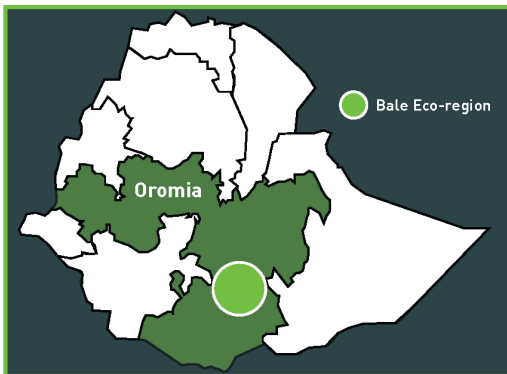


Sustainable livelihoods through ecosystem conservation

2019-2024 | Bale Eco-region, Ethiopia

Part of the European Union's 'Supporting Horn of Africa Resilience (SHARE)' initiative

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The Bale Eco-region is home to 1.6 million people and a biodiversity hotspot where there are many threatened animal and plant species. But increasing demand for the area's natural resources is putting the region's unique flora and fauna and the water supply for 12 million people living downstream at risk.

With support from the European Union, Farm Africa is leading a consortium of partners to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable people in the highland and lowland communities that depend on the Bale Eco-region, while ensuring the area's critical ecosystem is protected.

Eco-regional approach

The Bale Eco-region is made up of three agro-ecological zones: highland, mid-altitude and lowland. Communities living in the mountainous forest highlands mainly earn a living from forest products and mixed crop and livestock farming, while communities living in mid-altitude areas and the lowlands are predominantly pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. The rivers flowing downwards from the highlands to the lowlands are a vital water source for wildlife and communities including those living in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Using an eco-regional approach, the SHARE project addresses the interconnection between different ecosystems in order to understand how actions in different areas of the region impact one another. The approach takes into account how population dynamics, health and gender issues affect resource use.

For example, deforestation in the highlands is currently threatening the water supply to the lowlands, contributing to the drying up of pasture lands on which pastoralist communities' livestock in the lowlands depend. During the dry season from December to February, many pastoralist communities in the lowlands relocate to the highland forest for three months a year in search of grass, a move that further damages the forest and water supply.

Natural resource conservation can only be successful if communities and the government work together to take joint responsibility for protecting Bale Eco-region's natural resources. Farm Africa's consortium partners are using their expertise to address unsustainable practices from multiple angles, working with stakeholders to become active participants in the sustainable management of forests and water supplies while increasing livelihood opportunities for communities living in the region.



What are we doing?

The first phase of the project, which lasted four years from 2014 to 2017, created a framework to help the government to sustainably manage forests, rangelands and water sources, while helping to develop forest-friendly businesses and enhance production of existing agricultural land to prevent communities cutting down forests further.

Phase two is expanding the project, reaching 16 woredas and 1.6 million people in the Bale Eco-region over the period of 2019-2024, while also improving the drought resilience, food and nutrition security of an estimated 12 million people living downstream, who depend on the region for their water supply.

Capacity building

At kebele, woreda and zonal levels, Farm Africa is working with a number of government offices to develop and implement the eco-regional framework. This includes supporting government staff to offer training in sustainable livelihoods to 360,000 households in local communities. The training covers agronomy, climate-smart agriculture, agroforestry, sustainable livestock husbandry, cooperative development, and rangeland and forest management.

Natural resource management

Farm Africa is working with law enforcement, ranger patrols and the Bale Mountains National Park management to develop policies and management strategies to protect the ecosystem. This includes:

- Strengthening 115 Participatory Forest Management and 14 Participatory Rangeland Management committees to manage 500,000 hectares of forest and 420,000 hectares of rangeland.
- Supporting community controlled hunting areas.
- Increasing awareness in the community on the relationships between population, health and the environment, providing greater access to family planning services to address population pressures on natural resources.

Livelihood development

Farm Africa is supporting the government to strengthen existing ecotourism initiatives, helping to develop sustainable timber harvesting and non-timber forest products-based value chains, including forest coffee, honey, gum and resin. We are working with cooperatives to increase their access to finance and markets so they can grow their businesses and increase sales.

- By working with government officers, Farm Africa is promoting environmentally sustainable and climate-smart crop, fruit and vegetable production on existing agricultural lands outside of the forest and Bale Mountains National Park. Government officers provide local farmers with training in climate-smart agriculture, improve access to agri-inputs and promote small-scale irrigation technologies.
- To address livestock productivity constraints we are promoting sustainable fodder, forage and rangeland development, and increasing access to improved breeds, animal health services, water and markets. This includes training and equipping 50 Community Animal Health Workers and building the capacity of 23 animal health posts.
- Women and youth are often not included in cash-generating activities, limiting their ability to control income. These groups are being specifically targeted for new income-generating opportunities. We are supporting 30 women's goat husbandry enterprises, three women's milk cooperatives and three youth-led enterprises producing energy-efficient cook stoves and eco-charcoal to increase their production and sales.

