to interested farmers on nominal credit basis to start with. The chairman disclosed that so far the Association has collected seven varieties of local seeds (four belonging to wheat crop and three to teff crop) amounting to 805 kilograms in total. Before their issuance to the farmers, the seeds had been kept in a space which 06 Kebelle Administration provided to the Association temporarily together with a meeting room for the members of the executive committee.

Farmers who are members of the Association are entitled to borrow up to 20 kilogram (kg) of seed depending on the size of plot each farmer has. For the time being, each borrower pays a kilo extra per 10 kg they borrow. That means a farmer borrowing 10 kg is expected to repay 11 kg after harvest.





Model farmer Mr Tilahun Abebe with his landrace brown wheat variety harvested and ready for threshing at 06 Kebelle, Wereillu

He and his likes in the kebelle had used the local seeds in the just ended winter cropping season and, reportedly, they have collected good harvests. For instance, he had planted local wheat and teff varieties on three plots using compost (organic fertilizer). The crops were ready for threshing at the time of the visit.

Mr Tilahun said that he and the other members of the Association were very happy and satisfied with the results they obtained from the landrace farming they practiced in the last season on a trial basis, which motivates them to keep ahead with the practice more vigorously. Their happiness on the farming performance was in terms of both the quantity and quality of the seeds harvested.

According to Mr Tilahun, MELCA expended Birr 27,173 in purchasing and distribution of the seeds. It also arranged basic technical training for members of the Association in the identification and handling of landrace seeds and in the preparation of compost (biomass or organic fertilizer) and its application on crop fields.

The chairman also indicated that the Association is having the idea of constructing a warehouse for the proper management of the landrace seeds and is in the process of consultation with the local kebelle Admin office for land acquisition and community mobilization. As usual, MELCA can also take part catalytically in terms of technical and financial supports, while, of course, the members of the Association and the rest of community residents devoting whatever labour force required for the construction project.

Similarly, Mrs. Abebu Ali is an industrious woman in 06 Kebelle who actively involves in the Seed Association as well as in women's SHG; She had planted a local wheat variety which she had been offered (10 kg) by the Seed Association as a motivation to her tireless efforts. She expressed happiness by the outcome of the harvest she has just reaped.

Woreilu Experiment Field for local Seed Varity

MELCA-Ethiopia Woreilu Project Area has an experimental field for the local seed variety. In the experimental filed there is 30 local wheat seed, 3 local teaf seed, 2 local pea (Ater) seed, 1 local Shimbra seed and 1 local Lentil (Misir) seeds. Over all 37 local seed variety sowing in the experiment field (Demonstration Site) to produce, promote and conserve the local seed varieties for smallholder farmers in the project intervention kebeles.MELCA-Ethiopia got those local seed from Ethio Organic Seed Action (EOSA).

In addition to this on the experiment field MELCA-Ethiopia making organic compost and promote for smallholder farmers in the project intervention kebeles, than inorganic fertilizer.



One of Mr Tilahun's plots covered with local white teff crop variety ready for harvesting at 06 Kebelle.



A compost pit in Mr Tilahun's compound filled with plant organic matters (residues and household wastes) in the process of fermentation and being made ready for next cropping season.



Mrs. Abebu's local white wheat variety harvested and piled up, ready for threshing, 06 Kebelle



Woreilu Project Area local seed variety experiment field

ECO-FRIENDLY LIVELIHOOD IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

This is a programme designed to augment the economic status of local communities by supporting them to be engaged in eco-friendly on-farm or off-farm livelihood improvement schemes or income generating activities (IGAs) which are feasible in light of the local contexts. For on-farm IGAs, livelihood improvement can be realized through practical farm management trainings, use of eco-friendly agricultural inputs and technologies and other agro-ecology based improved agricultural practices while others can also be engaged in off-farm IGAs such as fuel saving stove production, animal fattening, beekeeping and petty trade activities depending on the local context and their interests. When implementing this programme in the communities, its friendliness to the environment is duly considered.

Livelihood improvement schemes are meant to minimize the economic need-driven pressure on the limited forest reserves and diversify household incomes in the project areas. As such, alternative means of livelihood have been created for disadvantaged/unemployed segment of the communities, with a particular focus on women, youth and minority groups, cutting across programmes that can be used as tools for the achievement of the overall objectives of each of the major thematic areas.

Generally, improvement of livelihoods are broadly thought to be realized through selecting and organizing disadvantaged community members into associations/cooperatives, practical farm management trainings, use of eco-friendly agricultural inputs and technologies, improved agricultural practices and engaging them in off-farm and non-farm alternative income generating activities such as animal fattening, beekeeping, collecting wild spices, home gardening and poultry.

Livelihood Supports

This intervention involved the distribution of income generation inputs to selected needy households (particularly focusing on women and the youth) that are unemployed and economically poor residing around and inadvertently threatening the natural forest resources for their survival. The supply of inputs include: ruminants/sheep, poultry, improved stoves, fodder grasses (Desho and Sinar), fruit seedlings, and seed money. MELCA, recognizing the dire economic problems of the target groups and the danger posed to the surrounding natural resources, initiated livelihood support programme in the project areas as an integral part of its agro-ecological and environmental governance programmes. The livelihood interventions are discussed as follows:

Livelihood intervention in Dinsho District

MELCA's project provided some of the residents of the Munamuno community (who are members of the Association) with heads of breeding sheep with a view to helping them supplement their limited household incomes. The recipients were also supplied with Sinar and Desho (Pennisetum pedicellatum) grasses to produce fodder for their livestock, including the sheep they were given.

Three specific beneficiaries were met for the study in Dinsho area. One of them is called **Mrs. Worko Roba** (40 years old with five children) and her 20-year old son called Abdurahman Kelil, both of whom received six heads of sheep three months ago. Altogether, the sheep had reproduced to 11 heads at the time of the fieldwork.

The third beneficiary met was Mrs. Urkia Usmael, 37 years old, who mothered as many as 11 children. She received three sheep which reproduced to five at the time of the visit.

The recipients of the support were quite optimistic that the sheep they possess now would multiply more and, in due course, they would start generating some income for their families.



Mrs. Worko Roba with some of her sheep

Apart from the provision of sheep as mentioned above, MELCA also supplied the association with 10 intermediate beehives some seven months ago to be jointly managed and used among the members. Although the scheme did no start production during the visit, the members were optimistic to harvest honey in the coming season as, they claimed from their experience and knowledge of the area, that the site is quite suitable for apiculture or beekeeping.



Partial view of the beehives provided with some members of the Association

Moreover, MELCA initiated and supported the establishment of **improved fuel wood saving stove** production association, locally named "Wolda Sherikuma" in Dinsho town about six months ago (i.e. about in May 2020) with eight members (five women and three men) identified by their first names as Kadija, Zara, Nigatua, Meko, Hayisha, Abdurahman, Tsegaye, and Harun.

According to youth Harun Hussein (M, 20 years old, chairman of the Association), MELCA provided a total of about Birr 47,550 as a startup fund for the Association for purchasing tools and necessary inputs including cement, coarse sand and fine sand. Dinsho District Micro-Finance Enterprise Office, which was one of the key partners to this endeavor, was learned to have played appreciable role in organizing and guiding the performance of the Association.



Youth Tsgaye Dangura talking about his engagement in the Association and the benefits he is getting from the project



Some productions of products of the association



Workplace of Wolda Sherikuma Stove Prod. Association; Youth Harun and Tsegaye (in front) giving explanation about the workshop

The members of the Association met on the worksite not only expressed happiness from the support they had been provided by MELCA but also see great hope in the performance of their Association in the future. All of them explained that they had been languishing from lack of job before getting this chance.

They disclosed that, so far, each member individually received up to Birr 10,000 from the incomes generated. And, collectively the Association had a deposit of Birr 21,000 in the bank at the time of the interview. Also, it was having a contract of producing 300 pieces of stoves for an NGO operating in the area at a total outlay of Birr 90,000.

They estimated one stove to cost about Birr 150 and wre selling it at Birr 300. If they are able to attract more demand and improve the products, the scheme looks viable. Just to cite a case story in this regard, youth Tsegaye Dangura (M, 31), secretary of the Association witnessed, "Besides starting to benefit financially from the scheme, I am now relieved from the mental/psychological instability I used to suffer previously, and attaining astonishing behavioral change after engaging in the work with other colleagues of the Association. Presently, as a result of the scheme, I am married and a father of a small child, and building my own house which is about 70% complete."



Mrs. Hayisha Habtamu witnessing about the project's support and the performance of the Association

Likewise, Mrs. Hayisha Habtamu, a youth and a mother of two children, is serving as an accountant for the Association. She explained, "Previously I was jobless. I'm now employed and getting better off. I have purchased different household items with the income I secured from the scheme. It's a great opportunity for me."



Mr Gezahegn Debalke, an official from Dinsho District Micro- Finance Enterprise speaking about the status of the Wolda Sherikuma Association

Moreover, the members of the Association were also learned to have the intention of establishing a nursery site for producing tree seedlings for sale to interested users and income diversification. They already had made a preliminary assessment on this option and were planning to submit application to the local administration to get land for the purpose.

Livelihood support in Goba District

Some livelihood supporting activities were encountered around Haji Nur Jawi SNS located in Buko Kebelle, Goba District. These include distribution of ewes or dairy sheep, Desho grass for livestock feed and fuel wood saving stove. The interventions were found to be quite promising according to the beneficiaries.

For instance, **Mrs. Ganno Kassim**, a member of Haji Nur Jawi SNS Association, received one female sheep around 2015. According to her, the single sheep has reproduced to six heads; she had sold three of them and was left with three others at the time of the visit. She disclosed that she had bought one donkey with the proceeds of the sales of the three sheep, which unfortunately had died a few months ago. According to her, it had been immensely serving her for transporting household goods, such as grain, farm harvest, etc. to/from marketplace and farm site.

Similarly, **Mrs. Radia Abduro** received one female sheep which reproduced to six. She bought one goat out of selling two of the young sheep. Also, Mr Aman Bilalo had received one female sheep which reproduced to five; he sold three of them the proceeds of which he had used in the construction of his new dwelling house.

Mr Abubeker Ibrahim had also received a sheep from the project which reproduced to seven heads. He had sold three of them to purchase fertilizer for his crop field. The ruminants possessed by the indicated beneficiaries are collectively shown on the group photo.



Mrs. Radia, Mr Aman and Mr Abubeker with their sheep herd, Buko Kebelle, Goba District



Mrs. Sa-ada Mohammed, another fuel wood saving stove beneficiary at Haji Nur Jawi SNS, Goba District



Mr Abubeker Ibrahim, Desho grass beneficiary farmer at Haji Nur Jawi SNS, Goba District

Livelihood and related interventions in Adaba District

Fuel wood saving stove distribution

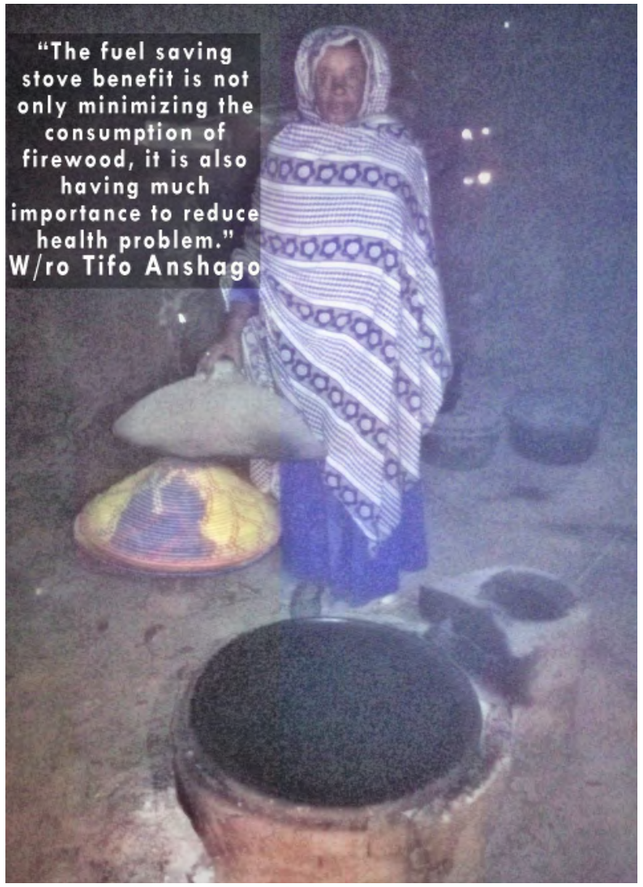
Mrs. Kedija Ibrahim is improved stove beneficiary at Bucha Kebelle, Adaba District of West Arsi Zone. She co-manages a family of five members including three children (2 males and 1 female), herself and her spouse. She was found being ready to bake enjera with the stove. She witnessed that the stove is fuel efficient.

In practical terms, she described that she used to consume three-donkey loads of wood every week using the previous traditional stove. But, now it takes her only a donkey load in a week using the improved stove, which means roughly 67% of reduction in fuel wood consumption. The stove had been distributed with a cost-sharing arrangement, i.e. 50-50%, between the beneficiary and the project. She also explained that, besides baking enjera, the stove can be simultaneously used to cook other things, such as boiling tea and making wot (sausage).

Not only did Kedija witness about the fuel efficiency of the stove she received but also about its convenience to use and its safety from excessive heat and carbon smoke, and associated health problems, which the users (largely women) used to suffer from the old stoves.



Mrs. Kedija with her fuel wood saving stove inside her kitchen



Mrs. Tifo Alshago another fuel wood saving stove recipient met in her kitchen at Bucha Kebelle, Adaba District

Medical items support to Bucha Kebelle Health Station

This is found to be one of the good practices that MELCA has undertaken at Bucha Kebelle, Adaba District. After realizing the dire capacity constraints of the Health Station in delivering the required health services to the communities, especially women and children, MELCA supplied it with some essential health service items, including, among others: different types of drugs, a delivery coach/bed, an autoclave (sterilizer), and a cupboard. According to Mr Aliyi Nebil, the health officer met, the support has considerably improved the service delivery capacity of the Health Station, which is supposed to serve a total of about 16,000 residents of the Kebelle.







A Delivery bed, a sterilizer and cupboard supplied to the Health Station by the project; the delivery technician of giving explanation

PHE Club at Bucha Kebelle, Adaba District

A Population-Health-Environment (PHE) Club was established in the kebelle in 2018 with six voluntary members who are students/youths. Three of them were met for discussion during the fieldwork. They are Mustefa Negesso (M, 25 years old, 10th grade), Radia Kedir (F, 22 years, 10th grad), and Yasin Hussein (M, 25 years, 12th grade complete). All members of the club were given basic skill training in such areas as: family planning, pre-adolescent marriage and other harmful traditional practices, sexually transmitted diseases, use of contraceptives, environmental issues, communication skills/discipline while dealing with communities, etc. They are now serving as peer educators to their fellow community members (mainly the youth and women) through one-to-one communication as well as in small same-sex group meetings.

They teach the youth and communities about the importance of contraceptives, preventing unplanned pregnancy, environmental issues, etc. Despite facing some challenges of resistance, taboos or hearsays from some corners of the society mainly for religious reasons (as the communities in the area are predominantly Muslim), the PHE practitioners indicated that they are generally observing and receiving encouraging feedbacks from time to time as a reflection of positive results of their services. They use MELCA's PHE Guideline (prepared in Oromiffa language) in their peer education activities. This is found to be a very useful tool for the dissemination of messages in their services appropriately and uniformly. The PHE Club was learned working hand and glove with Bucha Kebelle Health Station. The members are given operational guidance by and report to the Health Station.



PHE Club members met at Bucha Kebelle, Adaba District, demonstrating the PHE Guideline they use

Livelihood interventions in Wereillu District

MELCA's project office at Wereillu District of South Wello Zone was established in 2016. Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are characteristic features of the office. It has supported the establishment and operationalization of a total of 52 SHGs which are congregated into seven Cluster Level Associations (CLAs), each embracing six to eight SHGs. Altogether, some 865 resource-poor women are organized under the 52 SHGs, each of which embracing some 16 members on the average. Basically, these are micro or grassroots saving and credit groupings formed by interested women.

The process launched in the formation of the groups appears to be quite educative, interesting as well as painstaking. At the very initial stage, extensive agitation and awareness creation activities were carried out to convince needy women and bring them on board.

Individual households

Six women, three of them residents in different villages within 06 Kebelle and three others from different villages of 011 Kebelle, were contacted to tell their stories of engagement in self-help groups (SHGs). The first three were met at Mrs. Tayitus's house for ease of accessibility and saving time.

The first story teller was the host, **Mrs. Tayitu Yesuf**. She is a widow and mother of five children (3 females and 2 males), the two elder children being grade nine students. She is a member of Addis Alem (or Abebaw Shegen) SHG established in 2016, which currently embraces 20 members. She explained that she had been extremely suffering raising and educating her children single handedly. Before the project, she only had two small plots of land, a cow and a hen. She said she had rented the two plots out to other farmers on the basis of sharing produce. She had been a participant in the safety net programme engaging in labour based civil works in her locality. Her previous home was quite dilapidated and uninhabitable. Generally, for her, life was pitch-dark before the advent of MELCA's project.

As she had been almost in limbo, having nothing to do to address the growing basic needs of her five children, a woman called Meseret, who is her fellow community member and well known in her locality, had visited her. The visitor had come with the idea of the need for poor women to get organized in their locality. And, to make the long story short, upon the advice and strong insistence of the well-spirited visitor, Mrs. Tayitu finally happened to join Addis Alem SHG beginning with five Birr saving per week.

Subsequently, based on the status of her initial saving effort and level of neediness, Mrs. Tayitu had been given three ewes (breeding sheep) by MELCA project to augment her livelihood. After a while, the SHG had started issuing credit to its members and she received three cycles of credit, the last one amounting to Birr 1,500.

Currently, the saving rate per head has risen to 15 Birr every week, each member having a deposit of Birr 1,925, which totals to Birr 38,500 at the SHG level at the time of the visit.

Moreover, she had sold six lambs (young male sheep) reproduced from the initial three ewes she had received from the project at a total cost of 5,150 Birr, which she said had used it in the construction of her house in addition to the 12,000 Birr proceed/sale of a cow she had previously.

Generally, she explained that, thanks to MELCA, life now is quite better than the previous time. "Now, I am feeding, clothing and schooling my children without much hassle and suffering" she confirmed. She is cultivating and producing grains for household. She also said that she is even using a solar lamp for lighting her house, which is also the outcome of the project's support.





Mrs. Tayitu Yesuf standing in front of her new one-story house, her existing heads of sheep in the basement of her new house and telling her story inside her house, holding her saving book

The second woman met was **Mrs. Asaye Yesuf**, a mother of two sons form the same kebelle as that of Mrs. Tayitu, but different village. Before engaging with her SHG, a woman called Mrs. Meseret, a voluntary community organizer from her locality, had approached and suggested to her to try to start saving a little amount of money from whatever income she had been getting. She out rightly had shrugged the idea off, as it had been unthinkable for her to engage in the 'luxury' of saving money. She said had asked the woman, "I'm barehanded, what am I going to save?" Nonetheless, Mrs. Meseret tirelessly and patiently continued advising and insisting her to start saving no matter how small it may be. Mrs. Asaye said that the counselor had also informed her that there had been a lot of women like her in the kebelle who had been contemplating to get organized.



Mrs. Asaye Yesuf witnessing about her SHG and her status

In the final analysis, she had expressed willingness, though reluctantly, to take part in the 'saving initiative' and subsequently joined Edget Behibret SHG beginning with five Birr saving per week. Sometime after her membership, she had received first credit amounting to Birr 300, with which she had bought three hens. After some months, she had sold the reproduced chickens at a total cost of 1,300. In the meantime, the project provided her with four ewes. After some time, she had sold six lambs at an outlay of Birr 4,500.

With successful repayment record, starting from her first credit of Birr 300, she had continued borrowing from her SHG and reached up to Birr 4,000 in the last 10th round. In due course, she got her plot of land returned (paying Birr 4,000) which she had mortgaged previously because of her dire economic and health situation. She also bought a heifer at a cost of Birr 3,000 and sold it at Birr 6,900 after some time. Earning some more income, through time, she also bought another plot of crop land (0.5 hectare) at a cost of Birr 3,000.

At the time of the visit, she was saving Birr 20 per week and her deposit was around Birr 5,000 and that of her SHG was Birr 84,000, she estimated. Generally, Mrs. Asaye had a long interesting success story to tell. She was found to be a hard-bitten and exemplary woman who can motivate and inspire others how to eke out just from a scratch.

The third respondent met was called **Mrs. Abebu Ali** who has four children (2 males, 2 females). She is a member of Edget Behibret SHG and a chairwoman of Telewach Cluster Level Association. She said that 18 economically destitute women in her locality had gotten organized and formed the SHG. They had started saving Birr 5 per head. After a year or so, Mrs. Abebu had borrowed money from her SHG progressively for 10 rounds starting from Birr 300 to Birr 4,000 recently.

With the very first loan (i.e. Birr 300), she had bought a couple of hens for reproduction. She successively had sold the succession of chicks and bought a sheep for fattening. In the meantime, MELCA's project had also provided her four heads of sheep in consideration of her hardworking effort. With the last credit she took (i.e. Birr 4,000), she said had bought an ox at a cost of Birr 12,000 for fattening, adding Birr 8,000 from her elder son, who is a daily laborer. She was expecting to sell the fattened steer at an estimated Birr 20,000. She is also a member of the Landrace Seed Preservation Association, which had donated her with 10 kg of local wheat seed which she had planted in the last cropping season.



Mrs. Abebu Ali explaining about her story and her SHG

The fourth respondent was **Mrs. Zina Seid** from 011 Kebelle. She was a mother of two children (1 F, 1 M) and a member of Abeba Self Help Group (SHG), which she said has nine members currently, as opposed to 16 previously. Death and change of address or location of the members were explained to be the main reasons for reduced membership of the Group.

She was accidentally met on her way home from a marketplace. MELCA's project had provided her three female goats. She said had sold two of them to rent a farm plot and buy fertilizer.

The third one had reproduced to seven kids. At the time of the visit, she had two male goats which she was planning to sell to buy an ox. Saving of the members progressively has increased from the initial Birr 5, to Birr 10, and now to Birr 15 per week. She said her saving reached Birr 1,400 at the time of the visit.



Mrs. Zina telling her story related to the livelihood support project

She had taken six rounds of credit from the Group starting from Birr 500 to Birr 1,500. Also, more recently, she had borrowed Birr 3,000 from her Cluster Level Association (CLA) with which she bought three young female goats for husbandry. Mrs. Zina had also received improved stove which said had not only reduced her fuel wood consumption but also saved her from intensive heat and related health problem which she had had to suffer previously from the old traditional stove. Generally, Mrs. Zina reiterated that, these days, she has seen real changes in her living status compared to her previous condition.

The fifth story teller is called **Mrs. Fatuma Mohammed** from 011 Kebelle, Wereillu District. She is 25 years old having three sons. She is a member of Melkam SHG, which has 15 members. She had joined the Group with Birr 5 saving per week, which currently has risen to Birr 15.

She said MELCA had provided her with four ewes for rearing. With time, the ewes had reproduced and she sold five of them at a total cost of Birr 11,500 and recently bought a cow with Birr 12,000. During the visit, it was learned that she had five ewes, a lamb, and a baby sheep in addition to the cow. Her saving deposit at the time of the visit was Birr 2,280. So far, she had borrowed four times from her Group, the last one being Birr 1,740. In a nutshell, she explained that there is improvement in her household income and life in many respects compared to her previous situation.



Mrs. Fatuma Mohammed met with a herd of her livestock grazing on the field, a result of MELCA's livelihood support project in the last three years

The sixth respondent met was **Mrs. Ayalnesh Muhe** from 011 Kebelle. She is a member of Kogno Self Help Group (SHG) having 10 members. At the time of the visit, she was saving Birr 15 a week and had a deposit of Birr 2,360. She said the project had given her four ewes. So far, she has sold 11 lambs reproduced from the four ewes. Besides the small sheep husbandry practice, she was also engaged in a petty trading of some basic consumer goods, including edible oil, sugar, tea, soap, soft drinks, etc. inside her house for augmenting her household income. She had borrowed trice from her SHG ranging from the first one Birr 900 to the last one Birr 1,200. She had also withdrawn loan from her CLA amounting to Birr 3,000. She had bought two lambs for fattening. Generally she is doing quite better these days than previously in terms of her household income and livelihood status.



Mrs Ayalnesh with her improved stove and a bunch of basic consumer goods she sells at her home for income generation

Meeting with Edget Behibret Self-Help Group



Members of Edget Behibret SHG met inside the compound of 06 Kebelle Admin Office, Wereillu District. Mrs. Tsehai Tilahun, a young voluntary facilitator and member of the Group presenting a report

Some 14 members of Edget Behibret SHG were met inside the compound of 06 Kebelle Administration Office. "Edget Behibret" is an Amahric term which in English means "growing together". The Group had been established in April 2015 (2007 E.C.) with 18 members. The members had been given basic skill training organized by MELCA focusing on such topics as group microbusiness running, bookkeeping, social relationship, and dispute or grievance handling.

The Group has a set of stringent rules adopted by the members and meets every two weeks to review outstanding issues, address problems encountered, examine members' loan requests, and give decision on necessary matters. It was disclosed that the meeting is absolutely democratic in which each member participates and speaks out her mind freely. At the time of the visit, it was reported that each member had saved Birr 4,470 with the total deposit of the Association being Birr 80,460. The Group has issued 10 rounds of credit to its members eligible for borrowing with the first round starting from Birr 200 to the 10th round reaching Birr 4,000.

The role of the Group formation in terms of economic empowerment and independence and business creativity of the women has been one of the fundamental gains of the SHG initiative. The members witnessed that the Group has immensely equipped them with business or money making skill and ability, which they had been ignorant of previously.

The Group members also disclosed that fuel wood saving stove had been distributed to each SHG member household on 50–50% cost sharing basis. Besides its livelihood support, the women have also greatly appreciated MELCA's literacy initiative launched as part of the SHGs. They had started learning Amharic alphabets for some time, although unfortunately, at the time of the visit, it was discontinued due to the prevailing COVID-19. Anyhow, they witnessed that they have started writing and signing with their names, instead of using thumb finger print.

Interestingly, the participants vividly expressed that, over and above its economic value (in terms of the saving and credit services that it is providing to the members), the social value of the SHG is also a great attribute as it is serving them as a platform for reinforcing the social bond among and between the members collectively as well as individually. Witnessing this benefit, the Chairwoman of the Group, Mrs. Meseret Ayele, said, "We, the members, regard as a family, close friends and relatives to one another; even we yearn for the coming of the next meeting day of the Group. Beyond the formal procedures of the Group, we are helping each other individually wherever the need arises from any member."

Indeed, this is a remarkably useful outcome of the Group formation for its members. They also foresee that, through their increased effort and hardworking, they would achieve more improvement in the future in terms of the economic and social status of individual members as well as their Group collectively.

Finally, the women thanked MELCA wholeheartedly for everything it had done for them in the realization of their valuable economic and social organizations-SHGs and CLA.

Meeting with Telewach Cluster Level Association



Members of Telewach CLA met at the compound of 06 Keblle Admin, Mrs. Sa-ada Hussein, Secretary, presenting a report

Some 14 members of Telewach CLA were met inside the compound of 06 Kebelle Administration Office (Fig 62 below). Telewach CLA is a union of nine SHGs established in June 2019. It has 18 standing committee members represented from the SHGs, with two most active representatives from each SHG.

Therefore, as a union, all members of the nine SHGs, totaling 146, are also members of the CLA. This means that each member has the right to borrow loan, or get any legitimate benefit, both from her SHG as well as from the CLA. With government communications, the CLA legally represents the nine member SHGs. It was reported that MELCA had donated Birr 141,700 to the CLA as an initial capital or revolving fund for it to start issuing credit to its members. Until the time of the visit, the Association had issued loan to 39 of its members. The Association has a bylaw and meets every 15 days to review progress, evaluate the applications of members for loan, and decide on outstanding issues. It closely supervises the functioning of the SHGs under it and also the performance of the individual members who borrow credit from it.

It has four sub-committees, namely: SHG Strengthening Subcommittee, Loan Return (or Resource Mobilization) Subcommittee, Public Relations Subcommittee, and Education & Health Subcommittee, which are deployed to villages and households to do their respective outreach supportive and monitoring duties on the SHGs.

Livelihood interventions in Majang project area

Two potentially promising livelihood support activities were encountered in Mengesh District of Majang Zone engaging youth groups, although they were yet in a piloting stage. They were eco-tourism youth group and horticulture production youth group, each of which is elaborated as follows.

Burai Eco-Tourism Youth Group established and operates under the umbrella of Gubeti Kebelle PFMC. It has 15 youth members (10 males and 5 females). The Group is named after a very beautiful lake called Burai situated at the heart of the Majang Forest Biosphere. Four of the members were met for discussion, namely: youth Hassabewerk Kero (chairperson), youth Melkam Emato (vice chairperson), youth Asegahegn Tamiru (secretary), and youth Amanuel Telma (control). Initially MELCA-Ethiopia had approached Gubeti Kebelle Administration and initiated the idea of organizing unemployed and interested youth living in the Kebelle. The Kebelle Admin had welcomed the idea and subsequently organized the youths and handed them over to MELCA for subsequent activities. Then, MELCA had given them necessary orientation and guidance.

Subsequently, as a startup, it had supplied them with a small manually operated boat that can carry four persons to generate some income from recreational service which they intend to provide to some potential visitors coming from within or outside the area to enjoy Burai Lake and its breathtaking scenery. It also helped them construct a hut on the bank of the Lake





A small portion of Burai Lake and members of Burai Eco-Tourism Group met





The boat which MELCA provided to the Burai Ecotourism Youth Group and the hut constructed with finishing to be completed

in which they would cater for incoming guests with some foods or refreshments. Although the Group is still at a preliminary or establishment stage, the members met said that they see a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel, that one day their fledgling 'duck' would stand on its own feet and fly.

The other group met in Mengesh District was Epelori Horticulture Production Youth Group at Kumi Kebelle. Four members of the Group were available for discussion. They were youth Yaket Abrar (M), youth Wegene Abraham (M), youth Nikodimos Abiyot (M), and Mrs. Rebeca Yotaka (F). The Group had been formed with 15 members (9 males and 6 females) all from the indigenous Majang community.

They were observed engaged in banana plantation on about half a hectare plot of land. At the time of the visit, the plantation was only six months old. MELCA Majang Project Office obtained the banana seedling (which is Arbaminch banana variety) from Mekane Eyesus Church, Meti branch.

The plantation was observed to be on a pretty good and promising stand. Besides the banana farming, the group members were also observed practicing small beekeeping activity. Like the Burai Eco-tourism Youth Group, the Epelori Group members also disclosed that they were quite optimistic of harvesting some product from their plantation and beehives and getting some income after a couple of months.

Moreover, according to its Majng Project based in Meti town, the capital of the Zone, MELCA, like in the other project areas, distributed fuel wood saving stoves in the last couple of years to reportedly as many as 1,170 households residing inside the Majang Forest which covers both Mengesh and Godere Districts.



Epelori Horticulture Youth Group members met at their banana plantation site to tell their story



Epelori Horticulture Youth Group members met at their banana plantation site to tell their story

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Mrs. Meriya Ojelle, one of the stove recipients at Shone Kebelle, Mengesh District, was met at her house to tell if the stove has been of any advantage or benefit to her. She witnessed that the stove is fuel efficient. Mrs. Meriya said " When I began using the fuel efficient stove I can reduce the consumption of firewood used before and I can save my time spent for collection of wood. And besides baking foods the stove can be simultaneously used to cook other things, such as boiling water and making wot (sausage).



Mrs. Meriya in her kitchen with the fuel wood saving stove she received from the project, Shone Kebelle Mengesh District

Not only did Mrs. Meriya witness about the fuel efficiency of the stove she received but also about its convenience to use and its safety from excessive heat and carbon smoke, and associated health problems, which the users (largely women) used to suffer from the old stoves.



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