



WFP Promotes Resilience in Chronic Food Insecure Areas of Ethiopia

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Executive Summary

EcoAgriculture Partners has undertaken a project with WFP entitled, “Enhancing Food Security Resilience through Strengthened Natural Resource Management at Community and Landscape Scales.” This project is designed to learn how WFP is already building resilient livelihoods and ecosystems, and to help enhance its role in the delivery of food security related environmental and ecosystem benefits, further incorporate climate-related change resilience issues, and further advocate for the expansion of landscape approaches in its work. This is a report of our mission to Ethiopia, October 8 -11, 2012.

There is great potential for scaling-up the MERET model to promote socio-ecological resilience, particularly in areas of chronic food insecurity. The World Food Programme’s successes with the MERET program demonstrates key results that respond to critical gaps in issues affecting food security and resilience in Ethiopia and other countries, including the impacts of climate change, land degradation, poverty, and reduced agricultural GDP. The speed of transformation, its investment in multiple outcomes, the achievement of the integration of a technical watershed and participatory natural resource management approach, the explicit link between ecological assets and socio-economic issues, the long-term investment in sustainable assets, its focus on the most vulnerable communities and populations, the integration of climate smart agricultural practices that result in multiple resilience outcomes, and WFP’s decades of experiences in integrating MERET’s principles and operational approaches in other programs in Ethiopia all contribute to MERET’s strong characteristics for scaling-up and transferring the program in other parts of the world.

To enhance the gains already made in generating resilience outcomes, WFP may opt to develop a more robust knowledge management system, current partnerships, build collaborative funding, consolidate livelihoods strategies, deepen internal program coordination, finalize a MERET exit strategy, invest in community strategic communication and institutional fora at a watershed scale, and further adopt a climate smart agricultural lens.

WFP is in an excellent position to demonstrate what works in areas of high degradation and chronic food insecurity and to champion these successes in multiple policy fora. One such international platform is the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature (LPFN) (www.landscapes.ecoagriculture.org). The LPFN is a consortium of 10 co-organizing institutions, several dozen strategic partners, including WFP, and hundreds of collaborating landscape initiatives and organizations and their networks. WFP will engage one of the MERET landscapes as a learning landscape with the LPFN Initiative, where lessons will be shared among a wide network of participating partners.

Background

The United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) has traditionally utilized food for work/assets programs in Ethiopia to save lives in areas where food relief needs arise and chronic food insecurity persists. Through its work with the most vulnerable groups in Ethiopia, WFP has come to have a clear understanding of the linkages among land degradation, natural resource management, water availability, livelihoods, and food security in areas of chronic food insecurity and has begun to incorporate more design elements in its programs to address the root causes of recurrent food shortages and emergencies. WFP is currently exploring opportunities to enhance and expand its work in linking improved livelihoods and restoration of natural assets to food security in order to increase communities' resilience to weather-related risks. Such risks are largely attributed to climate change, and in the case of Ethiopia are intrinsically related to the negative effects of unpredictable and severe weather on already degraded landscapes.

WFP's implementation experiences in Ethiopia's most vulnerable areas offer a rich base of lessons from which to inform its future strategy. Further, WFP is embracing a long-term perspective to planning and implementing interventions that enhance resilience to a plethora of causes of vulnerability, which are compounded by climate change at a time when impacts are already felt in the agriculture, water and infrastructure sectors in Ethiopia. In addition to climate change adaptation, the integration of disaster risk reduction—that is, minimizing vulnerabilities and disaster risks, to avoid or to mitigate the adverse impacts of hazards—is a fundamental part of the approach. This perspective reflects WFP's experiences on the ground to deliver its mandate to administer food assistance while working to eliminate the underlying causes contributing to its need.

Historically, Ethiopia has been affected by variable rainfall and weather patterns, and more frequently from droughts and floods since the 1970s, all of which have negatively affected crop production and economic growth. Recent IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) research on projected climate change impacts in agricultural subsectors important to smallholders in Ethiopia found that climate change impacts are expected to increase poverty despite efforts by the Government to significantly increase irrigation. Within this setting, WFP's aim is to identify further ways that it can deepen its strategies to create greater resilience among already highly degraded areas and communities likely to be highly impacted by any climate variation. In addition, and complementary to ongoing programs addressing underlying causes of vulnerability in food insecure areas, there is potential to tap mitigation financing for programs in Ethiopia that can demonstrate large carbon sequestration benefits, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, reduced soil erosion and large increases in biomass.

WFP aims to consolidate its successes, demonstrate its comparative advantage, and raise awareness at country level and in the international policy community of the importance of food security and livelihood strategies that incorporate landscape management to protect the most vulnerable food insecure populations living in degraded and shock prone environments. It is in

in this context that EcoAgriculture Partners¹ has undertaken a project with WFP entitled, “Enhancing Food Security Resilience through Strengthened Natural Resource Management at Community and Landscape Scales.” This project is designed to learn how WFP is already building resilient livelihoods and ecosystems, and to help enhance its role in the delivery of food security related environmental and ecosystem benefits, further incorporate climate-related resilience strategies, and further advocate for the expansion of landscape approaches in its work.

As part of this project, EcoAgriculture Partners undertook three previous field visits to Kenya and Ethiopia in November 2011, and to Ecuador in May 2012. The team developed and applied a preliminary landscape resilience assessment tool to examine ways that pastoral, agro-pastoral and agricultural communities that WFP serves may be building assets that will improve their resilience to food insecurity². This framework for socio-ecological resilience emphasizes the relationships and dynamism between four landscape dimensions and scales: agroecosystems, ecosystems, livelihoods, and institutions³. Management strategies at each of these landscape scales are directed towards reducing vulnerabilities and promoting adaptive capacities through the production and maintenance of agricultural, livelihood, and ecological diversity. Together, the four dimensions comprising the landscape approach offer significant potential for promoting social and ecological resilience – including food and livelihood security – and adaptive capacities. The dimensions of the framework are brought together through multi-stakeholder adaptive management processes as depicted in Figure 1.⁴

The framework is used to identify successes and building blocks, as well as opportunities for adding, expanding, and/or linking activities that will lead to better socio-ecological resilience, and therefore reduced vulnerability of project beneficiaries to the effects of climate change. The analysis that stems from the application of this framework provides a foundation for identifying ways to enhance the adaptation, risk management and potential climate mitigation benefits of the project.

¹ EcoAgriculture Partners is an International NGO that has begun a global initiative with partners on “Landscapes for People, Food and Nature, (www.landscapes.ecoagriculture.org),” which is seeking to scale up the use of landscape-scale strategies to integrate objectives of food and livelihood security, ecosystem management, and agricultural development.

² The more detailed framework is developed in the forthcoming publication: EcoAgriculture Partners and WFP. (2013). *Managing for Resilience: Exploring a Landscape Approach for Improving Food and Livelihood Security*. Washington, DC: EcoAgriculture Partners.

³ Socio-ecological resilience recognizes the complex interactions – and interdependencies – of social and ecological systems and views human systems as part of natural systems, which combine to form an interrelated whole. Socio-ecological resilience thus focuses on multiple and inter-connected social and ecological scales and processes and the adaptive mechanisms that contribute to a more resilient system. In the context of climate change the emphasis is on reducing risks from droughts and floods and increasing capacities to adapt. See EcoAgriculture Partners and WFP. (2013). Ibid.

⁴ It is important to note that the four dimensions are separated in this framework for applied purposes, i.e. to inform policy and practice. In reality, these four dimensions are intricately connected. Therefore, we stress that this framework should be employed with attention to the interactions between these four dimensions.



Figure 1. Components of Resilient Landscapes

From October 8 -11, 2012, EcoAgriculture Partners and WFP staff visited the Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transition (MERET) program sites in the Tigray Region of Northern Ethiopia⁵. The purpose of this visit was to highlight the current and potential impacts of Government and partners' land and water initiatives in highly degraded areas in the context of strengthening community resilience, contributing to climate change adaptation, and identifying potential landscape-scale strategies that build on their success. The visit encompassed 3 days of field site inquiry in five woredas: Neder-Adiet Woreda, Adwa, Ahferom, Ganta Afeshum, and Kilte-Awlaelo, and included a discussion with the WFP sub-office in Mekelle and the regional government. A fourth day in Addis Ababa was spent meeting with the WFP country office staff, researchers based at the Water and Land Resource Center in Addis, and Government partners.

This report is organized as follows: 1) the evolution, goals and extent of WFP's program in Ethiopia, emphasizing the principles and the model of the MERET approach, including its unique aspects relative to other land and water initiatives; 2) the findings and analysis from the mission meetings at local, regional and national levels, including evidence of socio-ecological resilience along the four dimensions of the resilience framework; 3) key recommendations on how WFP might improve and/or scale up socio-ecological resilience, in particular on ways to generate investments in innovations that build ecological resilience through climate smart landscapes;

⁵EcoAg was accompanied to the field by Randall Purcell, Senior Advisor, from the Office of Climate Change, Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction at WFP Headquarters, Rome

and 4) next steps, taking care to highlight the potential of the approach to scale-up socio-ecological resilience in populations affected by chronic food insecurity.

1. The Context of the Success of WFP's Program in Ethiopia

The Evolution of MERET

MERET has evolved from a largely emergency focused, short-term and top-down approach that met with limited success for permanently turning around areas impacted heavily by chronic food insecurity, to the participatory, community-based integrated watershed approach that it represents today.

Early WFP programs in Ethiopia began as food for work projects to respond to the 1973 drought and famine. During this period food for work permitted a more development oriented approach to disaster mitigation through the incorporation of conservation and rehabilitation efforts. Starting in 1980 the Ministry of Agriculture and WFP, together with technical support from FAO, launched its first development project that aimed to demonstrate development results in drought affected areas through large-scale, top-down projects in rehabilitation, soil conservation, and rural infrastructure. Although the project was able to meet objectives such as improving productivity on degraded land, there were limitations, including centralized planning, low community ownership, low quality technical work and little integration of the activities at farm and watershed level.

In response to the limitations of early food for work programs, the government and WFP developed an approach that would integrate farmers' priorities with technical specifications of watershed hydrology and soil structure, which became known as the Local Level Participatory Planning Approach (LLPA). This approach was made possible in part as responsibilities were extended to communities through the ongoing process of decentralization in the early 1990s. The revised approach met many successes and enhanced impacts, such as better quality-control systems and the right balance of technical input and participatory local planning. In the late 1990s, the Government and WFP took key elements of the previous programs and broadened the approach to incorporate a livelihoods perspective through the integration of income generation activities (IGAs) and other productivity improvements such as small-scale irrigation. In 2002, MERET was born based on the premise that land degradation was a socio-economic issue. MERET is now a community-owned and managed success story and a model for integrated watershed management, productivity and livelihoods improvement.



Illustration 1. Mosaic land use in a rehabilitated watershed

The Current Scope of MERET

MERET utilizes a community-based participatory watershed approach aimed at improving the long-term livelihood and food security of chronically food insecure and drought-prone communities. Many of Ethiopia's regions are characterized by severe land degradation that undermines food security and rural livelihoods. Related issues include increased and recurrent drought, unpredictable and variable rainfall, population growth and in-migration, unsustainable agricultural practices and management, and low and declining soil fertility and land productivity. Climate change has multiplied these risks. MERET has documented success with land rehabilitation, improved food security, livelihood benefits and enhancement of ecosystem goods and services.

MERET currently operates in six regions of Ethiopia, covering 451 communities or sub-watersheds, and has rehabilitated over 400,000 hectares of degraded land in 72 chronically food insecure woredas (districts). The total number of targeted beneficiaries is 1.74 million, with approximately 125,000 direct participants, of whom 40% are female. WFP food commodities committed during 2007-2011 was 164,585 metric tons. The total cost for WFP is USD 72,306,786 with a government contribution (matching fund) of USD 6,663,150. MERET represents only a small fraction of the support to degraded lands in Ethiopia.

The Government of Ethiopia has expressed strong interest in expanding MERET to other regions. These include Gambela and Benishangul Gumuz regions, which are not, for the most part, chronically food insecure. However, these areas are currently subject to the rapid expansion of degradation caused by deforestation and overgrazing, and Somaliland, a traditionally pastoral area, faces food insecurity and climate vulnerability. More ambitious targets for scaling-up the MERET approach have been limited by funding.

In the meantime, a number of approaches and tools developed within the context of MERET are supporting other major initiatives, including the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) and the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) project of the World Bank, among others that also aim to tackle the severe deterioration of the natural resource base.

MERET's Unique Approach

The MERET approach is a participatory watershed planning and management approach to food security, meaning that water availability, soil conservation and food security are linked ⁶. MERET has evolved with strong Government of Ethiopia leadership and is well integrated in national and local policy and implementation practice. The lessons from MERET experiences have been integrated into key policy documents at several stages, and its principles, approach and operating mechanisms have been fully mainstreamed in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Several principles and practices of the MERET approach have been previously documented and broadly understood to contribute to its success. These are 1) a contextual understanding and rooting of the approach in the context of vulnerability, 2) a planning approach rooted in the basic unit of community level government, e.g. the local level participatory planning approach (LLPPA), 3) Government driven implementation, 4) the institutionalization of the participatory watershed management approach in the Ministry of Agriculture policies and programs through the national Community Based Participatory Watershed Development (CBPWD) Guidelines, 5) enabling factors that support collective action for ecological restoration, such as the positive motivation towards the Government policy of *compulsory free labor for community work*⁷, 6) continuous technical innovations, 7) technical work that is led by specialized conservation engineers that adhere to the 'watershed logic'⁸ and institutionalized high quality project standards and work norms in the provision of technical services and construction of physical and biological soil and water conservation structures, 8) engagement in capacity building at multiple levels (institutional, community, and household) and, 9) recognition of the issue of scale in managing large-scale spatial design projects while also recognizing the participation required for the successful management of local natural assets.

⁶ Technical guidance on the approach may be found in: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. 2005. *Community Based Participatory Watershed Development: A Guideline*. Addis Ababa: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

⁷ A study of Tigray residents' views of the Government policy of compulsory free labor for community work found that "*the people are motivated to provide their free labor to restore the ecology to increase agricultural productivity and production to avoid food insecurity and improve their general livelihood*." See Kumasi, Tyhra Carolyn and Asenso-Okyere, Kwadwo. 2011. "Responding to Land Degradation in the Highlands of Tigray, Northern Ethiopia." IFPRI Discussion Paper 01142. Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office: IFPRI.

⁸ The MERET approach is based on a principle of 'holistic watershed logic' or a principle that strategically applies treatment of the upper watershed first, followed by a coordinated and sequenced set of activities that follow one another

In addition, a number of other unique aspects of MERET that set the program apart from other donor supported food security and safety net initiatives are recognized here. These include the following:

- (1) Targeting the very poor to participate, often in geographic areas of high land degradation where other programs do not operate because of the high degree of marginal lands,*
- (2) The critical role of food aid in the process,*
- (3) A central focus on subsistence production and producing food year round,*
- (4) Use of very labor intensive interventions that serve as a self-selection mechanism for the poor due to their opportunity costs,*
- (5) An emphasis on low-cost technologies,*
- (6) The inclusion of an explicit focus on the landless (MERET plus),*
- (7) WFP's own evaluation criteria of success is according to the number of households that have food in off seasons, and*
- (8) The selection of sustainable land management (SLM) practices that are also climate smart agriculture (CSA) practices⁹.*

The following section presents the findings from the October 2012 field visit to the MERET sites in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.



Illustration 2. Irrigated vegetable gardening

⁹ FAO defines climate-smart agriculture as agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, strengthens resilience to climate change and variability, and mitigates climate change by reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increasing carbon storage.

2. Findings & Analysis of Socio-Ecological Resilience

In the Tigray Region, EcoAgriculture visited the sub-watersheds and project sites in five woredas (districts): (1) Neder-Adiet Woreda, (2) Adwa, (3) Ahferom, (4) Ganta Afeshum, and (5) Kilte-Awlaelo. In this section, we draw on the MERET example to highlight good practices in landscape management and food security. We describe salient components of the respective projects and provide an analysis of ways they are aiding the communities they serve to build agroecological, livelihood and institutional assets that can enhance food security resilience and reduce needs for food assistance.

- **Achievement of multiple outcomes - in agricultural production, livelihoods, social protection, and conservation** - sets WFP's approach to food security apart from other food security initiatives. Ahferom woreda reports that the food deficit has decreased to three months of the year and 642 of 2907 households have graduated and support their own household's food security from income earned through income generating activities. The number of livestock kept for fattening has increased from 320 to 2,330 in five years. Vegetation cover and groundwater recharge have both increased thanks to watershed management efforts, all of which have resulted in increased biodiversity in the area.
- MERET's **watershed management approach is in service of food security and production**, not an independent objective of its own. The food for work components that enable work such as hillside restoration, forest development, and vegetative measures are undertaken in service of improving livelihood and productive incomes, and enable other activities such as income generation and crop diversification. More than 50 user groups have been created in Adwa woreda, including for milk and honey production.
- MERET applies a '**holistic watershed approach**' that strategically applies treatment of the upper watershed first, followed by a coordinated and sequenced set of activities that follow one another. Traditional watershed approaches have been challenged in the past to adhere to a holistic approach starting at the top of the watershed due to demand for short-term tangible benefits from downstream households in the watershed. In the Ganta-Affeshum woreda, 53% of the upstream portion of the watershed has been treated, which has impacted downstream areas through protection of farmland from erosion and an increase in the number of hectares developed for irrigation.
- One of the demonstrable successes of MERET relative to other watershed projects is the **speed of transformation** from highly degraded and inhospitable lands, characterized by chronically food insecure populations dependent on food assistance and high rates of migration, to more food secure communities with increased incomes and water availability for more months of the year. For instance, operations in the Ganta-Affeshum woreda began in 2008. In 2012, the community has 74 hand-dug wells and 39 new

springs downstream of the watershed. Productivity has increased four fold from 6Qt/ha to 30Qt/ha.



Illustration 3. Re-vegetated hillside

- MERET projects are characterized by **sophisticated and high quality technical work** that is tailored for each watershed along multiple dimensions, including hydrological specifications of the watershed, land use and community needs. In Ahferom watershed, the community and conservation engineers have worked together to identify the crucial biophysical and institutional measures that best meet the needs of their watershed from the larger menu of MERET technologies, including terracing, integrated gully control, water harvesting, forest development, income generation, promotion of nurseries, construction of homesteads, and training and capacity building.
- The MERET model emphasizes the **balance of technical and participatory inputs** in the planning process. This balance supports the adoption of the watershed logic and participation in watershed management at multiple levels (household, community, institutional). Hence, there is greater buy-in to the sequencing and application of the logic across the watershed, and for the mobilization of labor for construction of biophysical structures. In Adwa woreda, as in the other woredas, community members highlight their participation in preparing community plans and organizing community labor as part of the Local Level Participatory Planning Approach (LLPPA). Sub-watershed committees develop plans and conservation engineers provide feasibility assessments for the priorities identified by the communities. The rural community depends on communal irrigation infrastructure, construction materials, firewood, and grazing pasture for their livelihoods. Therefore, contributing to strengthening the capacities for

collective action through the LLPPA is a critical part of successful participatory natural resource management in MERET.

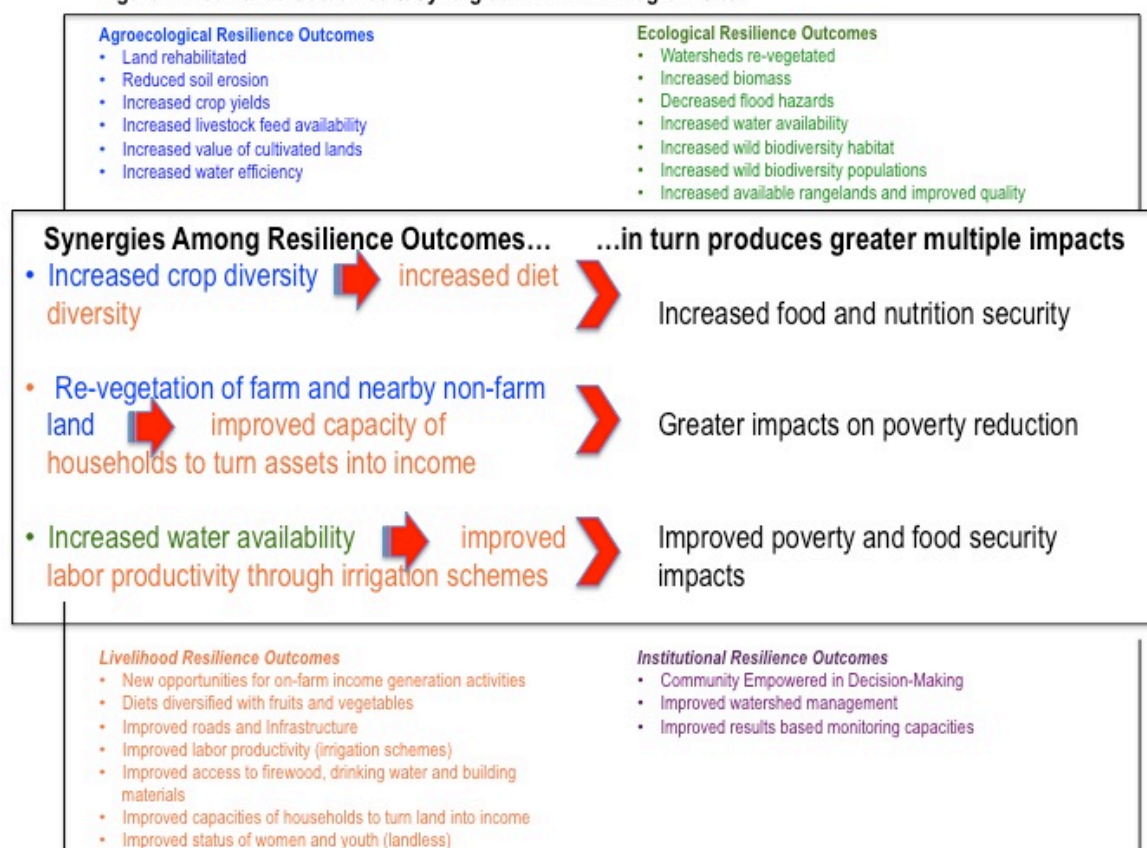
- The Local Level Participatory Planning Approach (**LLPPA**) and the **Community Based Participatory Watershed Development Program (CBPWD)** are well integrated in the **local institutional system**, enabling entry points that support capacity development of local institutions. In the Enamered watershed in Adwa woreda the community has created by-laws, including an agreement to sell surplus elephant grass and populus tree cuttings to other villages. Adwa woreda has also been one of the areas where the planning and watershed groups' capacities have been built through tools such as photo monitoring.
- The MERET approach successfully reflects the **use of sustainable land management practices that are also climate smart agricultural practices** and that are contributing to greater ecological resilience. Due to the combination, the scale, and the nature of the interventions, dramatic reductions in emissions are occurring, and carbon sequestration, increased biomass, and soil organic matter is improving.
- Finally, the MERET approach has had a **strategic impact on the development of methods and strategies of other food security, watershed and sustainable land management approaches on a national scale in Ethiopia**. In addition to the institutionalization of MERET principles and lessons learned in the Ministry of Agriculture's policies on participatory watershed development, MERET has also informed the operations of new safety net programs such as the national PSNP (Productive Safety Net Program). The MERET and PSNP programs are often overlapping and complementing in the same woredas, and the impact on multiple dimensions of resilience is evident in the extension to other communities through the adoption of MERET principles in the PSNP approach. The World Bank's project appraisal document for a USD \$30 million investment in Sustainable Land Management (2008) refers to the MERET project as largely informing the technical design of the watershed component of the SLM project, based on MERET's successful implementation of watershed management in food insecure areas through strong ownership and participation.¹⁰ The World Bank supported project also draws on the CBPWD guidelines that were developed based on MERET and other projects.

The evidence of outcomes of socio-ecological resilience in MERET in each of the four components of the draft resilience framework is represented in Figure 2. The generation of resilience in each of these components is not independent of the others, and in reality produces synergies. For instance, increased crop diversity (agroecological resilience) is leading to increased diet diversity (livelihood resilience), resulting in increased food and nutrition security;

¹⁰ World Bank. 2008. Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Grant to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for a Sustainable Land Management Project. March 28, 2008. Report No: 42927-ET. Sustainable Development Department: AFTSN.

the rehabilitation of degraded farm lands and re-vegetation of farm fields, nearby non-farm land and upper areas of the watershed (agroecological and ecological resilience) is supporting the improved capacity of households to turn assets into income (livelihoods resilience), resulting in greater impacts on poverty; and increased water availability (ecological resilience) is enabling improved labor productivity through small-scale irrigation schemes (livelihood resilience), resulting in improved poverty and food security impacts.

Figure 2. Resilience Outcomes & Synergies in MERET Program Sites



3. Recommendations

While the findings above demonstrate the robust and multiple achievements of MERET in fostering resilience in chronic food insecure areas of Ethiopia, there are a number of areas where WFP could intensify efforts to increase resilience in communities and scale-up the adoption of the MERET model. The following recommendations outline these potential steps.

1. **Develop a more robust knowledge management component of MERET.** MERET did not collect a baseline at the start of the project and does not currently have a systematic

database or M&E system, although documentation collected in the LLPPA has provided a good reference to the baseline situation. However, MERET has already recognized the need for a more systematic system to capture outcomes along multiple dimensions and has collected data on a number of different indicators, although the tracking of outputs and outcomes has been limited to certain sites and years. EcoAg recommends that MERET develop a more robust component on knowledge management that will track core indicators along the four dimensions of socio-ecological resilience over space and time, e.g. the multiple outcomes that MERET has already invested in. Tracking a core set of indicators will allow WFP to document the changes in community resilience among multiple dimensions, communicate results to different partners, and serve as the basis for dialogue about scaling up.

2. ***Revisit the partnership environment in Ethiopia and develop and formalize a current partnership strategy.*** A fresh perspective on the partnership question could aid WFP's strategic interest in scaling-up the benefits of the MERET model in Ethiopia by examining how partnerships could contribute to collaborative planning for multiple objectives and enhance the achievement of multiple impacts in a geographic area. Two areas that the WFP Ethiopia country office is focusing on already are a partnership with FAO and links with the PSNP/HABP and national sustainable land management program. WFP will want to build on its historical role as a center of innovation, and work as a catalyst for programs in new geographic areas in this collaborative approach going forward. Such an approach would also offer one pathway for offsetting or decreasing potential competition among similarly minded programs.
3. ***Consolidate strategies to increase livelihoods resilience.*** The livelihoods component has been part of MERET for the last decade, mainly through investment in community infrastructure (physical capital) such as feeder roads, etc., and support for the development of alternative incomes. The most recent evolution of MERET (MERET PLUS) explicitly targets the landless with these livelihood strategies. MERET has been exploring ways in which small business development and nutrition may be explicit focal areas of the next phase, and recognizes there is much that could be done to increase and strengthen this component and increase livelihoods resilience. Small business development and livelihoods programming should be a key area where WFP will revisit prior proposals and leverage partnerships to fully realize this outcome and to scale-up livelihoods resilience in the MERET model.
4. ***Continue to deepen internal coordination of WFP programs to strengthen synergies among components of socio-ecological resilience.*** WFP has already embarked on an initiative to tighten its internal coordination of various programs such as its relief programs, Child/FFE programs (including school meals programs), leave no women behind joint program, supplementary nutrition programs, Purchase for Progress (P4P) and adaptation programs. WFP should keep this internal focus on strengthening the linkages among

programs to better realize and scale-up synergies among the different components of agroecological and livelihoods resilience.

5. ***Develop a component on community strategic communication to support the scaling-up of the MERET model and increase institutional resilience.*** MERET has developed an institutional framework that is well integrated in local institutional systems and that has a specific focus on participation in decision-making in watershed planning. This approach has been institutionalized in the Ministry of Agriculture national policy on participatory watershed management. However, the missions observed that each watershed committee appears to be ‘starting from scratch’ in its own sub-catchment to build community capacity and ownership for the approach. Many of the planning committees visited highlighted that the most challenging aspects of their responsibilities are the mobilization of communities at the beginning of the project, and developing their own commitment, which took time to materialize after seeing what works on the ground¹¹. MERET should incorporate a component on strategic communication to help overcome these types of common entry barriers. These entry barriers are often found at the outset of programs that introduce a new approach, or that require collective action for activities that are expected to generate benefits that will affect households in the long term, but whereby individuals may not see immediate benefits to their own households.

Components of such a strategic communication approach should target key institutions such as the planning committees, and might include 1) study tours and exchange visits, 2) knowledge exchange and sharing among new and old MERET communities, 3) targeting religious leaders with training in the ‘watershed logic’ during the design phase of rolling out the approach in new communities, 4) creating videos that demonstrate the watershed logic and the before and after scenarios in previous MERET communities, which can be screened at trainings and in communities 5) generating dialogue on previous approaches to land management and the watershed logic through other best practice communication approaches in Ethiopia such as “community conversations,” 6) scaling-up and systematizing the use of photo monitoring as a participatory monitoring tool and a knowledge sharing tool among communities, and 7) developing a set of key messages and identifying the appropriate media at different levels to convey consistent and appropriate messages on the watershed logic and sustainable land management.

The strategic communication approach should better support planning/watershed committees to carry out their key functions critical to realizing the intended project outcomes. This component will be critical for scaling-up the MERET model in Ethiopia and in other countries as it will improve the entry point of the project as well as shorten the time to overcome entry barriers and develop community ownership of the approach. WFP could leverage partnerships with other institutions that have deep knowledge of strategic

¹¹ To inform investment in this area, these observations could be verified through a triangulation of data from focus groups composed of committee members from different watersheds.

development communication to develop this component. Strengthening this component may also enhance institutional resilience through an increase in horizontal communication channels and knowledge-sharing pathways, and an increased emphasis on local capacities for communication and learning.



Illustration 4. Woreda committee member presenting MERET program activities

6. ***Strengthen institutional resilience at a landscape scale.*** One of the critical ways that MERET can strengthen its landscape approach will be to support institutions at a watershed or landscape level, while taking care to retain a participatory community-based approach. Some interaction among stakeholders at a watershed scale has already taken place on a case-by-case basis, however MERET has not yet adopted a systematic institutional structure for dialogue and decision-making at a watershed scale. Structures for coordinated planning and decision-making on socio-ecological asset management would increase institutional resilience through improved capacity for adaptive management at landscape scale. Multi-stakeholder fora at a watershed scale should involve all stakeholders and could enable scaling-up while serving as a key entry point for partners - particularly if the recommendation to revisit partnerships is adopted. Decision-support tools already in use, such as photo monitoring, and other spatially explicit decision-support tools would enhance institutional resilience when applied at a landscape scale.
7. ***Adopt a climate smart agricultural landscape lens to increase synergies among resilience components in the MERET approach.*** Policy recommendations based on recent IFPRI

(International Food Policy Research Institute) research on the projected impacts of climate change in Ethiopia suggest the need for investments in multi-purpose water infrastructure such as reservoirs, detention ponds and small dams. Such infrastructure is meant to address irregular rainfall, the main projected climate related hazard to Ethiopia, by increasing water storage and regulating water flows, particularly for irrigation use. The African Union and the TerrAfrica platform have advanced the research and policy dialogue on relevant climate smart agriculture practices and are well positioned to inform new strategies. WFP should situate its successes in the context of recent and emerging paradigms that reflect what is needed to develop “climate smart landscapes”¹². Such a lens highlights strategies to track change at different scales, manage land use interactions at a landscape scale, and spatially target investments in the landscape - and offers a compelling approach to increasing resilience.

8. ***Build Collaborative Funding Based on Collaborative Programming.*** As WFP develops more collaborative programming strategies to meet multiple objectives, WFP will be able to seek opportunities for collaborative funding for the MERET model. Exploring more collaborative financing models will allow financing streams to expand beyond those feeding directly to food security and nutrition to those representative of the wide range of benefits that MERET brings from its multiple functions, e.g. water, climate, agriculture, and economic development. In October 2012, GAFSP (Global Agriculture and Food Security Program) announced new pledges to expand the multi-donor trust fund’s food and nutrition security work in the poorest countries. The MERET model would make an excellent case for available scaling-up funds as GAFSP aims to target funds to agricultural sector models with demonstrated transformational change, strong government commitment, and support for activities that have the greatest nutrition security outcomes. Another possible financing stream for the MERET model may be climate adaptation and mitigation funds. There is an emerging evidence base from research on climate trends, which suggests that investments should be geared to increase communities’ resilience to food insecurity and water scarcity by ensuring that funds do not go to stand alone climate change projects but rather be integrated in rural livelihoods projects in agriculture, natural resources and water. MERET is in an excellent position to inform how future climate financing can be integrated in robust and evidence based strategies for rural development and agricultural productivity in chronic food insecure areas.
9. ***Finalize a MERET exit strategy.*** While WFP is working actively to continue to mainstream the MERET approach in the Government’s sustainable land management agenda, there remains a lack of a clear MERET exit strategy. Before taking next steps to develop institutional relationships and scaling-up plans, WFP will need to fully develop its intended

¹² Scherr et al. define “climate-smart landscapes” as “landscapes that operate on the principles of integrated landscape management, while explicitly incorporating adaptation and mitigation into their management objectives.” See Scherr et al. From Climate Smart Agriculture to Climate Smart Landscapes. Agriculture & Food Security 2012, 1:12 <http://www.agricultureandfoodsecurity.com/content/1/1/12>

exit strategy, and the specific criteria by which the timeline will be established. WFP may wish to define the indicative timeline of activities for the MERET model at 8-10 years in order to achieve the intended impacts in socio-ecological resilience, while in some situations achieving such impacts in 5 years. WFP's end point should be when food security is achieved, and once the land is improved other partners may come in to support the development of markets and small business enterprise. Clear communication on the exit strategy, and on the successes and benefits of the MERET program will be needed in the process.

As the MERET model is scaled-up to other parts of Ethiopia and other countries, WFP may wish to consider how it can foster greater institutional collaboration from the start so that any exit or transition strategy that includes the handover of one or more components to other institutions will be smooth. WFP may wish to re-examine its role as the driver, technical support arm, funding agency, manager and champion of MERET, and to think strategically about what role it could play to its comparative advantage in a collaborative strategy driven by a consortium of institutions in support of the Government. WFP has already begun such work through its collaboration in the national sustainable land management platform, and could continue to have an influence and impact on the platform through the ongoing integration of lessons learned from MERET. WFP may do well to focus on role(s) such as knowledge broker and innovator in support of other lead institutions, while bringing its major contribution, e.g. its focus on the poor and food insecure.



Illustration 5. Hand-dug water pond



Illustration 6. Sand bund

Next Steps

The World Food Programme's successes with the MERET program demonstrate key results that respond to critical gaps in issues affecting food security and resilience in Ethiopia and other countries, including the impacts of climate change, land degradation, poverty, and reduced agricultural GDP. The speed of transformation, its investment in multiple outcomes, the

achievement of the integration of a technical watershed and participatory natural resource management approach, the explicit link between ecological assets and socio-economic issues, the long-term investment in sustainable assets, its focus on the most vulnerable communities and populations, the integration of climate smart agricultural practices that result in multiple resilience outcomes, and WFP's decades of experiences in integrating MERET's principles and operational approaches in other programs in Ethiopia all contribute to MERET's strong characteristics for scaling-up, replicating and transferring the program in other parts of the world.

There is great potential for scaling-up the MERET model to promote socio-ecological resilience, particularly in areas of chronic food insecurity. WFP is in an excellent position to demonstrate what works in areas of high degradation and chronic food insecurity and to champion these successes in multiple policy fora. WFP's success with MERET offers the opportunity to scale-up the MERET model through a consortium of partners at a much larger scale, based on how the Government of Ethiopia will continue to mainstream the MERET approach in national platforms and policies for addressing food insecurity and increasing the resilience of communities. WFP should strategically position itself to best inform and add value to the mainstreaming process and the consortium that may develop to carry MERET forward on a larger scale. Inclusive in these steps for WFP will be to ensure that the elements that are important to MERET's success are fully mainstreamed along with other aspects of MERET that have already been picked up in national platforms. As part of this process, WFP will want to clearly articulate how MERET is different from other approaches to food security, watershed and SLWM, including many of the elements of success previously discussed such as the integration of activities for speed of transformation, and a long-term approach to building sustainable assets through high quality work.

Some elements of the MERET program may easily transfer to other countries and regions, such as the principles of the watershed logic. However, there will be a number of important elements of the MERET model that will be necessary to re-conceptualize for different contexts, such as the participatory planning approach. WFP may wish to develop different models for various socio-ecological contexts and pilot test these adaptations of the MERET model. Ethiopia has a professional civil service, and strong hierarchical government institutions that have benefited the adoption and institutionalization of MERET principles as well as the degree of high quality technical work at the community level. A replication of the MERET model may wish to consider alternative contexts where the linkages among government tiers are less defined and the civil service has greater capacity needs. Replication elsewhere may also require a more demand driven approach.

WFP is already engaged in incorporating MERET into a more comprehensive framework of assets and livelihoods, including incorporating MERET experiences in the new WFP Food Assistance for Assets Manual. WFP envisions rolling out the MERET model under such a framework of assets and livelihoods, while the MERET model may continue to inform and serve as a learning platform to current corporate and country office efforts. As the country office is already working on strengthening its monitoring and evaluation system for MERET, such efforts

to share an enhanced evidence base of MERET's multiple impacts will place WFP in a better position to inform and advocate for opportunities to roll out the MERET model with multi-donor funds.

WFP will need all of the tools discussed in the recommendations to embark on an advocacy program to advance the next generation of the MERET model in Ethiopia and elsewhere. The Government of Ethiopia and multiple donors are interested in revising the *Community Based Participatory Watershed Development Guidelines* (2005) to reflect new innovations and lessons learned, and such an exercise may be a good starting point for discussions on institutional collaboration to scale-up the MERET model.

WFP seeks to raise the profile of the MERET program in new platforms. One such international platform is the Landscapes for People, Food and Nature (LPFN). The LPFN is a consortium of 10 co-organizing institutions, several dozen strategic partners, including WFP, and hundreds of collaborating landscape initiatives and organizations and their networks. WFP will engage one of the MERET landscapes as a learning landscape with the LPFN Initiative, where lessons will be shared among a wide network of participating partners.

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