



Reintegration Assistance

Good, Promising and Innovative Practices

Practice #11

Creating Livelihoods through Environmental Rehabilitation in Ethiopia

Implementing entity:	International Organization for Migrations (IOM)
Project title:	Creating Livelihoods through Environmental Rehabilitation in Ethiopia (implemented under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa)
Donor:	European Union

Summary

The “Creating Livelihoods through Environmental Rehabilitation in Ethiopia” project, implemented in the framework of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, improved the socioeconomic conditions of migrants who returned to two villages of the Habru District in Ethiopia, whilst simultaneously rehabilitating the environment and enhancing access to water and food availability for local communities.

The Habru District, like many other communities in the country, is subject to chronic and transitory food insecurity. A major cause for this is environmental degradation, which creates a multitude of negative effects.

Over the course of 16 months, this small-scale community project, implemented in collaboration with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission and other local partners, mobilized returnees and community members to tackle several challenges experienced by returnees in Ethiopia.

The project worked across three levels to:

- Support the sustainable reintegration of returnees by increasing their access to livelihoods;
- Help better protect the environment against degradation and the negative effects of climate change by rehabilitating severely degraded land and enhancing the availability of vegetation through an integrated watershed development approach;
- Create spaces for community dialogues and awareness raising for the promotion of an environmental rehabilitation model, and of the rights and needs of returnees.

The project’s final report shows an enhanced capacity to climate change adaptation as well as high satisfaction levels among participants in project design, implementation and results.



Operational details

Description of the activity

Implemented from April 2019 to July 2020, under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, this interconnected and multifaceted project had the aim to enhance the socioeconomic conditions of migrants returning to the Habru District in Ethiopia, whilst simultaneously rehabilitating the environment and enhancing access to water and food availability for local communities. It contributed to rehabilitate severely degraded land with an integrated watershed development approach to enable fruit growing. Furthermore, psychosocial support was provided through the engagement of returnees and potential migrants in various discussion groups, community conversations and the establishment of football clubs.

Towards the end of 2018, IOM started discussions with local community members. The project was developed in consultation with them and in collaboration with a local implementing partner, the [Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission](#). It focused on regenerating the land to harvest rainwater and trap silt sediments, in turn improving soil fertility. Thanks to this, community members and returnees can once again generate income from the land.

1. ENVIRONMENTAL REHABILITATION

A 20-hectare area of severely degraded land was selected by the local community for rehabilitation with an integrated watershed development approach. Under this approach, various soil and water conservation structures were designed to reduce soil erosion and harvest moisture, allowing for seedlings and grasses to grow. These included hillside terracing covering 3.52 kilometres, the construction of 454 trenches and 280 micro-basins as well as 14,697 tree planting pits. The types of conservation interventions were decided depending on biophysical conditions of the sites. A total of 115 community members, including 50 returnees, worked intensely over a period of three months to build these structures. They worked seven days per week, receiving a daily wage for six days, and volunteering for one day. These interventions led to an increase in vegetation cover of the area as well as improved flood control.



Degraded land in Habru Woreda 013 Kebele before the project intervention. © IOM Ethiopia



Environmentally rehabilitated land at Habru District 013 Kebele. A visit by the EU-IOM Joint Initiative's Program Coordinator, Ms. Sara Basha. © IOM Ethiopia

Furthermore, a fruit seedling nursery was set up. Two thousand seedlings of different species (including local mango, grevilia, eucalyptus and various acacia species) were prepared in the nursery site. They were then grafted, distributed to the community and planted during the rainy season.



A total of 2,257 fruit seedlings (grafted apple mango and avocado) were distributed to approximately 164 families (including returnees and other members of the community living in the watershed area) who are now starting to benefit from the cultivation of these fruit trees.

Selected community members established a committee to oversee the watershed project area and the activities. The watershed area is guarded by local community members to prevent the cutting of trees and to protect it from human and animal interference. The area is protected from any agricultural activity and closed from open grazing.

Beneficiaries of the project are people who owned the watershed areas, returnees and potential migrants living in the project sites, with a focus on women.

The watershed development contributed to improve water availability in the villages. It was followed by two additional phases meant to maximize the outcomes of the project by assisting a larger group of beneficiaries. The second phase of the project included the development of 435 metres of irrigation canals, which allowed crops to grow despite very low rain levels in the months that followed the implementation of the project. A third phase of the project is now being developed to increase the coverage of the irrigation canals by 400 metres.

2. SOCIOECONOMIC REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

In parallel to the watershed development, IOM also worked with small groups, composed mostly by women returnees and local community members, to support income-generating activities in the short term while the land was being regenerated and to further promote environmentally friendly practices. Several activities took place to this end:

- a) The project supported the establishment of three self help groups (SHGs) in two targeted communities. Each group was composed of 15 members, for a total of 45 (13 male and 32 female) community members and returnees. The group members received training on financial literacy including bookkeeping and savings, as well as small business start-up. The groups then started small businesses, including a savings fund.¹

- b) IOM also supported some beneficiaries with individual economic reintegration projects that helped them increase their savings as well as their capacity to diversify their business.

The provision of training and start-up capital supported the development of small businesses, including shoats fattening, a bakery, a billiard house business and a merchandise retail shop.

- c) Members of the SHGs who have no land in the watershed area were also trained on planting and cultivating fruit trees in their family's land as well as on generating income from fruit sales. They also planted a total of 1,919 trees (1,739 grafted apple mango and 180 avocado). Beneficiaries estimate that within three to four years, enough fruit will be produced to generate a steady income from market sales.

- d) In addition to the growing of trees, the project is tackling fuel consumption. Results from a discussion with community members showed that there was a growing demand for fuel wood for cooking, which led to deforestation. The project therefore promoted the use of efficient fuel saving stoves.

A practical training of trainers on stove making was provided in November 2019 by the District's Water, Mines and Energy Bureau. Fifteen returnees (three men and twelve women, the latter being members of the SHGs) were provided with materials and machinery, and were tasked with disseminating the practice throughout the community. This has led to the production of 120 stoves with a profit of 32,560 birr (USD 763) as of May 2021. The beneficiaries reported an increasing demand for the stoves. This activity thus not only resulted in the economic empowerment of its beneficiaries, but it also had an additional, tangible impact on the environment through the reduction of deforestation.

¹ With a start-up capital of 2,000 birr (USD 48) provided by IOM, each group member was able to save around 10–20 birr weekly, representing yearly savings totalling approximately 23,120 birr (USD 550) for the three groups. These savings can be reinvested in the group businesses.



3. COMMUNITY DIALOGUES AND AWARENESS RAISING

Community engagement needs to be maintained for this approach to work.

Members of the watershed project committee regularly organize community conversation sessions to discuss environmental degradation and rehabilitation, the reintegration of returnees as well as the dangers of irregular migration (including human trafficking).

These conversations help to disseminate knowledge and experience, and improve community members' awareness on these topics. In addition, they help to create a sense of ownership of all the interventions within the community and have had concrete consequences: for example, discussions on reintegration led the community-based institutions to mainstream reintegration into their bylaws.

They also led to organizing activities seeking to improve social cohesion as well as social and psychosocial support mechanisms. For instance, a football team of 23 members, both returnees and other youth from the community, was created.

Furthermore, the practice of watershed development was shared with the local government structures, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the community, through field level experience sharing visits and review meetings with community, as well as district steering committee members. Government officials committed to scale up the project to other areas of the District.



Football tournament between returnees and host-community youth during the celebration of International Migrants Day, 2020 in Habru District, Mersa. © IOM Ethiopia

Approach and rationale

The Habru District was identified as an area of both high outmigration and high return migration. One of the primary reasons for people from this rural district to migrate was the lack of arable land, which made it almost impossible to earn an income. Before the project started, a resident explained:

“All my children left me because my farm does not produce anything anymore — they went to look for better opportunities. It’s getting hot here, and when it rains, the water brings rocks and debris to my farm, killing all my crops.”

Like many parts of Ethiopia, most communities in the Amhara region, including the Habru District, are subject to chronic and transitory food insecurity. A major cause for this is environmental degradation, which creates a multitude of negative effects.

These include: declining agricultural productivity (both crop and livestock), lack of alternative livelihood systems, animal disease, low access to clean and potable water, and accelerated natural resource degradation. An additional exacerbating factor is the lack of awareness from the communities themselves on how best to respond and adapt to these changes, which are the result of climate change and variability, as well as of human activity.

The Habru District (which was once covered by forests) is now highly deforested and mostly barren due to unsustainable practices. Forest land is cleared for two main reasons. Firstly, due to the expansion of agriculture, as land is often used for livestock, either for roaming, or to grow the food communities need to survive. Secondly, due to an increase in demand for wood for construction and as a fuel source. Deforestation and improper cultivation have resulted in severe soil erosion due to seasonal run-offs. Raindrops, instead of percolating to the ground and recharging the water table, are lost through run-off, making the land unfit for the agricultural activities that people’s livelihoods depend on.

These factors deteriorate the area, creating serious challenges for the growing population. This problem especially affects the landless and unemployed youth, hence the younger generation in the project area look to migration as a better option to earn an income and support their family.

Community-based reintegration was deemed appropriate in this area due to the large scale of returns putting a strain on limited



Seedlings plantation area. © IOM Ethiopia

community resources and making it difficult to absorb returnees. The widespread environmental issues are critical for both community members and for returnees, therefore addressing these issues supports both the community and returnees.

The project contributed to meeting these interlinked challenges in two key ways: Firstly, by enhancing returnees' access to livelihoods, thus contributing to their sustainable reintegration; secondly, by enhancing the availability of vegetation, thus promoting increased community resilience to climate change. Awareness raising activities further strengthened these approaches by helping communities to better accept, support and include returnees.

Partnerships and synergies

The project was implemented through a local partner: the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission (EECMY DASSC), North Central Ethiopia Synod Branch Office. EECMY DASSC worked closely with communities, local government structures, NGOs working

in the area as well as with IOM, taking advantage of its strong presence in the area and using its experience on disaster risk reduction to share good practices.

Partnership within the local community was crucial. The target communities and the government offices at district level (i.e. the Federal Environmental Protection Authority, the Land Administration Authority, the Labour and Social Affairs Bureau, and the Ministry of Women's, Children and Youth Affairs) actively participated in the project design, site identification, beneficiaries' selection (with due attention placed on vulnerable groups such as poor farmers, female-headed households, returnees and people with disabilities), decision-making, sharing of experience and resources, and participation in various committees. This contributed to local buy-in and ownership.

Fair representation of all community groups, including women, was given due emphasis during the establishment of the different groups and committees, such as the watershed committee. For example, one community conversation group of 18 members was comprised of nine women, of whom four were returnees.



Evidence base

Outcome and evidence

Around 205 households living in the area are benefitting from the rehabilitation of the land. Trees and grass have significantly grown in the watershed, erosion is controlled and fodder availability has increased. This has allowed beneficiaries to keep some goats for fattening which will increase their income.

Additionally, the trees will also improve the vegetation coverage of the area and contribute towards the amelioration of the nutritional status of communities through increased access to fruits.

The project's final report states that 80 per cent of the targeted households have developed the capacity to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change. These have been mitigated by enabling access to irrigation water. Training on efficient water utilization and improved agronomic practices will enable beneficiaries to harvest at least three times a year and to diversify their income sources and activities in the coming years.

In addition to these results observed through regular monitoring, IOM Ethiopia conducted in February 2021 a data collection exercise aiming at capturing the outcomes of this community-based project as a pilot. Data was collected through five newly developed community-based reintegration (CBR) monitoring tools: a CBR returnee survey, a CBR key stakeholder survey, a CBR non-migrant community member survey, a satisfaction survey (developed internally for this exercise) and the Reintegration Sustainability Survey (which was excluded from the analysis due to the low number of beneficiaries interviewed).

The overall perception of respondents towards the project was positive with 92 per cent reporting satisfaction towards the project design, implementation and results. Of the key stakeholders surveyed, 88 per cent reported increased employment opportunities for returnees and non-migrant community members as a result of the community-based reintegration activities implemented under the project. Key stakeholders especially valued the self-help groups, the community dialogue sessions and the increased job opportunities along with cultural activities (in that order).

According to the project's final report, 70 per cent of targeted returnees and community members reported increased access to income-generating activities. However, this has not necessarily resulted in economic self-sufficiency for all beneficiaries yet.

Surveyed returnees and non-migrant community members, who reported being economically self-sufficient, were found to be 45 per cent among returnees and 9 per cent among non-migrant community members.

Self-sufficiency is likely to increase in the future as a steadier income is expected from fruit selling, once the trees start producing more. In addition to its positive impact on climate and livelihoods, the project has also shown results in the social and psychosocial dimensions.

When asked about basic social services, the vast majority (96%) of the key stakeholders reported at least one basic social service that improved. Specifically, they reported improvement of safe drinking water (87%), documentation (79%), and justice and law (67%).² Both returnees (91%) and non-migrant community members (94%), reported feeling a sense of belonging to the community.

Furthermore, the data analysis performed from the stakeholders' survey showed that the majority of them (79%) reported improved social relations between returnees and non-migrant community members. This could be partly due to the level of community participation in the project. Among all interviewees, 91 per cent of returnees, 84 per cent of community members and 79 per cent of key stakeholders reported that they have been consulted during the identification and design phases of the community-based reintegration activities.

Among all the respondent groups a high percentage (100% for returnees, 90% for community members and 92% for key stakeholders) reported having participated in the implementation of the community-based activities. In addition, the vast majority of the respondents reported that their opinion on implementation was considered. The overall perception of both returnees and non-migrant community members was that the CBR activities responded to their identified needs.

² The rehabilitated watershed led to increased discharging capacity of the spring and highly reduced flooding hazards. Furthermore, water management committees were established, leading to an improvement of water distribution. Fair distribution of water has also been significantly enhanced.



Recommendations

Consider the immediate and longer-term needs of returnees as well as the needs of the community.

This project addressed several levels of assistance simultaneously, taking into account both the immediate needs of returnees (mainly through income generation) and their longer-term needs (social acceptance among others), as well as the needs of the community (fighting land degradation, restoring livelihoods opportunities).

Adapt the project inputs and outputs to the local context and needs.

Aim for project types that best utilize locally available natural resources and that have potential of generating jobs and income for larger segments of the community, returnees and potential migrants.

Collaborate with local actors and relevant experts.

Such an approach can only be achieved with the buy-in of local actors, who know the area well, and the guidance of experts. Close collaboration and partnership among different actors are needed for these interconnected actions.

Capitalize on community dialogues.

These were essential to the project's success and continuity. Community dialogues can contribute to the buy-in of the local communities and improve cohesion among returnees and community members.

Ensure fair representation and leverage local engagement.

Various groups from the community should be represented in the design and implementation of the project (including religious leaders, opinion leaders, women, youth representatives and representatives of community-based institutions). The establishment of committees to oversee the project and to provide regular updates to community members on the project's outcomes, should be consistently envisaged when implementing community-based projects.

Conditions for replicability

A project that aims to support the sustainable reintegration of returnees, whilst also rehabilitating the environment, can be replicated in a wide range of contexts according to the area's specific needs.

Government involvement and active engagement of key local stakeholders is crucial. This includes local community members who must be willing to participate and take ownership of the project.

A sufficient amount of funding needs to be available in order to invest in the most efficient technologies. This does not necessarily mean costly investments, but making needed resources accessible. Technologies that use locally available materials are encouraged.

The environmental rehabilitation and income-generating activities should be complemented with capacity building to support stakeholders maintaining and further developing these initiatives.

EU-IOM Knowledge Management Hub

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