

Running period:
2026–2029

Location:

Ethiopia

The project will directly reach 371,428 people in 74,286 households in eleven woredas of two regional states:

Oromia Regional State: five woredas.

Southwest Regional State: six woredas.

Total Hectares of natural forest and associated landscapes under sustainable management: 228,509 hectares.

Total number of policies influenced: 12

Partners:

The project will be delivered by a consortium of four partner organisations:

Farm Africa (lead)

SOS Sahel Ethiopia

NABU Ethiopia

Environment and Coffee Forest Forum (ECFF)

Funded by:

the Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI) through the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia (RNE)

Harnessing forests and ecosystems for a climate-nature-people triple win (Harness)

The Harness initiative, funded by the Norway's International Climate Forest Initiative (NICFI) through the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia (RNE), aims to reduce and reverse deforestation and eco-system degradation. It also seeks to enhance climate resilience in Ethiopia by promoting an integrated landscape approach that simultaneously achieves poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation, and climate crisis mitigation across vulnerable forest landscapes.

Context

Deforestation, ecosystem degradation, and extreme climate vulnerability are chronic, compounding challenges in Ethiopia, particularly within the Oromia and Southwest Ethiopia forest landscapes. In 2024 alone, Ethiopia suffered the loss of approximately 67,600 hectares of natural forest, triggering 27.7 million metric tons of direct CO₂ emissions. Long-term microclimate reviews reveal that certain southwestern forest blocks have faced a staggering 80% decline in forest cover over the past sixty years, diminishing the total value of localized ecosystem services by tens of millions of dollars.

This escalating environmental decline is driven by several deep-rooted systemic barriers:

➤ **Fragmented governance & siloed sectors:** The management of forestry, environment, and climate actions is currently splintered across separate ministries and regional departments. This fragmentation leads to overlapping mandates, competing sector priorities, and a critical absence of region-specific operational directives for ambitious national policies.

➤ **Undervalued natural capital:** Tangible forest assets and non-market values (such as carbon sequestration, water table regulation, and soil protection) are heavily omitted from national accounts. Consequently, natural forests are rarely prioritised as economic assets, resulting in low public finance allocations and weak private sector integration.



► **Insecure tenure rights:** While community-associated forests are recognised under domestic legislation, practical implementation remains sparse. Forest-dependent communities routinely face insecure use rights, vulnerable boundary control, and systematic exclusion from emerging environmental benefit streams, heavily disincentivising long-term local stewardship.

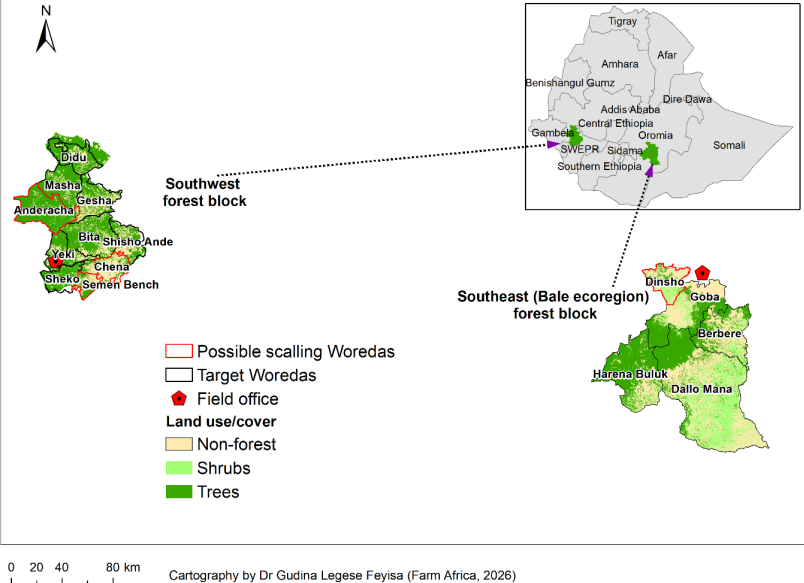
► **Underdeveloped value chains & population stress:** Agricultural expansion remains the primary driver of forest conversion into cropland. Local smallholder producers lack access to processing technologies, specialised finance, and clear traceability systems necessary to align with strict international due diligence standards like the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Simultaneously, 92% of rural households depend exclusively on forest biomass for cooking fuel, placing extreme, continuous pressure on existing forest canopies.

Project aims / key objectives

The Harness project will address the key drivers and root causes of deforestation and forest degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate vulnerability in the target regions of southwest Ethiopia and the Bale Eco-region (BER).

► **Policy operationalisation:** Strengthen the multi-level institutional capacity and cross-sectoral coordination necessary to effectively implement forest, climate, and land management policies from federal to Woreda levels.

► **Ecosystem valuation:** Establish a robust national knowledge base and data hub detailing the financial and non-market values of forest ecosystem services to



actively guide national economic planning and budget allocations.

► **Rights & livelihoods:** Formalise and protect the customary land and forestry tenure rights of forest-dependent communities, while driving sustainable, gender-responsive livelihood diversification and alternative green energy adoption.

► **Deforestation-free trade:** Build market traceability, compliance capacities, and ESG-aligned credit systems to transform local forest product value chains (such as wild coffee, honey, and spices) into globally compliant, premium-earning enterprises.

Approach

The Harness design relies on an evidence-based Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) framework, building on 20 years of field-tested models. By systematically addressing ecological connectivity, economic optimisation, and cross-sectoral planning, the approach systematically breaks down traditional thematic silos through a multi-tier structural strategy:

1. Policy and Institutional Alignment

The project builds the operational capacity of federal ministries and parliamentary standing committees to standardise and oversee environmental commitments. This includes driving legislative amendments to the Cooperative Societies Proclamation to formally recognise and protect conservation-oriented community entities.

2. The Nature, Value and Cost of Knowledge

The project improves the knowledge base on forest ecosystem values and deforestation costs. It standardises data into a national hub and shares

insights with planners to integrate forest conservation into national budgeting and development planning.

3. Community Empowerment

Local communities are positioned as the legal custodians of their natural resources. The project will establish 16 new Forest Management Groups (FMGs) and strengthen 51 existing Participatory Forest Management Cooperatives (PFMs) and 78 FMGs, providing extensive training in community-led forest tracking and boundary patrolling.

4. Market and Green Finance Integration

To eliminate economic drivers of deforestation, the project scales up advanced digital traceability platforms aligned with national export registries. By providing direct corporate de-risking mechanisms, business incubation, and revolving funds, the model incentivizes local banks to adopt ESG-compliant lending policies.

Project outcomes and key interventions

Outcome 1: Improved implementation of forest, climate and land management policies and strategies.

► Develops region-specific directives to operationalize existing climate frameworks such as Climate Resilient Green Economy, Green Legacy, Nationally Determined Contribution.

► Interventions scale out a digital Landscape Change Tracking System for near real-time monitoring and support the establishment of an online national measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) platform.

Outcome 2: Improved knowledge base of forest ecosystem service values and costs of degradation.

Conducts a comprehensive national economic assessment of tangible and non-market forest values (including bamboo and non-timber forest products). This data directly populates a standardised national forest and land-use data hub to influence public budget allocations via targeted cabinet policy dialogues.

Outcome 3: Improved rights and livelihoods of forest-dependent communities.

Facilitates legal certifications for community-



managed lands, leverages historical Bale REDD+ structures to stream benefits from jurisdictional carbon programs, and introduces a devolved, locally led climate adaptation finance mechanism. It actively promotes climate-smart agricultural intensification and ecotourism frameworks.

Outcome 4: Enhanced sustainable commodity production, trade, and finance mechanisms.

Transforms PFM cooperatives into legally functional, market-oriented business enterprises. Interventions introduce organic certification schemes for forest coffee, honey, and spices to secure international price premiums, while piloting landscape-scale Water Funds to drive long-term corporate environmental co-investment.

Exit strategy and local ownership

The project implements a rigorous four-tier operational governance model designed to shift from external execution to complete state and community ownership by the final phase. Key functions are embedded directly within regular Woreda annual budgets, while all digital tracking systems and associated data layers are formally transferred to the state-run Wondo Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources to guarantee permanent data governance, system maintenance, and cross-departmental reporting long after contract closure.





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