

**EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES
THROUGH FOOD-BASED PROGRAMMES:
ETHIOPIA CASE STUDY**

DISCUSSION PAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Development discourse regards the empowerment of poor people as crucial to the effectiveness and sustainability of development activities. The vast literature on empowerment focuses on the economic and political dimensions of local capacity development and how to scale it up. This study adopts the approaches to community capacity development and empowerment found in earlier International Food Policy Research Institute work (Gillespie 2001, 2004; Garrett 2004).

Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries, with natural resource degradation constituting a serious barrier to development. To address these issues, WFP has partnered with the Government of Ethiopia in the areas of reforestation and soil and water conservation for over 30 years through the MERET project – Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods. Presently, MERET operates in 600 communities and benefits more than a million people each year.

By design, MERET relies on a community-based and participatory approach. Launched in its current form in 2002, the project represents an important step in the evolution of Ethiopian soil and water conservation away from the “command-and-control” methodology of the 1970s and 1980s, in which central authorities controlled each step. Since 1991, soil and water conservation in selected communities in Ethiopia has employed the local-level participatory planning approach (LLPPA), through which *woreda* (district-level) government experts collaborate with communities on planning, implementation and evaluation. The regional and federal governments provide policy guidance and financial and technical resources.

WFP's role goes beyond providing food to community members in exchange for building and maintaining conservation structures. It also helped design the LLPPA methodology, train community members and officials, and devise and implement MERET's results-based management system.

In the communities they visited, the authors found that MERET's participatory approach clearly enhanced capacity to plan and manage development activities. There was also considerable evidence of a strong commitment among soil and water conservation officials to collaborate with the communities. A key institutional arrangement in MERET is the community-based elected planning team, which develops five-year conservation plans subject to ratification and evaluation by the whole community. This process allows for voice and accountability.

MERET addresses the issue of women's empowerment by boosting their incomes and ensuring that they have significant representation on the planning teams. However, government and WFP officials stressed that it will take time to institutionalize women's empowerment in light of centuries of cultural practices that relegate them to a subordinate social status.

A number of practical synergies have been found between MERET and other interventions. MERET provides labour for constructing school infrastructure and planting school gardens and there are efforts to coordinate planning for schools and for MERET through community-based committees. The success of LLPPA has inspired government officials and WFP staff involved with school feeding to try to broaden and deepen synergies through the Children in Local Development (CHILD) initiative. Also, some officials and WFP staff members feel strongly that as literacy levels increase, rural communities will be able to rely less on *woreda* officials and more on their own efforts. Since school feeding boosts enrolments, the synergies should contribute to greater capacity and empowerment over time.

Regarding MERET's food security and poverty reduction effects, previous studies have found a significant positive impact on food security. In the present study, the authors observed diversified agricultural production, including the cultivation of a wide variety of cash crops, and informants reported gains in agricultural productivity, food availability and income as a result of MERET. Community members stressed that the project had led to improvements in health, education, nutrition and even self-esteem.

In relation to the issue of scaling up and replication of MERET, the study has mixed findings. The project facilitates exchange visits among farmers across community, *woreda* and regional lines, but there are no formal associations of planning teams beyond the community level and some farmers interviewed expressed scepticism about the value of cooperatives, which in theory could serve this purpose. The authors did find evidence in several of the sites visited that MERET activities had led other communities to adopt some of the project's conservation practices. However, non-MERET communities frequently have less access to extension services, so it is difficult for them to adopt more complex conservation measures.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Government, WFP and several development partners have worked to incorporate LLPPA and other MERET standards into the 2005 national community-based participatory watershed development guidelines that are aimed at expanding sustainable land management activities in Ethiopia. The Government has led this important shift from previous approaches. The willingness of the Government to move rapidly toward community-driven approaches, commercialization and diversification of agriculture and a focus on the watershed is also evident in the process started in Nairobi (in June 2007) through the Horn of Africa Initiative on Food Security – a regional initiative whereby governments of six countries in the region (Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda), supported by a broad base of stakeholders, agreed on a common framework for collective action on food security, strengthening of institutions and community-focused capacity-building at national and regional levels.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, development analysts and policy-makers have increasingly embraced the empowerment of poor people as an important component of effective and sustainable development. Accordingly, in 2000, the World Food Programme (WFP) adopted a policy seeking to “ensure that its assistance programmes are designed and implemented on the basis of broad-based participation,” engaging “beneficiaries, national and local governments, civil-society organizations and other partners...in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all its activities...” (WFP 2006: 22).

How can food aid best contribute to empowerment at the community level? There is evidence that such assistance may help launch and sustain representative, community-based institutions that engage local people in planning and implementing development activities (Garrett and Dunston 2005). It is important to manage and target food aid carefully, so as not to undermine community self-reliance and willingness to engage in collective action and to assure that local elites do not capture the benefits (Barrett and Maxwell 2005; Mansuri and Rao 2004).

This paper explores how these issues play out in the Government of Ethiopia’s Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods (MERET¹) Project, for which WFP has provided food assistance and capacity development for many years. MERET and its predecessor projects have been the subject of several evaluations and independent assessments, but this is the first to focus systematically on its community empowerment aspects.

A team of two people² carried out research for this paper, spending three weeks in Ethiopia in November 2005 and visiting 11 communities in 4 Ethiopian regions. Annex C provides additional detail on the research.

The paper is organized as follows: the first section introduces the concept of empowerment and how it relates to sustainable development. The second provides some background on MERET and why it is a good example of food aid and community empowerment. The following section examines the institutional arrangements that underlie the project. There follow the results of research on the following issues: strengthening the capacity of communities to plan and manage development activities; empowerment of women; impact on food security and poverty; synergies with other programmes; and scaling up and replication. The paper concludes with a measurement of the degree of community empowerment in MERET using a tool adapted from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and recommendations.

¹ In Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia, *meret* means “land.”

² Cohen and Rocchigiani.

2. EMPOWERMENT: THE CONCEPT

Development discourse increasingly recognizes empowerment as crucial to activities that are effective and sustainable in both the financial and environmental sense. As the World Bank has pointed out, “Empowerment through community involvement is particularly effective in the management of local public goods such as water supply, sanitation, forests, roads, schools and health clinics” (Narayan 2002: 7). It makes intuitive sense that gaining affected people’s “buy-in” will help to assure the success and long-term viability of projects and programmes (Adato, Hoddinott and Haddad 2005).

Since 2000, the World Food Programme (WFP) has sought to engage all stakeholders in “the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all its activities.” This approach aims to “bring the poorest and marginalized people into its assistance programmes, strengthen their representation in community structures and overcome gender inequalities” while also “maintaining sufficient flexibility to ensure its programmes’ suitability to local situations and capacities” (WFP 2006: 22). Furthermore, participatory programming serves both as “a means for reaching marginalized groups with appropriate types and levels of assistance and as an end with the aim of building self-reliance and empowering women and men” (WFP 2000: 13).

We adopt the definition of empowerment of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD 1995), which has both economic and political dimensions. It consists of:

[the] ability of people, in particular the least privileged, to: (a) have access to productive resources that enable them to increase their earnings and obtain the goods and services they need; and (b) participate in the development process and the decisions that affect them. These two aspects are related; one without the other is not empowerment.³

Empowerment contributes to other development objectives, such as project success, cost-effectiveness, long-term sustainability and pro-poor growth (IFAD 1995; Ashby, Knapp and Ravnborg 1998; Narayan 2002; Larson and Zeledón 2004; Küpçü 2005). It also contributes to accountability and transparency (Larson and Zeledón 2004). This concept has also been linked to the issue of “good governance”⁴ (UNDP 1997), which is:

the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests,

³ The paper was prepared by IFAD for the 1995 Conference on Hunger and Poverty, held in Brussels. WFP and IFPRI were among the conference co-sponsors.

⁴ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and other donor agencies have come up with checklists related to good governance.

exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.

Hence, participation in governance processes is the essence of citizenship. With respect to government programmes that transfer funds or provide goods and services, empowered citizens transform themselves from “passive beneficiaries” into “active agents in their own affairs” through their “direct involvement [as] service users in the decision-making processes...” (Jones and Gaventa 2002).

2.1 A Focus on Communities

The trend in many developing countries toward decentralized governance in recent years has meant that the empowerment literature focuses more than ever on the local or community level. According to Gillespie (2004), communities are “genuinely” empowered when they have both the capability to participate in decision-making and the capability to make demands on government officials. Local and central government agencies, in turn, need to have the capacity and *commitment* to respond to the community. Therefore, capacity development is important both for community members and for government officials and institutions. Empowerment implies coordinated processes of interaction among the different stakeholders involved to achieve sustainable results.

Programmes that support empowerment and local capacity development must take local needs and institutions into account and provide an enabling environment for community action. Although those with skills and education are the ones most likely to emerge as leaders, this is not necessarily negative, particularly where there are representative organizations that are based in and accountable to the community (Garrett 2004; Gillespie 2004).

2.2 Community Empowerment and Natural Resource Management

With regard to natural resource management, community empowerment can help identify locally appropriate technologies, encourage their adoption and promote conservation (Ashby, Knapp and Ravnborg 1998). Engagement of affected farmers is especially important for successful and sustainable soil and water conservation, as it assures long-term commitment to maintaining conservation structures and allows adaptation of technical knowledge to local needs, problems and circumstances (Lutz 1998; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2002).

Community participation in development projects ranges along a continuum of degrees of ownership and control: compliance (doing what the project wants); cooperation (going along with the project ideas); collaboration (working with project staff); and community control (Humphrey 1998). By design, Ethiopia’s MERET project aims to engage both responsible government officials and community members through strong collaboration facilitated by the action of an external organization (WFP).

3. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

3.1 Food Insecurity and Natural Resource Degradation in Ethiopia

Ethiopia offers an important case study of WFP's engagement in empowering communities through food assistance. It is one of the world's poorest and most food-insecure countries, with natural resource degradation constituting a serious barrier to development. It ranks 170 out of 177 countries on UNDP's Human Development Index (UNDP 2005), with 46 percent of the population food-insecure and over 50 percent of the children under the age of 5 stunted as a result of chronic malnutrition (World Bank 2005). Although agriculture is the main source of livelihoods, the country suffers from chronic food insecurity and recurrent hunger crises as a result of periodic severe droughts, severe natural resource degradation and low development investment caused by past protracted conflict (Ethiopian Embassy, Washington DC 2005; United States Department of State 2006). To address these issues, WFP has partnered with the Ethiopian Government in the areas of reforestation and soil and water conservation for over 30 years.

3.2 Background on the MERET Project

By design, MERET relies on a community-based and participatory approach. Launched in its current form in 2002, it represents a significant break from Ethiopia's "command-and-control" approach to soil and water conservation in the 1970s and 1980s. That methodology proved ineffective, as communities felt little sense of ownership due to their lack of participation in planning and management and therefore seldom took responsibility for maintaining the assets created (conservation structures, terraces, check dams, etc.).

Since 1991, soil and water conservation in selected communities has employed the local-level participatory planning approach (LLPPA), through which *woreda* (district-level) government experts collaborate with communities on planning, implementation and evaluation. The federal and regional governments provide policy guidance and financial and technical resources.

MERET seeks to improve the livelihoods of food-insecure rural communities and households, particularly those headed by women, by providing food to enable these communities to invest in soil and water conservation, land rehabilitation, reforestation and the creation of productive assets and income-generating opportunities. MERET also focuses on strengthening households' and communities' development decision-making and enhancing the technical and organizational capacities of beneficiaries and implementing partners (WFP 2002b).

WFP's main implementing partner is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MOARD). The project covers over 600 communities in 74 food-insecure

*woredas*⁵ in 6 of Ethiopia's 11 regions. MERET provides resources to over a million people annually. Support for the project accounted for over 65 percent of the non-emergency resources provided in WFP's 2003–2006 Ethiopia country programme (CP) (WFP-Ethiopia 2005a).⁶

In the mid-1970s, the Ethiopian government identified land rehabilitation as a major development priority. Table 1 shows the evolution of WFP food aid-supported soil and water conservation activities since 1980, including changes in institutional arrangements and scale, the role of affected communities and relevant political developments. Initially, the government made little effort to consult the affected communities (Wickrema 2000). The project mainly focused on large watersheds and the role of farmers was simply to provide labour to construct conservation works, in exchange for food aid commodities. By the late 1980s, Ministry of Agriculture technical experts realized that farmer involvement and “ownership” were key to sustainable programmes (Zelege interview). Beginning in 1988, with technical assistance from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the project started to explore community needs assessments and community-based planning (Wickrema 2000).

Following a series of severe droughts and the violent overthrow of the government in 1991, there was a period of “widespread destruction of communal woodlots and certain physical conservation structures...” (Wickrema 2000: 26). Farmers themselves indicate that they regarded conservation efforts at the time as part of a government scheme to seize the land (Ketchema planning team interview). In addition, farmers removed structures that they found inappropriate to their circumstances or that failed to meet their needs (Holden, Shiferaw and Pender 2005; Lutz 1998).

Between 1991 and 1993, as the political situation stabilized, the Ministry of Agriculture sought to make significant changes in conservation policy. Working jointly with FAO and later with WFP (following the end of FAO technical assistance in 1992), the Ministry developed LLPPA as a means to respond to communities' needs. This approach requires experts to consult and even negotiate with farmers. It also requires a much smaller scale for activities, to assure meaningful community engagement (Zelege interview). LLPPA as a methodology has evolved over time and is now the foundation of MERET's community capacity development efforts (Wickrema 2000; WFP 2005).

Initially, LLPPA aimed to marry community-based, participatory soil and water conservation with technically sound approaches. MERET has gone one step further, with increased emphasis on enhancing community planning and management capacity. It also has a new focus on building community and household assets, including household

⁵ Ethiopia has nearly 600 *woredas* in total, each with 7 to more than 20 *kebeles* (multi-village communities). The *kebele* (also known in Tigray as a *taiba*) is the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia.

⁶ In 2004, WFP provided Ethiopia with 490,000 metric tons (mt) of food aid, valued at over US\$300 million, with nearly 6 million people benefiting. Less than 10 percent of this tonnage – 48,000 mt – went to development activities, benefiting about 2 million people. The bulk of WFP's assistance went to the protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) in the country.

Table 1: Evolution of Project 2448⁷ and MERET

Period	Project	Beneficiaries	Food aid (mt)	Cost to WFP (US\$ million)	Total cost (US\$ million)	Key political developments	Approach to conservation
1980-82	2448/ Original	2.3 million	145 000	49	66	<i>Derg</i> ⁸ rule	Top-down, large watershed focus
1982-87	2448/ Phase I	5.3 million	350 000	105	137	<i>Derg</i> rule continues amidst rebellion, drought and famine	Top-down, but conservation officials recognize approach is unsustainable
1987-94	2448/ Phase II	5 million	378 000	86.3	96	<i>Derg</i> falls, EPRDF ⁹ takes power	1988 – “minimum planning” 1993 – LLPPA community-based approach launched Smaller-scale watershed focus
1994-99	2448/ Phase III	936,000	137 000	50	60	Decentralization of soil and water conservation	Focus on capacity development
1999-02	2448/ Phase IV	1.4 million	320 000	122	142	Devolution of authority and resources from regions to <i>woredas</i>	LLPPA largely disseminated, including adoption by several non-MERET actors
2003-06	MERET	1.3 million	134 824	50	60		Focus on community management, asset development In 2005, LLPPA integrated into national

⁷ From 1980 to 2002, WFP provided support to soil and water conservation activities under “WFP Project Ethiopia 2448 – Rehabilitation of Forest, Grazing and Agricultural Land.”

⁸ *Derg* means “committee” in Amharic and is the name generally used for the military junta led by Colonel Haile Mengistu Mariam (initially, the group called itself the “Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army”). *Derg* rule was both authoritarian and highly repressive. The government officially adopted Marxist-Leninist ideology shortly after taking power in 1975 and aligned the country with the Soviet Union. Although the military officially transferred power to the Workers Party of Ethiopia in 1984, the same group of officers led by Mengistu remained in control of the government (Aalen 2002).

⁹ The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) defeated the *Derg*’s forces and took power in 1991. The Front has remained in office since. It remains a coalition of parties organized along regional and ethnic lines. As during the fight against the *Derg*, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, led by the current Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, is the dominant partner (Pausewang, Tronvoll and Aalen 2002).

							Community-based Participatory Watershed Development (CBPWD) guidelines
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Sources: WFP (1999); Wickrema (2000); WFP-Ethiopia (2005b); WFP (2005)

income-generating activities, such as crop diversification and off-farm activities (WFP 2005). It thus shifted from a technical conservation project to a “people-centred” one (WFP 2005: 11). To stress the new focus on sustainable livelihoods, the original MERET proposal approved by the WFP Executive Board characterized it as a “food-for-assets” project rather than a “food-for-work” project (WFP 2002b).

3.3 Evaluations of MERET

Several evaluations have given MERET high marks indeed. The most recent mid-term evaluation called the project’s results “impressive” (WFP 2005: 20) and noted, “It has rehabilitated over 300,000 hectares and enhanced the capacities of participating rural communities in those areas to plan and implement programmes centred around their own human resource contributions” (WFP 2005: iii). Table 2 summarizes the project’s conservation, assets-development and capacity-development activities in 2005. A cost–benefit analysis found a 13.5 percent rate of return to MERET investment over a 25-year period (WFP-Ethiopia 2005b).

Past studies of MERET and its predecessor, Project 2448, have also found that they institutionalized community participation. The last mid-term evaluation said of Project 2448 that “popular participation is, clearly, the keystone of the entire effort,” from planning through implementation and evaluation. It characterized community-based planning teams (PTs) as accountable to communities as a whole, with members replaced if results are unsatisfactory (WFP 2002a: 33). Likewise, a 2002 joint WFP–MOARD impact assessment study found that MERET “has strengthened community planning skills” (WFP-Ethiopia and MOARD 2002: 4). An independent evaluation funded by bilateral donors commented favourably that PTs assess needs, prioritize activities, supervise implementation and select beneficiaries, while communities revise and update five-year plans annually based on implementation experience. This study concluded that MERET’s development of community project management capacity will contribute to sustainability (DRN 2004).

The MERET cost–benefit analysis is somewhat more restrained in its assessment of participation and community empowerment. It argues that while farmers utilize training to implement activities, *woreda* technicians often initiate planning discussions and sometimes dominate the process. *Kebele* (community) officials frequently serve as planning team leaders (WFP-Ethiopia 2005b).

TABLE 2: MERET – CONSERVATION, ASSETS AND CAPACITY	
Biophysical achievements	2005
Cultivation and conservation activities (terracing of farmland) – hectares (ha)	130 000
Hillside terracing – ha	11 500
Gullies stabilization – ha	2 700
Rock, soil and vegetative bunds stabilization – ha	3 500
Seedling production – number (no.)	317 000 000
Planted trees – ha	12 000
Closure of land to grazing – ha	26 843
Assets protection	
Cut-off drains – kilometres (km)	1 890
Waterways – no.	363
Road access – km	> 2 000
Road maintenance – km	5 200
Construction of ponds – no.	211
Springs – no.	803
Construction of minor farm dams – no.	19
Construction of sediment storage dams – no.	35
Households with income-generating activities – no.	10 000
Capacity development	
MOARD/BOARD staff trained – no.	2 500
Govt. staff trained in results-based management – no.	249
Farmers and community members trained – no.	30 000
Community watershed plans prepared – no.	800

Source: WFP (2005)

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

In this section, we explore the institutional arrangements underlying MERET. We begin with a discussion of the agro-ecological and socio-politico-economic context that shapes those arrangements. We then examine the rather complex structure through which MERET seeks to engage communities through partnerships with several levels of government and WFP.

4.1 Context

4.1.1 Biophysical and Agro-ecological Factors

Ethiopia's regions exhibit agro-ecological diversity as well as social and political differences. Plough-based systems for farming cereals predominate in the northern and central highlands, while mixed plough/hoe cereals-farming systems are found in other parts of the country. In the south, farming systems are based on *enset* (a root crop also called "false banana"). The Afar Region is inhabited mainly by nomadic pastoralists (Dercon and Hoddinott 2005).

Current and former government officials, WFP staff and independent experts all emphasized to us that land degradation is a highly significant factor in poverty and food insecurity in Ethiopia. Erratic rainfall, low-input farming, cultivation of steep slopes and poor soils, free livestock grazing on hillsides and rapid population growth have combined to make even some traditional "bread baskets" in Ethiopia severely degraded, food-deficit areas (Zelege interview).

MERET addresses this tight linkage of agro-ecological and socio-economic factors by identifying project sites based on chronic or severe food deficiency and serious land degradation. Over 70 percent of the project *woredas* are located in moisture-stressed and drought-prone areas; the remainder have medium or high rainfall but are severely degraded and highly populated (WFP-Ethiopia 2005a). The project focuses on "critical watersheds" that are defined on both a biophysical and social basis and may transcend existing administrative boundaries. By emphasizing rehabilitation of small-scale watersheds, MERET seeks to keep agricultural livelihoods viable and prevent disruptive rural migration to uncertain urban prospects (Haileselassie, Mesfin, Nedessa and Zelege interviews).

4.1.2 Decentralized Governance

Since the current Ethiopian Government took power in 1991, it has stressed decentralized federal governance, after centuries of centralized rule whereby authorities in Addis Ababa, the capital city, had made all forestry and soil and water conservation decisions. Local officials implemented these decisions and neither they nor the affected communities had any input (F. Desta interview).

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the Government established a new system of “ethnic federalism,” devolving considerable tax and budget authority to the regions (Pausewang, Tronvoll and Aalen 2002). Further policy and programme decentralization has occurred more recently. Since 2003, *woredas* are responsible for agricultural and rural development policy implementation and budget allocations (Gebrehawaria interview; see Table 1 and Figure 1).

4.1.3 Official Commitment to Empowerment

Current and former government officials with whom we spoke all expressed strong support for LLPPA. We met a number of current and former officials at the federal, regional and *woreda* levels who had many years or even decades of experience in natural resource conservation. They accentuated to us that the shift from a top-down approach to community-based planning was less ideological than pragmatic: the former approach simply was not sustainable. Over time, some officials came to recognize that local people are better able to identify local problems and prioritize solutions than outsiders and projects are more likely to succeed when there is a local sense of ownership. As one former regional Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BOARD) official told us, “Unless you go with the community, things won’t work” (Wossoro interview). The change in the approach to conservation came gradually, as projects based on the old paradigm repeatedly failed (Mesfin, Alemu, Gebrehawaria, Zeleke, Abebe and Gebregziabher interviews). Hence, there was a process of institutional learning and change (Uphoff 2001).

In many non-MERET *woredas*, the approach to agricultural extension was top-down until recently, with community-level targets decided by officials, in contrast to MERET’s community-based participatory paradigm that emphasizes local demands and priorities. MERET has played a significant role at the community and *woreda* level in increasing the space for local-level planning. The successful effort to create national community-based participatory watershed development (CBPWD) guidelines, which were launched in 2005, represents a major break with command-and-control extension (see the “Scaling Up and Replication” discussion, below).

4.2 Relations between Communities and Local Governments

The institutional lynch-pin of LLPPA is the elected community-based PT, which develops and manages five-year forestry and soil and water conservation plans. These are subject to amendment, ratification and evaluation by the whole community. PTs typically include farmers; representatives of vulnerable groups (such as women who head households, unemployed high school graduates and demobilized soldiers); community leaders (elders, religious leaders and so forth); an extension agent (called a development agent, or DA) assigned to the *kebele*; a *woreda* BOARD soil and water conservation specialist; and a *kebele* official (chairperson, treasurer or secretary). Based on LLPPA guidelines, PTs conduct socio-economic and biophysical community surveys on which conservation plans are based. They also identify food aid beneficiaries, based on poverty

and asset criteria. Selected participants receive a daily ration¹⁰ for up to three months per year during the lean season (Wickrema 2000; WFP 2005; PT interviews).

Another important MERET institutional arrangement is the linkage established between district-level authorities and communities through the DAs, who collaborate directly with communities and advocate on their behalf vis-à-vis local-level government. These local officials are the frontline representatives of a multi-level partnership linking government officials with MERET *kebeles* (see Figure 1). MERET operations depend on close cooperation between *woreda* technical experts, DAs and the PTs. Developing trust between the DAs and the PT is crucial, as is the creation of a sense of ownership on the part of the community. This represents a paradigmatic transformation for conservation policy (Zelege interview).

In the communities we visited, we were able to observe some of these mechanisms. Several of the PTs with whom we met spoke very favourably of their relationship with their DAs. Some mentioned that they count on their DA to identify problems that they have encountered to the *woreda* (Abreha Atsbeha, Lemo, Addis Mender PT interviews). One PT told us, “We work closely with our DA and he is a father for us” (Addis Mender PT interview). In another community, the team chair (also chair of the *kebele*) expressed great pride on behalf of the community in what it had accomplished when showing us a pond that provides drinking water. He also gratefully acknowledged “those who helped us,” i.e., the *woreda* BOARD and WFP (Ketchema PT interview).

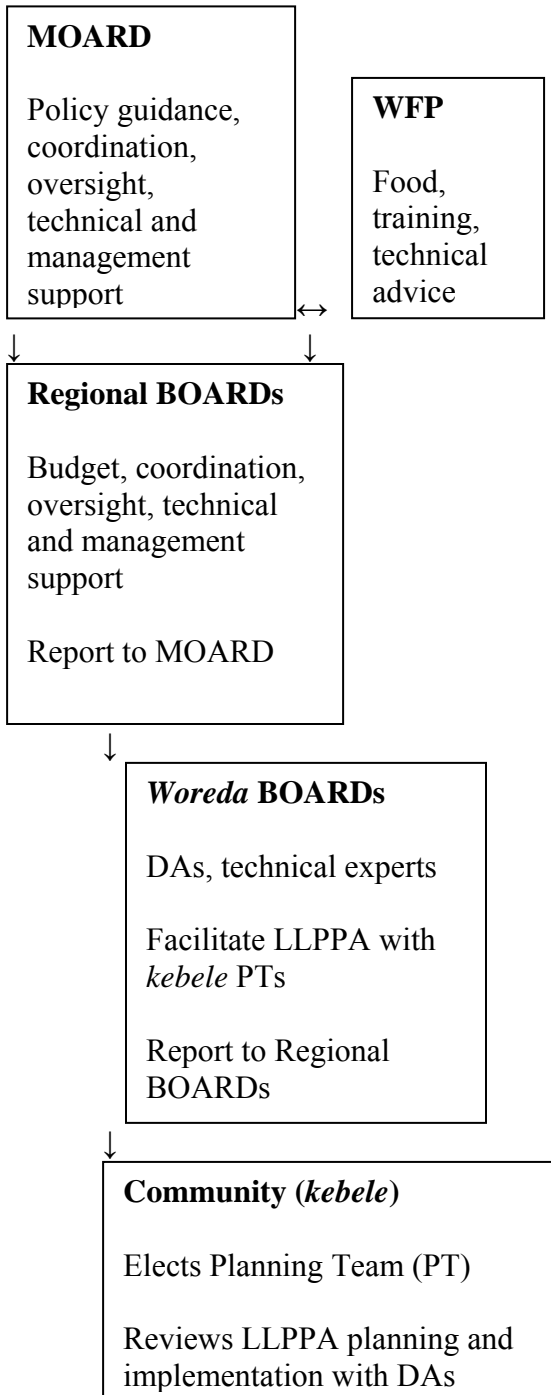
A former official who helped to design LLPPA describes MERET as involving “double subsidiarity.” There is political and administrative subsidiarity, with the *woreda* and especially the DAs working in partnership with the PTs and trying to help them realize their goals. There is also “scientific subsidiarity,” with reduced emphasis on highly technical soil and crop analysis. Instead, there is a marriage of the DAs’ technical knowledge and the farmers’ own experiences to get the community buy-in that leads to sustainable progress (Zelege interview).

4.3 Role of BOARDS and MOARD

Currently, MERET’s mode of operation is quite decentralized (see Figure 1). BOARDS in the six participating regions are responsible for implementation, with overall policy coordination and technical support from MOARD. DAs are accountable to the *woreda* BOARDS. The DAs are the essential building blocks of the MERET partnership, given their constant contact with the communities and especially their PTs (Gebrehawaria and Zelege interviews). MERET community DAs are expected to understand the community’s concerns and desires and communicate these back to the *woreda* BOARD. According to the project’s guidelines, every MERET site should have four DAs assigned to it: a natural resources specialist, an agronomy specialist, a livestock specialist and a home economics/nutrition specialist. Likewise, according to government plans, every *kebele* is supposed to have the first three specialists assigned. Before the current government took power, all *kebeles* had just one assigned DA. In practice, at the time of

¹⁰ A daily ration consists normally of 3 kg of wheat.

Figure 1: Ethiopian Administrative Structure and MERET Institutional Arrangements



Source: Adapted from WFP (2002b)

this study, many *kebeles* still had only one assigned agent, regardless of whether MERET operated in the community. Several of the sites we visited had three DAs assigned, but the home economist/nutrition position was often vacant.

A high turnover rate among DAs and other *woreda* BOARD staff is a persistent problem, interfering with project continuity and undermining the needed bonds of trust (Aregawi and Merkuria interviews). We met some current and former *woreda* and regional BOARD experts with over 25 years of experience in conservation, but for the most part, the DAs and many of the *woreda* experts whom we met appeared young.

Increasingly, DAs are expected to have graduated from a three-year technical college, so their technical knowledge of agriculture and natural resources is improving. However, evaluations of MERET emphasize that DA training should include greater emphasis on social mobilization, organizing farmer associations and gender mainstreaming (WFP 2005).

4.4 Role of WFP

WFP's core global mission is to contribute to ending hunger and malnutrition through food assistance in emergency relief, protracted relief and development projects. In the case of MERET, food aid provides an essential incentive to encourage community members to engage in the often heavy labour needed to construct conservation works. WFP transports food aid commodities from the port of Djibouti to regional hubs in Ethiopia. MOARD then transports the food to *woredas* and MERET distribution sites.

Government officials and WFP staff alike emphasize that MERET is a Government of Ethiopia project that receives support from WFP. However, the partnership between MOARD and WFP is extensive and longstanding and WFP's role goes well beyond providing food aid commodities. WFP's vulnerability analysis and mapping unit helps identify project sites based on food insecurity. WFP also provided technical assistance to design the LLPPA methodology and to devise and implement MERET's results-based management system. It trains both community members and government officials at all levels (national, regional and *woreda*). WFP offers technical training in various aspects of integrated participatory watershed management, enhancing the adaptation and promotion of appropriate technologies in water harvesting, soil-fertility management and productivity improvement, as well as training in income-generation activities. Study tours for government technical experts are also carried out among the different regions and outside the country (WFP 2005; WFP-Ethiopia 2005a). In 2005, WFP and a broad group of stakeholders supported the Government in developing national CBPWD guidelines.

WFP staff, especially those based in the network of sub-offices, have close working relationships with officials at *woreda* and regional BOARDS. Field-based staff spend considerable time at MERET sites. Many of the WFP national staff whom we met had worked at MOARD or BOARDS earlier in their careers and continued to maintain extensive ties to their former colleagues.

5. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CAPACITY TO PLAN AND MANAGE DEVELOPMENT

The mid-term evaluation of 2005 underlined the important role that MERET has played in strengthening *kebele* and *woreda* capacities through its emphasis on training. At the community level, the project provides training in watershed management and participatory planning and evaluation (WFP 2005).

Several PTs emphasized the value of the skills they had gained in planning and implementing conservation and forestry activities as a result of MERET interventions (Maiweiny, Lolfata, Ashoka, Lemo, Addis Mender PT interviews). It was largely because of these skills, the PTs reported, that they felt optimistic about programme sustainability. These communities have acquired important human resources in the form of skills and beliefs (specifically a sense of self-confidence), which are key elements of capacity.

The planning activities in which the PTs and communities engage go beyond choosing from a menu of forestry and soil and water conservation technologies provided by the DAs. Plans include allocation of productive resources, governance of communal assets and assuring that vulnerable groups have livelihood options. Drawing on advice from their DAs and *woreda* experts, communities develop rules governing the use of communal resources created through MERET activities, such as grass and woodlots. At one site we visited, the community had assigned common land on hillsides to landless young men after terracing had restored productivity (Haileselassie interview). This decision addresses both equity and social cohesion questions, since the young men lack other employment options. In the same community, the PT agreed that the community should provide assistance to households headed by women, which often do not have the labour resources to undertake such activities as digging shallow wells, which can have a high income payoff (Abreha Atsbeha PT interview); these households account for over 20 percent of the households in the community.

In several of the communities we visited, all households that contribute labour to conservation and forestry activities receive food (Abreha Atsbeha, Maiweiny, Lolfata PT interviews), because all residents are asset-poor and food-insecure. Elsewhere, however, PTs determine who will engage in the work and receive the food, based on a vulnerability ranking methodology in the LLPPA guidelines, with the poorest and most vulnerable receiving the most benefits. This methodology measures wealth primarily in terms of access to land¹¹ and how many head of livestock people own (WFP-Ethiopia and MOA 1999). PTs make these decisions in consultation with the *kebele* chairperson and *woreda* officials (Asore, Lemo PT interview).

¹¹ The *Derg*'s land reform "made all land the property of the Ethiopian people" (Aalen 2002: 5), in other words, property of the state (Dercon and Hoddinott 2005). The EPRDF government has not reverted to private ownership of land. Farm households enjoy open-ended use rights that can be passed across generations, but not partitioned or sold. Distinctions between "public" or "common" and "private" land in Ethiopia thus refer to use, not ownership. Ethiopian land tenure policy is thus similar to that of post-1978 China (see Gulati, Fan and Dalafi 2005).

In sum, enhancing communities' planning and management capacity advances both the economic (access to resources) and political (participation in decision-making) aspects of empowerment.

Regarding dominance by *kebele* officials of many PTs, pointed out in the cost–benefit analysis (WFP-Ethiopia 2005b), we found the *kebele* chair also chaired the PT in at least two of the sites we visited (Abreha Atsbeha and Ketchema PT interviews). Yet, in one of these communities, the team emphasized that while they are the leaders of the *kebele*'s self-managed development efforts, they remain accountable to the community (Ketchema PT interview). At the other such site, the *kebele* chairperson is well-known in the *woreda* as an innovative leader and has received awards for his efforts (Haileselassie interview). At the same time, another PT member in this community told us with great passion that election to the PT is an exercise in democracy and that it confers not just influence, but also great responsibility to the community on those selected.

As noted earlier, as long as these community leaders remain accountable to their constituents, their dominance of the PTs does not necessarily diminish broader community empowerment. In one community, PT members said that they are subject to an annual review by the *kebele* general assembly and can be removed for unsatisfactory performance. The *kebele* administration is elected to a five-year term and the community can likewise remove these leaders if it so chooses (Ketchema PT interview). In another community, PT members said that although they do not have a defined term in office, they are aware that they serve at the pleasure of the community (Maiweiny PT interview).

In every community we visited, PT members and residents told us that their annual conservation plans are subject to debate, amendment and ratification by the *kebele* general assembly, as well as to monitoring and evaluation (PT interviews). At one site, the PT told us that the general assembly meets weekly, with the DAs present, to review implementation, including technical questions. Although this takes up a great deal of time in a farming community where most work is done manually, one PT member commented, “Without discussion, no development” (Maiweiny PT interview). In another community, the *kebele* chair told us “everything would have failed” without community consensus, particularly on the need to end free grazing on the hillsides (Gideg interview).

Thus, in the communities we visited, there were mechanisms in place to assure voice and accountability and to prevent elite domination of the planning process.

5.1 Sustainability and Ownership

Concern about the long-run viability of development programmes pervades policy discussions in Ethiopia (Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington DC 2005; Abebe, Alemu, Gebregziabher, Gebrehawaria, Gideg, Mesfin, Nedessa, Wossoro and Zeleke interviews). In all the communities we visited, there was recognition among both residents and local officials that food aid is unlikely to be available on an open-ended basis. In Amhara, the regional government is trying to limit food aid payments under MERET to 4 of every 10 days worked (Aregawi and Merkuria interviews). In general, MERET does not provide

incentives for maintenance activities, with the exception of road maintenance and upgrading of check dams. This is a major change from the *Derg* era, when it was common to provide food-for-work commodities in maintenance efforts. Other forms of maintenance depend on communities' own self-help efforts. This rule is generally well-respected in all regions. In Tigray, where there is a labour tax of 20 days' work per year, maintenance of conservation structures takes place without payment.

Natural resource management specialists argue that Ethiopia can only feed itself if it addresses land management issues and MERET is presently one of the main vehicles to do this. They believe that poor communities are unlikely to engage in the hard labour that conservation and land rehabilitation require without incentives, particularly in severely degraded areas. These could be in the form of cash or food; if carefully managed, incentives in the form of food do not create dependency (Nedessa, Ato Simone and Zeleke interviews). In years of good harvests, MERET procures food from within Ethiopia (WFP-Ethiopia 2005c).

Some PT members also stressed the need for incentives. As one team member at a site where MERET activities had begun relatively recently told us, "We can't work if we don't eat" (Abreha Atsbeha PT interview). Over the longer term, members of this team felt that land rehabilitation and MERET-supported income-generation activities would boost incomes sufficiently for the community to sustain collective action on common property areas without food aid as an incentive.

In several of the communities we visited, PT members were optimistic about their ability to continue conservation activities in the absence of food incentives (Maiweiny, Lolfata, Ashoka and Lemo PT interviews). They acknowledged that lack of payments would slow down activities, but they asserted that because of participation in MERET, their communities have learned the value of conservation. They now can make landscapes that once appeared "like a naked person" bloom again (Abreha Atsbeha PT interview). In addition, they report that they have achieved tangible income gains as the soil became productive again and MERET helped diversify income-earning activities. (All PT interviews pointed to improvements in income.) They have gained incentives in the form of economic benefits for such elements of capacity as responsibility, motivation and leadership. The mid-term evaluation underlines the "notable impact of the MERET project in improving the livelihood of farmers and households members" (WFP 2005: 48) and as an example, it mentions the nursery management pilot programme, where responsibility is handed over to groups within the local community.

WFP staff and government officials pointed out that MERET will need to continue to provide fairly extensive technical advice to *kebeles* for some time to come, because of high rates of illiteracy. As efforts to boost basic education enrolments lead to literacy gains, an alternative in the future is for DAs to train farmers as peer trainers and reduce the ongoing level of technical assistance (Mesfin, Gebrehawaria interviews).

Reports from the MERET results-based management system for 2005 indicate that assets created through the project are properly maintained and managed on a

self-help basis by virtually all households surveyed. Also, the overwhelming majority of households replicated assets without food assistance (74 percent, compared to 68 percent in 2004) (see Table 3). In Damot Gale, in the Southern Nations', Nationalities' and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), homesteaders with whom we spoke said that they no longer receive MERET food aid and sustain themselves through the crops, honey and livestock that they raise and sell in the market.

Table 3: Outputs and Outcomes from MERET Activity (%)

Outcomes	2004	2005
Community assets 2 or more years old are properly managed on self-help basis	92	90
Households replicate assets without food assistance	68	74
Households maintain their created assets to standard on self-help basis	86	86
Households claim their income increment as a result of MERET intervention is significant	71	61
Participating households state that their food deficit months have been reduced by 2 or more	31	41
Women consider that they have benefited from assets created		91
Sites with a LLPP plan	89	84
Outputs		
Women DAs and Home Economics Agents trained, out of the total available workforce of women	38	68
Women heads of household trained in income-generating activities	19	26

Source: WFP-Ethiopia (2004, 2005d).

In Ketchema in Oromiya, we had an opportunity to test the assertion that communities can sustain activities in the absence of food aid incentives. This community “graduated” from Project 2448 in about 1999, but continues to plan and manage conservation activities. The PT has evolved into a general development planning committee that addresses a wide range of issues. Team members expressed a sense of pride that they are able to manage their development and address such crucial problems as access to drinking water on their own. Ketchema continues to seek technical advice from the *woreda* BOARD (Ketchema PT interview). The community receives food-for-work when it builds new conservation structures, but no longer receives payment for maintenance of existing works or for guards who prevent grazing in closed areas (Abebe

interview). Furthermore, even for new works the community contributes 10 to 40 percent of the total labour in most cases.

5.2 Enhancing Advocacy Capacity

Community empowerment requires the capability to make demands and the capability to participate in decision-making. We found considerable evidence that MERET had developed the advocacy capacity of communities. PT members told us that they view their role as advocates on behalf of the community vis-à-vis the *woreda* BOARD on such matters as obtaining services (such as training), assuring that community-endorsed plans are technically sound and securing new conservation technology (Gideg, Abreha Atsbeha PT, Lemo PT and Addis Mender interviews). Betru Nedessa, the Government's national MERET coordinator, says that with the institutionalization of LLPPA, communities have adopted a strong sense of ownership in conservation and income-generating activities and frequently lobby DAs for advice, services and technical assistance (Nedessa interview).

At a number of sites where we were accompanied by WFP, *woreda* and sometimes regional BOARD officials, members of the communities complained about government services and policies. The issues included inadequate home economics and nutrition advice from the BOARD, delays in receiving payment for conservation and forestry actions, lack of access to high-value crop seeds and crop destruction by government-protected wildlife that have taken up residence in forest and grassland created through MERET interventions (Ketchema, Lolfata, Asore and Lemo PT and Ato Emmanuel interviews). At one site (Addis Mender Kebele), we noticed that the groups with whom we met had a strong proclivity toward collective decisions and action. We witnessed demands being made for expansion of income-generating activities and training and for the enhancement of girls' education; these demands were expressed in a very participatory way by the whole group. We were unable to ascertain whether our visits had served to embolden people to complain or make demands, but in most cases, the farmers were extremely outspoken in airing their views. A WFP official told us that MERET has created space for frank exchanges between communities and local government, perhaps beyond what is possible outside the project in communities with no experience in participatory planning.

6. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

WFP policy calls for all of the organization's activities to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment (WFP 2002c). This is a challenge in Ethiopia, which has a strong tradition of discouraging women's participation in civic affairs.

MERET seeks to empower women in two ways: through development outcomes and through engagement in planning and management of conservation activities. By promoting reforestation and closing hillsides to grazing, it seeks to reduce the heavy burden of fetching water and gathering forage and fuel wood that falls to women and girls (Nedessa and Mesfin interviews). MERET encourages the creation of community-based income-generation activities groups made up of women (Abreha Atsbeha community interview, W/z Rebecca interview, Lemo community interview, Addis Mender community interview). Finally, a project goal is that by 2006, women should account for at least half of the members of all PTs (WFP 2002b). According to WFP country office results-based management surveys, the average proportion of women on the teams was 45 percent in 2004 (WFP-Ethiopia 2004). In the communities we visited, women generally made up half the teams (PT interviews).

Despite their high rates of representation, however, previous studies of MERET communities have found that women (both PT members and other community residents) feel that they have little influence on decision-making. Some analysts consider this the result of cultural norms (WFP 2005; WFP-Ethiopia and MOARD 2002; WFP country office staff interviews).

For example, in one community that we visited in SNNPR, we met with only men, both PT members and other residents, although we asked to meet with PT members who were women as well. PT members said that the team is composed of five men and five women and that all members participate equally. However, men serve as Chair and Vice Chair "because they are better educated." Women serve as Secretary (Asore PT interview).

We were also told that the strength of cultural norms that frown on women's participation in civic affairs varies by region. In Tigray, we found women PT members to be especially outspoken, although we spoke with very articulate women on the teams and in income-generation activity groups in other regions as well. We noted a tendency in Tigray for people, including PT members, to view the armed struggle against the former regime as a touchstone. In the old days, we were told, women were not permitted to participate in public meetings and often risked beatings if they went out in public without their husbands (Abreha Atsbeha and Maiweiny PT interviews). But, as one team member told us, "During the war, our mothers and sisters fought, were leaders and were often better fighters than men." There is a strong sense that since that time, women enjoy equality and can speak their minds (Abreha Atsbeha PT interview). Likewise, women have an equal say in economic decisions at the household level, such as what to plant or whether to take out loans. Previously, men made these decisions unilaterally (Maiweiny

PT interview). Women's associations are active at the local level in Tigray. Nevertheless, analysts have noted that peace has made women less visible in development management (Mesfin and Gebregziabher interviews).

In most of the communities we visited, women PT members assured us that their voices are equal to those of members who are men. In one community, the women said that in community meetings, women are often more articulate than men and their opinions and democratic rights to participate in discussions are respected (Abreha Atsbeha PT interview). At another site, women PT members noted that gender equality is protected and promoted by the Government (Maiweiny PT interview). At several sites, women PT members said that they have raised issues of importance to women and that they made sure that plans address these issues. Sometimes this requires arguing with PT members who are men. While their views do not always prevail, these women felt that they have an equal chance to put ideas forward (Abreha Atsbeha, Maiweiny, Ketchema, Lolfata, Lemo PT interviews). At one site, women PT members emphasized to us that disagreements on the team do not necessarily follow gender lines. Moreover, they said, PT members frequently are in agreement on many issues (Ketchema PT interview).

In general, women PT members felt that one of their roles was to bring up women's concerns, particularly with respect to labour and time burdens and to try and address these in the planning process (Abreha Atsbeha, Maiweiny, Ketchema, Lolfata PT interviews). The Government's national MERET coordinator stresses that the teams are much more likely to address these issues and include in their plans activities that empower women economically, if women are members (Nedessa interview, also Mesfin interview). For example, at one site, a woman PT member said that women on the PT had insisted that plans give a high priority to road improvement, so that women in the community would have better access to the local clinic and attendance during childbirth. Women also pressed to have a grinding mill included in the plan. In both instances, the PT and eventually the community agreed to the women's ideas (Lolfata PT interview).

We spoke with many women, both PT members and other community residents, who considered MERET to have made a great contribution in reducing their burdens and improving their lives (Abreha Atsbeha community member interview; Ketchema, Lolfata, Addis Mender PT interviews). At one site, women PT members said that before MERET, they had to travel 15 km to fetch water, but now there were community ponds (Ketchema interview). Women at another site told us that before the flour mill was constructed, they had to walk seven km to grind their grain. One woman said, "Our voices are heard as we contribute to the improvement of our community" (Addis Mender PT interview).

Community members and women organized into income-generating activity groups through MERET mentioned that the project had provided them with a variety of skills and resources. For example, MERET had trained them in new cultivation techniques, facilitated group organization, boosted their incomes and allowed them to diversify their production beyond subsistence staple cultivation. At several sites, women mentioned income gains from producing fruits and vegetables and fattening livestock for

market (Abreha Atsbeha community interview, W/z Rebecca interview, Lemo community interview, Addis Mender community interview). As Table 3 indicates, in 2004, 19 percent of the people MERET trained in income-generating activities were women heads of household, who are often extremely vulnerable to food insecurity because their households tend to have less labour available. The new skills provided these households with important assets.

We did notice that few of the DAs or *woreda* specialists whom we met were women. Women are being trained as DAs, particularly in Amhara, but overall, the extension service remains heavily dominated by men, with women predominating only among home economics/nutrition specialists. Table 3 shows that 68 percent of the women DAs and home economics agents working at MERET sites were trained through MERET in 2005, up from just 38 percent the year before. In our site visits in Amhara, we found that women serve as distribution agents for the Child Survival Initiative, in which women control the food distribution process. Recently, WFP has advocated for Community Conversation Facilitators to create an atmosphere of dialogue within the community on sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS, hygiene and health more generally. In Addis Mender we met two women facilitators who were part of the women's income-generating activities group with which we met.

Throughout Africa, women account for a small percentage of extension agents, despite the important role of women in food production and processing and despite the evidence that women agents provide more effective extension services to women farmers. Moreover, in Africa and elsewhere (including in the developed countries) women agents tend to focus on home economics rather than production and natural resource management (Quisumbing 2003a; Saito and Weidemann 1990).

Both government officials and WFP staff emphasized that gender equality will not come to Ethiopia overnight, in light of centuries of patriarchal culture. Government policy puts considerable stress on not just gender equality, but the economic empowerment of women,¹² and a positive government role can help change cultural norms. Women generally do participate in planning, managing and implementing development in MERET sites and the project has proved to be an important vehicle for advancing gender equality in Ethiopia (Nedessa and Wossoro interviews). Our interviews and observations at the sites we visited definitely confirm that assessment.

¹² See Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2006) for details on policies on gender equality.

7. FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY IMPACT

Previous evaluations have suggested that MERET has a significant positive food security impact. The MERET impact assessment found that food availability increased significantly in beneficiary households due to increased agricultural productivity. Some households reported gains in income and assets as well. The most vulnerable households continued to experience food shortages, but these were reduced and for many vulnerable groups the three months of MERET food aid allowed them to achieve full food security (WFP-Ethiopia and MOARD 2002). An IFPRI study of food for work in Ethiopia (including MERET and other projects) found that such food aid is well-targeted to poorer and more vulnerable households and contributes to improved nutrition among children in beneficiary households (Quisumbing 2003b). As Table 3 indicates, in 2005 over 60 percent of the beneficiary households surveyed by MERET's results-based management system claimed that their income had increased significantly and the figure was over 70 percent the preceding year. In the same survey, 41 percent of households reported that their food deficit months had declined by two or more months as a result of the project, up from 31 percent in 2004. More than 90 percent of the women surveyed considered that they had benefited from assets created by MERET.

In the communities we visited, we were able to observe diversified agricultural production, including the cultivation of a wide variety of cash crops and our informants reported gains in agricultural productivity, food availability and income as a result of MERET activities. This suggests enhancements in both food availability and accessibility. Community members also told us that the project had led to improvements in health, education, nutrition and even self-esteem.

With regard to food production, in all of the communities we visited, residents told us that agricultural productivity had increased as a result of improved soil and better access to water. We spoke to many farmers who had diversified their production into a variety of cash crops, especially fruits and vegetables, some of which they kept for their families' own consumption, but most of which they sold. All continued to produce staples such as teff, maize and sweet potatoes as well. One PT told us that reforestation had changed the micro-environment and led to increased rainfall (Ketchema PT interview). Another team reported double and triple cropping as a result of MERET interventions (Maiweiny PT interview) and several said they had increased use of high-yielding seeds (Maiweiny, Ketchema PT interviews). Homesteaders reported that MERET had helped them learn new farming techniques and provided new seed varieties, but one complained of difficulties in obtaining seeds in the market after the first crop (Lolfata homestead, Ato Emmanuel interviews).

Many community members reported increases in their incomes, which they were able to use for investment in automated water pumps, livestock, housing improvements and other assets. At several sites, farmers told us that due to increased incomes, they no longer had to migrate in search of jobs for part or all of the year. In one community in Tigray, there were fewer opportunities to migrate in any event, due to the closure of the

Eritrean border (Abreha Atsbeha PT interview). By closing areas to grazing, communities realized significant income from selling grass for roofing material or fodder. One community was able to build a school using this income (Ashoka community interview). In another community the PT told us, “Through this MERET project people have really improved their lives and changed status, from belonging to the poor level they shifted to medium or to the better-off category” (Lemo PT interview).

PT members, homesteaders and community members at all sites felt that MERET had improved their well-being. We were told repeatedly, “Now our children are eating better,” and many farmers reported that their families were now healthier.

Women have a greater propensity than men to invest increased resources in improved health, education and nutrition of their children (Quisumbing 2003a). PT and community members reported using income gains from MERET for school-related expenses for their children. One representative of a women’s income-generating activity group told us that because of the women’s increased incomes, none of their children were malnourished any longer (W/z Rebecca interview).

Likewise, IFPRI research has found that increases in female education and improvements in the social status of women are key drivers of reductions in child malnutrition in developing countries (Smith and Haddad 2000). Because MERET calls for gender equality on PTs and targets resources to women, it helps boost women’s social status. In those communities with both MERET and school feeding, we were told that school feeding is an incentive for families to send all their children to school, especially girls (Abreha Atsbeha, Damotta and Chorissa School Director interviews).

Perhaps most importantly, we found that MERET gave participants a sense of dignity and optimism. A homesteader said, “We aren’t going to beg anymore, now we stand on our own two feet” (Ato Emmanuel interview). This, too, can be considered an aspect of food security (Sen 1999).

8. SYNERGIES WITH OTHER PROGRAMMES

8.1 Food for Education

The WFP country programme for Ethiopia for 2003–2006 called for strengthening linkages among the three components: MERET, school feeding and supporting households affected by HIV/AIDS (WFP 2002b). At the time of the study, about 15 percent of the *woredas* with MERET sites also had WFP-supported school feeding (WFP 2005). We visited three such sites and specifically asked officials and community residents about the synergies that result. Synergies between the two projects could be an indication of scaling up if there were an increased number of activities that the community plans and manages. This, in turn, would enhance community capacity to participate in and direct development across sectoral lines.

Food aid plays quite a different role in the two projects. School feeding seeks to boost school attendance, retention and performance: the availability of meals attracts children to school (Damotta and Chorissa School Directors interviews). It also induces children to participate in extracurricular activities such as music and HIV/AIDS awareness sessions. At participating schools where female enrolment is under 20 percent, families who send their daughters to class receive the additional incentive of 10 litres of vegetable oil (WFP 2002b; Mikkelsen interview; Abreha Atsbeha School Director interview). School feeding can also have a direct impact on child nutrition, for example by providing micronutrient-fortified foods. Primary school students at participating schools receive a daily meal of 150 g of blended food (for example, corn-soya blend served as a porridge) that is fortified with vitamins A and D and sometimes iron; 6 g of oil; and 3 g of iodized salt (WFP 2002b; Mikkelsen interview). In one community we visited, the school director reported that he had observed improvements in child growth, energy levels and classroom attention as a result of the feeding project. However, he said that he was not aware of the micronutrient fortification (Abreha Atsbeha School Director interview).

In contrast, in MERET food serves primarily as a labour incentive. The effects on nutrition are indirect, stemming from increased food availability and higher incomes.

Despite these differences between the projects, there are clear and very practical linkages. For example, MERET supports road construction that improves access to schools (Addis Mender PT interview). It also supports construction of school latrines and planting of school gardens. At one school we visited, MERET labour dug a well for the garden and planted trees in the school yard. Future plans include constructing a fence and helping to purchase a pump. The school sells produce from the garden and uses the proceeds to provide school supplies to poorer students, as well as to buy classroom materials and soap (Abreha Atsbeha School Director interview). In other communities we visited, MERET helped with classroom, library, kitchen, food storage, water system and playground construction (Damotta and Chorissa School Directors interviews).

We also found that in communities where both MERET and school feeding operate, community engagement in development planning and management broadens and deepens. In one community, the MERET PT vice chairperson also serves on the Parent-Teacher-Student Association, which mobilizes community support for the school, such as funds to pay cooks and firewood to fuel the stoves. He told us that the two bodies consult on the community's general development plan (we found this to be the case in other communities as well) and the School Director works closely with both (Abreha Atsbeha School Director and PT interviews; Damotta and Chorissa School Directors interviews).

8.1.1 CHILD

In order to institutionalize these synergies, WFP's 2007–2011 CP includes the Children in Local Development (CHILD) project. This seeks to use LLPPA in community education. WFP and the Ministry of Education (MOE) began implementing CHILD on a pilot basis in 2004–2005 in three regions. Using schools as a base, it seeks to establish linkages with MERET or other development or food security interventions in order to reduce rural poverty. WFP staff emphasize that the project focuses on empowering *kebele* and *woreda* Education and Training Bureaux and Parent-Teacher-Student Associations. During the formulation of the pilot project, there was considerable discussion of CHILD's approach to education and development among regional, *woreda* and local officials, pilot project communities and donor agencies, in order to achieve a sense of "buy-in" (Mikkelsen and Barnes interviews). CHILD focuses on HIV/AIDS, gender awareness, health, water and sanitation, as well as education. The idea is to make schools the focal point of participatory community development, engaging multiple *woreda* bureaux and multiple donors for support. There are also efforts to include food security, agriculture and natural resource management in the curriculum through CHILD (WFP-Ethiopia 2005c; WPF-Ethiopia and MOE 2005; Nedessa, Mikkelsen, Barnes, Aregawi, Merkuria interviews).

8.2 HIV/AIDS

WFP's policy is to mainstream HIV/AIDS concerns in all of its work. In order to do this in MERET, the WFP country office has developed pilot projects in 14 *woredas* with BOARDS, Bureaux of Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Offices. These projects use "community conversations" to involve communities in identifying HIV/AIDS issues and coming up with plans to address them (WFP 2005; Aregawi, Merkuria and Addis Mender women's income-generation group interviews). We observed the community conversation process integrated into MERET interventions in one community we visited (Addis Mender). However, the mid-term evaluation called for a systematic review of community conversation activities prior to further scaling up, given high cost and management requirements (WFP 2005).

9. SCALING UP AND REPLICATION

When community empowerment leads to project success, but is limited to a small number of communities, it will not contribute to national development goals or international commitments such as the Millennium Development Goals unless there is scaling up. This can involve expansion of a project's geographic base or an increase in the type of activities and links to other projects (Gillespie 2004). Consistent with recent evaluations, in the communities we visited we found limited evidence of scaling up of MERET, either in terms of geographic expansion or in terms of enhanced organizational strength. The project does facilitate sharing of experiences among farmers across *woreda* and regional lines. PTs indicated to us that learning from the experience of other communities has proved valuable for their own MERET activities (Abreha Atsbeha, Maiweiny, Lolfata PTs, Nedessa interviews). However, MERET lacks the resources to promote community exchanges extensively. Developing PT associations beyond the *kebele* level would have value, but this is MERET's "missing link" (Zelege interview). It is difficult to scale up such organizations without the resources to carry out capacity development and provide the necessary trained staff. Extremely poor communities that engage in subsistence activities cannot be expected to spontaneously adopt best practices on a wide scale.

However, MERET often operates at the "critical watershed" level,¹³ covering more than one *kebele*. This allows for activities that require inter-community commitment to management (roads, large gully control, etc.).

In 2005, MOARD issued the national Community-Based Participatory Watershed Development (CBPWD) guidelines, incorporating LLPPA and MERET technical standards. Several donor agencies, including WFP and the *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (German Agency for Technical Cooperation – GTZ) helped to develop the guidelines, along with the International Livestock Research Institute and a number of non-governmental organizations supported by the United States Agency for International Development. This multi-stakeholder initiative is the foundation for a nationwide approach to sustainable land management. It also represents a demonstration effect of MERET. Field evidence convinced officials of the value of community engagement in the design, management and evaluation of interventions. Between September and December 2005, MOARD undertook large-scale efforts to train *woreda* BOARD staff to implement the guidelines in support of the Productive Safety-Nets Programme (PSNP).¹⁴ PSNP is a large-scale social protection programme supported by WFP and other donors. It includes a public works employment component that can include building soil and water conservation structures in non-MERET areas. The goal of the training effort is to encourage non-MERET communities and their DAs to make use of MERET's participatory approaches to sustainable natural resource management. WFP staff told us

¹³ The critical watersheds include clusters of LLPPA sites that belong to a common hydrological and socially connected territorial unit.

¹⁴ We are grateful to Dr. Daniel Gilligan, IFPRI Research Fellow, for background information on PSNP.

that the guidelines have helped spur the growth of community-based natural resource organizations.

Cooperatives also offer a vehicle for participatory approaches to rural development. Farmer cooperatives exist in Ethiopia and each regional BOARD has an Office of Cooperative Promotion. These groups have helped farmers gain access to fertilizer on favourable terms, obtain credit, produce coffee at the standards required on international markets and market fruits and vegetables. MERET spurred the creation of apple cooperatives in Chencha Woreda in SNNPR (WFP-Ethiopia 2005a). However, cooperatives in Ethiopia tend to be closely tied to the Government, rather than grassroots associations created by farmers themselves (ACDI-VOCA 2005; Kahan interview). Cooperatives and farmers' organizations are widespread in Tigray and actively promoted by the regional BOARD (Gebrehawaria interview). In the other regions we visited, we found differing views on the value of coops even within the same *woreda*. While one community found them helpful for marketing and had established a cooperative store (Ketchema PT interview), we were told by another PT that experience with coops during the previous government had created negative attitudes and households preferred to carry out marketing on their own, without any collective action (Lolfata PT interview). In at least one community we visited, the MERET PT is the only community organization (Asore PT interview).

MERET *has* expanded the number and type of activities carried out at the community level. The project encourages the creation of income-generating activity groups, especially among women, and the creation of asset-specific management bodies. These groups elect their own officers, maintain the assets and set the rules governing their use. The groups multiply the number of organizations within a community and help facilitate collective action in natural resource management (Lemo PT interview). However, as yet there has not been a systematic evaluation of the implementation of rule-making at the community level.

In several of the sites we visited, we found evidence that the success of MERET activities had led other communities to adopt conservation practices. According to the Government's national MERET coordinator, relatively easy conservation efforts, such as planting trees, do not require big incentives and non-MERET communities may adopt them once they see the benefits in neighbouring MERET sites. Homesteaders who diversify production with MERET support in the southern part of the country will typically inspire another 200 farmers to adopt some of their practices (Nedessa interview). We observed a site on the opposite side of the valley from a MERET site where residents had closed the hillside to free grazing after seeing the benefits their MERET neighbours had obtained; these include substantial income from selling grass for feed and roofing materials (Asore PT interview). But non-MERET communities have less access to extension services, so it is difficult for them to adopt more complex measures such as more sophisticated water conservation structures, and they do not have the resources to pay for the required labour.

In all of the MERET communities we visited, PT members, residents, homesteaders, members of income-generating activity groups, local officials and WFP staff told us that they receive frequent visits from farmers from other communities and other MERET sites who want to learn about conservation techniques and the benefits that can result. Farmers also told us that they frequently discuss their experience with MERET when they go to market (Maiweiny, Ketchema PT interviews). A typical comment was one we heard from a PT in Amhara: “Other communities were inspired by our work and some peasants started replicating some of our activities” (Lemo PT interview). A homesteader in SNNPR told us that MERET helped him diversify his production from just cultivating sweet potatoes on a subsistence basis to growing a broad range of fruits and vegetables. His income had gone up considerably and he still grew some sweet potatoes for his family’s own consumption. He had found that many farmers in his own community and nearby had adopted some of the same practices (Ato Emmanuel interview).

MERET has clearly triggered adoption of various conservation and income-generation techniques beyond the project sites and numerous development agencies have used LLPPA or at least some aspects of it outside of MERET, although this is not always well-documented. In addition, MERET trains BOARD agriculture and natural resource staff who work outside of MERET communities.

WFP staff and government officials told us that MERET has helped MOARD to institutionalize bottom-up participation through the experience of LLPPA, now incorporated in the national CBPWD guidelines, and to reinforce the DA-community relationship (Gebregziabher, Mesfin, Gebrehawaria interviews).

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Measuring Community Empowerment in MERET

In order to measure the extent to which MERET empowers communities, we have adapted a tool from Shrimpton (1995). UNICEF originally designed this tool to use qualitative data to assess the extent to which its community-level nutrition interventions had empowering effects. IFPRI subsequently adapted it for more general use in organizing qualitative data on aspects of community involvement in development activities to measure the degree to which an intervention empowers local communities (Gillespie 2001, 2004). Our adaptation of the tool includes eight indicators, displayed in the first column of Table 4, and assigns a ranking for each on a scale of 0 to 4, based on the row into which the project under assessment fits. Scores will range between 0 and 32 and the higher the score, the more empowering the project.

Our rankings of MERET on each indicator, based on our observations, interviews and document review, are indicated in the table by highlighting. We assign MERET an overall score of 23 out of 32. This is 72 percent of the highest possible score and the mean ranking for the indicators is 2.875, meaning that the project has a “good” level of empowerment.

Our rationale for the rankings is as follows:

- Assessment and action: The communities are engaged, but with assistance from their DAs and other *woreda* staff.
- Organization: The community as a whole has a role in ratifying and implementing the MERET plans, but the DAs also have considerable input.
- Leadership: PTs do not supervise the DAs, but they do take initiative in collaboration with the DAs. Based on past evaluations, our ranking is somewhat weak, given that DAs sometimes dominate the planning process. However, in the communities we visited, the PTs were very active, in partnership with their DAs, and in the post-MERET community, the PT was clearly the main initiator of new soil and water conservation activities.
- Training: We gave this a high ranking because of efforts in recent years to upgrade DAs’ pre-service training and efforts through the WFP-MOARD-BOARDS partnership to provide ongoing in-service training, with *woreda* BOARD supervision. However, we must also qualify this ranking, given the limitations of DAs’ professional formation vis-à-vis community empowerment. Nevertheless, MERET is working on addressing these limitations.
- Resource mobilization: MERET does not have a firm community resource mobilization requirement, in contrast to the WFP-supported school feeding project, which expects communities to provide fuel wood for the kitchens and salaries for cooks. However, the project encourages communities to provide 15–20 percent of the labour without payment. The post-MERET community that we

Table 4: A tool for measuring community empowerment in MERET

Ranks (Bold indicates our ranking of MERET for each indicator)					
Indicator	Zero (0)	Poor (1)	Medium (2)	Good (3)	Excellent (4)
Needs assessment/ action choice	None	Done by outsiders without community involvement	Done by outsiders, discussed with community representatives	Done by community, outsiders help with assessment and action choice	Done by community without outside assistance
Organization	Imposed without links to existing community organization	Imposed, but some links to community organization	Imposed by planning team, but becomes very active	Uses existing community organizations	Existing community organizations in control
Leadership	Dominated by local elite or officials	DAs, independent of local social structures	Organizational support, led by DAs	PT active, takes initiative with DAs	PT in control, supervises DAs
Training	Little or none	DAs have pre-service training at remote institution	DAs have pre-service training at local institution, little in-service training	DAs have local pre-service training, regular outside in-service training	DAs have local pre-service training, regular in-service training by local supervisors
Resource mobilization	External finance	External DA salary, fees for services, w/no control by PT	Community fundraising and fees, volunteer DAs, no local expenditure controls	Community fundraising, volunteer DAs, PT controls expenditures	PT manages all funds, pays staff
Management	External	DA management with PT input, external supervision	PT self-managed, no control of DAs	PT self-managed, involved in DA supervision	PT supervises DAs
Orientation of actions	No clear objectives, no targeting	Process-oriented objectives, no targeting	Impact-oriented objectives, no targeting	[Not applicable]	Impact-oriented objectives, targeted by PT
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)/ information sharing	No information system	Information sent to outsiders, no feedback to PT	DA uses information for decision-making, aware of problems and programme progress	PT receives info in tandem with DAs, aware of problems & progress	PT informs community of problems and progress

visited now pays the guards who prevent grazing in closed areas and arranges for maintenance of existing conservation structures by the community.

- Management: The PTs are self-managed, with accountability to the community.
- Orientation of actions: Actions are clearly impact-oriented and targeted by the PT, which decides whether to provide food aid commodities to all participants or on the basis of need.
- Monitoring, evaluation and information sharing: We found a high level of community engagement in monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of plans, institutionalized through the MERET participatory evaluation profile.

10.2 Summary of Lessons Learned

The MERET project is a relatively recent outcome of thirty years of partnership between WFP and the Ethiopian Government. It involves officials at all levels of government as well as elected community-based PTs that are accountable to their constituents. WFP has been involved in designing and refining LLPPA, the participatory approach to community-based soil and water conservation that underlies MERET, in training both community members and officials and in devising and implementing the results-based management approach to monitoring and evaluation. In order to assure that MERET is both empowering and responsive, WFP goes well beyond its traditional role of providing food aid and logistical services.

MERET seeks to reverse natural resource degradation and assure sustainable rural livelihoods. Informants told us that because of improvements in agro-ecological conditions and income gains due to MERET, they experienced less volatile weather, more resilient farming conditions and less need to migrate as a coping strategy. Government project managers have concluded from experience that participatory approaches are necessary to sustain conservation gains and overcome constraints.

The project puts community-based planning and management of soil and water conservation activities at its centre; communities view this as one of the tangible assets that they gain. We also heard many examples of how MERET planning and management mechanisms give voice to the whole community and hold leaders accountable. Although this means a lot of meetings, PT members and ordinary residents repeatedly told us that democratic discussion is the essence of development.

MERET tries to foster lasting community empowerment that does not depend on receiving external assistance. It enhances communities' capacity for development planning and management and at the post-MERET site that we visited, the community was clearly operating on the basis of LLPPA even though residents no longer regularly received food aid. Also, the project convinces both participating and neighbouring communities of the value of conservation activities, which they can continue beyond the availability of food aid. When possible, WFP tries to purchase MERET commodities from within Ethiopia; this can have long-lasting positive effects on local and national markets.

Regarding advocacy, we frequently witnessed PTs and residents engaged in advocacy vis-à-vis officials. Moreover, MERET's operating mode is based on continuous dialogue between the communities and DAs, the front-line government representatives.

In every community we visited, we received detailed descriptions from residents of how MERET had improved agricultural productivity, boosted incomes, reduced malnutrition, enhanced health and created a sense of dignity and hope. Empowerment is crucial for achieving all this, since Ethiopia's experience is that soil and water conservation does not work unless the community feels a sense of ownership.

Some communities reported an excellent relationship with their DAs and count on the DAs to advocate on their behalf at the *woreda* BOARDS. Other communities complained about the lack of home economics and nutrition services.

We found a number of synergies between MERET and school feeding programmes. MERET provides labour to build school infrastructure and plant school gardens and there are efforts to coordinate school- and MERET-related planning. The success of LLPPA has inspired government officials and WFP staff involved with school feeding to try and incorporate a similar approach. We found indications that these synergies contribute to intensified development planning at the community level. Also, some officials and WFP staff members feel strongly that eventually, with increased literacy, rural communities will be able to rely less on *woreda* officials and more on their own efforts. Since school feeding boosts enrolments, the synergies should contribute to greater capacity and empowerment over time.

We found collaboration between community-based soil and water and school committees, each of which work with officials from separate *woreda* bureaux. However, we were unable to ascertain whether this led to greater coordination across bureau lines at the *woreda* level. Scaling up of CHILD will require effective inter-sectoral collaboration both within communities and within local governments. The community conversation approach to AIDS awareness also requires such collaboration, but we did not find any evidence on how this is working.

10.2.1 Facilitating Factors

We found that the following factors contributed to community empowerment:

- MERET's organic linkage of the political and economic aspects of empowerment, with community engagement in decision making leading directly to enhanced assets and increased income;
- the project's increased emphasis on income-generating activities and homesteads, as well as improvements to communal assets such as woodlots and grass;
- a strong official commitment to community empowerment, based on lessons learned from the failures of the previous command-and-control approach to conservation;

- decentralization, facilitating development of trust between communities and DAs;
- observable success, leading to demonstration effects in other communities;
- synergies between MERET and other programmes, including dialogue and collaboration among community-based committees related to the various programmes; and
- WFP's strong and credible partnership with the Ethiopian government. There is continuous dialogue and active involvement of counterparts in planning, implementation and monitoring of activities.

10.2.2 Continuing Challenges

A number of impediments remain:

- an organizational culture and approach to agricultural extension training that places little emphasis on social mobilization or gender mainstreaming;
- high turnover among DAs, weakening bonds of trust with communities;
- religious views and cultural practices that slow down the pace of women's empowerment;
- limited scaling up of organizations beyond the *kebele* level, i.e., national or regional associations of local organizations are scarce;
- resource constraints that inhibit the possibility of spreading the programme, for example by limiting the number of DAs assigned to non-MERET communities; and
- high rates of illiteracy, which limit community self-reliance.

10.3 Recommendations

Based on our findings, we have a few recommendations for the future of MERET. First, we want to reiterate some points already made by the MERET cost-benefit study and the mid-term evaluation of the 2003–2006 country programme:

- It would be valuable to include some efforts to scale up LLPPA. The existing critical watershed approach is one vehicle. Developing cooperatives and associations of MERET PTs beyond the community or watershed level (*woreda*, zone, regional and even national associations) would be another mechanism. Such organizations would facilitate efforts to increase self-reliance.
- In order to deepen and sustain MERET's recent expanded focus on income-generation as well as conservation, the project could develop links to microfinance institutions and efforts to promote collective action in marketing and trade.
- Securing donor support for more farmer-to-farmer exchanges and farmer field schools would also contribute to self-reliance. This might mean that a new donor partner should join the Government and WFP in supporting MERET.
- DAs should receive more training in social mobilization, community organizing and gender mainstreaming.

- MERET should expand to additional communities.

With regard to the first and last of these points, it is significant that the new national Community-Based Participatory Watershed Development guidelines, devised by MOARD with support from WFP and other partners, include LLPPA and MERET technical standards. The Ministry is using the guidelines in PSNP. This significant expansion of the use of LLPPA may help transform the top-down approach that persists in much of Ethiopia's agricultural extension activity. We agree with our informants who suggest that PSNP systematically draw on MERET's experience. This would allow expansion of participatory conservation, asset-building and income-generating activities.

Finally, we recommend that WFP and the Ministry of Education make sure that school staff and Parent-Teacher-Student Associations are aware of the nutritional benefits of school feeding, particularly given the multiple health impacts of micronutrient fortification. Information and awareness are essential for empowerment.

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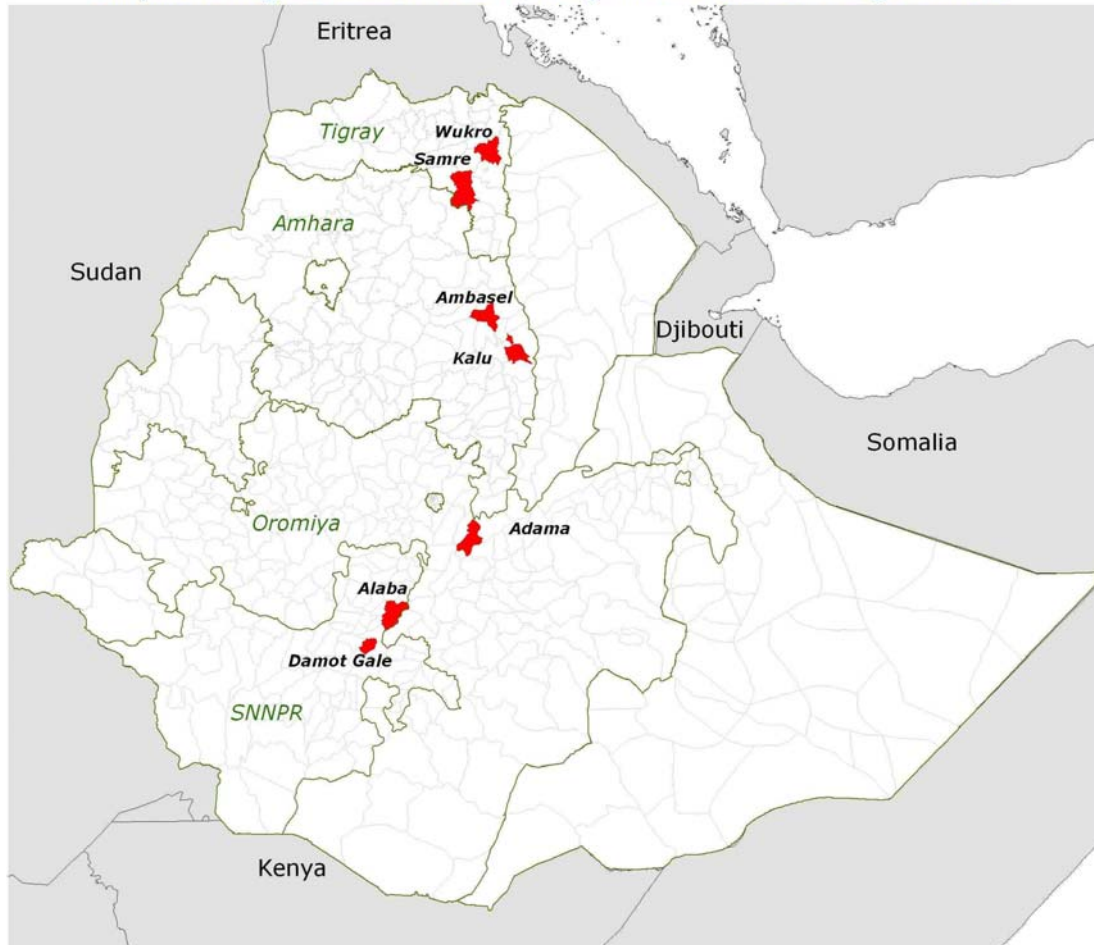
ANNEXES

Annex A



Ethiopia visited communities

"Empowering Communities through Food Based Programmes"


**Communities visited in Ethiopia at Kebele Level
(November 2005)**

Tigray Regional State:

1. Abreha Atsbeha Taiba (Kebele), Wukro Woreda *
2. Maiweny Taiba, Suharti Samre Woreda,

Oromiya Regional State:

3. Ketchema Kebele, Adama Woreda, ****
4. Lolfata Kebele, Adama Woreda **

Southern Nations', Nationalities', and Peoples' Regional (SNNPR) State:

5. Asore Kebele, Alaba Woreda,
6. Ashoka Kebele, Alaba Woreda,
7. Damot Mokonis Kebele, Damot Gale Woreda***
8. Taba Kebele, Damot Gale Woreda ***

Amhara Regional State:

9. Lemo Kebele/Aromba Lemo LLPPA Site, Ambasel Woreda,
10. Cheffe Kebele/Gamura Cheffe LLPPA Site, Ambasel Woreda *
11. Addis Mender Kebele, Kallu Woreda *

Map Produced by VAM June 2006

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used in this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

Legend

- Communities visited
- First level administrative boundaries
- International administrative boundaries

- Visited MERET site
- * Visited MERET site and school feeding site.
- ** Visited MERET site and homestead.
- *** Met only with homesteaders.
- **** Former MERET site.

Annex B

Persons InterviewedWFP Country Office, Addis Ababa

Programme Unit: Paul Turnbull, Head
Peter Van Orden, Field Security Officer

MERET and
Safety Nets Section: Volli Carucci, Head
Messele Gebregziabher, Programme Assistant
Tariku Alemu, Programme Assistant
Yihenew Zewdie, Consultant

Nutrition and
Education Section: Jakob Mikkelsen, Head
Joseph Barnes, Consultant

WFP Suboffices

Mekele: Awash Mesfin, Field Monitor
Awasa: Nasiba G. Nabi, Head
Fredrick Asamo, Deputy Head
Erkeno Wossoro, Field Monitor
Dessie: Haile Aregawi, Field Monitor/Officer in Charge
Mesfin Mekuria, Field Monitor
Abraham Teklie, Field Monitor

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Addis Ababa

Betru Nedessa, National MERET Project Coordinator

Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Addis Ababa

Gete Zeleke, Coordinator, Environmental Economic Policy Forum

Regional and Woreda Bureaux of Agriculture and Rural Development

Tigray:

Woldegebreal Gebrehawaria, Head, Department of Soil and Water Conservation, Tigray
Regional BOARD
Hailemariam Gebreselassie, Team Leader, Natural Resources, Wukro Woreda BOARD
Kiros Haileselassie, MERET Coordinator, Wukro Woreda BOARD
Mebrahitu Tadele, Development Agent for Abreha Atsbeha, Wukro Woreda BOARD

Oromyia:

Lemma Abebe, Soil and Water Conservation Expert, Adama Woreda BOARD

SNNPR:

Mamo Godebo Abaro, General Manager, SNNPR BOARD
Bekele Haile, Head, Natural Resources Development Department, SNNPR BOARD
Frehiwot Desta, MERET Coordinator, SNNPR BOARD
Melesse Teshome, Soil and Water Conservation Expert, Alaba Woreda BOARD
Ato¹⁵ Simone, Soil and Water Conservation Expert, Alaba Woreda BOARD
Ato Lucas, Head of Agriculture, Damot Gale Woreda BOARD
Hiwot Desta, MERET Coordinator, Damot Gale Woreda BOARD
Ato Fikri, Head of Rural Development, Damot Gale Woreda BOARD
Ato Ermias, Soil and Water Conservation Expert, Damot Gale Woreda BOARD

Amhara:

¹⁵ *Ato* is Amharic for “Mr.”

Daniel Tekle, MERET Team Leader, Ambassel Woreda BOARD
 Yalemzewd Demissie, HIV/ AIDS Community Conversation Focal Point, Kallu Woreda BOARD
 Mohamed Yesuf, Food Security Expert and MERET Focal Point, Kallu Woreda BOARD
 Menen Asfaw, Home Economics Expert-Flour Mill Focal Person, Kallu Woreda BOARD
 Tesfaye Semaw, Development Agent, Addis Mender Kebele

MERET planning teams

Abreha Atsbeha
 (Gebremichael Gideg, Chairperson and Tabia Chairperson)
 Maiweiny
 Ketchema
 Lolfata
 Asore
 Lemo
 Addis Mender

Homesteaders, Community Members, Income-Generating Activities Groups

Abreha Atsbeha
 Lolfata
 Ashoka
 Damot Mokonisa
 Taba: Ato Emmanuel, W/z¹⁶ Rebecca
 Kallu Woreda
 Lemo Kebele

School Feeding Committees/Parent-Teacher-Student Associations and School Directors

Abreha Atsbeha school director, parent-teacher-student committee member
 Cheffe Kebele (Damotta school): James Abele Nega, School Director; members of parent-teacher-student committee; members of school feeding committee
 Kallu Woreda: Chorissa school director

FAO

David Kahan, Agricultural Economist, Agricultural Support Systems Division, Rome (interviewed in Addis Ababa)

IFPRI

Eleni Gabre-Madhin, Leader, Ethiopia Country Strategy Support Program, Addis Ababa
 John Pender, Leader, Sustainable Development of Less-Favoured Lands Research Program, Washington
 Daniel Gilligan, Research Fellow, Food Consumption and Nutrition Division, Washington
 Tewodaj Mogues, Postdoctoral Fellow, Development Strategy and Governance Division, Washington

¹⁶ W/z is an Amharic neologism intended as the equivalent of the English “Ms.” *Woizero* is the traditional Amharic equivalent of “Mrs.,” and *Woizerit* is equivalent to “Miss.” We thank Dr. Tewodaj Mogues of IFPRI for assistance with this terminology.

Annex C

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS**Research Questions**

- How does WFP work with national partners to develop and implement programmes that support community empowerment and assure the responsiveness of local and district-level government officials to poor and marginalized communities?
- How may national programmes assure sustainable empowerment of communities that is not dependent on receiving external assistance?
- What lessons can be learned from successful or unsuccessful efforts by WFP to support the use of participatory approaches at local level as a means to empower communities?
- Did the programmes develop the capacity of communities and empower them, as intended? What factors made the programmes successful and what were the impediments?
- Did the programmes enhance communities' ability to plan and manage development activities for themselves and to advocate on their own behalf vis-à-vis relevant government officials?
- Did community empowerment enhance programmes' contribution to food security and reduced poverty?
- Did the programmes encourage *woreda* (district) officials, particularly the development agents (extensionists), to listen and respond to the communities with which they work and to advocate on their behalf vis-à-vis other *woreda* officials and higher levels of government?
- Are there differences in programme implementation, effectiveness of community empowerment and officials' commitment to empowering communities by region?
- In communities with both MERET and school feeding programmes, are there synergies?
 - Do these contribute to enhancing community capacity and empowerment?
 - Do they help foster more holistic development planning and management by *woreda* officials across sectoral and ministerial lines?

Methodology

Marc Cohen and Mariagrazia Rocchigiani visited Ethiopia between November 2 and 19, 2005 to explore the community empowerment aspects of the WFP Country Programme (CP), i.e., the agency's development-oriented programme. They worked in collaboration with Volli Carucci and Yihenew Zewdie of WFP's Ethiopia country office. James Garrett of IFPRI and Sonali Wickrema of WFP's Rome headquarters collaborated on the design of the research.

We carried out the research using qualitative methods, including:

- Key informant and focus group interviews at the community level
- Key informant interviews with regional and local government officials
- Key informant interviews with WFP staff
- Key informant interviews of experts
- Review of secondary data sources.

We conducted our interviews using interview guides that we developed based on the research questions and the conceptual framework below. We tailored the interview questions to specific stakeholder groups. The questions probed informants' views, but our format was loosely structured to allow informants to identify additional issues of importance, assuring that the research had a participatory element and was not extractive.

We carried out interviews in 11 *kebeles* in four different regions of Ethiopia – Tigray, Oromiya, SNNPR and Amhara. The communities we visited included 10 active MERET project sites and one former MERET site. Three of these communities had WFP-supported school feeding projects as well as MERET. We interviewed members of the MERET community planning teams at seven of the sites. In some instances, we were able to meet with all of the PT members, but in other cases we met only selected members or a single member. At the other four sites, we met with groups of residents, including in some instances MERET-supported homesteaders and members of income-generating activities groups. We also met with residents who were not PT members in many of the communities where we were able to meet with the PTs. In the SNNPR, we visited some additional MERET sites where we examined conservation structures, but did not meet with community members. In communities with school feeding activities, we interviewed members of the school feeding committees established as part of the project or members of the parent-teacher-student association.

We complemented the interviews with a review of secondary data sources. These included Ethiopian government documents, relevant WFP policy documents, WFP project documents related to MERET and school feeding, independent evaluations of MERET and other development food aid in Ethiopia, studies drawing on IFPRI's eight years of research on sustainable land management in Ethiopia and work by IFPRI's Food Consumption and Nutrition Division on Ethiopia and on community empowerment and child nutrition in various countries.

Conceptual Framework

We adopted the approaches to community capacity development and empowerment found in earlier IFPRI work on community-driven development and building capacity to improve nutrition (Gillespie 2001, 2004; see also UNICEF 1990).¹⁷ The matrix below displays in the rows the elements of the conceptual framework,

¹⁷ The substance is similar to that of the U.N. Development Programme's capacity assessment framework (UNDP 2005), although somewhat different terminology is used.

adopted from Gillespie (2004): vision, context, financing, capacity, triggers, facilitating factors and challenges. The key aspects of capacity are resources (human, financial, social/organizational, physical and natural), authority, responsibility/motivation/leadership and systems of assessment, analysis and action. The columns of indicate the components of each element; the specifics in Ethiopia and the source of information on that component.

Elements	Components of Elements	Ethiopia Specifics	Source of Information
Vision		Reduce poverty, promote sustainable livelihoods, manage natural resources sustainably, enrol and retain primary school-aged children in school	Programme documents; all stakeholders: MOARD, MOFED MOE officials; <i>woreda</i> officials; WFP staff; MERET community PT; school management committee; community members
Context	1. Institutional arrangements	Partnership among central government, local officials, community-based organizations (CBOs), supported by WFP	MOARD, MOFED, MOE officials; <i>woreda</i> officials; WFP staff; MERET community PT; school management committee
	2. Linkages to other stakeholders	Do communities participate in planning and managing activities, are local officials responsive to communities, do they encourage other local officials and central government officials to be responsive? Does WFP play facilitating role?	All stakeholders; programme documents; M&E data
Financing	1. Internal/external	Ethiopia seeks to move away from reliance on external resources	WFP; central government
	2. Sustainability	Will programmes continue in absence of substantial external food aid?	All stakeholders

Elements	Components of Elements	Ethiopia Specifics	Source of Information
Capacity	1. Resources	Human, organizational (CBOs), physical (roads), natural (soil and water resources), diversified rural livelihoods, skills training for local officials and community members	<i>Woreda</i> officials; community PT; school management committee; community members; programme documents; M&E data
	2. Authority	Decentralized governance, communities engaged in planning and management	<i>Woreda</i> officials; community PT; school management committee; community members; programme documents; M&E data
	3. Responsibility/motivation/leadership		All stakeholders; programme documents; M&E data
	4. Systems of assessment, analysis and action	Programme planning and management at <i>woreda</i> and community levels	Especially <i>woreda</i> officials; CBOs; community members
Triggers	1. Internal/external	Do demonstration projects lead to capacity development elsewhere?	Especially <i>woreda</i> officials; CBOs; community members
	2. Planned/accidental/spontaneous	LLPPA, charismatic leaders in local government and community, serendipity	Especially <i>woreda</i> officials; CBOs; community members; programme documents; M&E data
Facilitating Factors	1. Increased decentralization	Enhanced local authority and responsibility	<i>Woreda</i> officials
	2. Programme reputation	WFP-supported programmes well-regarded in Ethiopia	All stakeholders; programme documents
	3. Official commitment to empowerment	Are officials at all levels committed to community empowerment?	All stakeholders; programme documents

Elements	Components of Elements	Ethiopia Specifics	Source of Information
Challenges	1. Biophysical	Periodic weather shocks, resource degradation	All stakeholders; programme documents
	2. Capacity of community organizations		<i>Woreda</i> officials; CBOs; programme documents
	3. Officials' training in social mobilization		<i>Woreda</i> officials; programme documents
	4. Programme integration		All stakeholders; programme documents
	5. Gender mainstreaming		<i>Woreda</i> officials; women in communities; programme documents

ACRONYMS USED

ACDI-VOCA	Agricultural Cooperative Development International/Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance
BOARD	Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development
CBO	Community-based organization
CBPWD	Community-Based Participatory Watershed Development
CHILD	Children in Local Development
CP	Country Programme
DA	Development agent
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GTZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i> (German Technical Cooperation Agency)
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
LLPPA	Local-level participatory planning approach
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MOARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
MERET	Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transitions to More Sustainable Livelihoods
PSNP	Productive Safety-Net Programme
PT	Planning team
SNNPR	Southern Nations', Nationalities' and Peoples' Region
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund