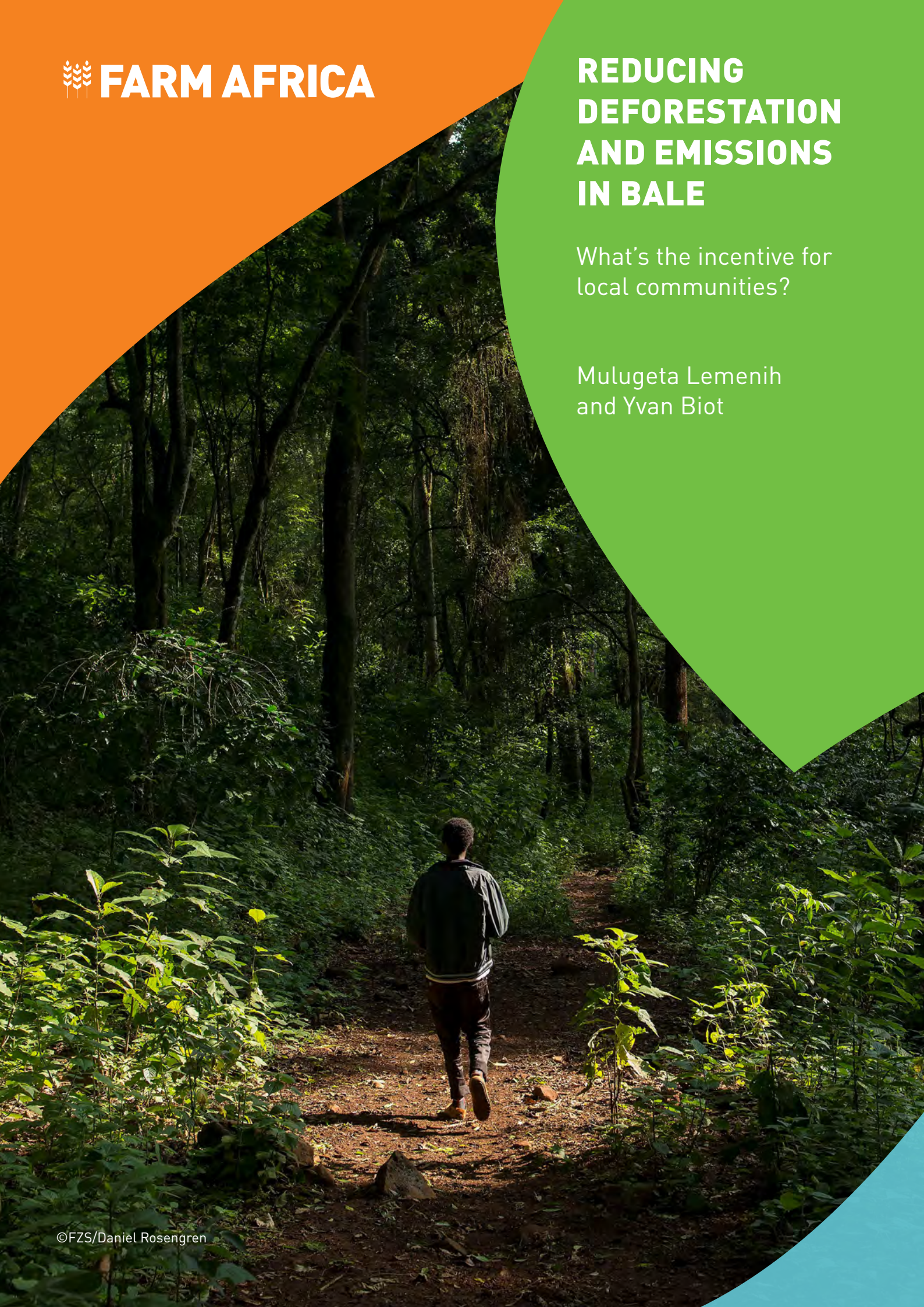
FARM AFRICA

REDUCING DEFORESTATION AND EMISSIONS IN BALE

What's the incentive for local communities?

Mulugeta Lemenih
and Yvan Biot



ACTUAL, AVOIDED AND PROJECTED LEVELS OF DEFORESTATION IN THE BALE PROJECT AREA BETWEEN 2012 AND 2015

ACTUAL DEFORESTATION
7,748 HECTARES

+

AVOIDED DEFORESTATION
12,496 HECTARES

=

PROJECTED DEFORESTATION
20,244 HECTARES

SUMMARY

Since 2012, Farm Africa and a consortium of partners have been implementing Ethiopia's first Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) project, a scheme that pays developing countries for carbon storage, in the Bale Eco-region. Bale is an area of significant ecological importance, where de facto open access to the forest had been driving rapid deforestation for many years. The REDD+ project builds on a Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach, which supports local forest users and the government to manage the responsibilities and benefits of the forest together.

The REDD+ project offers a framework to create an additional income stream to incentivise conservation of the forest by earning carbon credits for avoiding deforestation and forest degradation. Proceeds from the sales of the carbon credits will be shared on a 20:80 basis between the Government of Ethiopia and forest management cooperatives in Bale.

Over the REDD+ project's first monitoring cycle, which covered the period 2012 to 2015, we can report an externally verified reduction in deforestation of 62% against the anticipated rate of deforestation. A total of 12,496 hectares of forest was saved, which is equivalent to a saving of 5.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

As other conditions that affect forest management in the area have remained unchanged since project inception, and rates of deforestation across the country during that time were almost double those experienced in the preceding 10-year period, we are fairly confident that the reductions in deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to the project's actions.

Farmers in Bale are benefiting from their engagement in PFM through various forest-based enterprise developments. However, the income they are generating from these activities is small compared to the gain they could have made by converting forests into cropland. The integration of the REDD+ scheme was designed to generate additional income from the carbon market, and we believe that the forest conservation achievements were primarily driven by the anticipation of those financial gains.

This finding supports the underlying assumption of "payment for environmental services" schemes, such as REDD+, that environmental goals can be achieved when anticipated benefits are clear and communities trust that they will materialise. Conversely, there is a risk that if this expectation were to fail to materialise, the environmental benefits would be put at risk.

As of 2017, the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project will be fully integrated into a regional or jurisdictional REDD+, the Oromia Forested Landscape Programme (OFLP). The merger of the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project with the OFLP marks the first nesting of a project-level REDD+ initiative into a sub-national REDD+ programme. To generate lessons on managing REDD+ at larger scales, it will be critical to continue monitoring how the community in Bale manage their forest and subsequently reduce deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions under this initiative.

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BACKGROUND

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Farm Africa implements several linked projects in Ethiopia that enhance local livelihoods by improving the management and sustainable use of natural resources.

Since 2006, Farm Africa and local organisation SOS Sahel Ethiopia have worked with the Government of Ethiopia and local communities to use a participatory forest management (PFM) approach to improve the management of the forest in the Bale Eco-region, where deforestation is widespread. The initiative aims to ensure the sustainable flow of forest-based ecosystem services from this ecologically important but fragile region, and is in line with the Government of Ethiopia's green growth initiative the Climate Resilient Green Economy (CRGE)[1].

In January 2012, Farm Africa launched the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project, in partnership with SOS Sahel Ethiopia, Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) and the Government of Ethiopia, with funding from the Norwegian government. The project is a pioneer in combining PFM with a REDD+ scheme. The project works in an area of 333,924 hectares of tropical forest and engages over 45,000 households, who are organised into 64 forest management cooperatives. The local community has benefited from the establishment of enterprises selling forest products, such as coffee and honey, linked to markets.

The objective of the REDD+ project is to increase the forest's income generation potential further by monetising carbon credits obtained through reductions in deforestation and forest degradation.

The project uses a combination of internationally recognised standards, the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS[2]) and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA[3]), to ensure that carbon credits earnt from reduced deforestation in the area are obtained using globally accredited standards.

This paper reports the results of an impact monitoring exercise focused on the assessment of the reduction in deforestation achieved over the period January 2012 to December 2015 and presents important policy implications.

1 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2011

2 Verified Carbon Standard, 2005

3 The Climate, Community and Biodiveristy Alliance, 2014

Bale Eco-region: a unique, sensitive and important ecological resource

The Bale Eco-region is an area of unique ecological significance. The Eco-region encompasses Africa's largest alpine plateau and is part of the Eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot[4], home to species of flora and fauna that cannot be found anywhere else on earth, making conservation efforts in the area vital to preserving global biodiversity.

A wide range of communities and ethnic groups reside in the area, but the predominant group is the Oromia people. Communities living in the forest highlands mainly earn a living from forest products and mixed crop and livestock farming.

The Bale Eco-region has very important socio-economic significance for communities living beyond its borders. The region functions as the main water tower for the drainage basins that supply water to vast areas of lowland in south-eastern Ethiopia, Somalia and northern Kenya. More than 40 springs and streams emerge in the Bale Mountains ecosystem that feed five major rivers: the Web, Wabi Shebelle, Welmel, Dumal and Ganale. As a result, an estimated 12 million pastoralists and agropastoralists are dependent on ecosystem services provided by the Bale Eco-region.

The Ethiopian wolf is Africa's most threatened carnivore, unique to Ethiopia with many residing in Bale.

The forests comprise diverse plant species including the wild gene pool of coffea arabica.

Pictures above by ©FZS/Daniel Rosengren

4 Brooks, TM et al, 2011

Participatory forest management

Poverty levels are high in Bale and for many years this drove communities to exploit the region's forests, primarily for firewood and agricultural expansion. Recognising the ecological significance of the region, in 1986 the Ethiopian government closed off local access to the forest in an attempt to quell rising levels of deforestation. However, the restrictions were difficult to enforce and failed to stem the felling of trees. Trapped in poverty, many of Bale's residents continued to engage in unsustainable, unmanaged and often illegal forestry practices.

In 2007, an accord between the local communities and regional government, mediated by Farm Africa and SOS Sahel-Ethiopia, marked the introduction of a PFM approach in Bale. The agreement saw regional government and forest users take on joint responsibility for managing the forests and conserving threatened forest resources.

Under the new regime, forest users are permitted to develop forest-friendly businesses, allowing farmers to benefit from the forest's resources, while protecting the environment long into the future. Farm Africa helped communities capitalise upon these changes by supporting the set-up of enterprises, such as beekeeping and wild coffee production, and linking them to lucrative markets. These businesses provided economic incentives to reduce the environmentally destructive agricultural and livelihood practices that were occurring previously.

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THE BALE REDD+ PROJECT

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The Bale REDD+ project area encompasses 333,924 hectares of tropical forest: mainly moist and dry forests. The Bale Eco-region also includes a further 232,334 hectares of natural forests that belong to the Bale Mountains National Park, which is not part of the REDD+ project target area.

The average deforestation rates between 2000 and 2011, assessed using multi-temporal satellite images, were 1.1% for the moist tropical forest stratum and 6.7% for the dry forest stratum[5]. Smallholder farmers were identified as primary agents of deforestation through the expansion of farmlands into forestlands, the unsustainable collection of fuel and construction wood, and the intermittent incidence of forest fires[6].

The project aims to address these drivers of deforestation by tackling their underlying institutional and governance causes, building on early investments in PFM that have been implemented in the region since 2006. Project interventions include:

- setting up small forest-friendly businesses and cooperatives that provide an income stream for the local community
- local institution building to address the challenges associated with open access to forest resources
- tree planting as an alternative measure to supply wood for construction etc
- the introduction of improved cookstoves and promotion of practices to reduce the unsustainable harvest of fuelwood.

As reduced deforestation resulting from targeted actions in the project area could increase deforestation elsewhere, the project incorporates actions to reduce the risk of increased deforestation in the area immediately outside the project area, referred to as the project's "leakage" area. Conservation and development activities were designed to tackle the main drivers of deforestation in the leakage area and included the introduction of improved fuel-efficient stoves, tree planting and improved crop-livestock management practices.

5 Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE), Farm Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia, 2014

6 Ibid

What is REDD+?

Reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD+) is a framework that incentivises forest protection and mitigates global climate change. REDD+ enables developing country governments and communities to be paid for actions that prevent forest losses and/or degradation and thereby reduce carbon emissions.

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REDD+ ON THE GROUND

Until recently Tahrir Malima wasn't able to make much from the wild coffee he was collecting from the forest. His fortunes began to change when his co-operative signed a PFM agreement with the local government. He received training in coffee harvesting, and investment in the form of a long wire mesh bed on which he could dry his coffee beans before selling them, adding hugely to their value.

He now sells coffee at up to 50 Ethiopian birr per kg, whereas before he could only make 20-30 birr per kg. This means he no longer needs to cut down trees to supplement the money he makes from coffee. He has invested his additional income in his children's education, and beamed with pride as he showed us the new home he has built with a corrugated iron roof that affords far greater protection from the elements.

During the second phase of Farm Africa's REDD+ project, programme partners will devise and implement new models for sharing the revenue gained from the carbon credit pay-out to local communities. Part of the local community's share will be used to invest in sustainable forest enterprises, such as Tahrir's wild coffee business; underpinning the long-term sustainability of the forest management system and the community's involvement in the REDD+ scheme.

METHODOLOGY

Measuring our success

The combined Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) methodology includes indicators about the contribution of the Bale project to climate, biodiversity and community goals. This report focuses on the climate benefits of the project.

Climate benefits

The project aims to reduce deforestation in the Eco-region by 50% for the first five years and overall by 70% over the entire project period (2012-2031) of what would have happened under a "no project intervention" or "business as usual" scenario. Using historical average deforestation rates, business as usual deforestation rates for the project lifetime of 2012-2031 were estimated to total 84,150 hectares (ha), which represents greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 38.3 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide (mtCO2e)[7]. The anticipated 70% reduction in deforestation and associated GHG emissions amounts to 58,905ha and 26.8 mtCO2e, respectively. With a credit buffer[8] of 15%, the net ex-ante GHG emission reduction anticipated under the project scenario is 22.8 mtCO2e.

7 Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE), Farm Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia, 2014

8 This 15% buffer refers to the quantity of verified carbon units preserved that is not included in the net tradeable carbon storage earnings of the project, to buffer against the risk of non-permanence of the emission reduction.

Attributing success

REDD+ projects must follow a rigorous monitoring and evaluation criteria.

Leakage

Projects must demonstrate that they have avoided 'leakage', which occurs when conservation efforts in one area shift deforestation to another area[9].

Additional

REDD+ projects need to demonstrate they are 'additional', deforestation and degradation must be shown to have not happened simply because of wider changes in the economy or other socio-economic factors outside of the control of the project[10].

The Verified Carbon Standard, the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliances and the Rainforest Alliance[11] are commonly used reference frameworks for verifying stated climate change and other benefits. The Bale REDD+ project was developed using a combination of both the VCS[12] and CCBA standards and aims to deliver Climate, Community and Biodiversity benefits simultaneously[13].

9 International Institute for Environment and Development, 2017

10 Ibid

11 Rainforest Alliance,2017

12 Verified Carbon Standard, 2017

13 Ibid

Methodology applied in monitoring the project's climate benefits

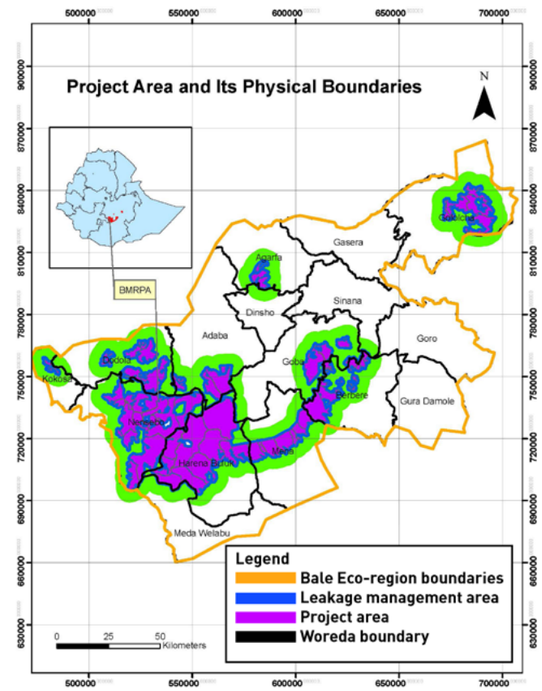
Climate benefits were determined using the rate of deforestation and GHG emissions in the project area and comparing these measurements with projected deforestation rates under a business as usual scenario. Projections were calculated using the deforestation rates that prevailed during the period immediately preceding the project, also called historic deforestation, which in this case was the period between 2000-2011.

The assessment was conducted in both the project area and the leakage belt. The project area refers to the section of the forest that has remained under forest cover for at least the past 10 years but is threatened by deforestation. It represents the area that the project intends to protect from deforestation and the unsustainable use of resources through the REDD+ initiative. The project area totals 261,053 ha and includes moist (238,200 ha) and dry (22,853 ha) forest strata as identified and mapped from imagery analysis.

The leakage belt represents a buffer area around the core project area. This belt includes areas that could suffer increased deforestation as a result of the forest protection action occurring in the project area. The monitoring cycle's leakage belt was defined based on a VCS mobility analysis[14]. For the Bale project the area designated as leakage belt amounts to 30,418 ha of dry forest and 148,102 ha of moist forest. For REDD+ to yield a positive climate benefit, deforestation in the leakage belt should not be significantly greater than its historic rate. Where deforestation in the leakage belt is greater than expected under the historic reference, the deforested area will be deducted from the achievements in the project area. The leakage management area refers to sections of the leakage belt where project activities have taken place.

The historic rate of deforestation was estimated by measuring land use and land cover changes as detected by multi-temporal Landsat satellite imagery. The area's land use and cover for the years 2012 and 2015 were analysed using the same image analysis procedure as the one applied for the historic deforestation rate of the period 2000-2011, referred to as the forest reference level at the beginning of the project[15]. The forest cover in 2015 was deducted from that in 2012 to quantify the area of deforestation during that period, and compared with the projected deforestation expected under the business as usual scenario. The difference between the computed business as usual and measured deforestation was reported as the total area of reduced deforestation achieved by the project, following applicable REDD+ project achievement reporting standards. This was done in both the project area forest and the leakage belt.

Project area and its physical boundaries



14 (as per the requirement of option II, step 1.1.3 VM0015 methodology of VCS)

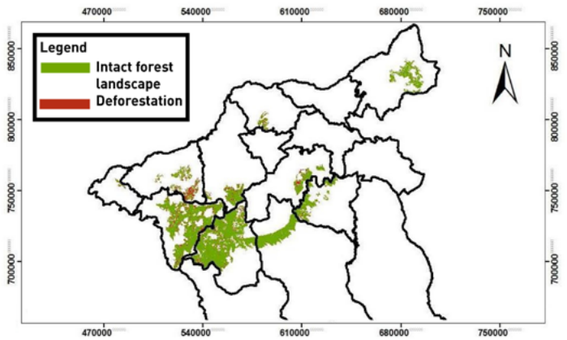
15 Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE), Farm Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia, 2014

PROJECT IMPACT

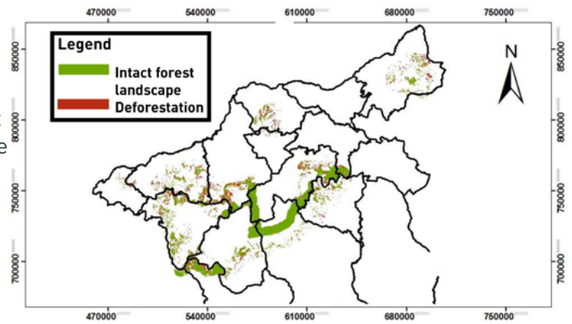
Deforestation and GHG emissions avoided in the project area

The total area of forest that was expected to have been converted between January 2012 and December 2015 in the absence of the project's interventions in the project area forest was estimated using average historical rates of deforestation and amounted to 20,244 ha (Table 1). The observed area of forest conversion over the same period as measured using the methodology described above amounted to 7,748 ha, which is 12,496 ha less than the baseline deforestation. That means that 12,496 ha of forest that would have been deforested had it not been for the project, were saved. This is equivalent to a 62% reduction in the rate of deforestation. The equivalent GHG emission reduction against baseline emissions amounts to 5.5 M tCO2e (Table 1).

Project area



Leakage belt



Forest cover changes between 2012 and 2015 in the project area and leakage belt in the Bale Eco-region (BER) REDD+ project. Areas coloured green show the extent of the forest in 2015. Areas in red show areas of forest in 2011 that had been cleared by 2015.

Table 1: Deforestation and emissions analysis over the period of 2012 - 2015 in the project area forest in Bale

Forest types (A)	Baseline deforestation 2012-2015 (ha) (B)	Observed deforestation (ha) (C)	Avoided deforestation (ha) (D=B-C)	Emission factor (tCO_2e/ha) (E)	Total avoided emission (tCO_2e) (F= D*E)
Moist	15,796	7,256	8,540	510.91	4,363,171
Dry	4,448	492	3,956	295.55	1,169,196
Sum	20,244	7,748	12,496		5,532,367

Deforestation and GHG emissions avoided in the leakage belt

REDD+ will only be effective if it manages to achieve net positive reductions in GHG emissions across the landscape. The net GHG emission reduction effect of a REDD+ project takes account of changes in emissions from the project area's leakage belt. If deforestation in the leakage belt is greater than projected using historical average rates of deforestation, the extra deforestation and associated GHG emissions in the leakage belt should be deducted from what has been achieved in the core project area.

Table 2 shows deforestation and GHG emissions in the leakage belt of the Bale REDD+ project area. The total amount of deforestation and associated GHG emissions in the leakage belt (moist + dry stratum) of 674,020 tCO_2e was well below the projected values of 3.1mtCO_2e. The fact that deforestation rates were well below those anticipated under the business as usual scenario is a clear indication that project activities deployed in the leakage belt aimed at minimising deforestation and forest degradation were successful. However, deforestation in the leakage belt of the dry forest stratum was found to be greater than anticipated, which warrants future intensification of leakage management activities by the project in the dry forest stratum.

Table 2: Carbon stock changes in the leakage belt between 2012 and 2015 in Bale REDD+ project (tCO_2e)

Baseline carbon emissions from deforestation	3,163,428
Observed carbon emissions from deforestation (tCO_2e)	674,020
Avoided carbon emissions (tCO2e)	2,489,408
Avoided carbon emissions annual	622,352

Net GHG emission reduction

The net GHG emissions from the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project are presented in Table 3. The net emissions are the same as the emissions from the project area because the emissions from the leakage belt overall were found to be below the projected amount at Eco-region level, and therefore no deduction was required from the emission reductions achieved in the project area. The VCS standards require consideration of a buffer credit of 15% to be reserved for any possible future reversal of achieved emission reduction. By deducting the 15% buffer credit, which is 829,855 tCO_2e, the net GHG emission reduction achieved by Bale Eco-region REDD+ for the period of 2012-2015 is therefore 4,702,512 tCO_2e, see Table 3.

Table 3: Net greenhouse gas emission reduction between 2012 and 2015 due to REDD+ project (tCO_2e)

Baseline emissions	Project emission	Leakage emissions	Net GHG emission reductions	Buffer for credit (15%)	Tradeable Net GHG emission
9,384,941	3,852,574	0	5,532,367	829,855	4,702,512

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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Our results show conclusively that deforestation rates between 2012 and 2015 were considerably lower than they were between 2000 and 2011. The fact that other conditions affecting forest management in the area have remained largely unchanged during project implementation allows us to be confident that the reduction in deforestation can be attributed to the project's actions. This reduction is even more striking if we consider that, according to Global Forest Watch data[16], deforestation rates across Ethiopia almost doubled in the period 2012-2014 compared to the reference period.

The climate benefits achieved over the course of this project show the potential of combining PFM and REDD+ schemes to achieve forest sector emission reductions in Ethiopia. The two distinct processes complement each other, with PFM providing a strong institutional base for achieving REDD+ climate change mitigation objectives, and REDD+ enhancing PFM through the community's anticipation of additional financial incentives.

Farm Africa's experiences in Bale add to a growing pool of literature indicating that PFM is an effective tool for helping Ethiopia deliver its commitment to curb its GHG emissions between 2015 and 2030. Furthermore, it suggests that the Government of Ethiopia's commitment to use PFM in its REDD+ Preparedness Plan and National Forest Law is well placed.

We believe the engagement of local communities has been motivated primarily by the anticipation of their share of carbon credits and income generated from forest products based enterprise developments, which serve to offset financial gains that could have been made through the conversion of forest to other land uses. In other words, the project has managed to conserve forest resources by responding to rural development demands. We strongly suspect that without strong incentives, such as these, the climate and biodiversity benefits gained over the course of the project will not be sustainable. This may also suggest the need to put in place benefit-sharing mechanisms to ensure carbon payments effectively reach the local community to maintain their strong commitment to forest management.

As of 2017, the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project will be nested into a broader, regional (or jurisdictional) REDD+ programme under the supervision of the Oromia Forested Landscape Programme (OFLP). The OFLP is supported by the World Bank with funding from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, and is the first jurisdictional REDD+ programme in Ethiopia. The merger of the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project with the OFLP marks the first nesting of a project level REDD+ initiative into a sub-national REDD+ programme. Continued monitoring of how the community in Bale manages their forest, and associated impacts on reduced deforestation and GHG emissions, under this jurisdictional REDD+ initiative could generate important lessons on the future management of REDD+ initiatives at larger scales.

The research we carried out found higher than expected rates of deforestation in the dry forest stratum of the leakage belt. Further research is needed to understand why deforestation in this area increased, and how it can be tackled in the most efficient way.

16 Hansen et al., 2013

Appendix: detailed methods

About 176 training points for forest and non-forest land classes were digitised from 2015 Landsat images using ENVI 5.0 version and those points were used to run image classification using the supervised image classifier with maximum likelihood algorithm. For accuracy assessment, 152 testing points were collected from the ground using a Garmin72 GPS both for the forest and non-forest land areas. The overall accuracy achieved for the image classification was 91.67%. Ethiopia's forest definition of 0.05ha was too small a resolution to detect on medium resolution imagery. To handle this the baseline was made conservative by limiting the mapping unit resolution to be 0.09 ha. Therefore, all forest areas with less than 0.09 ha were filtered out and assigned a non-forest category. The same was applied during this monitoring analysis. This was done by converting the classified image of 2015 into a vector file, exporting it to Arc Map GIS and filtering out forest areas with less than 0.09ha. Deforestation avoided up to 2015 was obtained by comparing forest area in 2015 against what was projected to exist in 2015 under the baseline scenario both in the project area as well as in the leakage belt. The avoided deforestation (activity data) was multiplied by the emission factor established through forest inventory at the start of the project to quantify the amount of GHG emission avoided.

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PROJECT PARTNERS

ROYAL NORWEGIAN EMBASSY

SOS SAHEL ETHIOPIA

OROMIA ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE BUREAU

Thank you

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