



# LEARNING STORY

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Climate & Development  
Knowledge Network



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ORDA Ethiopia

## Key messages

- Ongoing climate and human-induced pressures are undermining the ecosystem services the Simien Mountains provide, affecting local livelihoods.
- Community-led ecosystem-based adaptation has resulted in cascading benefits for biodiversity, climate and socio-economic development with 164,239 community members directly benefitting from improved agricultural productivity and improved access to water resources and finance.
- Central to this has been the establishment of watershed cooperatives in 15 watershed sites, which formally recognise communities in the governance of watershed management.
- Shifting social norms through the application of Social Analysis and Action directly benefitted women, youth and people with disabilities, ensuring that their challenges and needs were acknowledged and that their capacities and decision-making power was strengthened.
- The diversification of livelihoods has expanded communities' incomes and skills. The establishments of Village Saving and Loan Associations also empowered communities to access finance and invest in their local businesses.

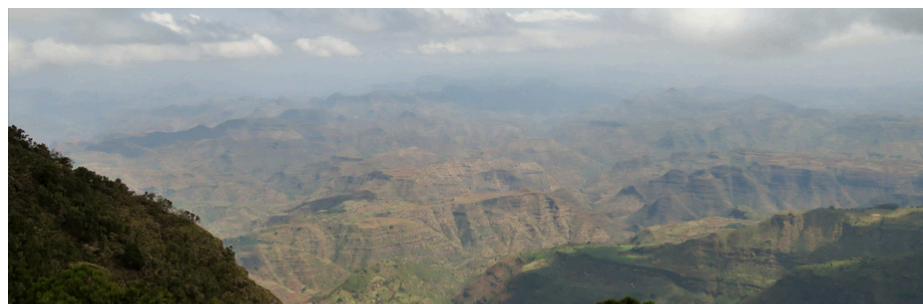
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## Enhancing resilience in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains through community-led ecosystem-based adaptation

In Ethiopia's Simien Mountains, community-led ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA; see Box 1) is delivering tangible environmental, economic, and social outcomes to rural communities in Debarq, Janamora, Adiarkay and Beyeda districts, known as *woredas*. These communities are situated close to the Simien Mountain National Park (SMNP), a UNESCO Heritage site, and have faced ongoing livelihood challenges as a result of climate change, with women and children often facing the brunt of these impacts. Within this context, the project in the SMNP aims to strengthen resilient livelihoods and promote sustainable ecosystem management.

Funded by the Austrian Development Agency and implemented by ORDA Ethiopia and CARE Ethiopia, the RELIVES project is capacitating these communities on EbA approaches through tailored interventions, including restoration practices and watershed management. These promote sustainable livelihoods, gender equity and social inclusion (GESI), community development, and financial literacy within the SMNP and surrounding *woredas*. The project showcases how EbA can be purposively implemented to address social and economic inequalities, including entrenched power dynamics, among groups facing marginalisation.

This case study highlights several key enablers of success, including the empowerment of communities through locally-led approaches, GESI measures, and centring livelihoods through income diversification. These elements inform replication in similar contexts to achieve transformative outcomes for both people and nature. This provides valuable insights for climate policy and practice, in Ethiopia and globally, illustrating that community-led EbA is not only feasible but also sustainable and equitable. This creates more contextually-relevant, diverse and inclusive livelihood opportunities than conventional top-down approaches.



Partial view of Simien Mountains. Photo credit: Chuck Moravec, Flickr

## Primary outcomes

### Community-driven restoration and rehabilitation at scale:



- 29 youth-led private nurseries and 4 public nurseries were established, supporting economic opportunities for women, youth and those facing marginalisation.



- Over 1.922 million seedlings were planted for forestry and agroforestry purposes in 15 watershed sites resulting in 8,642 hectares restored, which directly benefited 164,239 community members.

### Enhanced integrated watershed management (IWSM) through local leadership:



- 15 integrated watershed management plans were co-developed and 15 watershed cooperatives (see Box 1) gained formal certification.



- 17 springs were constructed using an IWSM approach, increasing communities' access to clean water.

### Enhanced biodiversity and protection of endemic species:



- 502.6 hectares of land were regenerated through controlled free grazing on communal and farmland, resulting habitat protection for endemic and endangered species, such as the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf.

### Minimised livestock-wildlife conflict:



- Livestock movements into or crossing and grazing in the park was reduced, minimising livestock-wildlife conflicts.

### Income diversification through sustainable livelihoods:



- A total of 280 Village and Saving Loan Associations (VSLAs; see Box 1) were established, comprising of 7,180 members (4,088 women, 3,100 men), including 222 people with disabilities.



- Diverse income-generating activities were created including beekeeping, eco-tourism, composting, and improved crop varieties.

### Transformative GESI in action:



- Women in VSLAs leadership positions rose from 44% to 91.5%.



- Watershed cooperatives now ensure at least 30% female representation in leadership roles and currently women constitute 41% of leadership positions in the watershed cooperatives.



- Social Analysis and Action (SAA; see Box 1) empowered women and marginalised groups, reduced harmful social norms, and increased women's leadership in natural resource governance.

### Increased access to clean energy:



- 1,450 solar lanterns and 435 fuel saving stoves were distributed to community members, enabling children to study at night and offering numerous environmental, economic, and social benefits.



Collecting wood in the Simien Mountains after a storm. Photo credit: Francois de Halleux, Flickr

## Box 1 : Defining key terms

**Community-led ecosystem-based adaptation** involves community-driven efforts to use biodiversity and ecosystem services to help people adapt to the adverse effects of climate change as part of an overall adaptation strategy. Common approaches include restoration of landscapes through agroecology, re-populating areas with native tree and plant species and restoring riparian zones to enhance water quality and quantity. Importantly, this approach actively seeks to ensure that community members co-design, implement and monitor the initiative to ensure actions address their specific contexts.

**Watershed cooperatives** in the RELIVES project consist of a general assembly, an audit/inspection committee, management committee and sub-committees including loan and marketing, education, training and gender committees. The general assembly is composed of member communities of the watershed responsible for watershed planning and approving, following up on the implementation of activities, overseeing annual activity, financial and audit reports, etc. As a result, the communities are playing an active role in watershed governance and decision-making.

**Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA)** are community-based, self-managed savings groups that enable members to save money regularly, access small loans, and build financial resilience without relying on formal banks.

**Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach** is pioneered by CARE International to re-envision gender norms by facilitating a process through which individuals explore and challenge the social norms, beliefs, and practices that shape their lives and health.

**GESI transformative outcomes** represent sustained shifts in power relations, social norms, and institutional practices that dismantle structural barriers to gender equity and social inclusion. By reallocating resources and reshaping policies, these outcomes enable women, girls, and marginalised groups to exercise agency, and participate meaningfully in decision-making, ensuring they benefit equitably from climate resilience and development processes.

**Ecosystem services** also referred to as nature's contributions to people, encompass material and non-material benefits derived from the natural world. These include the provision of food, fuel and water; the regulation of climate, air and water cycles; and non-tangible contributions to cultural identity and sense of place. Together, these elements are fundamental to human wellbeing and development (IPBES, 2018)

### Climate risks and socio-economic vulnerabilities in Simien Mountains

The Simien Mountain National Park holds immense biological and cultural value to the Ethiopian people. It is home to several endemic and threatened species, such as the endangered Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf.

Surrounding households and *kebeles* – the smallest administrative units in Ethiopia – rely on the park for their livelihoods. However, ongoing climate-induced risks like drought, flooding, and warmer

temperatures are reducing the park's ability to provide essential ecosystem services (see Box 1). These include the provision of food and water, access to grazing and agricultural land, regulating services such as the filtering of water sources and cultural value that the SMNP holds for the Ethiopian people.

The park's surrounding communities already live in marginalised contexts. The loss of these ecosystem services further exacerbates their vulnerability to risks induced by climate change and resource scarcity.

Communities face restricted access to grazing land and seasonal pasture routes due to park protections, while women and youth have limited land ownership and little say in decision-making. High-altitude isolation further limits access to roads, healthcare, schools, and markets.

Climate impacts are also compounded by human-induced environmental pressures, including expanding settlements and cultivation, water pollution, overgrazing, deforestation, land degradation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and increasing human-wildlife conflict.

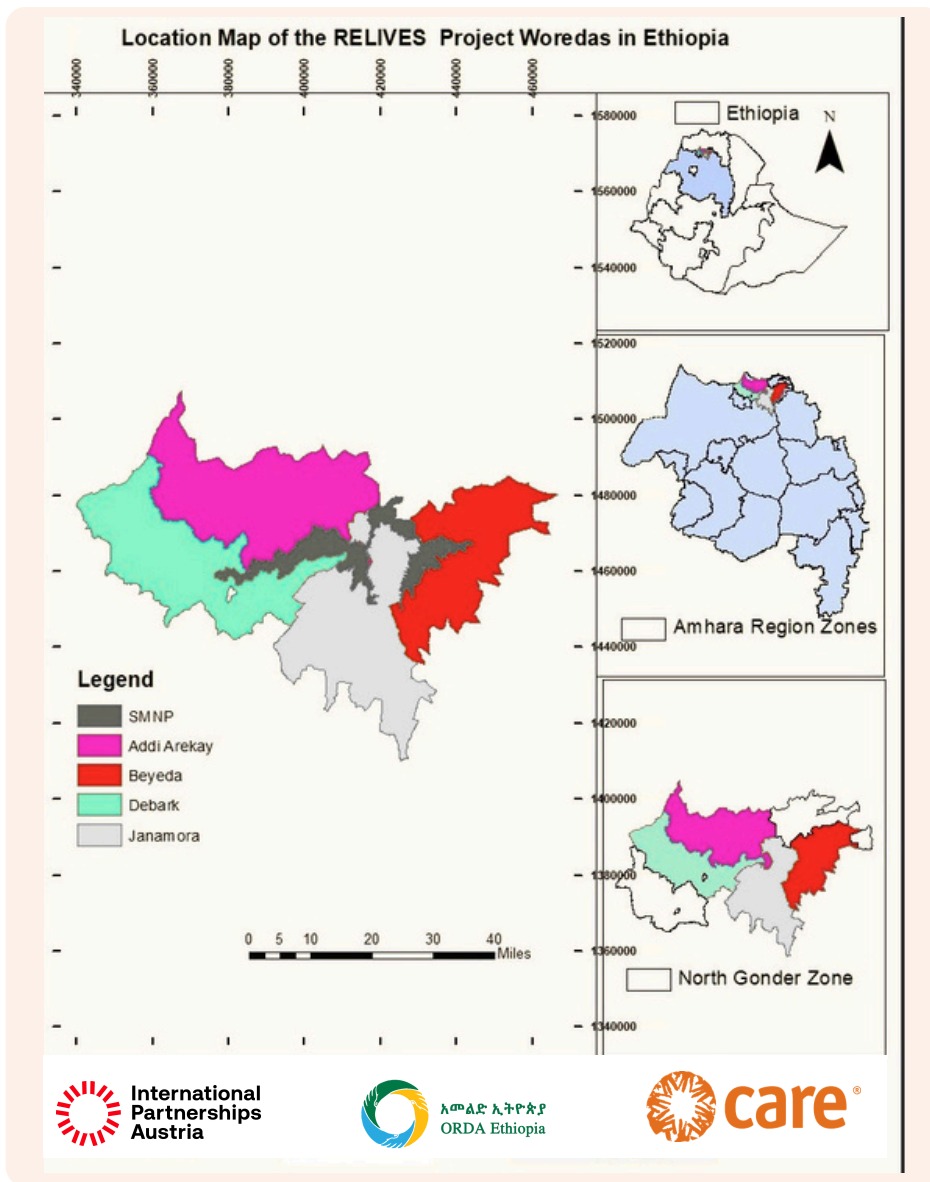


Figure 2. Location of the RELIVES project *Woredas* in Ethiopia

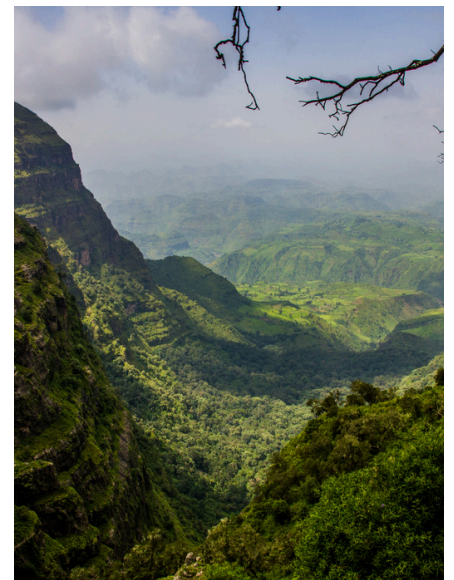
Additionally, ongoing violence<sup>1</sup> in the area has disrupted family structures and destroyed service delivery infrastructure.

The combined effects of climate and human pressures are degrading the environment and reshaping livelihoods, affecting agriculture, tourism, human-wildlife relations, and access to clean water. This particularly impacts women, youth, people with disabilities and those living in conflict zones, who depend heavily on nature for their livelihoods.

### Enhancing resilience through EbA: Community-led restoration and water resource management

Recognising the importance of the park's ecosystems for the surrounding communities' livelihoods, the RELIVES project empowered communities to co-design and implement EbA interventions in the SMNP and surrounding *kebeles*.

EbA seeks to contribute to climate resilience by restoring and conserving nature, thereby ensuring that ecosystems are able



Simien Mountains. Photo credit: Thomas Maluck, Flickr



Honey product. Photo credit: Tewodros Getnet, ORDA Ethiopia Audiovisual officer

to withstand climate shocks and can continue providing essential ecosystem services. EbA interventions also contribute to a range of other co-benefits for both nature and people, including enhanced biodiversity and socio-economic well-being (through better livelihoods, access to jobs and markets, higher crop yields etc.)<sup>2</sup>

As a result, EbA contributes not only to climate resilience, but also accelerates the achievement of several of the Sustainable Development Goals, while simultaneously protecting those who depend directly on nature for their livelihoods and are most vulnerable to climate change.<sup>3</sup>

The community-led EbA interventions implemented through the RELIVES project successfully restored 8,642 hectares through:

- **Community-led reforestation** (tree planting-to restore degraded land, protecting existing forest-to conserve the ecosystems and water sources).

Other EbA interventions implemented through the project included:

- **Climate-smart agriculture** (terracing and soil conservation, crop diversification, agroforestry);
- **Water harvesting and management** (watershed management, rainwater harvesting); and
- **Sustainable livestock management** (improving the feeding system and engaging the community in beekeeping and other alternative livelihoods).

These local actions resulted in several benefits to the communities, both by increasing their resilience to climate change and enhancing their livelihoods. For example, these interventions helped stabilise surrounding slopes, preventing landslides and soil erosion while also improving soil fertility and health. This, in turn, boosted agricultural productivity and reduced runoff and erosion, ensuring communities' farms can withstand climate shocks in future and are able to continue producing crops.

These measures were led by the communities themselves and have been supported by the establishment of 29 youth-led private nurseries and four public nurseries.

As a result of these interventions, 164,239 community members (79.5% of which are women, youth, and those living with disabilities and in conflict areas) have benefited through enhancements in ecosystem services and associated livelihood opportunities.

The project also successfully enhanced sustainable Integrated Watershed Management (IWSM) across 15 watershed sites, developing integrated watershed management plans and certifying watershed cooperatives after they met local government requirements. Communities access to clean water was further enhanced through the construction of 17 springs using an IWSM approach.

Local communities also received training on various sustainable and climate-related practices including: IWSM, Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA), climate-smart agriculture, sustainable livestock husbandry, vermicomposting (using worms to break down organic waste), sustainable natural resource management, beekeeping and highland fruit management. Additionally, 22 *woreda* government experts and 48 *kebele*-level agricultural development agents received GIS and GPS training to enhance sustainable land management practices.

Nature is also benefitting from these practices. Recovery of forests and biodiversity are being achieved through the restoration activities, coupled with soil and water conservation.

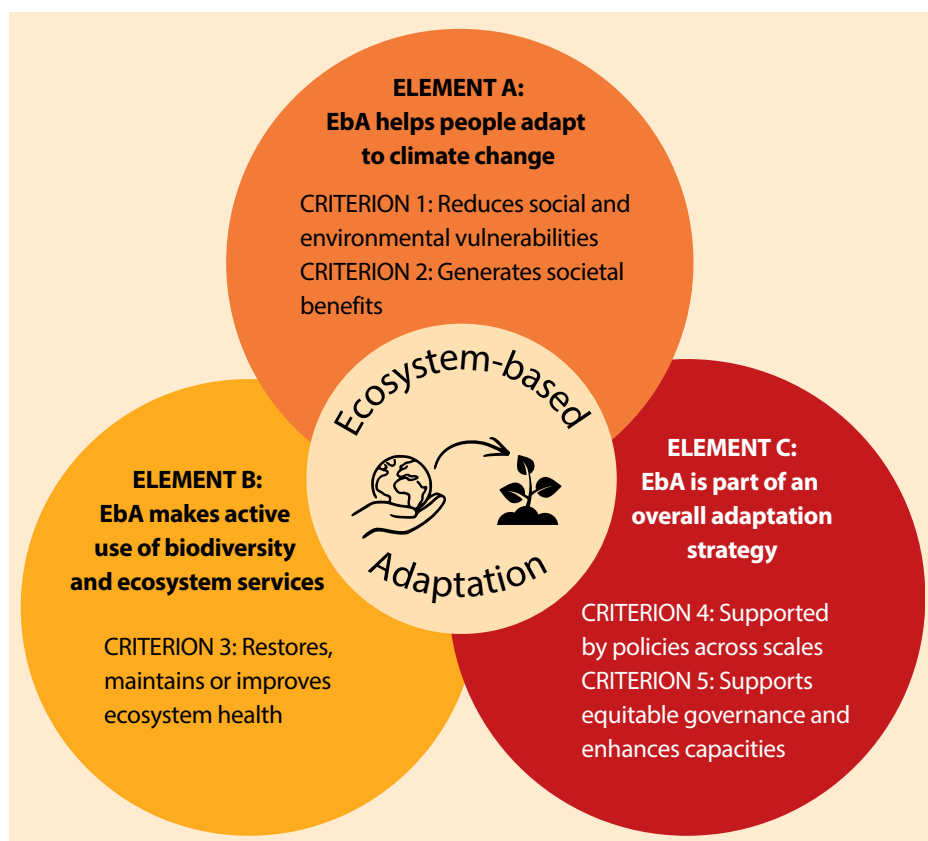


Figure 3. Core elements and criteria of EbA. Source: CDKN

Wildlife populations are on the rise, including the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf, which are now being monitored as key indicators of ecosystem health in the park. The project also sought to support households with access to clean energy through the distribution of 1,450 solar lanterns and 435 fuel saving stoves. As a result, children were able to study at night, and adults could engage in income-generating activities after sunset without compromising indoor air quality, resulting in better health outcomes for surrounding communities.

## Scaling impact through transformational project design

### Beyond participation: From engagement to empowerment

The RELIVES project used a range of participatory approaches to support local ownership and leadership in the project's implementation. This ensured community buy-in and ownership in the project, with the intention to safeguard its sustainability beyond the funding period. Firstly, communities were incentivised to participate in the EbA interventions and trainings through the provision of high-quality agricultural inputs. These included tree saplings, wheat, potato and beetroot seeds from project run nurseries, as well as lime to reduce soil acidity, livestock and/or poultry and solar lanterns.

These initial provisions secured community commitment and feedback during the EbA activities, and gained their interest in targeted trainings on sustainable farm practices. A total of 87,395 individuals, including 38,286 women, actively participated in soil and water conservation measures, fostering local ownership and ensuring the sustainability of gained results.

Supporting local leaders and community groups through training, transparent feedback mechanisms, and inclusive decision-making also increased participation and buy-in, particularly among marginalised groups. This fostered a sense of ownership and ensured interventions were tailored to their needs.

Community reflection meetings enhanced knowledge, improved practices, and promoted financial independence, deepening collective community ownership and has contributed to ongoing project success and sustainability. To strengthen technical expertise, RELIVES provided a three-day surveying and planning training on soil and water conservation measures to five farmers from each of the 15 watershed cooperatives. Now, these trained surveyors actively support watershed user cooperative members in implementing high quality soil and water activities. Other trainings included livestock management, crop production, vermicomposting and other sustainable livelihood options such as beekeeping.

### Box 2: Defining integrated watershed management

**Integrated watershed management** is a holistic strategy for the conservation and efficient use of available but often scarce resources. It is a process of managing human activities and natural resources on a watershed basis and, in agricultural areas, and involves the development and deployment of different soil and water conservation practices at selected locations in the catchment (CGIAR).



River in Simien National park.  
Photo credit: Joepyrek, Flickr

Through the establishment of the watershed cooperatives (see Box 2 for a description of the cooperative governance structure), watershed activities are now planned, implemented, and monitored with participation from communities, improving the intervention's quality. Each watershed cooperative consists of publicly elected management members, ensuring at least 30% female representation in leadership roles. All watershed cooperative management members hold monthly meetings and receive IWSM training. All targeted watershed cooperatives also developed 3-5 year strategic plans, developed by the watershed beneficiaries and facilitated by government staff. These insights indicate that RELIVES was able to strengthen watershed sustainability, improve institutional frameworks, and enable local communities to independently plan, implement, and sustain watershed initiatives. This improvement is largely due to capacity-building efforts for watershed cooperative members and their management bodies, including training and office arrangements.

Spring development projects also improved access to clean water while reinforcing community stewardship of catchment areas, which has positive impacts for upstream and downstream beneficiaries.

Local government officials also reported being more engaged in joint planning with community members resulting in community-based organisations managing revolving funds and restoration activities with local knowledge being integrated into climate-smart agriculture and natural resource management. As such, there is compelling evidence that the initiative's inclusive design has enhanced both ecosystem integrity and social resilience.

### Shifting social norms for improved GESI outcomes

In the *kebeles* surrounding the SMNP, women, people with disabilities, youth and those affected by conflict are disproportionately made vulnerable to the ongoing climate change impacts and lack access to finance. For example, the baseline analysis showed that women face challenges regarding access to finance with limited number of women initially being members of VSLAs, due to lack of awareness of its existence and insufficient knowledge about how to engage.

To address the underlying gender injustices, the RELIVES project integrated targeted measures to shift perceptions and behaviours in the surrounding communities to ensure the priorities of women and other marginalised groups were acknowledged and that their capacities and decision-making power was strengthened. As a result, 79.5% of the project's primary beneficiaries were women, youth, people with disabilities or members of communities affected by conflict.

The RELIVES project applied Social Analysis and Action (SAA), which is CARES' signature approach to re-envisioning unequal social norms<sup>4</sup>, to advance transformative change for better gender and social inclusion.<sup>5</sup>



Training on beekeeping production and management at Adiarkay district.  
Photo credit: Aleligne Tilahun, RELIVES Manager

The approach involves a facilitated process where participants are prompted to surface and challenge restrictive norms and act together to create more equal ones. Through targeted focus group discussions with 36 SAA groups, 16 harmful social norms were identified within the communities related to: sex and gender, gender-based division of labour, women's and men's role in house-hold decisions and assets, women's community participation, social mapping, gender-based violence, early marriage, females' mobility, inclusion, harmful traditional practices, natural resources management and horticulture development. As a result, the social norms or practices that have changed include gender-based division of labour, horticulture development, and shared responsibility and ownership. In addition, SAA action plans were developed in the sample *kebeles*, and SAA members shared their experiences with other community members, helping to shift norms in other surrounding communities.

Specifically, the application of SAA resulted in several key shifts in gender-based inequities including:

- The halting of early marriage for youth girls who were able to continue their education as a result.
- The number of women in VSLA leadership positions increased from 44% to 91.5% and watershed cooperatives now ensure at least 30% female representation in leadership roles.
- Positive shifts in men's perspectives of shared values/ roles resulting in more men participating in household chores.
- Reduced excessive spending on social and family events, such as funeral ceremonies, and more spending on necessary safeguard measures, such as mosquito nets.

## Centring livelihoods through capacity building and income diversification

Agriculture remains the dominant source of income for communities surrounding the park. Given the ongoing climate challenges, and pressures on the park's ecosystems, an important outcome of the project was to ensure the diversification of income for the surrounding communities, particularly through the establishment of sustainable livelihoods. This includes beekeeping, ecotourism, selling compost and supporting climate-smart agricultural practices (such as crop rotation and the planting of drought-resistant crops).

Community members were also trained in business skills and other income-generating activities including grain trading, food and beverage production, animal trade and fattening, poultry and egg trade, goods trading, handicrafts, weaving, and crop and vegetable production. These capacity building programmes had a particular focus on women. Evaluations showcased that 54.7% of participants in the income-generating activities were women.

The project also sought to leverage and enhance existing community structures such as VSLAs to empower communities to access finance to engage in alternative livelihoods and invest in their local businesses. Through economic empowerment efforts RELIVES established 280 VSLAs comprising of 7,180 members (4,088 women, 3,100 men), including 222 people with disabilities. These VSLAs have achieved substantial savings and loan disbursements, supporting members in various income generating activities.

Additionally, communities expanded their access to finance through microfinance institutions, such as Tseday Bank.

Recognising the importance of the park for tourism, zonal<sup>6</sup> and *woreda* tourism offices were supported through existing eco-tourism cooperatives by sharing insights on feasible income generating activities with 8,282 eco-tourism members and local guide associations. RELIVES also established seven energy saving stoves production and marketing groups, which produced 330 energy saving stoves units and sold 111 to the community. Additionally, the project provided 1,450 solar lanterns, offering numerous environmental, economic, and social benefits and supported 22 youth entrepreneurs in producing and selling tree seedlings, meeting community demand, generating profit and contributing to natural resource management.

## Measuring success through robust and inclusive monitoring and accountability mechanisms

The project's monitoring and evaluation process used a suite of methods, applying both ecological and social indicators to showcase gains for both people and nature. For example, hectares of land restored was measured using remote sensing, GIS technologies and satellite imagery to analyse both baseline conditions and land cover changes at specific time intervals. This data was disaggregated at both the *woreda* and *kebele* levels showcasing land cover changes/ progress on restoration in specific locations.

By partnering with Debarq University, the project was able to conduct biodiversity assessments and wildlife censuses, offering crucial insights into ecosystem recovery and resilience.



Teshome Woldeyohannes with his honey produce. Photo credit: Tewordros Getnet, ORDA Ethiopia audiovisual officer

Watershed assessments and environmental impact assessments were conducted as part of the baseline assessment, and the planted seedling survival count was carried out during each year of implementation. Importantly, the project applied household surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to collect data on socio-economic improvements from the communities themselves. This information informed the results of key indicators including: the number of people with access to clean water, the percentage increase in community income and the number of people involved in income diversification activities, to name a few.

Data was also disaggregated by gender and people with disabilities to ensure GESI outcomes were accurately measured.

Government partners and community representatives were actively involved in the project's monitoring and evaluation process and were supplied with data collection templates for standardise use and reporting to feed into the project's monitoring and evaluation process.

The project also established formalised Feedback and Accountability (FAM) channels. This included suggestion boxes located next to the main offices in intervention areas, which were reviewed once a week, and a FAM mobile number which was sensitised to project stakeholders and communities for its use. Face-to-face platforms, including review meetings, site visits, SAA sessions, and VSLA meetings, allowed stakeholders to share feedback and track progress. These mechanisms facilitated real-time problem-solving and resolved issues directly while also enhancing transparency, accountability and engagement.

The project actively involved government representatives at the zonal, *woreda* and *kebele* levels to report on key developments, progress and challenges. Project Steering Committees coordinated efforts across all levels. Zonal representatives oversaw regional activities and *woreda*-level alignment, while *woreda* officials managed implementation and community engagement within the kebeles. A Training of the Trainers was implemented at the *woreda*-level to enable trained officials to effectively transfer knowledge to

community members. These sessions emphasised inclusivity, ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities and other groups who can face exclusion while amplifying their voices in discussions and project implementation.

In addition, the project appointed women empowerment, community development and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officers who collaborated with government experts for joint monitoring visits, helping provide timely technical support to meet project targets.

### Reflections and learnings: Navigating sustainable and just paths forward

The RELIVES project demonstrates how EbA actions, which prioritise equity, shared responsibility, and sustainable livelihoods, can build resilient families and strong communities.

These efforts allow residents to live in harmony and improve their well-being, even amidst a changing climate and harsh socio-economic conditions.

While the project has experienced many successes, it requires continued reflection, learning and commitment from all partners to ensure the benefits and impact of the RELIVES project is sustained well beyond the project closure.



Mr. Alemu Mengsitie and Tesfa Getie, potato producers at Beyeda *woreda*, Medebay Kebele. Photo credit: Tewardros Getnet, ORDA Ethiopia Audiovisual officer.

# Community-led Ecosystem-based Adaptation in Ethiopia's Simien Mountains



## Drivers of risk

Direct:

- Insecure land tenure
- Encroachment
- Deforestation
- Unsustainable land use practices

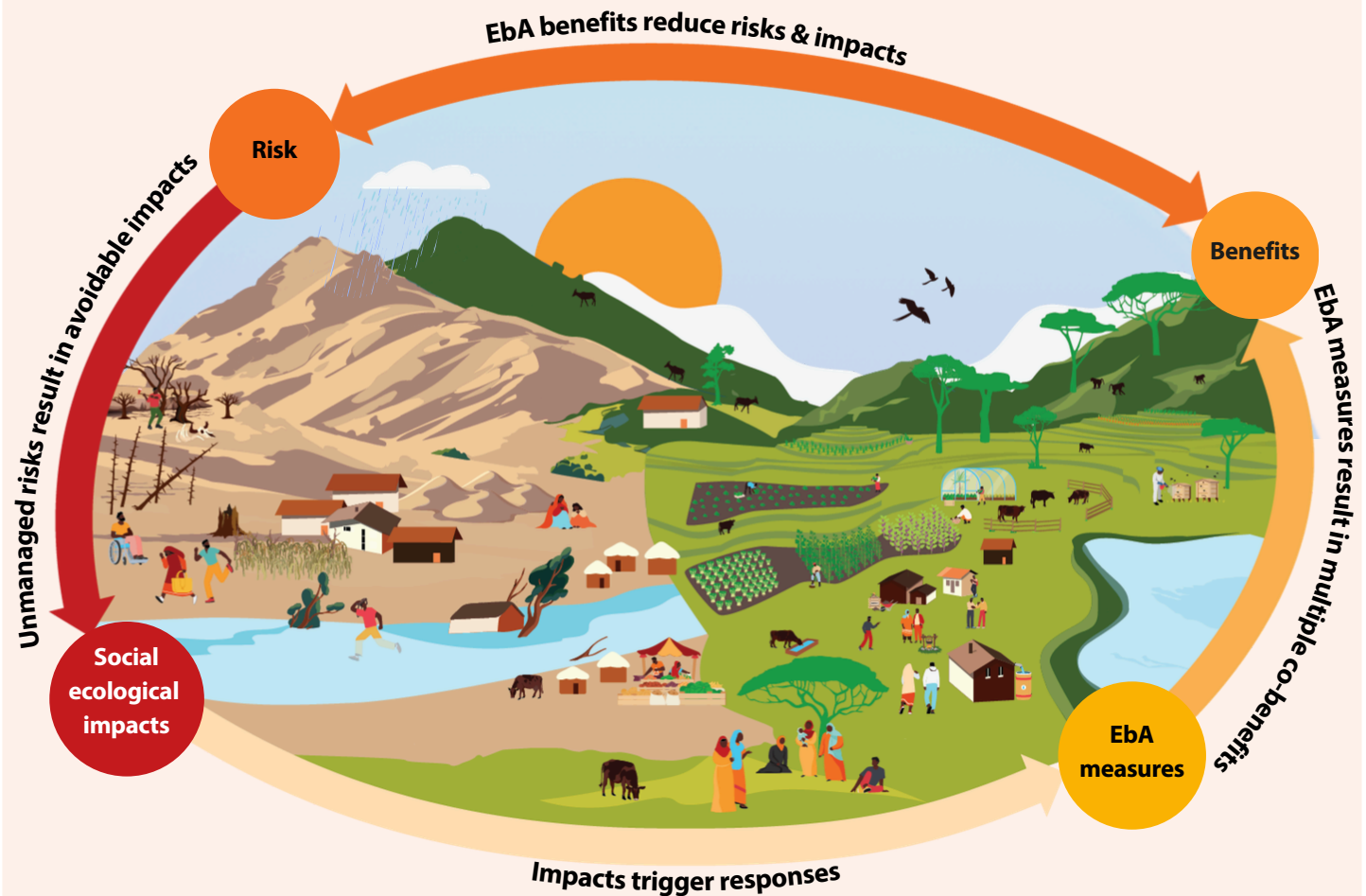
Indirect:

- GESI-blind decision making
- Poverty/lack of economic alternatives
- Climate change



## Social & ecological benefits

- Community-driven restoration across 15 watersheds
- Increased income opportunities, knowledge & skills particularly for women, youth & people with disabilities
- Improved access to clean water through springs
- Diversified livelihoods through beekeeping, establishment of nurseries, eco-tourism, composting & improved crop varieties



## Social & ecological impacts

- Drought & floods
- Human wildlife conflicts
- Livelihood, water & food insecurity
- Loss of biodiversity & ecosystem services
- Exclusion of women, youth & people with disabilities from decision making processes



## Enablers

- Community-led adaptation including:
  - Capacity strengthening
  - Diverse collaborations
  - Village savings & loan associations
  - Watershed cooperatives
  - Social ecological surveys
  - Increased access to clean energy



## GESI measures

- Youth & women-led nurseries established
- Social Analysis & Action
- Setting targets for % inclusion of women, youth & people living with disabilities

Figure 1. Illustration of the Simien Mountains, Ethiopia, showing landscape conditions and livelihood outcomes before (left) and after (right) community-led EbA measures.

**For community-led EbA to thrive and be sustainable, the RELIVES project highlights the following five key learnings:**

**Achieving meaningful agricultural transformation requires long-term investment, institutional backing, and strengthened technical and financial capacity**

Traditionally, farmers surrounding the SNMP primarily produced food for household consumption within their backyards. Through the RELIVES project, woreda agriculture officers collaborated with selected farmers to transition from small-scale subsistence gardening to larger, field-based cultivation. As a result, farmers' attitudes and practices changed, leading to improved livelihoods, more stable local food prices, and reduced food insecurity.

This experience demonstrated the importance of building the capacity of local farmers to scale up production and, potentially, to collaborate to increase output and strengthen local food markets. However, scaling agricultural production requires substantial technical expertise and financial investment, particularly to support both pre- and post-harvest activities such as input provision, processing, and storage infrastructure.

While the project has succeeded in expanding production beyond household consumption, transitioning to large-scale agricultural production will require sustained investment, institutional support, and continued farmer training.

**Participatory engagement can support equitable resource allocation**

By establishing and strengthening community-based organisations such as the VSLA's and watershed cooperatives, more finance was available to the communities and was distributed in fair and equitable manners, supporting both EbA activities and income generating activities within the communities. Capacitating communities on financial management skills and diverse sustainable livelihood opportunities, while also creating formalised participatory governance mechanisms within the watersheds, transferred ownership of resource allocation to the communities themselves. This resulted in finance being channelled to where it was most needed. Thus, the project showcases that locally led EbA can be more sustainable and cost-effective compared to more conventional, top-down approaches.

**Legal frameworks are important to sustain community-led initiatives**

While the project implemented several innovative initiatives to empower communities in governance and decision making, the sustainability thereof is contingent on having formalised co-created legislation that allows for good practices and community inclusion to be embedded in EbA and GESI actions. The endorsement of the watershed cooperatives and the 15 IWSM plans lay the foundations for future community-led natural resource governance within the SMNP and surrounding kebeles, that is formally endorsed and supported by local government.

**Pervasive and inequitable gender norms require consistent engagement, especially through the inclusion of boys and men in participatory processes**

The implementation of SAA proved to be immensely effective in shifting social norms, and safeguarding the livelihoods and opportunities for women, youth and other marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities. However, to ensure systemic change that supports just and equitable outcomes, it is important that this approach is scaled to all kebeles and surrounding communities within the SNMP, specifically by targeting men and boys to be engaged in the process.

The development of SAA action plans will help to ensure that this approach continues, but it must be supported with formalised knowledge exchanges between surrounding kebeles to ensure that transformative change does not happen in siloed structures but rather cascades across geographies and communities.



Teshome Woldeyohannes in his malt barley farm. Photo credit: Tewordros Getnet, ORDA Ethiopia audiovisual officer.

**Documentation of lessons and experience sharing can help scale up good practices**

To ensure continued learning and knowledge exchange on EbA best practice, the project highlighted the need for continued engagement, reflection and documenting of successes and challenges from the project's implementation. In this regard, community reflection meetings were important for enhancing knowledge, improving practices, and deepening financial management and independence, contributing to ongoing project success and sustainability.

Experience sharing sessions between the watershed's cooperatives will be essential for scaling up best practices for effective natural resource management. Such exchanges, both between governance committees and the communities will help to deepen sustainability and scale out best practices to other neighbouring kebeles.

**The success of the RELIVES project is evident in how it has transformed the lives of surrounding communities.**

Many initially reported that they were struggling to feed their families and have now set up small sustainable businesses, and have reliable access to food, water, finance and clean energy.

As reported by one community member:

*"This opportunity not only improved our lives and nutrition, but having a reliable source of income makes it easier to hope for a better future."*

This proves that EbA models that incorporate participatory governance, GESI measures and livelihood considerations can help to ensure transformative change for future generations.



Tesfa Getie and husband Mr. Alemu Mengsitie, a vegetable producing family at Beyeda woreda, Medebay Kebele. Photo credit: Tewordros Getnet, ORDA Ethiopia Audiovisual officer

## Endnotes

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4. Social norms are the perceived informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behaviour
5. CARE (n.d.) Social Analysis and Action (SAA). Available at: [CARE International](https://www.care.org/our-work/health/strengthening-healthcare/social-analysis-and-action-saa/) (Accessed: 7 May 2026). <https://www.care.org/our-work/health/strengthening-healthcare/social-analysis-and-action-saa/>
6. Zonal administrations sit between woredas (districts) and regional states. They coordinate development activities across woredas and facilitate communication between the regional government and woredas.

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Simien Mountains. Photo credit: Stuart Orford, Flickr

## Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN)

The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) is a global Southern-led programme founded in 2010. The programme is managed by SouthSouthNorth, and implemented in partnership with Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano and ICLEI South Asia. CDKN works to improve the wellbeing of the most climate-affected people in the Global South, especially marginalised groups, through transformative climate-resilient action. We work in partnership with the public, civil society and private sectors to mobilise knowledge, leadership and capacity in the Global South from local to global levels.

## ORDA Ethiopia

ORDA Ethiopia is a national non-governmental organization founded in 1984 as the Ethiopian Relief Organization (ERO) in response to severe drought, conflict, and rural poverty. Since its establishment, ORDA Ethiopia has evolved from a relief-focused agency into a leading development organization, implementing integrated programs in agriculture, natural resource management, water and sanitation, and community resilience.

The organization works across Ethiopia to improve livelihoods, strengthen food security, and enhance climate resilience, with a strong focus on vulnerable and marginalized communities. Guided by a series of strategic plans, ORDA Ethiopia delivers sustainable, community-driven solutions through partnerships with government, civil society, and development partners.

## CARE Ethiopia

Since 1984, CARE Ethiopia has worked with communities across Ethiopia to respond to humanitarian crises and address the root causes of poverty and vulnerability. In partnership with local organisations and government institutions, CARE supports access to food, water, health services, and sustainable livelihoods, while placing a strong focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Its work spans both emergency response and long-term development, including climate resilience, maternal and reproductive health, economic empowerment, and ecosystem restoration initiatives such as RELIVES in the Simien Mountains.



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