

MELCA-Ethiopia

Success Stories of Bale Project Area



Swedish Society
for Nature Conservation

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MELCA-Ethiopia

Vision:

To see healthy and prosperous people that preserves 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 increasing the adaptive capacity to social and ecological challenges of communities and contribute to the creation of a healthy ecosystem resilient community.

Background

MELCA-Ethiopia is a non-profit making nongovernmental organization founded in 2004 by lawyers and environmental activists concerned of the bio-cultural erosion in Ethiopia. The organization was established with the objective of supporting local communities become aware of the erosion of their culture and nature and its consequences and create a movement for the revival of cultural values of indigenous communities having strong connection with conservation of nature.

Whereas MELCA has an overall goal of increasing the adaptive capacity to social and ecological challenges of communities and contribute to the creation of a healthy ecosystem, it holds a vision of seeing healthy and prosperous people that preserve their biocultural diversity. Its mission toward the anticipated vision and goal is working for healthy ecosystems, resilient communities and critical young generation through developing and institutionalizing innovative approaches and experiences.

MELCA has been using innovative approaches to achieve its goal of increasing the adaptive capacity to social and ecological challenges of communities and contribute to

the creation of a healthy ecosystem. Its innovative approaches are generally categorized under four thematic areas namely Agro-ecology, Environmental Governance, Livelihoods Improvement Schemes and Children and Youth Empowerment that are considered would contribute toward the achievement of its set goals and anticipated vision.

Sub programs under MELCA's Environmental Governance program include supporting and strengthening traditional governance systems of communities and conservation of Sacred Natural Sites (SNS), promotion of Community Conserved Areas (CCAs), facilitation of Man & Biosphere Reserve (MAB) initiatives, rehabilitation of degraded landscapes, Law enforcement capacity building and awareness raising trainings and participatory community mappings. In terms of intervention areas, MELCA is currently working at five project areas in four regional states of the country. These are Bale and Adaba project areas in Oromia Regional State, Majang Project area in Gambella Peoples Regional State, Wereilu Project area in Amhara Regional State and Asosa project area in Benshangul Gumuz Regional State.

MELCA-Ethiopia Bale Project Area

Bale is MELCA's first-born project area. MELCA has been working at the project site since 2005. The three woredas where MELCA is operating in Bale zone, Dinsho, Sinana and Goba are located around the famous Bale Mountains National Park (BMNP), which is considered one of the biodiversity hotspot areas in Ethiopia.

The BMNP plays critical roles in protecting biodiversity that provide major sources of water, food, and habitats for rich ecosystems, and support the tourism industry - a potential source of income for local communities and the nationwide. The area is also known as water reservoir for millions of people living in southeast of Ethiopia and parts of Somalia.

The Bale Mountains watershed is also a source of mineral-rich water, firewood, grazing land, medicinal plants and food for many thousands of people. The area serves as a source of rainfall for agriculture and is of critical importance for perennial water for the arid lowlands of Ethiopia. Bale is known not only for its biodiversity but also the rich culture of the community that is strongly connected to conservation of nature.

Sacred Natural Sites (SNS), which is part of its Environmental Governance program for about the past eight years.

Name of project: Building the Resilience of Bale communities through mobilizing the community for ecosystem rehabilitation and improving livelihoods with the financial support obtained from Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) MELCA-Ethiopia attained through the interventions in these project area.

Some of the projects achievements and stories of change relating to these 1 MELCA-Ethiopia Vision - To see healthy and prosperous people that preserve 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 challenges of communities and contribute to the creation of a healthy ecosystem. two intervention areas, as testified the beneficiaries of the projects, are presented as follows:

Reviving and Conserving Sacred Natural Sites

Sacred Natural Sites are almost certainly the world's oldest form of habitat protection. Traditional beliefs systems are proved to have a profound contribution to conservation of nature through their philosophy, teachings, approaches to land and religious-based management systems. The close links between traditional belief systems and habitat protection offer major conservation opportunities, but also have a lot of challenges in today's modern time.

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Conservation of Sacred Natural Site (SNS) and promotion of Community Conserved Areas CCAs as well as rehabilitation of degraded landscapes

are part of MELCA's Environmental Governance program that are being undertaken at the Bale project area. In Bale, MELCA has managed to realize rehabilitation and conservation of more than 25 SNS accounting for about 120 hectares of land in three districts of Bale zone, namely Dinsho, Sinana and Goba. Out of these 17 are demarcated, protected/fenced and legally recognized as Community Cultural Sites.

The communities in Bale are known for their close connection with their natural environment and traditional belief system related with conservation of nature as Sacred Natural Sites (SNS) in Bale were full of vegetation before 3-4 decades, but now the areas abandoned and degraded. These were areas where the community used to conduct their rituals, pray for the wellbeing of all beings, including humans, animals and the vegetation, gather to solve their social problems etc. MELCA has been supporting the initiative through raising fund from various donors. Major supports provided include: conducting survey of SNS by the community in collaboration with Local Land Administration and Environmental Protection Office and provision of barbed wire and nail for those who want to fence their SNS.





Sinana Woreda Communities and Elders Celebrate Irreecha Festival at Sayidana Kadar SNS

Irreecha is thanksgiving holiday of the Oromo People in Ethiopia. The Oromo People celebrate Irreecha to thank Waaqa (God) for the blessings and mercies they have received throughout the previous year. The Irreecha festival is celebrated every year at the beginning of Birraa (spring), new season after the dark and rainy winter season.

The thanksgiving is celebrated at sacred natural sites in Oromia region. Sayidana Kadar one of sacred natural site located used to celebrating the festival in Bale zone Sinana Woreda however; Sayidana Kadar is degraded for the last 80 years.

Hussein Esmael is a SNS expert in Bale Zone Sinana Woreda Culture and Tourism Office and Alo Barsho is one of Oromia Abba Gada council members and Elders Association Member in Bale zone Sinana Woreda. Those parts of the community members assessed and identified Irreecha festival history in Bale Zone like sacred natural site on which the Irreecha used to celebrated and related issues.

Accordingly in the history of Bale zone Irreecha festival celebration could be realized with great effort of this individuals and financial support of MELCA at Sayidana Kadar sacred natural site after 80 years. Being first time attempt more than 2000 people have participated and the different

body of the community surprised and was happy for revival of Irreecha culture.



Hussein Esmael

Hussein studied History and Heritage Management for three years and he is graduated with Bachelor of Art Degree from Meda Wolabu University. He is one of experts actively working and playing a great role to conserve and promote the Sacred Natural Site through his position in CTO Sinana Woreda.

He is also one of motivated persons to working with MELCA as focal person in his working Sinana Woreda. And he is committed to realize rehabilitation and revival of sacred natural site resource and related cultural practices and Hussein has a great love and respect for his community culture and value.

Hussein expresses his interest in nature and support for cultural values having connection with conservation of nature saying “Before I came to Cultural and Tourism Office of Sinana Worada and collaborated with MELCA there is no any data which is related to Sacred Natural Site in Sinana Woreda. However after I came to the office and working collaborated with MELCA, the conditions are radically changed. This is due to the fact that I got support and chance to identifying cultural site potential areas and collecting all necessary data related each and every sacred natural site.”

He further added “I have conducted assessments on 20 sacred natural sites and collected necessary information, documented, registered, legalized and works actively for their conservation. I have been working carefully in close relation with Elders Association established by MELCA in Sinana Woreda. I also work with Elders Association



to study about Oromo Gada system and wrote book of Gada system having more than 270 pages that serve for generation to know about Gada system. In addition I also identified more than 100 medicinal tree and herbs from Elders Association and members of sacred natural site and compiling in the book form so the knowledge shall be shared to any interested persons.”



Aba Gada Alo Barsho

Finally Hussein and Aba Gada Alo Barsho asked all stakeholders at different level to be beside MELCA in efforts the organization conducts.

Youth Custodians for Sustainability of SNS

Since its establishment MELCA-Ethiopia has been working to conserve Bio cultural diversity in the Sacred Natural Site (SNS) through implementation of the cultural connection to nature conservation concept. One of the methods that the organization has been implementing is motivating the rehabilitation of cultural practice/knowledge that helps conservation of natural resource in and around Sacred Natural Site. For the realization of this objective MELCA has been working in collaboration and participation of relevant governmental sectors and



Munamuno Sacred Natural Site (SNS)

individuals starting from identification of potential Sacred Natural Site in project areas and organizing custodians to conserve through their participation.

The other activity that MELCA has been conducting in the project areas is empowerment of local community through developing their capacity by giving trainings and experience sharing field trips on different conservation issue at different time. The trainings have been implemented intensively to change negative attitude and increase understanding of the community related to the benefits of conservation of Sacred Natural Sites and thereby reducing destruction from this areas. Formerly MELCA and other relevant government sectors focus on

communities around the area, mostly elders, to conserve their SNS with the view that they know the importance of the site and understand easily as they have close relationship with cultural activities conducted in the site.

Munamuno Sacred Natural Site is one of such area found in Bale zone Dinsho Woreda. It is one of the SNS rehabilitated and conserved by elder custodians. The Custodian association organized around the SNS is devoted for conservation of Munamuno sacred natural site to protect the area from internal and external pressures through fencing the area and follow up. The efforts made by the custodians to conserve the area by fencing required some labor force like digging, carrying fence material and other activities.



Therefore this activity is not easy task for elders. Besides conservation of the Sacred Natural Site by the elder custodians has a limitation because of some reasons like dropout due to age, disease, death and weak coordination.

Therefore the Sacred Natural Site started to face treats like cutting of trees and damaging the fences by community members who are against the idea as well as agricultural expansions. However MELCA provided awareness training solve the problems to community members including youth and it was become fruitful.



Abdurahman Aman



Youth Custodians held a dialogues around Munamuno SNS

After the training youths of the community observing what is going on the remaining resource and the responsibility of their ancestor to convey to them. They believed that to be passionate person to take the role of ancestor high and critical responsibilities.

Abdurahman Aman and Ahmed Umer are among youth community volunteers to exerted their efforts to conserving the natural resource in Munamuno SNS.

Abdurahman and Ahmed explain that they have got a chance to hearing and understood about the importance of

Sacred Natural Site MELCA giving training for wider community. And they aware the benefits of sacred natural site from training given and observed the inverse human activity on it. And also they understood the limitation of former conservation custodians association.

They have begun their job by convincing their friends one by one and organized youth group agreed with their objective.

Accordingly they discussed with youth group in the community around Munamuno SNS to fence the site and fenced sacred natural site with local biological materials and materials donated by MELCA.

Currently Munamuno Sacred Natural Site is among well protected and rehabilitated Sacred Natural Site (SNS). According to them with this work they saved their Sacred Natural Site and related historical values of their ancestors. Finally their message for all conservation practitioners is to include young generation in all activities so as rapid success is achieved.

Win-Win Approach

Eco-friendly Livelihoods Improvement Schemes program works to improve the life of disadvantaged local communities through provision of alternative livelihood options but in a way that does not harm both the culture and the environment.

Livelihoods improvement schemes are meant to minimize the economic need driven pressure on the limited forest coverage and diversify income 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.

Kadija Nigatua and Kamal Fuel Saving Stove Producing Association was established in mid of 2019 in Dinsho town. The association was established through collaboration of MELCA and Dinsho Woreda cooperative office. In this collaboration MELCA having budget for this purpose notified Dinsho Woreda cooperative office to screen jobless youth with a focuses women to be organized in an association and engage in income generating activities (IGAs). Accordingly Dinsho woreda cooperative office organized





Kadija Nigatua and Kamal Fuel Saving Stove Producing Association

an association consisting of 12 youth members, 7 female and 5 male. According to Ahmed Abda Dinsho Woreda Expert of transitional enterprise and experience each member witness, all of members of the group were individuals that used to face deferent financial challenge and psychologically problem. Some of the members especially males were immersed in addiction of drinking alcohols and chewing chat by little money earned from daily laborers. All of the members were under severe financial challenge up lacking of what to feed their children. They were mentally restless and in great instability with their family on farm land and other support.

After they were organized into association fuel saving stove producing group even the process of convincing and taking the job was not easy task because their behaviors were deferent and odd. Due to this problem some of Dinsho Woreda cooperative experts couldn't convince them to start the production of fuel saving stove. As a result they decided to leave them and organize another group; however Ahmed Abda who is one of those experts, worked on them in committed manner.

Ahmed explains the challenge they faced saying “before they go we decided to save and give a chance to change their life. Finally we can convince them

with help of MELCA through giving them inspired training on production skill and by showing individual models which is previously followed the same road for their success.”



Ahmed Abda

After this all process and challenge MELCA provided them skill training and inputs of fuel save stove production like cement and sands. And to show the profit they may get from this job and to solve market problem MELCA promised to buy some of the

produced fuel saving stove. Within this situation they start producing fuel saving stove.

Accordingly the agreement with MELCA the association produced and delivered to MELCA with agreed price. And the produced fuel saving stoves is distributed for local community which is win- win approach in that help the group to get income by producing and reducing pressure from natural resource by distributing fuel saving stove to community around forest.

Now the association says the situation is deferent from what they were thinking and they are profitable from the job as promising. The association members as all reported they have great change in their life as compared to their former situations. Now they are getting better income for living and supporting their family.



Some fuel saving stove productions of the association



One members of the group stated “when we started as members of the association we came with empty hand; however now in addition to the income we have a skill of to producing fuel saving stove.”

In addition to supporting their respected families, some of them have bought 2 to 3 chicken and sheep to start rising while there are also some members who bought fertilizers and improved seed of wheat and potato to engaging in agriculture and increase their income and feed their family. So they are expecting more income from their investments on sheep, chicken and crops.

The association members individually have also some moneys from their bank account that ranges from 1500ETB to 3500ETB which is not the case before they came to the association. As association they have more than 46000ETB without including the production input they have on the ground. The association also reported that they have another order from other organizations to produce more fuels saving stoves so they expecting more earnings.

Finally each member of the association said that if it is not MELCA proposed the idea and helped them; they were live there live under different challenge.

Income Generating Activities (IGAs) for Improving Livelihood of the Community

Ganno kassim and Bariso Hussein are husband and wife and they are one of MELCA-Ethiopia’s 2018 IGAs (Income Generating Activities) beneficiaries selected from Goba woreda Waltai Wacho Kebele Buko Zone. Ganno and Bariso have 6 children and they have no farm land to live and feed their children.

Ganno bought one sheep in 2018 with ETB 1100 she got from MELCA. The sheep she owned gave birth to twin lamb for six times and the number of sheep in 2020 reached 13.



W/ro Ganno Kassim and her family



Ganno and her husband Bariso said “being the poorest of poor use sheep milk to feed our children which is not culture of our community. To purchase food and school materials for our children we sell some of reproduced sheep one by one. We sell each sheep for about 1300ETB three months after birth to support family.

Finally in 2020 the mother sheep died because of unknown sudden diseases. At the moment they have no sheep however, Ganno and her husband Bariso bought donkey with the money saved from sold sheep lamb for family basic needs. They use this donkey different uses such as fetching water, loading firewood for house consumption or sell and loading bamboo for sell. Genno load firewood twice to market in a week and earn 40ETB to feed her family while her husband Beriso use this donkey to lad bamboo once a week to earn 100ETB and support his family.

Speaking of the benefits, they have no what to eat and they noted that own donkey by the family would not have been possible without MELCA’s sheep support.

Ato Jeylan Usman and W/ro Dinkure muhammed are husband and wife with 7 children. They are residents of Goba Woreda and Income Generating Activities (IGAs) beneficiary of MELCA as member of custodians conserving Abukoy SNS.



W/ro Dinkure muhammed

MELCA provided them with two female sheep for breeding in end of 2018 with a price of 2000ETB. The sheep reproduced and reached to seven in number within three years. They sold four lambs for 5000ETB and buy fertilizer, improved seed, donkey, cloth and exercise book for their children. According to their estimation the remaining 3 sheep could be sold for 4000ETB. They are expecting 40 quintals of wheat from the formed and they cultivated using proceeds from sell of the sheep.



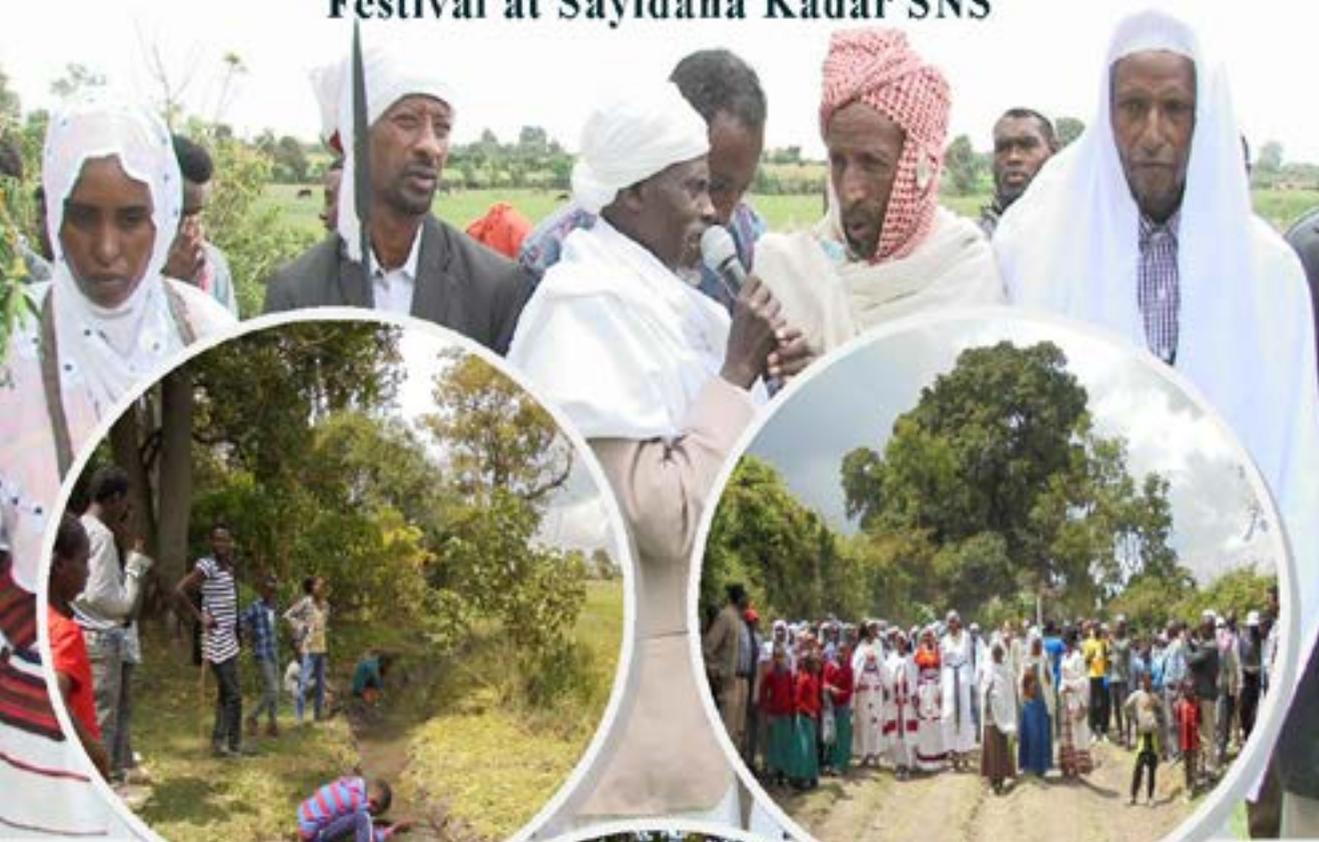
Haji Nurejawi (Buko) Sacred Natural Site



Gedebgedela Sacred Natural Site



Sinana Woreda Communities and Elders Celebrate Irreecha Festival at Sayidana Kadar SNS



Munamuno Sacred Natural Site



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