

## **MERT-PLUS Contribution to human Capacity Development**

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### **Background**

Since 1980, the World Food Programme (WFP) has supported rural land rehabilitation in Ethiopia through the MERET Project, formerly known as ETH/2488, addressing the root causes of land degradation that resulted in food insecurity. The main activities of MERET are natural resources rehabilitation and development such as stabilization of hillsides, construction of farm land terraces, gully erosion control and rehabilitation, reforestation of degraded lands, water harvesting for small scale irrigation, construction & maintenance of feeder roads, area closure, productivity enhancement, etc.

The Government's implementing partner of the MERET Project is Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development at different levels (federal, regional and woreda levels). The MERET Project is currently under implementation in six regions (Oromiya, Amhara, SNNP, Tigray, Somali and Dire Dawa), in 72 woredas (districts), in 500 community sites.

To mitigate the problems of land degradation and food insecurity, WFP has been supporting the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development through MERET Project and considerable achievements have been made with regard to land rehabilitation, protection and development.

Because of the climatic shocks, traditional poor farming practices and alarming population growth, since 1983 severe droughts have been almost an annual event in Ethiopia. According different studies and project Impact Assessments undertaken, households who were producing only five to six months of food supply in a year has reduced the food gap in a year to 2 – 3 months. Anticipating renewed interest in addressing the root causes of chronic food insecurity, WFP has assessed the potential contribution of MERET Project to mitigate problems of food insecurity and currently, WFP is providing supports to the implementation of the 6<sup>th</sup> phase of MERET Project, which is operational during 2007 – 2011.

### **Objectives of MERET-PLUS**

The medium and long-term objectives of MERET-PLUS are to encourage household and local institutions engaged in decision-making, concerning their own community-based participatory watershed development; enhance the technical, organizational and program management capacity of community participants and implementing partners at all levels; improve land productivity and natural resource rehabilitation and protection; create income generating opportunities and integrate them with improved practices of land husbandry; improve the livelihood and food security of the rural population in particular for women headed households through a sustainable use of natural resources base.

Practically speaking, human beings are at the heart of the land degradation problems, either as actors or victims. The fight against land degradation in the marginal areas of Ethiopia is a fight for subsistence or survival, and is an integral part of the socio-economic development components of natural resources in the project areas in particular and in the country in general.

MERET-PLUS aims primarily at integrating the immediate, medium-term and long-term needs of the communities. Satisfying only the immediate needs will be risky and provisional if land productivity and resources are not improved and rehabilitated. However, land productivity and resource management will be hampered if immediate needs are not fulfilled. The medium-term and long-term needs include the protection, rehabilitation and management of available natural resource bases. The MERET-PLUS principle extends to integration of techniques and actions to satisfy both immediate and long-term needs in a clear and coordinated manner, and to avoid any contradiction in implementation and its after-effects. MERET encompasses the integration of indigenous knowledge and traditional experience with its long-years of field experience obtained under similar circumstances, and more emphasis has been given to the integration of human resources at all levels, with the goal of popularising and promoting active community participation.

The *participation principle in MERET-PLUS* is based on active participation of communities practiced at several levels of the communities. Active involvement of the community has enabled the community to take decisions, to organize and manage their work while sorting out differences between the various types of activities. Participations of communities have been carried out at different levels through community-based participatory watershed development at sub-watershed, micro-watershed, village and community levels. The actions of *decentralized* decision-making and modalities have essentially favoured the success of MERET-PLUS in which community-based participatory watershed development approaches have been implemented within an organizational framework of integration, planning, management, consultation, and action of government policies. These decentralized functions and transfer of decision-making power to regions and woredas have been linked with the function of result-based monitoring and prompted reply to services, initiatives and suggestions from local and regional levels to ensure the coordination and coherence of interventions and decisions at regional and woreda level and to provide consistent support to the improvement of the natural resources base development.

### **Human Capacity Development as the determinant factor for Progress**

Capacity building supports such as provision of non-food items & transportation, and technical training to field staff of the Government partners. More than 2,600 technical staff of implementing partners, involved in the planning and implementation of project activities have

been trained in different technologies and techniques. Consequently, more than 500 community sites have been planned and 75% are under implementation.



Fig 1: Capacity development activities to technical field staff at different levels provided

MERET Project gives more emphasis to community empowerment and participation and the project activities are community centered, use community-based participatory watershed development as planning tool, communities actively participate in prioritization, planning, implementation & decision-making processes. Communities have organized themselves into user groups and generated sustainable incomes, demonstrated strong success in improving food security, and poor household food gaps has been reduced considerably.



Fig 2: Human capacity development to overall development

The main MERET-PLUS intervention packages include soil and water conservation; soil fertility management; forestry and biological stabilization; homestead productivity intensification and income generating activities; water harvesting at community, groups and household level; small community level access road development; and small scale irrigation activities.

The major physical and biological achievements of MERET include:

- treatment of over 130,000 ha of cultivated lands;
- training of more than 2,600 technical field staff of implementing government partners;
- preparation and distribution of over 20,000 copies of technical guidelines and training modules;
- scaling up of homestead development and income generation activities;
- over 800 water springs, 211 water ponds and 1,000 shallow wells constructed;
- construction of more than 20 farm dams and 50 overflow dams;
- plantation of over 300 million tree seedlings in degraded lands;
- over 26,000 ha of degraded land closed & planted with trees (rehabilitated);
- construction of over 1,000 km of gully check dams;
- construction and maintenance of over 2,000 km of feeder roads;
- promotion of compost making in all regions;
- result-based monitoring and evaluation system established and made functional at all levels.



Fig 3: MERET support for water harvesting and reforestation programme

Based on the MERET impact assessment results of 2002:

- about 85% of beneficiaries are able to cope up with drought;
- about 84% of beneficiaries have increased production from 150 kg/yr to 400 kg/yr (more than two times increase);
- 72% of beneficiaries increased their income;
- 73% of beneficiaries are able to invest more on education, health, shelter & clothing;
- average annual food gaps reduced from 5 months to 3 months in sites over five years intervention;
- economic and financial rates of return is greater the 12%;
- environmental effects are visible and sustainable (water table, biodiversity, soil fertility, flood protection, etc)

Fig 4: Impacts of MERET Project on environmental rehabilitation and restoration



Fig 5: Improving productivity of homesteads and increased livelihood opportunity



Fig 6: MERET supported household-based income generating activities (SNNP- Chencha)

**Implementation Strategy of MERET-PLUS**

The evolution of MERET into MERET-PLUS (MERET-Partnership and Land Users’ Solidarity) has been designed to respond to the UNDAF area of cooperation on humanitarian response, recovery and food security by consolidating and enhancing elements of the current phase of MERET. By building social networks and productive assets that contribute to resilience to shocks, improved

food security and enhanced livelihoods, MERET-PLUS has contributed to UNDAF II. This has been realized by following an integrated community-based participatory watershed development approach. Food has been provided as an incentive to the most vulnerable households who are engaged in the implementation of the Project activities at community as well as individual household levels.

The main aim of MERET-PLUS is to redress land degradation and introduce practices to improve land husbandry in highly degraded and food-insecure areas while diversifying sustainable income generating opportunities and ensuring the sustainability of the natural resource base. MERET-PLUS gives emphasis on partnerships for sustainable land management and the creation of community and social assets for the resource-poor households.

The implementation strategy of MERET-PLUS is to generate mutually reinforcing program, to encourage synergies and partnerships, mobilize additional complementary non-food resources and widen the enabling role of food assistance for development. The Project outcomes are intended as outcomes “without borders” that disseminate best practices and lessons learned at the woreda, regional and country levels.

Under MERET-PLUS, women will have a significant role in community empowerment and efforts will be made to enhance their decision-making role, access to knowledge and support activities that reduce hardships and promote sustainable income-generating opportunities. MERET-PLUS training and knowledge-based capacity building will include gender-specific sessions to enhance women’s role in planning, implementation and in reducing barriers to women, and building upon progress achieved through years of participatory planning, gender mainstreaming.

In consultation with the implementing Government partners, special attention will be given to selected *woredas* of strategic importance with respect to UNDAF partnerships and Programme synergy with children in development (CHILD) based Food-For-Education (FFE) and the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) concentrating on the creation of “impact points” for increased programme efficiency. MERET-PLUS will promote the joint programmes and will advocate the Government-led sustainable land management (SLM) with FAO, UNDP, the World Bank, GTZ and other stakeholders.

The main MERET-PLUS expected outcomes include:

- increased ability to manage shocks, meet food needs and diversify livelihoods;
- sustainable land management institutionalized at the community level and replicated to other areas;
- ability of implementing partners to plan and manage food-based programmes;
- sustainable and productive community behavioral changes in relation to HIV/AIDS.

Major outputs of MERET-PLUS include:

- number of beneficiaries reached by food aid assistance and the level of community empowerment attained;
- biophysical, environmental and social assets coverage and benefits gained;
- skills and capacities acquired by implementing institutions;
- partnerships, including those related to UNDAF strengthened;
- mainstreaming of sustainable land management, HIV/AIDS initiatives in large-scale food-security initiatives attained.