



Bale Bulletin

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Bale Eco-Region Sustainable Management Programme (BERSMP)

BERSMP is a jointly implemented Government (Bale Forest Enterprise) and Non Government (FARM-Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia) partnership. The goal is to mutually enhance the unique biodiversity and vital ecological processes of the Bale Mountains Eco-Region as well as the social and economic well being of the communities dependent on the Eco-Region's natural resources.

First Forest Management Agreements Signed in the Bale Eco-Region

Securing access and use rights to forests and other natural resources is a crucial stage of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) in the Bale Mountains. After three years of hard work, the first legal agreements were signed in July between community groups and the Bale Forest Enterprise for the joint management of natural resources. The Forest Management Agreement (FMA) is the same as a business contract, with both parties agreeing to undertake specific roles in order to sustainably conserve and utilize the forest for everybody's benefit.

FMA's were signed in Chiri and Wabero Kebele of Dello Mena Woreda and Kumbi and Shawe kebele of Harena Bulluk Woreda. With the signings complete, over 25,000 hectares of forest will now be managed jointly between the Oromia Government and the local community. This is now one of the biggest PFM sites in the country and will only continue to grow in the coming months and years.

Each FMA stipulates the rights, responsibilities and revenues that the Bale Forest Enterprise and the Community hold. Undertaking responsibilities for forest management guarantees revenues from forest products such as coffee and honey. This includes payments for environmental services and carbon sequestration if they are secured in the future.

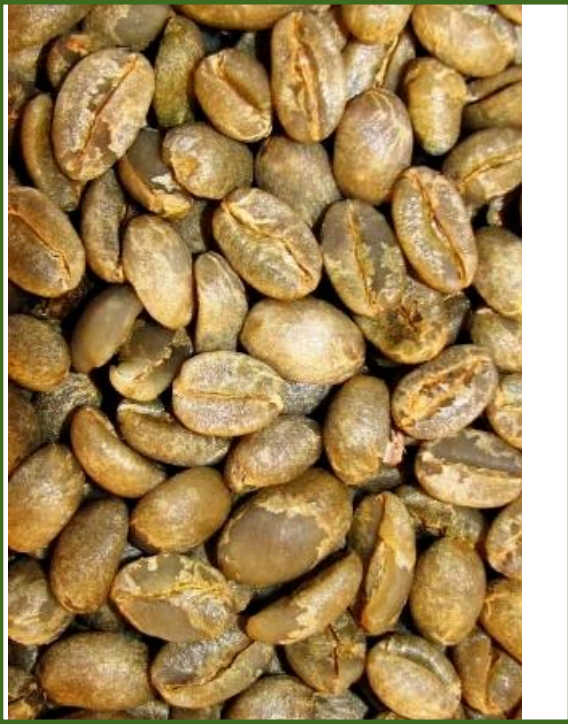
With secured forest use rights, the forest management groups can now invest in sustainable use. In Dello Mena and Harena Bulluk this includes wild forest coffee and honey as well as a range of aromatic and medicinal plants. The Bale Forest Enterprise will support the community through technical assistance as well as acting as a bulking and semi-processing facility for forest products. ■



Belay Asfaw, Manager of the Bale Forest Enterprise, concludes the forest management agreement for Kumbi kebele

Wild Forest Coffee Exported

Improving the livelihoods of forest dwelling and neighboring people in the Bale Mountains is being achieved through the promotion of non-timber forest products (NTFP) such as bamboo, coffee and honey. Despite the renown of Ethiopian coffee, developing a consistent quality coffee from the Bale Eco-Region has been a great challenge.



Green sun-dried forest coffee from Harena,
from a sample exported to Italy

Bale coffee has never been held in the same regard as other Ethiopian coffees, a fact confirmed when a sample was first 'cupped' in 2007 with poor results. The major cause of this was mixing ripe and unripe cherries before drying them on the ground and packing them into plastic bags. The heat inside the bags caused mould, which combined with the unripe cherries, resulted in dull tasting coffee.

Since then, BERSMP and the Bale Forest Enterprise have been working closely with growers in the Harena Forest to improve their coffee and to construct suitable drying and storage facilities. Increasing acceptance of PFM has improved tenure over coffee, which means that cherries no longer have to be harvested at one time for fear of theft. The red cherries that are harvested are now dried on raised beds and then stored in sisal sacks before being transported to the new store in Mena Town. But all of this extra effort needs extra reward, and in November 2008 the Bale Forest Enterprise was able to offer a 25% premium to growers on three tons of improved coffee. So what does forest coffee from Bale

taste like today? In the words of Union Roasters in London:

The special natural sun-dried Bale Mountain wild forest arabica has a mild sweet fruity acidity with medium light body and cinnamon-chocolate tinged aromas and flavors. They also remarked that the shape of the beans is akin to Harar Longberry with many long boat shaped beans instead of the usual rounded oval shape.

The search was then on to find a buyer/roaster who was interested in this relatively small quantity of specialty coffee. In July an order for 525 kg of wild Harena forest coffee was placed by a gourmet roaster in Trieste, northern Italy. This represents the first export of coffee from the Bale Eco-Region, which was realized by the Bale Forest Enterprise. ■

Leading the Fight against Climate Change

In January 2009, staff from BERSMP and international consultants from Unique Forestry Consultants (Germany), TerraCarbon (USA) and Climate Focus (Netherlands) chartered a flight over the Bale Mountains to help assess forest coverage in the Eco-Region. The purpose was to gain a greater understanding of the resource base with a view to tendering Bale's carbon stocks on the international market.

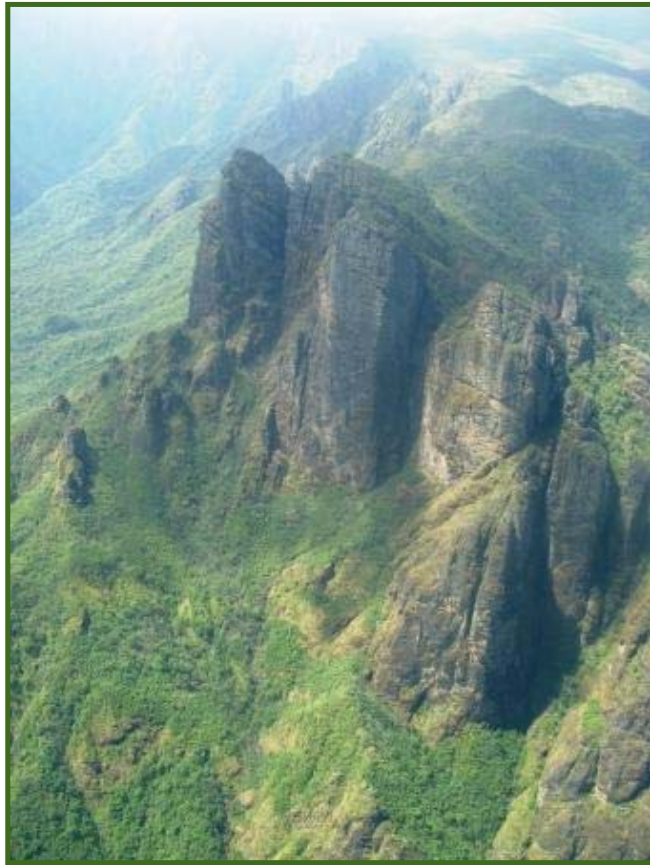
Carbon markets have emerged in recent years as a means to protect forest resources and finance environmental rehabilitation. Since 2007, BERSMP has been exploring the possibility of establishing a Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) project over an area of 500,000 hectares based on the participatory management of forests.

Gaining the benefits from carbon markets requires sustainable management of a core area as well as the establishment of zones for leakage. Leakages, in carbon terms, are areas where increased utilization is likely to

take place as a result of restrictions over the project area. The technical requirements to establish REDD projects are large and the significant financial returns do not always guarantee a profit when costs are accounted. However, when added to other direct and indirect values of forests, carbon finance can often be an important component of forest-based livelihoods.

The Designated National Authority for Bale's REDD project is the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) although it is expected that many of the responsibilities will be undertaken by the Oromia State Forest Enterprises Supervising Agency (OSFESA) as well as the Arsi and Bale Forest Enterprises. Benefit sharing between these institutions and the community in Bale will need to be clearly established.

The proposed Bale REDD project is the biggest such project emerging in Africa, to date. Only by working on such large scales can the long term benefits of carbon financing be realized beyond the life of financial support by development projects. ■



Surveying the Bale Mountains from the air highlighted the dramatic scenery and vast forest resources

Forest Product Entrepreneurs

Commercialization of non-timber forest products (NTFP) has often been attempted by development projects in Ethiopia and beyond. However, while many of these projects have succeeded in increasing supply they have been unable to increase demand.



A trainee learns to weave bamboo at a workshop held in Shashemane in 2008 as part of BERSMP's earlier skills development program

Producing bigger quantities of better quality forest products is a major challenge. Knowing how to sell them for a good profit is another. With this understanding, BERSMP embarked on a training program to support rural producers understand the dynamics of small business entrepreneurship with the help of Match Maker Associates (MMA) Ltd from Tanzania. MMA is a private consulting firm that specializes in value chain analysis as well as training and capacity development for value chain actors and those that support them. With their support, a four-month program of mentoring and market analysis using value chains has begun the process of business development for Bale's producers.

MMA's mentoring program focused on developing these skills by focusing on marketing, record keeping, financial projections, and monitoring and evaluation. These were provided to small groups and individuals in four *woreda* within the Eco-Region, including many women's savings and credit groups that had been previously supported by BERSMP. The new skills are essential for an enterprise to develop a business plan, which is used to strategize, plan and prepare as well as to access loans and credit from banks and other lenders.

At the end of the work, options for upgrading existing forest product value chains were presented to stakeholders in Addis Ababa. These included changes to the bamboo, coffee, honey and ecotourism value chains that would enable rural producers to realize a greater share of the market and increase their profit margins. ■



A women's group in Dello Mena processes honey following the harvest in 2009 in order to supply a retailer in Addis Ababa

Summer Student Enroll at Wondo Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources



Participants in the women's internship program gather in Robe prior to beginning the summer term in Wondo Genet. When they have graduated, the interns will play significant roles in the management of natural resources in Bale.

Having fully qualified and experienced people on the ground ensures the long term success of BERSMP. In July, 56 students made their way to Wondo Genet to begin the summer term. The qualifications being pursued range from Diploma to Master of Science and involve government staff from across the Eco-Region. Wondo Genet has long been recognized as the foremost forestry institute in Ethiopia and forms part of Haramaya University.

Many of the existing foresters in Bale were trained at the College, but very few were women. The very limited supply of professionally trained women foresters represented an acute challenge to BERSMP, as it is now widely acknowledged that sustainable natural resources management is in part dependent on the inclusion of *both* men and women. Women use different natural resources, at different times of the year, and in different ways to men. They have complementary knowledge to men concerning various plants and their uses and often depend on the environment to feed their families. Being unable to reflect these realities amongst those trained to support the community is a major failing and reflects gender imbalances at all levels. For these reasons BERSMP has been sponsoring 24 young professional women to complete their diplomas and to gain valuable field experience when not studying. The women will complete the third of five summer sessions this year and are expected to graduate in 2012.

Another milestone for BERSMP is the successful defense of four MSc theses in June 2009. These papers fill important knowledge gaps in many areas of BERSMP's work. The papers cover topics ranging from customary agroforestry practices, plantation pathology, non-timber forest products, and local perceptions of Participatory Forest Management (PFM). The theses are the work of government staffs in Bale who were sponsored by BERSMP to upgrade their technical skills. Congratulations to Abera Worku Zeleke, Kedir Nino, Muzayen Sultan Feto and Oumer Ejero Logomo on their successful defense. ■

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BERSMP Bale Bulletin

The Bale Bulletin is an occasional electronic document that is produced in order to keep interested parties up-to-date and aware of programme actions and developments. It is seen as a fast and effective mode of communication, taking advantage of the expanding internet capacity in the country. The Bulletin is circulated to a restricted list of partners and collaborators. If you want to join or leave the mailing list, please contact us through the email below. Also, please feel free to pass on this Bulletin to those who may be interested.

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