

Access to Land Rights and Sustainable Livelihoods for Landless Youth

INTRODUCTION

Access to land rights and sustainable livelihoods is a pressing issue facing rural youth in Ethiopia. Despite government policies and strategies aimed at addressing youth unemployment and landlessness, the number of landless youths in rural areas continues to grow. The scarcity of land and limited employment options pose significant challenges to the livelihoods of these young individuals. However, the Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP) is making a difference by restoring degraded land and providing landless youth with access to land for economic opportunities. The case of landless youth in Bedele woreda, Oromia regional state, and how the Resilient Landscapes and Livelihood Project (RLLP) is empowering these young individuals through sustainable environmental practices and facilitation of land titling showcases a promising new beginning for landless youth towards sustainable livelihoods.

THE CHALLENGE OF LANDLESSNESS FOR RURAL YOUTH IN ETHIOPIA

According to the Ethiopian federal constitution and land laws, every citizen above the age of 18 who wishes to make a living from agriculture should have free access to land. However, the practicality of this constitutional provision is challenging due to the scarcity of land and the ever-growing rural young population. Limited employment options exacerbate the problem of youth landlessness and unemployment in rural Ethiopia. Without secure tenure and access to land, it becomes difficult for landless youths to establish sustainable livelihoods.

FINDINGS

The Resilient Landscape and Livelihood Project (RLLP), under the government's Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP), aims to restore degraded land and improve access to land use for economic opportunities. By examining the number of landless youth groups organized and engaged in restoration activities, land transferred after restoration is completed, and benefits gained through sustainable land management and livelihood improvement activities, this case study has generated evidence on how landless youth can contribute to SLM activities thereby get access to communal land through the issuance of land certificates or other legal documents in exchange for their valuable engagement in restoration activities.



As part of the project, landless youth will be provided with access to land through the issuance of group landholding certificates or other legal documents once they have restored degraded landscapes, mostly communal lands. These certificates are granted based on community decisions in exchange for land restoration efforts. In Bedele woreda, 510 landless youth, including 253 female members, were organized into 26 groups and gained access to 130 hectares of rehabilitated communal and individual land for engaging in various economic activities.

The case study was conducted on a purposively selected landless youth group called *Warabi* in Bedele woreda. The group was organized in 2021 and engaged in various activities, including coffee seedling production, forest seedling production, vegetable production, vermicompost, and honey production.

The landless youth group consists of 10 members, including 3 females. The group was formed to carry out diverse activities such as producing coffee and forest seedlings, vegetable cultivation, beekeeping, and vermicomposting. These activities aim to enhance their livelihoods using the 0.4 hectares of rehabilitated land they received as a donation after undergoing rehabilitation.

Coffee and Forest Seedling Production

The *Warabi* group has produced 1,500 coffee seedlings each year on 0.049 hectares of land since its establishment. Each of these seedlings was sold to farmers and the woreda SLM project for 20 Ethiopian Birr (ETB). During the first year of this activity, the group earned 30,000 ETB, contributing significantly to their economic well-being. The group also engaged in forest seedling production, such as *Grevillea* tree seedlings, and sold them to the woreda office of agriculture and local farmers. The group produced 3,000 seedlings during the period 2021/22 and earned 30,000 ETB through the sale of each seedling at a price of 10 ETB.

Vegetable Production

Apart from producing tree seedlings, the youth group also produced vegetables, including 10 quintals of carrots on 0.2 ha of land, which were sold for 10,000 ETB. In addition to contributing to their income, this activity also enhanced food security in the community.

Beekeeping

Warabi also engaged in beekeeping activities, with 14 hives donated by the woreda agricultural office, produced 15kg of honey from each beehive and sold for 300 birr/kg. Since 2021 the group engaged in the beekeeping activity and earned 126,000 ETB which has significantly contributed to their livelihoods.

Vermicomposting

Vermicompost production was another activity in which the *Warabi* landless youth group participated. The group produced around 280 kg of vermicompost annually and sold each kilogram of vermicompost for 500 ETB. Additionally, they utilized the compost for their coffee, forest seedlings, and vegetable production farms.



Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The Resilient Landscapes and Livelihoods Project (RLLP) is playing a crucial role in organizing landless youth to restore degraded land and get access to land through legal procedures. The case of the *Warabi* group has demonstrated the positive impacts of access to land on the economic well-being of landless youth. By engaging in activities such as coffee and forest seedling production, vegetable farming, beekeeping, and vermicompost production, the young individuals are improving their livelihoods and contributing to the sustainable management of the environment. The success of the *Warabi* group serves as a testament to the potential of access to land rights in empowering landless youth and creating a more sustainable future for rural communities and an inspiration for other landless youth in Ethiopia, demonstrating the potential for a brighter future. To date, about 35,000 landless youth have been awarded landholding certificates across the country, among them more than 4500 are women.
