

## Using Special Community Groups to Manage Natural Resources in the Central Rift Valley of Ethiopia

By Tibebe Koji, Water Program Coordinator, Oxfam America

### Natural Resource Management Committees and Associations

Under the Global Water Initiative (GWI), Oxfam America is supporting Natural Resource Management (NRM) and educating and mobilizing existing community structures in Dugda district of East Shoa Zone in Ethiopia. With support from the GWI program, members of community *iddirs*<sup>1</sup> and School Environment Clubs are formed into Natural Resource Management Committees at the community level. At the *kebele*<sup>2</sup> level, these bodies make up a wider Natural Resource Management Association. Elected members are trained on key NRM, disaster risk management and climate change issues by local level staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The program is also supporting the formation of Savings and Internal Lending Committees (SILCs), which are community groups that save collectively and provide credit to their members to engage in livelihood activities. SILC members actively engage in NRM activities in their communities such as soil and water conservation and tree plantation, and are finding ways to generate income through NRM. This serves a dual purpose of protecting and rehabilitating degraded land while also offering alternate sources of income through growing fruit trees and elephant grass (to use for animal feed) on these community managed land enclosures.

These cohesive and powerful community structures have proven to be very effective in raising community awareness on environmental issues and promoting active engagement in NRM activities. This fosters a true sense of ownership to protect and rehabilitate the community's natural resources.



Community participation in physical soil and water conservation on degraded land

Oxfam applies a Participatory Learning and Action tool to promote wider community involvement and understanding in NRM to foster collective ownership and management of community assets. To perform different NRM priorities effectively, the committee members are divided into core groups each assigned to different soil and water conservation activities which they perform on a voluntary basis.

To date, the program includes seven *iddirs* in three *kebeles* with a total of 1,724 household members (874 female) who participate through the NRM committees. These committees meet twice a month and receive guidance from Oxfam community facilitators and government experts. Together, they form three Natural Resource Management Associations with subgroups that are assigned to different NRM activities.

### Success to Date

- 156 hectares of land formally enclosed, delineated, demarcated, and mapped as Community-Managed Area Closures (CMAC). There are three CMAC in the target area supported by the GWI program.
- Five SILCS with 156 female members were established with the help of GWI. One SILC is currently linked with the NRM activities and is

<sup>1</sup> Iddir is an informal association of people who share a common interest such as family membership, friendship, residence in the same district, affiliation by employment,

<sup>2</sup> A *kebele* is the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia similar to a ward, a neighbourhood or a localized and delimited group of people.

# The Global Water Initiative

A Partnership Funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation



gaining economic returns as a result. The group has generated about 1,500 birr (about 90 USD) from the sale of elephant grass grown in a designated CMAC area. Group members manage and protect the area by planting different indigenous plant and tree species and employ conservation methods such as terracing while raising income which is used to provide loans to its members.

- Drought affected women are taking an active role in managing their communities' natural resources by engaging in physical soil and water conservation activities such as making soil bunds (for flood diversion), hillside terracing to protect against erosion, and tree plantation to replenish the area with indigenous species.



Community working on micro basin structures on degraded land

## Lessons Learned, Recommendations and Next Steps

To achieve further progress in the NRM component of the program in the next phase of GWI, Oxfam identified the following lessons and recommendations:

- In Ethiopia, working through existing community structures, has proven to be a very effective way to implement NRM program activities and promote collective community management and ownership of resources. However, more intensive and widespread community awareness and mobilization should be performed before starting soil and water conservation activities. This will build better understanding and commitment so that program investments are owned and sustained by the community from the start.
- Tree plantation is often chosen as a core activity for NRM committees, but trees that are planted

continuously year after year have low survival rates. Therefore, more attention should be paid to care of trees after plantation to ensure the quality of these investments.

- The survival rate of planted tree seedlings was found to be higher when the selection of seedlings was based on prior community consultation and identification of specific needs. This highlights the importance of joint participatory planning with communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring stages to improve overall commitment and involvement.
- Plans for CMCA's need to include potential for income generation in order to generate sustained commitment to engage in NRM. However, as environmental protection and conservation measures do not show immediate economic or social returns, building understanding of the needs for patience and long term commitment and investment is required. The program should explore ways to generate community interest in non-monetary terms by fostering a sense of duty to protect natural resources for future environmental benefits.
- Legal recognition and support from the local and district government is required for enforcement of CMAC protection (to prevent illegal farming, grazing or unauthorized use by external parties). The program needs to advocate for the diligent enforcement of NRM protection and guidelines at the local level.
- Themes of Community-Managed Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation should be emphasized more by the program, especially education on mitigation measures and development of community risk management plans.



Nursery seedlings