

Women Lead the Way in Conserving Forests in Bale, Ethiopia

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM,
September 14, 2022 /

EINPresswire.com/ -- A new report outlines how [Farm Africa](#) and SOS Sahel Ethiopia's Bale Mountains Eco-region REDD+ forest conservation programme in Oromia, Ethiopia has achieved impressive results in its priority objectives of reducing deforestation, cutting greenhouse gas emissions and increasing household incomes. It has also helped the community take significant strides towards advancing gender equality.

The report, [Making Forests Sustainable](#), details how over the period 2012-2019, deforestation in the Bale Eco-region was 58% lower than it was projected to be in the absence of the project. This avoided deforestation resulted in more than 25,000 hectares of forest being saved and emissions being reduced by 10.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. Meanwhile, the average annual household incomes of forest-dependent communities in the Bale Eco-region rose by 143% from an average 17,000 Ethiopian Birr per household per year at the start of the second phase project in 2016 to 43,000 Birr per household per year at the end of 2020.



FARM AFRICA



Women taking part in the Bale Mountains Eco-Region REDD+ Phase II Project, funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia, have played an impressive role in community efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation.



The forest conservation efforts are also bringing major improvements to women's lives in terms of time freed up from the drudgery of firewood collection and cooking, the chance to earn income from forest-friendly businesses and higher social status from taking on positions of responsibility in forest management cooperatives.

Women in Bale stand to benefit further from community plans to invest the funds they have recently received from the sale of REDD+ carbon credits generated by the reductions in deforestation achieved. Plans include a new local flour mill, which will relieve women of the need to undertake long, arduous, unsafe journeys on horseback to the nearest grain milling facilities.

Fuel-efficient stoves

The culture in Bale dictates that responsibility for feeding the family falls on women and girls. In a region where the vast majority of meals are cooked on open fires, food preparation dominates women's time, involving the exhausting daily burden of spending hours collecting and carrying home bundles of firewood.

Recognising the toll that firewood collection was exerting not only on the forest's resources, but also on women, Farm Africa and partners distributed a total of 5,961 fuel-efficient stoves, which reduce pressure on both women and the forest.

On average, households' annual consumption of fuelwood has fallen from 12.84m³ to 9.25m³ over the last four years, enabling the project to save a total volume of 34,500m³ of fuel wood that would otherwise have been collected from the natural forest. Women have benefited hugely from the reduction in their time and energy needed to collect firewood and cook meals for their families. Unlike traditional fires, the fuel-efficient stoves have capacity for two pots at a time, enabling two dishes to be prepared simultaneously.

Mother of two Etagegegnehu Mulushewa, who lives in the town of Goba in Bale, makes a living by selling the Ethiopian staple food, home-baked injera. She explains how a new fuel-efficient stove has halved her consumption of firewood:

"With the traditional open smoky stove, I had to use more than two quintals (200kg) of firewood

to bake 800 injera. But now, with the fuel-saving one, I only need one quintal firewood for the same amount.”

That means less time collecting firewood, as well as lower exposure to heat and smoke:

“I like the fuel-saving stove a lot, it doesn’t expose me to excessive heat as in the open stove. This one keeps me clean and allows to do more cooking chores at the same time,” said Etagengnehu.

The time saved from firewood collection and cooking is time that women are now able to invest in other activities, including income-generating work. Some women are now earning money from the construction and sale of more fuel-efficient stoves, which are subsidised by the project in order to encourage take-up amongst low-income households. Other women are engaging in other forest-friendly businesses, selling products such as coffee, honey and bamboo, spearheaded by the forest management cooperatives set up with support from the project.

Female forest guardians

Female leadership has been vital in efforts to monitor breaches to rules outlawing the cutting down of trees.

The 25 members of the all-female Biftu Beri Women’s Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) Kumbi kebele, set up in 2015 with the support of Farm Africa, patrol the Harena forest at the same time as collecting firewood.

Mrs Momina Adem Gutu, former chairwoman of Biftu Beri VSLA group, commented: “I could say women in our area are highly attached to the forests around and I believe our contribution to the protection of such resources is way bigger than men. As the responsibility at home requires us to collect firewood, we visit the forests daily; in the mornings and evenings. This has given us a chance to closely monitor and report on the status of the forest.”

When the women find evidence of illegal tree felling, they report it to authorities who take legal action, and sometimes take direct action themselves as Momina Adem Saida, another member of the group, recounted:

“One day, we received information that a group of eight people had been cutting branches off trees. Though we asked him to stop, one man refused. I was unable to bear the feeling, he was cutting our trees in front of my eyes with me there doing nothing. I couldn’t bear that feeling and took action immediately. I held his hands and took away the hatchet from him. My friend helped me chase him out of the forest. I am glad we saved that particular tree.”

Forest-friendly businesses

With more time available, women have been able to take full advantage of opportunities offered by the project to develop new income streams from forest-friendly businesses.

In a region where a major driver of deforestation is agricultural encroachment, it was vital to help communities to earn money in other ways than clearing trees for the expansion of farmlands. Farm Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia worked with communities to promote climate-smart agriculture, which enables farmers to increase yields on existing plots of land, as well as increase their incomes from the sale of non-timber forest products by improving the quality of their produce and developing links to higher value markets.

The work to support forest coffee production was particularly successful, with cooperatives achieving an increase in the grade of their coffee from grade 6 to specialty coffee (grade 1 or 2) as measured by the Coffee Exchange standards. This enabled the sale of more than 67 tons to the international specialty coffee market over the last coffee production season, which ran from October 2020 to July 2021, with average prices secured of between US \$4.34 to US \$5.45 per kg.

Women were actively encouraged to join community-based organisations focused on the production and marketing of non-timber forest products such as coffee and honey, with many women taking up positions of responsibility for their first time in their lives. The number of community-based organisations with women in leadership positions increased sixfold from 10 in 2016 to 61 in 2021.

Almost all of the 64 participatory forest management cooperatives supported by the Bale Mountains Ecoregion REDD+ project now require at least two women to be members of their executive committees.

Carbon credit proceeds

Income from the sale of REDD+ carbon credits, which is additional to the average increases in household income mentioned above, is enabling forest management cooperatives to invest in new community development initiatives. The project is the first of its kind to secure income from the carbon credits sale in the history of Ethiopian REDD+ implementation. Its success has paved the way for the creation of subsequent REDD+ initiatives in Ethiopia. The communities supported by Farm Africa and SOS Sahel are now actively managing the forest and protecting biodiversity in the Bale Eco-region as part of the jurisdictional Oromia Forested Landscape Programme (OFLP) REDD+ scheme, and they will continue to earn a share of the income from the sale of carbon credits now being generated.

The Hida Bira participatory forest management cooperative in Goba woreda has invested their carbon credit income in the construction of a new flour mill, which will save women from having to undertake arduous journeys to remote mills to mill their grains.

Munisa Kedir, Deputy Chairwoman of the cooperative, knows from personal experience how gruelling and dangerous those journeys could be. One harvest time when her family were receiving help from neighbours to bring in their yield, Munisa and her husband set out on horseback with heavy loads of teff and wheat that needed grinding into flour to prepare meals

for their helpers. Munisa had to trek from village to village to find a mill that was open. She finally ended up 30km from home, alone, having lost her husband en route. After waiting for hours in a queue at the mill, it was dark before she could return home, undertaking an unsafe journey through forests with just her horse for company.

“It was around 1am when we arrived near a water spring. I heard a group of hyenas screaming out loud. I felt petrified, my horse fled to me for his life. It seemed he was asking me to save him. I had no choice but to hold my breath, stay calm and see what would happen.”

While Munisa eventually returned home safely to her anxious family, her story highlights the importance of women and girls having access to milling facilities close to home.

Bale’s global significance

The project aligns with the Ethiopian government’s Climate-Resilient Green Economy strategy and marks a significant contribution towards the achievement of the country’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to reducing carbon emissions in line with the Paris climate agreement, which includes a stated aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing deforestation.

The Bale Eco-region hosts the largest Afro-alpine ecosystem in Africa and is one of the two major biodiversity rich rainforest blocks in Ethiopia. By conserving forests, the project contributed significantly to the conservation of flora and habitats of wild animals in the Bale Eco-region. Due to the ecological importance of region, the project’s work to conserve biodiversity in the region is of not just national but also global significance.

Despite its ecological significance, there is widespread deforestation in Bale, which impacts loss of biodiversity, alteration of hydrological systems, loss of soil fertility, forest loss and other important ecosystem services that ultimately affect the livelihoods systems of local communities.

Improved management and conservation are crucial to sustaining the Eco-region and its forests, and to enhance the livelihoods and resilience of its people.

The project in Bale had national significance by playing a key role in shaping Ethiopia’s national REDD+ strategy, generating learning for other REDD+ initiatives including the Oromia Forest Landscape Programme (OFLP) and helping build the capacity of local institutions, including local universities, by providing opportunities for scientific research by academic and research institutions. The project shared lessons with government and others involved in forest protection in Ethiopia in order that good practice could be replicated as much as possible at a wider scale.

Shewit Emmanuel, Country Director for Farm Africa in Ethiopia, commented: “Farm Africa is proud of the excellent work undertaken not only to conserve the forest in Bale, but to secure communities’ futures by developing sustainable livelihoods and a better quality of life for both

women and men, which do not damage the environment.”

Notes to editors

For more information please contact:

Libby Plumb, Head of Communications, Farm Africa, libbyp@farmafrica.org

Tel: +44 (0)20 70671237

Medhanit Gebrmichael, Communications Manager, Farm Africa, medhanitgm@farmafrica.org

The full report, Making Forests Sustainable - Lessons learnt from the Bale Eco-region REDD+ Phase II project, Ethiopia, can be downloaded from:

<https://www.farmafrica.org/downloads/2022/making-forests-sustainable---lessons-learnt-from-the-bale-eco-region-redd--project-ethiopia.pdf>

A selection of photos of Farm Africa’s REDD+ project can be downloaded from:

<https://farmafrica.resourcespace.com/?c=2130&k=f51bd84edd>

The reduction in carbon emissions achieved were audited and verified by the independent external evaluator TÜV SÜD South Asia PVT Ltd using validation of CCB and VCS Standard.

About Farm Africa:

Farm Africa is a leading international development charity that reduces poverty by unleashing the ability of farmers across eastern Africa to grow more, sell more and sell for more. We apply practical approaches to development, providing inputs, tools and expertise to enable farmers to double or triple their yields.

Farm Africa helps farmers to become more resilient to the effects of climate change and to access markets so they can increase their income and build sustainable businesses. We work closely with communities, the private sector and governments to make sure we’re finding the most effective ways to sustain natural resources, increase food production and help end Africa’s need for aid.

Typically, Farm Africa’s staff are from the local area, can speak the local language, and have a deep understanding of the local context. With 35 years’ experience working on the ground in rural Africa, we have a unique ability to spark change.

For more information please visit www.farmafrica.org or follow us on Twitter @FarmAfrica

Farm Africa is a registered charity in England & Wales (charity registration no 326901)

About SOS Sahel Ethiopia

SOS Sahel Ethiopia is a local NGO dedicated to improve the wellbeing of smallholder farmers and pastoralists through actions that enable them exercise their land and environmental rights, create fair access to resources and services, reduce the inequalities and power imbalance they experience and enhance the sustainability of the fragile environment on which they depend.

The organisation has more than 30 years of development experience with a proven track record in building resilience against climate extremes, enhancing food and nutrition security, improving access to rewarding market opportunities, securing access to land and forest resources.

About Royal Norwegian Embassy, Ethiopia

The Royal Norwegian Embassy supports activities related to forestry and climate, food security, education, governance, gender, migration and human rights. The Embassy also follows up activities supported directly from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad through civil society organisations and multilateral institutions in Ethiopia. The support to forestry and climate in Ethiopia started when Ethiopia launched the Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) strategy in Durban in 2011, where Norway and the UK pledged support for its implementation. Later, other countries have also joined this climate partnership with Ethiopia. Norway has been supporting Farm Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia's REDD+ project in the Bale Eco-region as part of this partnership.

Libby Plumb

Farm Africa

+44 20 7067 1237

libbyp@farmafrica.org

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/590858896>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.