

Goncha integrated rural development project

Goncha Siso Inesie district is a place located in the Blue Nile Basin of East Gojam in Amhara Regional State of Ethiopia. The district is situated at 165 km east of Bahr Dar, Capital of the region. The woreda has 37 rural and one urban kebele, Gundowoin is the capital. The Woreda is characterized by rugged mountains, and has an undulating nature of landscape which has made the area susceptible to ecological denudation. Gullies have been naturally created during heavy rainy seasons. The misuse of natural resources by the local residents has further exasperated the area. The traditional farming practices have also made the area less productive. Harmful traditional practices (HTP) including female genital mutilation, early marriage and male chauvinism are some of the major contributing factors for exacerbating the problem in the area. This has necessitated EOC-DICAC and its funding partner to undertake various projects which benefit the people in the locality, some of which are prevention of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), environmental rehabilitation, small scale irrigation scheme, water supply, sanitation and hygiene education, community empowerment, capacity building for wereda sector offices and project capacity building. This project is funded by ACT for Peace of the National Council of Churches in Australia

This column focuses on the eradication of FGM, environmental rehabilitation with especial emphasis on tree nurseries and check dams used for the prevention of soil erosion and the restoration of the ecosystem at large.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a cultural ritual that has been practiced on young girls in Africa for thousands of years. FGM includes all procedures that involve the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. This harmful traditional practice is a violation of women and girls' human rights and represents a deep-rooted inequality between sexes in some cultures.

The eradication of FGM will help in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Promoting Gender Equality, Reducing Child Mortality and Improving Maternal Health. After a girl's genital is cut, she will often face severe childbirth complications, resulting in tearing, excessive bleeding, reproductive damage or even the death of both mother and infant.

Shockingly, in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, FGM is still performed regularly to this day. It is one of the key harmful traditional practices that ACT for Peace's Ethiopian project partner, the Development and Inter-church Aid Commission (DICAC), is working to abolish.

Emebet Woldeyes, DICAC's Gender & Development Division Head, says, "The majority of the communities surveyed believe that if a girl's genital is not cut, she will not be sexually attractive to be acceptable for marriage or be able to bear children. FGM can cause permanent physical and psychological damage. Through developing Women's Associations, educating the community and training the clergy to speak out against FGM to their congregations, DICAC is making great strides to protect young girls from this traumatizing mutilation."

Habesha Tefarah, Chairperson of Women's Association in Amhara, says, "DICAC helped start our Women's Association and taught us about FGM, so that we can share what we have learned with the rest of our community. We need to set an example for the next generation."

He also says that the beneficiaries of this locality are indebted to EOC- DICAC and its funding partner-Action by Churches Together(ACT) for Peace for helping ensure that young girls will not have to suffer through the maiming ritual of female genital mutilation and can look towards a more healthy and hopeful future.



Discussion with the women's association chairperson, Habesha

Environmental Rehabilitation

The alarmingly increasing environmental degradation occurred due to deforestation and soil erosion needs due consideration of all practitioners in order to rehabilitate the degraded parts. Establishment of satellite nurseries to raise indigenous and exotic tree species will increase farmer's participation in planting the seedling on communal and private plots. On the other hand, encouraging farmers to establish their own private nurseries has significant contribution in combating desertification in a sustainable manner.

Soil erosion severely damages farmland and gullies grow larger and larger with each passing wet season.



Deforestation and overgrazing leading to gully erosion

To harness the problem, trees have been planted in naturally formed gullies created during rainy seasons, and check dams must be built. Check dams with gabions have also been constructed in the areas where land degradation is extreme. Concerning the prevention of soil erosion and other concomitant conditions in the locality, residents so called Abebe Gelaye and Balew Damtie explain in the following ways.



Abebe Gelaye

Abebe Gelaye said that building check dams help prevent further soil erosion occurred in their community. According to Abebe DICAC gave him and his friends technical training on building the dam and how to maintain it. The dam is made up of rocks, wire and straw in descending terraces. Abebe and others from his community planted trees and grasses and fenced off the

area.



Gabion structures in Goncha woreda

Abebe says, “Before we built this dam, farmland and crops would wash away during the wet season. Now our land is protected from further erosion, and I can plant crops to feed my four children and wife.”

Balew Damtie on his part expresses the mechanisms he used to prevent soil erosion and maintain



the natural resources. He narrates” DICAC provided us with seeds, tools and training last year and we have now harvested more than 6000 seedlings in this nursery.” He also said that the purpose of growing these trees is to plant them in naturally formed gullies. These gullies expand over time, eroding more and more soil and washing away cultivated

farmland and grazing pastures for cattle and sheep. By planting trees, the root system develops and prevents further erosions. We can also use the wood from the trees we grow for building huts and firewood. We have built a fence around the tree nursery to prevent animals from trampling on or eating the seedlings. We also take turns guarding it to ensure that the animals do not break through the fence. With the teaching we have learnt, we have also created our own tree nursery in different sites nearby.



Nursery site in Goncha Integrated Rural Development Project

DICAC has helped the communities throughout this region build and maintain more than 360 check dams and 600, 000 seedlings.