



Sustainable livelihoods through ecosystem conservation

2014 - 2017 | Bale Eco-region, Ethiopia

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

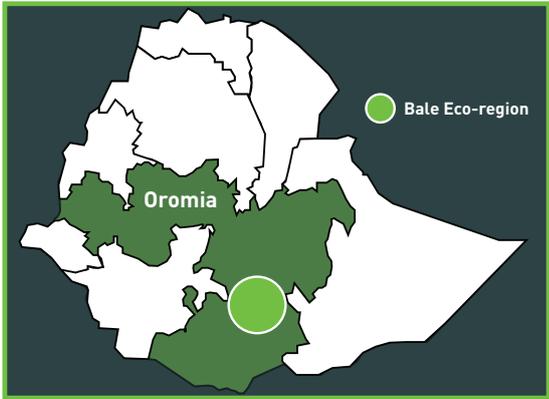
The Bale Eco-region is home to 1.6 million people and a biodiversity hotspot where there are many threatened animal and plant species. But increasing demand for the area's natural resources is putting the region's unique flora and fauna and the water supply for 12 million people living downstream at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

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 vital, as they are the region's only water source.

Population growth and poverty are leading to the unsustainable use of forest, land and water resources. The conversion of forests to farmland, unsustainable timber extraction and over-grazing of livestock are very common, and a lack of awareness about the connections between different ecosystems within the region means people don't always realise that their practices are damaging the natural resources available to other communities.

Over the last few years, as much as 7% of the forest has been lost every year and natural resources have diminished sharply, leading to soil erosion, seasonal flooding and drought as well as the depletion of groundwater. As a result, communities living in the Eco-region have become chronically food insecure and are extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

To counteract this, Farm Africa is leading a consortium of NGOs and working closely with the Ethiopian government in a coordinated effort to reverse the damage done to the Bale Eco-region and boost livelihoods for inhabitants in a sustainable way.



THE PROGRAMME:

- enhances drought resilience, food and nutrition security of an estimated 878,000 people living in the Bale Eco-region, as well as up to 12 million people downstream.
- uses a holistic approach to ecosystem conservation, recognising the highland-lowland linkages and multi-faceted nature of natural resource management problems in the area.
- is implemented by a consortium of five partners:





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UNIQUE APPROACH:



The SHARE programme encourages communities and government stakeholders to become active participants in sustainable natural resource management in the Bale Eco-region. The programme takes into account how population dynamics, health and gender issues affect resource use. Each of the five consortium partners offers expertise in specialist development areas and by working collectively the unsustainable practices can be addressed from multiple angles to achieve maximum impact.

ENSURING SUSTAINABLE LAND USE:

Research into problems and interlinkages between highland and lowland natural resource management is being conducted. This helps inhabitants to better understand the impact they are having on other communities within the Bale Eco-region. Research areas include water use and the regulation of the flow of the rivers that bring water to millions of people living downstream, whose livelihoods are at risk without enough water.

Farm Africa supports local community members and government technical officers to ensure they take protected areas, natural resource use and watershed management into account when planning and implementing land use in the Bale Eco-region. This helps to provide land security for communities and limits their need for land conversion from forests to farmland.

IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS:

- Training in climate-smart agricultural techniques will diversify crops and enhance production on existing agricultural land, improving resilience and nutrition without the need to expand farmland.
- Training in improved production and market development of forest products such as honey, bamboo, coffee and natural oils, will help to diversify livelihoods away from agriculture and livestock-keeping and acts as an incentive for communities to preserve the Bale Eco-region's forest for future generations.
- The introduction of sustainable energy initiatives like using fuel-efficient cookstoves will alleviate the demand for firewood and stop people from cutting down trees.
- Employment of new strategies for better livestock health, forage management and markets will improve livestock survival and quality, leading to higher income whilst not increasing herd size above already unsustainable levels.

COORDINATING COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT:

Natural resource conservation can only be successful if highland, mid-altitude and lowland communities as well as the government work together and take on joint responsibility for protecting Bale Eco-region's natural resources. Farm Africa is facilitating individual training and mentoring programmes, experience sharing visits and provides material support to increase the capacity of communities and government so they can work together more effectively.

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