



**Bale Eco-Region Sustainable  
Management Programme (BERSMP)**



**Oromia State Forest  
Enterprises Supervising Agency**

**BERSMP**

**BFE**

## Policy Brief No.2

**New Institutions and New Partnerships for  
Participatory Natural Resource Management and  
Food Security**

## Summary

How do you address the downward spiral of poverty in rural Ethiopia, what development strategy would you use? The key characteristics of poverty in rural Ethiopia are: open natural resource access, dysfunctional community organisations, and limited income opportunities. The degradation of natural resources and the disintegration of livelihoods are inherently linked. These key characteristics leave rural communities stripped off assets and unable to fight poverty. Rural communities become resigned to rely on external relief bodies, be they Government and/or NGOs. This poverty spiral is happening now in the Bale zone of Oromia. Bale is known for its abundance of natural resources but these natural resources are now being degraded at an alarming rate, with consequent increases in livelihood vulnerability and food insecurity.

In 2007 the Oromia State established a new natural resource management institution, the Oromiya State Forests Enterprises Supervising Agency (OSFESA) and 8 geographically located Forest Enterprises. This new institution aims to drive development through business based natural resource management. One such Enterprise is the Bale Forest Enterprise (BFE). Upon its establishment a unique opportunity was created for the BFE, as a business oriented government agency, to implement forest management in partnership with forest adjacent impoverished communities. The BFE intends to achieve this goal in partnership with the FARM-Africa – SOS Sahel Ethiopia Bale EcoRegion Sustainable Management Programme (BERSMP). In order to stabilise and improve the livelihood and food security situation, the BERSMP and the BFE combine three core development processes in a new natural resource management approach. These processes are Participatory Natural Resource Management (PNRM), Community Enablement, and Sustainable Natural Resource Livelihoods. These development processes combine to form the basis of sustainable development.

The setting up of the OSFESA and the experience of BERSMP and BFE in an implementation partnership, generates important lessons in the contribution of PNRM towards improved food security in Ethiopia, and calls for appropriate policy reforms.

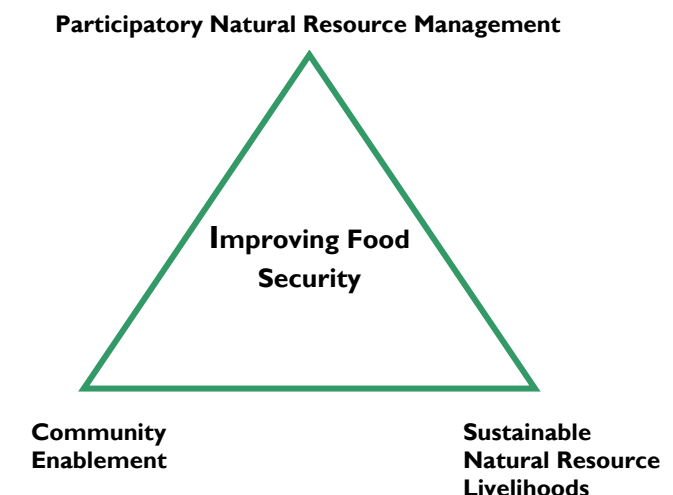
## Introduction

The purpose of this *Policy Brief* is to discuss and highlight the reasons why the Bale Mountains area, and the development work being carried out by the Oromia BFE in partnership with FARM-Africa – SOS Sahel Ethiopia Bale EcoRegion Sustainable Management Programme (BERSMP), is of high relevance to the natural resource management and food security debate and actions on-going across Ethiopia.

## Food Insecurity- Prevention rather than Cure

In line with the development context of Ethiopia, a part of the overall aim of the BFE and BERSMP is to stabilise and improve the food security situation of the Bale area. This is to be achieved by a three pillared approach to this highly complex, multi-sector problem. The approach focuses on, and combines three core development concepts. These concepts

are: Community based Participatory Natural Resource Management; Community Enablement; and Sustainable Natural Resource based Livelihoods. Combining these concepts in a holistic approach to food security represents a fundamental opportunity to improve development practice in Ethiopia.



The development challenge is to address the seemingly unstoppable poverty spiral that afflicts

rural Ethiopia. This poverty spiral is characterised by open access natural resource management, unplanned and uncontrolled settlement, destructive landuses, dysfunctional community organisation, and limited and narrow income opportunities. The results are the continuing mining of natural resources, diminished livelihoods, and the disintegration of social cohesion and function within rural communities. In many food insecure areas of Ethiopia this is exactly what has happened, and is continuing to happen. Contacts with these food insecure communities repeatedly show that they now feel disenabled to pursue development goals, feel no ownership over their developmental problems, lack the responsibility and motivation to fight poverty for themselves, and are increasingly reliant on external bodies (GO / NGO) for relief support.



***Unplanned and uncontrolled Settlements in Bale, Dinsho Woreda; A key driver of environmental destruction***

This poverty spiral is occurring in the Bale area. The situation can only be addressed through addressing the drivers of the poverty spiral. The *prevention* of poverty is more important, economically and sustainably, than the *treatment* of poverty. This means

building on the existing (capital) assets of an area, rather than allowing the assets to be stripped and disintegrated, and then trying to rebuild them.

### **Sustainable Development Approaches**

The Bale Forest Enterprise (BFE) and BERSMP focuses on sustainable development through supporting capacity, ability, awareness, and activities of local rural communities, and their institutions, in relation to local natural resources and livelihoods. Seeking to work with traditional NRM systems in order to root development activities within community knowledge systems.

The BFE and BERSMP aim to respond to the stated needs and desires of local community groups to manage their own lives and resources, through their own institutions. The programme looks forward, rather than back, in relation to the development of potential development partnerships with traditional institutions and local management systems. It is designed to equip and enable community based institutions and organisations to re-begin to act, as equal partners, in the transitional processes that are affecting their lives. Communities are partners in the development processes, and plan and implement sustainable natural resource management strategies of key natural resources. They will secure legal rights of natural resource management, use and ownership. They will plan and manage settlement and landuse practices. They will improve their incomes through improved natural resource management, natural resource utilisation, and through the establishment of small and medium scale natural resource based



enterprises. The communities will achieve these goals through their own community level management institutions and organisations.

### Participatory Natural Resource Management

Involving local people and their institutions in the management of natural resources has been identified as one of the most appropriate approaches to sustainable development. Conversely, excluding people from decision making roles and denying access to resources has been shown to increase poverty and dissolve local levels responsibility. Local communities have the right to manage their resources and their lives. By developing *Participatory Natural Resource Management Systems*, the BERSMP aims to establish NRM systems that contribute towards sustainable rural livelihoods, environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation. The programme focuses on community level management of critical natural resources: forests, water and grasslands<sup>1</sup>.

The key elements of PNRM are the defining of legal rights of resource use, rights to natural resource product benefits, and ways of sharing management responsibilities. PNRM is realised through improved management practices by those who have the most vested interest in the resources, that is, those who are livelihood dependent on the resources and their products.

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<sup>1</sup> It is assumed that the promotion and improvement of Agricultural development is already the focus and priority of government services.

PNRM is defined by three clear stages:

- Investigation (learning and understanding),
- Negotiation (planning and agreeing),
- Implementation (doing and reviewing).

A detailed methodology is set out in the FARM-Africa / SOS Sahel publication: *The Key Steps in Establishing Participatory Forest Management: A field manual to guide practitioners in Ethiopia* – [http://www.pfmp-farmsos.org/Docs/pfm\\_manual.pdf](http://www.pfmp-farmsos.org/Docs/pfm_manual.pdf)



**Gathering natural resources information: Participatory Stakeholder Analysis**

### Community Enablement

The development of functional community groups, structures and systems is central to the long term development progress of Ethiopia. Development progress, in the main, is determined by people themselves, by their capacity and capability, using their own methods, means and motivations. Community strengthening aims to establish ways and means by which communities can become equal

partners in development processes, and the eventual leaders in local level management and governance.

The BFE and BERSMP aim to establish robust local level systems and structures of management and control, that are able to work with external change agents (GOs and NGOs), in equitable development partnerships.

Local communities have identified that undermining their traditional institutions and resource management systems, has been central to their problems of resource destruction and diminishing livelihoods. Requests and demands that development intervention be based around existing local governance structures have all but been ignored up until now. The fact that past development interventions in the area have predominantly ignored local structures and systems is increasingly recognised as one of the core reasons for the limited impact of development efforts.

In 2006 BERSMP and Frankfurt Zoological Society carried out a rapid rural appraisal (RRA) of views and perceptions amongst the Bale community towards the management of the Bale National Park and wider landscape. RRA results showed a huge consensus demand and support for both improved natural resource management (>70% respondents) and community level involvement and partnership in that management (>80% respondents).

### Sustainable Natural Resource Livelihoods

A sustainable rural livelihoods approach encompasses the understanding of community capital assets: natural capital (natural resources); social capital (social systems); physical capital (infrastructure); human capital (skills); and financial capital (income).



*Promoting opportunities such as sports fishing as a means of livelihood increases the diversity of potential incomes*

The levels of each capital asset held within a community, and the interactions between capitals relates directly to development opportunities and potential. In Bale, natural, social and human capitals are the key capital assets held by the communities.

In the BFE and BERSMP approach, building sustainable natural resource based livelihoods aims to balance government and community use of natural resources with environmental sustainability and improved revenues and incomes. Livelihood diversification and multiple income strategies will be

strengthened through community organisation and BFE / community business development and partnership. A focus on skills building and small and medium scale natural resource based enterprises is being supported.

The BERSMP and BFE concentrate on building upon three key capital assets that communities hold: natural, social and human capital, whilst jointly seeking opportunities to improve and build up the other less abundant physical and financial capital assets by channeling revenue (in collaboration with other actors). The key reason for building on what communities have; is that it seeks community level solutions to local level problems. Thus, the processes and the practices are community owned and community understood. These aspects are the building blocks of sustainable livelihoods and sustainable development.

The BFE and BERSMP are working with communities to establish natural resource based enterprises. The programme and communities are working on Forest Honey, Forest Coffee, Sustainable Wood and Bamboo Products (GOOD WOOD), Community Tourism, Trout Sports Fishing, Community Trophy Hunting, and Essential Oils.

### **The need for an enabling policy environment: the case of Forests**

According to WBISPP (2002)<sup>2</sup>, it is estimated that in

1990, there were some 4 million ha. of high forest, 29.2 million ha. of woodlands, 26.4 million ha. of shrub lands, 130,000 ha. of highland and 800,000 ha of lowland bamboo, and more than 500,000 ha of man-made forest plantations in Ethiopia. These resources are exposed to extensive human pressure. The annual deforestation rate, according to 1998 studies, is 163,600 ha. This figure also complies with previous estimates of annual deforestation rates which were estimated at c.150,000 – 200,000 ha (EFAP, 1994)<sup>3</sup>. The main causes for the depletion of natural forests are agricultural encroachments in the forests, and intensive livestock grazing with detrimental effects on natural forest regeneration.

The situation of continued deforestation and forest degradation revealed that conventional approaches that are in practice to manage the natural resources, in this case forests, in Ethiopia have not been able to guarantee the conservation of our natural resources.

However, in areas where Participatory Forest Management (PFM) is being implemented, major impacts have been recorded on; forest conditions and management, rural livelihoods and social issues.

The positive impacts on forest conditions include increased forest regeneration, respect of new forest boundaries by communities, community initiated plantings on degraded forest areas, wise use of forest

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Woody Biomass Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Addis Ababa

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<sup>2</sup> Woody Biomass Inventory and Strategic Planning Project (WBISPP), 2002. A Strategic Plan for the Sustainable Development, Conservation, and Management of the

<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian Forestry Action Program (EFAP), 1994. Synopsis Report, Ministry of Natural Resources Conservation and Development, Addis Ababa

products, re-appearance of wildlife, regulation of open access, minimised occurrence of fire, and reduction in forest protection costs for government.

Positive impact in social development has also been apparent. Forest-dependent people are typically widely dispersed and not well organised. As a result, institutions of civil society tend to be weak. The PFM process has enabled the people to organise themselves into various group types. Groups have formed for forest conservation as well as other development endeavors. The Forest Unions of Chilimo and Adaba-Dodola can be cited as good examples. Further, the mechanisms of mediating resource use conflicts arising between different groups are creating tolerance and understanding among those involved. This can be considered as an ingredient in building a stable society.

Though more studies are needed to bring to light the real extent of relations between livelihood improvement and forest management, generally, it is agreed that rural livelihoods have become more secure and sustainable. The benefits secured include:

- ❖ Financial returns (from the sale of forest products including NTFPs),
- ❖ Empowerment through securing of legal use rights over local resources
- ❖ Reduced vulnerability through a sustainable supply of forest based goods and services for consumption (water, medicine, firewood, food, timber.)

In spite of these success stories PFM or PNRM are not being embraced by the Ethiopian Forestry sector as a potential strategy for sustainable forest management and forest development.

### **Leading the way: Oromia State Forest Enterprises**

In 2007, the Oromia State set up the OSFESA. This new forest based institution aims to improve forest management systems in partnership with forest adjacent communities. It is the first Government institution to embrace the approach of PNRM as part of its strategy for sustainable development. The OSFESA comprises 8 geographically located Forest Enterprises. The Bale Forest Enterprise is working with BERSMP, as described in this brief.

### **From experiential pilot to enabling policy**

With the set up of the Oromia State Forest Enterprises, the opportunity is now in place for the new institution to become a forest practice and forest policy pilot.

This is a unique opportunity for government to government and Region to Region learning, experience sharing and collaboration.

The BFE and BERSMP programme partnership is a model for new Government - NGO working relationships. It is proposed that through this NRM pilot in working partnerships between Government, NGO and Community, policy for NRM and Food Security be positively reformed. ■

The Bale Eco-Region Sustainable Management Programme (BERSMP) is a joint programme of FARM-Africa and SOS Sahel Ethiopia. The programme has been operating in the Bale Massif since the end of 2006 and aims to bring local communities into a central role in sustainable natural resources management supported by government services, across the whole Bale Massif.

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