

UNDP Eritrea

2015 Newsletter



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

Message from the Resident Representative



Photo: UNDP Eritrea Resident Representative Ms. Christine N. Umutoni.

I take this opportunity to introduce the first edition of UNDP Eritrea annual newsletter. In this edition we share with our partners and the public some of UNDP stories from Eritrea.

This year marked an important milestone for the United Nations as we transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNDP in Eritrea played a critical role as the frontrunner for MDGs in Eritrea and will continue playing the same role with the SDGs. Already, we are building the momentum for SDGs roll out in Eritrea. In November this year, we held a successful panel discussion under the theme “Transition from MDGs to SDGs; what does it mean for Eritrea?” as part of our UN day celebration. The Eritrea Government has shown its commitment towards the achievement of some of the MDGs and we are optimistic that this momentum will continue in 2016, when we transition to the SDGs.

UNDP Eritrea supported both international and national events. Earlier in the year, February 23-24, UNDP supported the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) to host 38th session of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU)’s

General Council and international symposium in Asmara, Eritrea. In March, UNDP was part of UN agencies that supported the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) in showcasing its 10 years achievements during the 59th session of the Commission on Status of Women (CSW) in New York. In November, a panel discussion on MDGs – SDGs transition was held in Asmara as part of UN at 70 celebrations. Already, UNDP is gearing up to support a number of events in 2016.

In 2015, we joined Senafe community as they celebrated the opening of the new Senafe District hospital, a fully equipped health facility that will enhance access to health care in the Debub region of Eritrea. The new facility was constructed and equipped with support from UNDP and the European Union as part of the UNDP post war recovery program for Eritrea. In line with our work to support gender equality and women empowerment in Eritrea, UNDP supports the national union of Eritrean women on many programs; in October, together with NUEW; UNDP held a Training of Trainers (TOT) on gender mainstreaming and gender equality. The training was attended by high profile government officials and representatives of civic societies in Eritrea.

UNDP continues to support the development priorities of the Government of the State of Eritrea (GoSE): including youth and employment creation, institutional capacity building justice, human rights and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process and evidence based planning through support to national statistics office. From our success stories, you will connect with Eritrean people as we partner to spearhead soil and water conservation initiatives, mitigate and adapt to climate change, adopt use of cleaner energy, embrace sustainable land management practices and enhance improved livelihoods.

As we cross over to 2016 and start the new development agenda, I encourage each one of us to reflect on our successes and lessons learned. The SDGs remind us that **“We are not leaving anyone behind”**. We look forward to partnering with you in 2016.

Wishing you a joyous festive season and a happy new year.

Organization of Africa Trade Union Unity (OATUU) holds Symposium in Asmara

The Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) held its 38th session of its General Council and an international symposium in Asmara, Eritrea on 23 - 24 February 2015 at Asmara Palace hotel. The international symposium was under the theme "Trade Union Reforms in Africa" and brought together heads and delegates of Africa Trade Unions from 54 African countries and representatives from the Chinese, Italian and Turkish workers federations among other dignitaries.

The symposium was geared towards promoting relations and cooperation with regional and international trade unions. Delegates discussed contemporary trade union themes that advocate for collective effort in promoting the rights and interests of the African workers. Such themes included; the post 2015 development agenda, peace and stability in Africa.



Photo: Delegates at the OATUU symposium in Asmara.



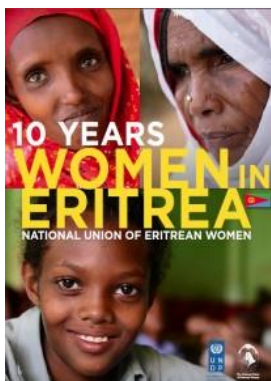
Photo: Barnabas Mebrahtu leading the union song.

In his welcome speech, National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) General Secretary Mr. Teketse Baire acknowledged the work by OATUU in advocating for workers' rights. In addition, Mr. Baire thanked UNDP for supporting the NCEW. The NCEW aims to build a strong and democratic trade union movement that works to promote and protect the rights and interests of workers as well as social and economic development of Eritrea.

At the opening ceremony, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni, UNDP Eritrea Resident Representative commended the NCEW for organizing and hosting the symposium. At the same time, she highlighted the need for trade unions to embrace the dynamic work environment for both employees and employers, such as; responding to the challenges and opportunities brought about by new technologies. She also reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations in contributing to enhancing decent work and livelihoods, job security and better living standards for all people.

Since 2000, UNDP Eritrea has been partnering with the NCEW in the areas of advocacy, awareness raising, economic empowerment, social cohesion, human and institutional capacity building. Currently, UNDP is partnering with the NCEW to strengthen its capacity to promote decent work, effective and strong social dialogue and workers industrial skills.

UNDP among UN agencies that supported NUEW side event at CSW



UNDP supported the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) showcase its 10 years achievements during the 59th session of the Commission on Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, 9 to 20 March 2015. A side event - Empowering Women: Eritrea's Achievements and Experiences, was hosted by the permanent mission of Eritrea to the United Nations, in collaboration with UN Eritrea, on 16th March 2015.

According to Ms. Christine N. Umutoni, UNDP Eritrea Resident Representative, the CSW event created a platform for Eritrean women to share their stories and experiences. Women in Eritrea have played a key role in

nation building, from their struggle for independence to their current role in promoting gender equality and women empowerment. Eritrea is also one of the countries that have done exceptionally well in achieving the targets under health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as per MDG report, an achievement credited to women in Eritrea, who spearheaded campaigns on health related issues such as maternal and infant health care. With UNDP support, NUEW has produced significant reports such as its 10 years achievement report and Beijing+20 report. The CSW event also provided a forum to raise the profile of gender issues in Eritrea as well as identify collaborations for future work.

UNDP has played a proactive role in promoting gender mainstreaming in line ministries and integration of gender issues across its interventions in Eritrea. In addition, UNDP supports NUEW through capacity building for advocacy, sensitization on gender equality and equity, economic empowerment of girls and women as well as implementation of international agreed human rights instruments such as CEDAW, Beijing Plan of Action and Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs). As a result, there is increased awareness of gender issues among authorities and the general public of Eritrea.



Photo: Delegates at the CSW event.

Eritrea Ministry of Health opens new health facility in Senafe

September 20, 2015 was a jubilant day for the community in Senafe as they witnessed the opening of Senafe hospital, a new fully equipped health facility that will enhance access to health care in the Debub region of Eritrea. The new facility was constructed and equipped with support from UNDP and the European Union as part of the recovery program.

The construction of the new facility was spearheaded by UNDP Eritrea during the period when UNDP was supporting recovery and rehabilitation programs in Eritrea after the 1998 -2000 border conflict with neighbouring Ethiopia. During the conflict, the old Senafe District hospital was completely destroyed; in its place, lies an open field surrounded by an old brick wall. About 50 metres away, a massive white new facility stands, complete with; outpatient department, accident and emergency block, maternity block, imaging, laboratory, dental care, pharmacy, medical wards, operation theatre, staff changing rooms, doctors' offices, incinerator, kitchen, laundry etc. The hospital is fully equipped with new furniture, drugs, modern equipment and accessories.

The facility was opened by the Minister for Health, Mrs. Amina Nurhussain. While delivering her speech, she said that the Senafe community had indeed overcome their adversity, since the old Senafe hospital had been looted and the building reduced to rubbles. "Until the completion of this hospital, the residents of Senafe and the surrounding community were getting health services from the makeshift health facility." She said.



Photo: Equipment at the new Senafe District hospital.

During the inauguration the Administrator of Debu, Mr. Efreem GebreKristos said that the hospital, which has 88 beds, will cater for about 85,000 people from Senafe and its surroundings. At the same time, he acknowledged that the facility has taken about 7 years to construct and cited technical difficulties such as access to resources and construction materials. However, he thanked the people of Senafe for their resilience and patience.

While addressing the gathering, UNDP Eritrea Resident Representative, Ms. Christine N Umutoni said, “I am happy that we are inaugurating this facility, its true what they say – patience pays.” She added that the recovery and rehabilitation programme used a comprehensive approach to reconstruction. “It would not have been appropriate to say that this community had full rehabilitation, resettlement and integration if there was no hospital.” She said. In addition she acknowledged good partnership with the Eritrean Government and the EU on the project. “There is value for money as every dollar we spent on this project has been accounted for and every equipment is in its place.” She added.

The European Union Head of Delegation, Mr. Christian Manahl congratulated Senafe residents and commended the work by GoSE in providing access to health care. “I hope that we will be able to continue contributing to development in Eritrea. In our new programme we have agreed with the Eritrean Government that the majority contribution from EU (EDF 11) will contribute to energy. We believe that even though energy is an indirect contribution to the health sector, a reliable energy supply is very important in running a modern hospital like the one we are opening today.” He said.

Ms. Lemlem Hagos from the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) thanked the development partners and especially the Government of the State of Eritrea (GOSE) for their commitment in ensuring access to health to Senafe residents. “This is such an excellent hospital, we are delighted to have such a great facility in Senafe.” She said.

Going forward, the Eritrean Government plans to continue with construction of phase 3 of the hospital.



Photo: The new Senafe District Hospital.



Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good health and well-being.



Panel discussion on SDGs held to mark UN celebration in Eritrea

This year, the United Nations turned 70, a significant milestone that was commemorated on November 12th 2015 in Asmara, Eritrea. To mark the event, a panel discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the theme “Transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to SDGs; what does it mean for Eritrea?” was held. The event was attended by Government ministers, Ambassadors representing foreign missions in Eritrea, members of international community, staff and students from the College of Business and Economics Halhale and UN staff among others.

The event was opened by the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni. While delivering her speech, Ms. Umutoni said that the SDGs will form the basis of a new development agenda, that spells out how countries can work together to promote and achieve dignity, equality, justice, shared prosperity and well-being for all, while at the same time protecting the environment. “The SDGs are expected to put people and the planet on a sustainable path by 2030” she said. The 17 goals provide the roadmap for world development in the next 15 years.

The SDGs discussion was introduced and moderated by the UN/UNDP Economics Advisor, Dr. Luka Okumu. He traced back the MDGs – SDGs transition journey from June 2012 when UN Member states convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), commonly known as ‘Rio+20’. They agreed to establish an inter-governmental open working group to design the post 2015 agenda to succeed the MDGs. The conference was followed by worldwide consultations. African countries held consultations and discussions and came up with a common position that was submitted to the working group. UN led global conversations saw the participation of nearly 3.5 million people who expressed their views through ‘The future we want’ a global platform dedicated to the post 2015 agenda. Ultimately all the consultations and preparations culminated to the SDGs that were adopted in September 25th 2015 in New York.



Photo: Panel discussion on MDGs –SDGs transition.



Photo: Guests at UN @ 70 celebration.

One of the panel members was Prof. Abraham Kidane, Economic Advisor in the Ministry of National Development. In his key note address, Prof. Kidane noted that Eritrea’s development plans and programs are firmly rooted in the calls for gender equality and empowerment of women; sustainable development; eradication of poverty and hunger; shared prosperity; inclusive and participatory work ethics; public and private partnerships; protection of the environment; and enhancement of democracy and justice, among others. He also emphasized on the Government’s commitment to achieve the SDGs. “To maintain momentum, the government has identified focal persons within public agencies and established committees to regularly review and monitor progress” he added.

A youth panel member, Ms. Deborah Tedros, a 4th year Business and Economics student at Halhale College started her presentation by challenging the audience to think about their aspirations in life. She highlighted that the SDGs appropriately emphasize transformative change and pledge to ‘not leave anyone behind’. “When we start talking about SDGs, my expectation is to bring change in all aspects. Though Eritrea has achieved some MDGs and working towards ensuring food security, infrastructure development, capacity building and social services, we still have gaps in ensuring quality education. Education is a key component in ensuring reduction in economic, social and environmental vulnerabilities, building more resilient systems and raising awareness on achieving the SDGs.” She said.

A panel discussant, Dr. Giorgis Teckle, an Assistant Professor at the College of Business and Economics Halhale, discussed about Eritrean perspective of SDGs. Dr. Teckle gave an overview of the SDGs from an Eritrean perspective and underscored that the SDGs are in line with the development strategies and priorities of the country as indicated on the Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (SPCF) as well as in other sectoral strategic plans. He noted that Eritrea had many hurdles to overcome so as to achieve eradication of extreme poverty by 2030. “With poverty eradication as the highest priority for the new sustainable development agenda, the first goal ‘End poverty in all its form everywhere’ aims to go further than the MDGs by looking into the root causes of poverty. Thus there is need to revisit and develop policies and strategies to ensure a sustainable future that benefits everyone and leaves no one behind.” He said. On the goal ‘Ending hunger and achieving food security’, Dr. Teckle said that the transformation of the agricultural sector from the dominant rain-fed to modern farming techniques such as irrigation is currently underway.

Dr. Teckle also highlighted that the issue of financing the SDGs could not be ignored. As observed, the SDGs would cost three times as much as the MDGs and would require doubling public spending. He proposed that investment and domestic resource mobilization be encouraged. Following the presentations the audience was invited to contribute.



Photo: H.E Mr. Iqbal Jhazbhay makes a contribution during the discussion on MDGs-SDGs transition.

Audience participation was kicked off by Mr. Louis Mazel, Charge d’Affairs at the Embassy of the United States of America who highlighted the concern that the post 2015 development agenda had 17 goals. Against the backdrop that the MDGs are only eight and have not been fully achieved, “wouldn’t the 17 goals and several targets and indicators be a burden, especially to many developing countries?” he asked. Another participant, H.E Mr. Iqbal Jhazbhay, Ambassador of the South African Embassy in Eritrea observed that none of the discussants had talked about the composition of the United Nations Security Council (UNSG). He noted that, since its establishment in 1946, the UNSG has not undergone significant reforms. He argued that in the spirit of achieving SDGs, it would be appropriate to have reforms at the UNSG to accommodate the growing needs of the world population. His counterpart, H.E. Mr. Yasser Ali Mahmoud Hashem, the Ambassador of the Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, commended youth participation on the panel discussion and acknowledged that the youth were the right ambassadors of the post 2015 agenda. Dr. Mansoor Mirza, a Policy Specialist at the UN in Eritrea, inquired about the actions the Government of Eritrea has put in place to implement the SDGs and whether there are any criteria for prioritizing the SDGs.

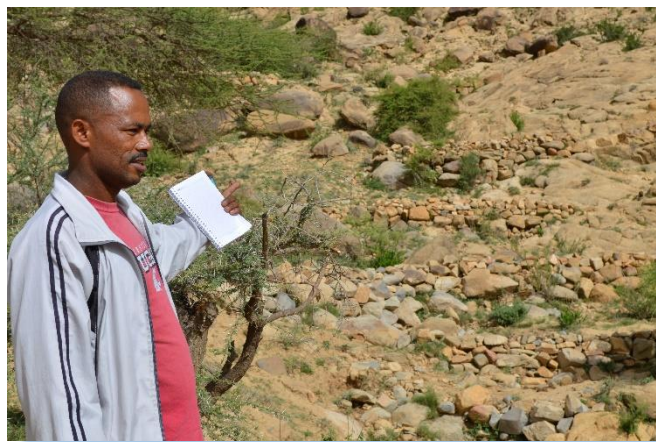
Concluding the panel discussion, Dr. Okumu responded on the 17 SDGs, highlighting that the SDGs are interlinked and apply universally to all countries. They aim to address economic and social progress while ensuring the protection of the non-living component of the ecosystem. Ms. Umutoni noted the observation made on the UNSG and said the issue is for the member states to take up. In closing the celebrations, Ms. Umutoni thanked the panellists and participants for the lively discussion. “Emerging from the discussions, we all agree that the achievement of SDGs in 15 years’ time will result in a world of dignity, equality, justice, shared prosperity, and well-being for all, while at the same time protecting the environment.” She said.

2015 success stories....

Eritrea farmers embark on sustainable land management practices, increase land productivity

Tesfay Bariagaber, a 74 year old farmer from Keih-Kor village in Debub region is looking forward to a bountiful harvest. He hails from Dekamhare sub-region, and is a beneficiary of a community based sustainable land management project that aims to reclaim 45 ha of farm land. As the team leader, Tesfay oversees water and land conservation activities such as land levelling, terracing and construction of check dams. “Look at our farm, our maize is doing so well. This year, we will have a good harvest” He said. The project benefits about 800 community members.

According to Dawit Frezghi, the administrator of Metsalu, the area suffered soil erosion and consequently led to poor yields in the farms. The run-off water from the hills was wasted instead of been used for productive agricultural activities like farming and the crop was eroded by water and wind. Once they levelled the land, build terraces and constructed check dams, their farms can retain fertile soil, and rain water is retained for crop cultivation. The community plants maize, teff and barley.



Mr. Dawit Frezghi points at some of the check dams.

The community has understood conservation issues and are actively engaged in all the project activities. Letekidan is 48, a mother of 5 and leads one the community groups. “We are working very hard to construct more check dams. The check dams reduce the speed of run-off water from the hills and as a result, protect our farms from erosion. We are happy about the progress we have made in the last 3 months. Everyone is happy!” She exclaimed. “People keep asking us, why you didn’t tell us to build these check dams before?” added Dawit Frezghi.



Photo: Khei Kor community at work.

With the support of UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) and the government institutions in the region, the community has reclaimed their farm land. The community is committed to continue with the conservation work. The project is implemented in partnership with Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Agriculture and the National Union of Eritrean Women. Idris Mohammed from the Department of Agriculture, provides technical support for the project. He said that the project has been productive because the people owned the project and are eager to keep up with the conservation work. “More work needs to be done in the catchment area. We need to plant cactus and reeds to increase the vegetation. In future women can use reeds to make baskets”.

Though the project has achieved good results in the last three to four months, it has not been without challenges. Michael Syom, head of economic development in Dekamhare sub-region said that they lack machinery to lift, carry and break the big stones, which they need to construct the check dams. “Over the years, there has been a lot of erosion, we couldn’t do everything in three months, so we will have to continue with the conservation work.” He emphasized.

In future the community would like to construct a dam for water harvesting and use it for irrigation during the dry spells.

About the project

- ✓ The average rainfall in Keih Kor is 470mm. People depend on rain fed agriculture.
- ✓ The SGP project is targeting reclamation of 45 ha of farm land through soil and water conservation activities.
- ✓ The project is benefiting 800 community members.

Eritrea kicks off low carbon solar systems for rural homes in Qnafna

Everyone broke into song and dance as soon as they saw the cargo truck around the corner. The drivers honked their cars in response, while cows mooed and goats and sheep bleated in unison. It was a dream come true for many villagers as they received solar equipment to power their homes. Qnafna has a population of about 2,000 people living in 350 households that are off the grid since they are located 22kms away from the nearest power line.



Photo: Breaking the seal.



Photo: Batteries and other equipment for solar lighting.

In July 2015, most these homes got solar lighting for the first time. The area is dominated by dry and sunny climate and the community members are looking forward to using clean energy for lighting, cooking and charging their electric gadgets. Consequently, rural households can communicate and disseminate important information on health, education and agriculture.

Since Eritrea enjoys sunny weather most of the year, solar energy is a good alternative for lighting rural households. This inspired the Qnafna development committee to partner with UNDP- GEF Small Grants Programme, the Ministry of Energy and Mines and the local administration in providing solar photovoltaic panels to communities.

One of the elders, Keshi Tsegay Gezehey said “I feel so happy and I cannot fully express my gratitude because we have been waiting for three years to have solar energy in our homes. With the support of our partners, I have been able to see this day at the age of 87.” For 85 years old Adey Asli Berhane, solar energy will change the lives of women. “We have been using cow dung as fuel since it was the most affordable and accessible in our neighbourhood. We were suffering from the smoke and it affected our health. Use of solar energy will improve the quality of our lives.”

Demonstration of low carbon solar home systems and afforestation in Qnafna is one of UNDP-GEF small grants programme’s phase 5 projects in Eritrea. The target area of the intervention is Qnafna, A’samari and Endabashigundo villages in Mai-Ayni sub-region, Debub region. Debub is one of the 6 administrative regions of Eritrea. Estimated budget for the project is USD 324,548.00.



Photo: Solar panels at UN offices in Eritrea, a good example of use of clean energy in the country.

Sustainable land management practices in Serejeka curbs soil erosion, increases land productivity

On the outskirts of Asmara in Eritrea, lies Serejeka sub-zoba (sub-region) which has 28 villages with about 11,000 households. It is a vast ecosystem that was previously bare but is currently a bedrock of productivity. Severe land degradation caused by both natural and man-made practices such as overgrazing and deforestation had robbed the ecosystem of its ability to sustain itself and its inhabitants. Livestock roamed the hills and plains in search of pastures while the people desperately searched for wood to use in their households.

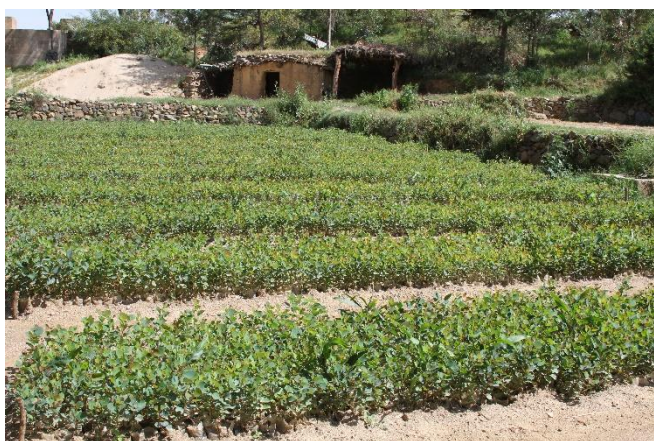


Photo: A tree nursery in Serejeka.

Since majority of the people depend on agriculture, population growth had contributed to unsustainable farming practices such as cultivation of marginal lands with steep slopes and shallow, easily eroded soils. This was compounded by insecurity of land tenure, since farmers were not committing to take care of the land and only to move to another piece of land after 5 or 7 years. With the support of UNDP and the GEF, the Government of Eritrea initiated a pilot project to reclaim land productivity and enhance environmental protection while at the same time boosting agriculture and promoting forestry. The Sustainable Land Management (SLM) pilot project was started in 2009. The SLM work started in 5 villages with the aim of scaling up the project to the remaining villages. The initial phase focused on creating awareness on environmental issues and the SLM concept.

“At first we mobilized all the stakeholders; farmers, ministries of agriculture, land, water and environment and the administrators.” Said Dawit Mebrahtu, SLM project site manager. The project team visited the villages and had meetings with the stakeholders and conducted trainings on SLM aspects. They set committees at the villages and ensured that the community felt that they owned the project. “The farmers had already seen some of the changes, for example, the bees had since deserted the

hives since there were no trees and they could no longer harvest honey. They understood that if they adopted the new practices, it would improve the quality of their lives.” He added.

In 2010, afforestation began. They segmented the land into farming land, grazing land and forested land. The forested lands and grazing lands are communal. The committees have ensured that the communal lands are used appropriately. For example, the community members are not allowed to graze in the forested lands, but they are allowed to cut the grass for their animals. That way, there is less pressure on the ecosystem and it's able to revive itself.

Currently, most of the hills that were bare have been forested. The community has planted acacia, eucalyptus, bottle brush and olive trees. They cut grass to feed their cattle during the dry season and the bees have come back to the ecosystem. Wild animals such as antelopes have also come back to the forested lands. Farmers, especially women are given apple and avocado trees to plant on their farms.

As part of its contribution, the Government of Eritrea build Shimanegus dam. Farmers use the water for irrigation. They grow vegetables such as tomatoes, spinach, kale, potatoes, carrots, etc. and sell to the market, thus providing a reliable income for their families.



Photo: 2 year old olive trees.

One of the most significant aspects of this project is land distribution. Under the traditional land tenure system, farmland was redistributed every seven years, this discouraged farmers from undertaking activities that could boost land productivity. Currently the Government is promoting security of tenure by allocating long-term use (usufruct) to farming lands. According to Iyob Fesseha, a chief at Guritat village, people are now making more long term investments on the land, they have constructed terraces, built check dams and planted trees. Consequently, there is reduced soil erosion, increased

fertility, improved water retention capacity, which will lead to increased productivity and production. “The crops are still in the fields and it looks promising, we look forward to a good harvest.” He added.

Another interesting pilot activity undertaken is on use of marginal lands that are not suitable for farming or grazing. The unproductive terrain has been allocated to farmers in each village for long term use as individual forest land. This measure, allows each farmer to own a small plot, plant tree species of their choice, harvest and sell products leading to increased personal income.



Photo: An SLM project community meeting in Guritat.

Abrehet Ghirmay is 43 and a mother of 5. She is a committee member of the land distribution initiative. She said that she had benefitted from the SLM project because previously she had been allocated 5 different pieces of land and it was time consuming to attend to each one of them since they were far apart. “I can proudly say that I have a piece of land that I can use for life and inherit to my offspring for the first time in my life. This year, am looking forward to a bountiful harvest of wheat and barley. I am confident that I can improve the productivity of my land and it will be a source of livelihood not just for me but my children too.” She said. Abrehet has managed to plant around 35 trees for commercial use and she plans to harvest in 2016. There is ready market for timber and wood. In fact, the electricity company in Eritrea buys poles from the farmers.

So far the initiatives have been successful and the Government has decided to scale-up the project in the Central highland zone that has similar land tenure issues. Although people did not understand the concept of SLM at the beginning and were sceptical about some of its aspects like dividing land for different uses, they have since come to appreciate it. Some farmers preferred free range grazing and were of the opinion that dividing the land will deprive their livestock of feeds. “Now that we have been successful in Serejeka Sub-Zoba, the government is keen to replicate these initiatives in other

parts of the country.” Said Abraham Daniel, SLM Project Co-ordinator.

About the project

- ✓ Serejeka sub-region is in Maekel Region of Eritrea and has 28 villages, consisting of about 11, 000 households.
- ✓ Population growth had contributed to unsustainable farming practices such as cultivation of marginal lands with steep slopes and shallow, easily eroded soils.
- ✓ Currently the Government is promoting security of tenure by allocating long-term use (usufruct) to farming lands.
- ✓ The Government has decided to scale-up the project in the central highland zone that has similar land tenure issues.

New Afentera dam to improve access to water for irrigation and livestock

The new Afentera micro dam has heightened hope for the residents of Afentera village in Molki sub-region, Gash Barka region/zoba. In full capacity the dam will hold 160,000 cubic metres of water. It has a catchment area of 2.5 kilometres squared, is 10.5 metres deep and 160 metres wide. Over the years, the residents have had to travel six kilometres to find water for their livestock. Livestock drinking troughs have been constructed at the dam site. The area is arid and subsistence farmers grow drought resistant crops like pearl millet and sorghum since they depend on rain fed agriculture. With the new dam, the residents can use the water for irrigation to grow vegetables such as spinach, tomatoes and cabbages. About 273 households of about 1365 people will benefit from the construction of the micro-dam.



Photo: Livestock drinking at the Afentera dam.

Tesfamariam Tekle (43), Russom Ghebre (40), Tewolde Araia (76) are some of the stakeholders who were involved in the project during the construction phase. The community participated in the construction process; they carried out tasks such as ferrying stones for constructing the dam wall, treatment and conservation of the catchment areas. They build check dams and terraces. The project also provided employment opportunities for the community. According to Engineer Samson Yemane - Agricultural infrastructure head in Zoba Gash Barka, majority of the community members who worked at the project site during the construction were women.

One of the beneficiaries of Afentra micro dam, Tesfamariam Tekle said “We didn’t have good rains this year, but we know that there is potential to improve the quality of our lives in future. We are grateful to UNDP and Zoba Gash Barka for building this dam”. The Zoba administration also plans to start small scale irrigation for female headed households and also provide clean water for household use. It is expected that the dam will boost the underground water table, providing potential to sink a downstream well for human consumption.

So far UNDP has supported construction of 4 micro dams in Gash Barka through the food security and sustainable livelihoods/water supply project. Through the project, UNDP supports Government’s priority to ensure that all Eritreans have sufficient food at affordable prices and enhanced livelihood opportunities. Since Eritrea is situated in the arid and semi-arid region of the Sahel of Africa, it is vulnerable to adverse effects of variability in rainfall patterns. Consequently, it could undermine the progress of attaining sustainable development, poverty reduction, food security and improved livelihoods.

Through the Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (SPCF) between the UN and the Government of Eritrea, UNDP focuses on supporting Government interventions such as building long term resilience and economic empowerment of local communities. Specific areas of intervention include; support to boost agricultural production, creating employment and income generating opportunities specially targeting women and youth.

Community spearheads conservation of Dembe Tikul catchment area in Gullie, Zoba Maekel

Mohammed Ahmed, a farmer in Gullie is 80 years old. He has been working on his land for the last fifteen years. He grows fruits such as guavas and oranges. He also has maize crop under irrigation. “In this area one cannot depend on rain fed agriculture that is why we dug a well for irrigating our farm.” He said. His sons, Saleh Mohammed (50) and Ahmed Mohammed (40), have since taken over the management of the farm from their elderly father. They supply fruits to vendors in Asmara city. Their land is on the periphery of the river, but not everybody is so lucky.



Photo: Mohammed Ahmed flanked by his sons.



Photo: One of the climate smart farms in Gullie.

Many of the community members have to depend on rain fed agriculture. The rains have not been reliable and most of the lands have been degraded by soil erosion whenever it rains. Against this backdrop, the Gullie catchment rehabilitation project was started to address the land degradation problem. The project engages the local stakeholders to create sustainable livelihoods options for the poor rural community of Gullie in Galla-Nefhi district.

The project targets 615 households of about 2,454 people who take part in conservation of 50 hectares of land. So far, conservation work on 48 hectares is ongoing. The community is organized in groups who take part in activities such as terracing, building check dams, planting eucalyptus and sisal. The community members said that they decided to plant eucalyptus trees because they grow fast and they can use the timber to build their houses. “If we plant eucalyptus trees, we will be able to build nice houses.” said Omer Mohammed (60), a guard of the conservation area.

Majority of the women participate in soil and water conservation activities. There are women representatives in the committees. Each committee is made up of 50 community members. Nejat Abubaker (20) and Jemeo Hiyabu (55) said that they were not members of the committees, but they understood the advantages of the community based afforestation, soil and water conservation work. “This is not just for us, it is for the future generations.” Said Jemeo. Two other women, Fatna Ali Gide (48) and Zahra Jaber (60) are heads of their households. They have been inspired by the project and planted 70 and 120 eucalyptus trees respectively around their homesteads.

The youth are also represented in the committees, they are involved in bee keeping activities and are motivated in the conservation work because more trees will attract bees into the ecosystem. Idris Mohammed (27) is a father of one son and two daughters. He is one of the youths involved in the conservation work. He said that one of the challenges they faced was the fact that the ground was very dry, making it tedious to dig the terraces and plant the trees and sisal. “It is hard work, but we understand that we depend on the environment for our survival. We have to take care of the environment, so we will keep working.” He added.



Photo: Gullei landscape.



Photo: A community member at work.

There are four guards, members of the community who ensure that the conservation work is not vandalised. They also protect the trees in the ecosystem. Based on community rules and regulations, community members are penalized if they are caught cutting the trees. The villagers are only allowed to use the dry twigs for cooking. All the homesteads use Adhanet improved stoves – energy saving stoves distributed by the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Department of Environment makes regular monitoring visits to the site and surveys the survival rate of the species. Extension workers from the Ministry of Agriculture support the conservation work in Gullie. According to Mr. Tesfom Mesfin, a Ministry of Agriculture official in the sub region, they have noticed that the survival rate of sisal in the conservation area is better than eucalyptus.

This project is supported by the UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme and is implemented by the Gullie Community Development (GCD) in collaboration with the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). Other stakeholders of the project include the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment.

About the project

- ✓ The project contributes towards rehabilitation of degraded land and conservation of 50 ha of land that form the Gullie catchment area.
- ✓ About 615 households of around 2,454 people in Gullie village, Galla-Nefhi sub-region, Maekel region benefit from this project.
- ✓ The project has support from the Maekel regional administration, Galla Nefhi sub-regional administration, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Land, Water and Environment.

Eritrean women take lead in conservation of Mai Nefhi dam catchment area

Abrehet Issac (59) is passionate about environment conservation. She led 5 groups of women who undertook a cumbersome task of digging, ferrying stones and planting trees at the Mai Nefhi catchment area. “The ground was very hard and our hands were bleeding, but we were committed to finishing the work that we had begun.” She said. As the leader, Abrehet coordinated the activities undertaken by the groups and found solutions for those encountering problems. “Sometimes I just made jokes to cheer them up. They still want to come even though we don’t have any ongoing work at the moment!” She exclaimed. They call the place “Taba Hamadae”, loosely translated it means the hill where women meet.

Two years ago, a group of 120 women from two villages Abarda and Kutmowlie in Galanefhi sub- region, Maekel region started an ambitious environment conservation project that entailed planting trees and constructing check dams on 100 hectares of land that form the Mai Nefhi catchment area. During the implementation of the project, they formed committees that were responsible for ensuring that all the planned activities were implemented.

According to Tiblez Weldgherima, the administrator of Abarda and Kutmowlie villages, it is the residents of Abada village that came up with the conservation idea as they were looking for ways to improve their livelihoods. “As an administrator, I had already mobilized the women and organized ourselves into groups” she said. Tiblez is an ex fighter from Eritrea’s armed struggle for independence. “I have witnessed the death of my comrades. Their blood was not shed in vain, it is what drives me” she said. Since then she has nurtured the commitment to see the prosperity of the future generations in Eritrea. “The armed struggle for independence has taught many of us to be resilient, the women are committed to the initiative. I am still a soldier, fighting for the protection of the environment” she added.



Photo: The catchment area 2 years before.

The project is implemented by one of UNDP’s implementing partners, the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) and is funded by UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme and co-financed by the communities and government ministries. There is a development committee comprising of representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), NUEW, sub region and village administration who supervise the soil and water conservation activities as per MoA guidelines. So far, soil and water conservation work has been undertaken on 38 hectares of land through community participation. They have also constructed 152 Kms terraces, built 1500 m3 of check dams and planted 39,540 tree seedlings of eucalyptus, cactus and “Awhi” (*Cordia Africana*). In future the community of about 720 households, will be able to harvest the trees and sell as firewood for extra income or poles for house construction. They can also harvest the cactus fruit ‘beles’ during the rainy season (May to September), to supplement household food and income especially for the rural population.

The project is anticipated to improve the livelihoods of about 2,500 people, in addition to decreasing siltation of Mai Nefhi dam. The dam is the main source of water for part of Eritrea’s capital, Asmara and its surrounding villages.

About the project

- ✓ Environmental degradation is a critical problem in Eritrea. The project addresses degradation through community participation in soil and water conservation activities.
- ✓ The project is implemented by the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). NUEW has worked to propel social transformation in Eritrea and build a conducive environment for enabling gender equality and empowerment of Eritrean women.
- ✓ The projects contributes to conservation of biodiversity and promotes sustainable livelihoods.



Photo: The catchment area in October 2015.

UNDP convenes a gender mainstreaming TOT in Asmara

UNDP held a Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop on gender mainstreaming and gender equality in Asmara, from 17th to 18th October 2015. The training was attended by high profile government officials and representatives of civic societies in Eritrea. The workshop covered gender concepts, analysis and impact assessment, accountability and gender and economic development.

Government participants were from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Land, Water and Environment and the Ministry of Health. Other participants were from the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), Eritrean Centre for Organizational Excellence (ECO) and UNDP. Out of the total 25 participants 10 were women and 15 were men. Majority of the training participants were gender focal persons in their respective organizations and departments.

Gender mainstreaming is key to UNDP work and the country office is committed to building the capacity of its staff, implementing partners and stakeholders. In her opening speech, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, Ms. Rose Ssebatindira said, “We hope that this initiative to build gender mainstreaming capacity at the national and local level will boost and enhance our collective efforts to foster gender equality in Eritrea.”



Photo: Participants at the gender training.



Photo: A participant making a contribution.

The objectives of the training were to: enhance the skills and knowledge of the participants on gender management approaches; build a pool of trainers on gender mainstreaming; equip the trainees with skills to train their colleagues; and advise the policy makers on integrating gender mainstreaming in future projects - from the development stage through implementation and monitoring, to impact assessment. The workshop was also a platform to enhance partnership between UNDP and the institutions represented.

During the closing ceremony, UNDP Resident Representative, Ms. Christine N. Umutoni, congratulated the participants for completing the training. “Gender equity and equality are indispensable in all development processes. Human rights cannot be attained without ensuring equality for all” she said. She added that the training workshop had commissioned all participants to strengthen their partners and networks in order to integrate gender mainstreaming in development projects. The training participants received a certificate of completion from the Resident Representative.

UNDP Eritrea integrates gender equality and women empowerment into its programming as guided by the organization’s three key thematic areas: sustainable development pathways; resilience; inclusive and effective democratic governance. According to the Country Programme Action Plan (2013 – 2016) UNDP supports the Government of Eritrea in enhancing the capacity of National institutions to have gender responsive sector plans and policies that promote empowerment of women.

Theory to practice; lessons from UNDP led gender mainstreaming training



“I have learned that gender is a society issue and it cannot be separated from development. Poverty reduction and decision making are not gender neutral.” This is what one of the participants at the UNDP facilitated gender mainstreaming workshop had to say. The workshop was held on the 17th and 18th of October in Asmara. The workshop was part of UNDP work in enhancing the capacity for gender equality and women empowerment. The objective of the workshop was to enrich the participants’ understanding of the gender concept.

What is gender? Contrary to its definition - social construction of femininity and masculinity, many people have perceived gender to be about being male or female. According to UNDP Gender Advisor, Ameena Al Rasheed, gender is about the structure of the community. How the community set-up, its hierarchy and how decisions are made. This is one of the key lessons that the participants at the gender training identified. Another area is gender responsive budgeting; even though many organizations talk of gender mainstreaming in their programmes, many times the activities and actions for integrating gender are not considered while budgeting for programmes. Eventually, these activities and actions end up not been realized.



Photo: Ameena Al Rasheed, Gender Advisor.

Photo Credits: UNDP Eritrea/Abraha/Freweini/Mwaniki

For Issaias Beyene, a trainer and strategic plans developer, the training will help him in articulating and providing input related to gender issues especially during design, monitoring and evaluation phases of the projects. The training broadened his knowledge on gender mainstreaming, budgeting, accountability and gender based discrimination. The training also provided a good opportunity to share experiences on gender mainstreaming with other participants.

The participants committed to ensuring that the knowledge acquired during the training will be used in their organizations. Most participants said that they would conduct gender mainstreaming trainings in their respective organizations, ministries and departments. Others said that they would ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed into their policies, strategic & operational plans, projects and programmes. Some participants also said that they would raise more awareness on gender issues.

A major highlight of the training was the recognition that Eritrea is very aware of gender issues. Gender equality and women empowerment issues have been championed by the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), one of UNDP’s implementing partners. For the last 10 years, NUEW has promoted participatory and balanced political action at both national and grassroots levels in Eritrea by: raising awareness on gender equality and justice in the society; encouraging implementation of policies that consolidate women’s rights and equality of opportunities; creating a strong political foundation for the economic empowerment of women. Bases on successful gender and women empowerment interventions in Eritrea, the discussions and contribution from the participants at the workshop were very informed.

An area of improvement is gender analysis. To make well informed gender strategies and to effectively mainstream gender into projects and programmes, there is need for data that can be collected through surveys, assessments and research. The participants said that they would like to have updated statistics as well as success stories on gender strategy and implementation from other countries.

Going forward, the participants asked to have a knowledge network for gender specialists. UNDP is committed to supporting gender mainstreaming work in Eritrea as underscored by the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) for 2013 – 2016.

Contact Information:

United Nations Development Programme
HDAY Street, P.O.Box 5366
Asmara – Eritrea
Tel: +291 1 151166 Fax: +291 1 151081
Email: registry.er@undp.org
www.er.undp.org