

Conserving soil and managing water in the highlands

Spectacular mountainous topography is a typical view of east Hararge zone, Oromia region. In this chain of mountains, several woredas rich in natural resources are located; and Kersa woreda is one of the well-known woredas in the area. Watching the landscape of Kersa and its neighbouring kebeles is a feast for eyes of a visitor but for the community it's a threat that sends down devastating running water to the farms and residential fields during every rainy season. In the contrary, during the dry seasons, the community suffers from scarcity water to their farming activities. Although the woreda is known for production of cash crops such as coffee, 'chat' and vegetables, the struggle with seasonal changes that affect the water sources has been a challenge for farmers.

Mr. Mohamed Abdu, chairperson of Ifa jalela Micro watershed users' cooperative explains that few years a decade ago most of the household heads in the watershed were daily labourers working in the nearby towns and characterized by subsistence lifestyle as most of them don't have a plot suitable for farming. This is because the hillsides have been highly eroded, rocky and unproductive. Whereas the area along the lower stream has higher water scarcity.

Against all the odds, SLMP started soil and water conservation interventions in Kersa woreda in 2008. Since then, the intervention which is focused on hillside treatment of five micro watersheds mainly by construction of stone-bund terraces, area closure and gully control and other soil and water conservation technology has given a sign of hope for the community.



Figure 1 treated hillside and lower stream covered with good stand maize crop and potato Kersa woreda Oromia .

"After three years of consecutive effort with close support from SLMP, the land once again became productive; as a result, our husbands ceased working as daily labourer returned back to the farming and back to their home as well, this is how our livelihood changed and we stand firm " said Mrs. Kabira Ibrahim with smile.

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Figure 2 Stone wall bench terrace constructed along the hillside

Following the soil and water conservation interventions, SLMP supported the community to dig wells near their farm which will serve as a water source for irrigation during the dry seasons.

“Now the water is near our farm and we are producing potato and other vegetables both for market and to feed our family, and SLMP is ” said Mrs. Kabira, member of the watershed users’ cooperative.

Change in productivity before and after SLMP in 0.5 hectare of land

No.	Crops	Before 2007 in quintals	In 2014 in quintals	% of change
1	Maize	10	20	200
2	Sorghum	8	22	275
3	Potato	20	100	500

The physical structures constructed along the hillsides have halted the running water and highly reduced soil erosion. In addition, the controlled gully erosion protected the farm and residential areas from damage.



Figure 3: protected gully erosion in Ifa Jallela micro watershed

Ifa Jalela River is now serving more than 105 households living around the river and engaged in irrigation farming, the river capacity water to supply water increased and the dispute to utilize the water source was reduced.

The Ifa jalela watershed users’ cooperative has got legal identity to pursue the soil and water conservation activities in a sustainable manner and started production of crops on communal land and continued protecting the natural environment around the micro watershed based on the lesson from the SLMP program. The cooperative, as a legal entity, has a bank account with saving of more than 29,000 birr. Mr. Mohamed and his follow farmers argue

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That the SLMP support made the members of the cooperative to restore capital and to save at average of 8000 birr annually.

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