

MELCA's PHE Project

Efforts toward sustainable development, poverty reduction, and improved livelihoods, especially in developing countries like Ethiopia, are requiring integration of issues in the areas of population, health and environment. That is so because considering the alarming rate of deforestation, land degradation and rapidly growing population pressure, addressing problems in these areas in a coordinated and integrated manner deserves due attention and the concerted effort of the Government, NGOs and the community at large.

MELCA Mahiber has been engaged in the integration of Population, Health and Environment (PHE) intervention with the intention of being a part of the concerted effort toward bringing sustainable development through application of an integrated approach towards population, health and environment.

MELCA conducted its PHE project, from March 2008 to December 2009, by a fund obtained from the Packard Foundation through Engender Health, in Bale Zone of Oromia Region, Dinsho area in the locality known as Horosoba.



Ethiopian Mountain Nyala



Ethiopian Wolf Bale Zone

The major objective of the project was to raise the awareness, and build the capacity of the various actors involved in the issues of population, health and environment. The intention is that the actors would be able to address the problems prevailing in these areas in a coordinated and integrated manner for improved livelihoods and sustainable wellbeing of the community and the ecosystem.

As such MELCA provided a series of PHE focused trainings to a total of 377 health extension and agriculture and rural development workers and 45 officers from zonal and woreda health and agriculture and rural development offices. At community level also 160 community members, including women and religious leaders, have taken PHE focused trainings. In addition 60 members of school community including students, teachers, directors and officers of woreda education office,



Some of the PHE Participants

as well as 40 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) members of House of Peoples Representatives, federal and regional level stake holders, NGO representatives and local administration officials have participated in the trainings.

INTERVENTION AT SCHOOL LEVEL

As a result of PHE focused trainings and sensitization programs conducted in schools, the already existing Environmental Education Program (SEGNI) clubs in collaboration with women's and Anti AIDS clubs have become active actors of PHE promotion.

MELCA has been working, since 2005, to protect bio cultural-diversity in Bale Zone through research, advocacy and an environmental education program called SEGNI in such a way that elders selected from among the community get together with selected



youth members, in a selected area, usually a natural forest, and transfer cultural and ecological knowledge to the youth.

After participating in SEGNI program the youth would establish, in their respective schools, SENGNI clubs that are meant to be involved in training and educating their peers, families, and community members about the importance of protecting and preserving their cultural and ecological resources.

Participants of SEGNI Program /trekking/

Hence MELCA got quite a good opportunity to reinforce its PHE focused awareness creation and sensitization trainings by integrating its SEGNI program with the PHE project. As a result members of SEGNI club, women's club and Anti AIDS club collaboratively worked together to create and disseminate integrated message on family planning, health and ecological preservation by way of poems, dramas, riddles, question and answer sessions and songs in the schools and various events in the community.

To strengthen the movement, MELCA provided mini-media equipments for 11 model schools. Accordingly, the PHE focused sensitization messages are now reaching much greater number of youth and community members. MELCA has also provided nursery equipments to 17 model schools so that they would be able to create nursery sites that meet the growing demand for seedlings, especially, of indigenous trees.



Handover of mini- media and agricultural tools for one of the model schools

So far 178 members of school community have joined the PHE club and are actively engaged in inculcating the benefits of bio-cultural conservation, family planning and adoption of health and sanitation methods.

INTERVENTION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL



At community level, women and religious leaders were deliberately made to have the active role in the education and sensitization process. Involvement of these groups of the community has brought about some good results. Among these, rapid attitudinal change and mobilization of the community toward bio cultural conservation as well as the use of family planning methods are the prominent ones.

Some of Community level PHE participants

During the session held with community members religious leaders said that their religion does not forbid proper family planning. They told about the importance of family planning, but without being involved in abortion. Religious leaders also commented on the contribution of family planning to environmental protection. So the ideas forwarded by religious leaders had a positive impact of clearing hesitation of women in using family planning services.

INVOLVEMENT OF GOVERNMENT & NON-GOVERNMENT ACTORS

With regard to trainings provided to government and non government PHE actors at zonal and woreda levels, the focus was on creating the awareness of these actors to conduct their interventions in an integrated manner. As a result health extension workers and agriculture and rural development agents started to work together collaboratively on planning and implementation of their interventions. Members of the House of Peoples Representatives and officials at zonal and woreda level were also sensitized in the importance integrating population, health and environment interventions.

The successes registered by MELCA in its implementation of the PHE, during the project period, were immense and more than expected. Significant changes in the awareness of the community toward usage of family planning services, adoption of health and sanitation measures, and the importance of tree planting and land recovery were registered.

Assessments made to measure the outputs and see impacts of the project show that more than 10,000 people in the area were reached with the awareness raising education and sensitization messages, family planning service users doubled as compared to the base line study and over 60,000 seedlings were distributed and planted at different sites.

Significant changes are also being observed, in the community, with regard to adoption of health and sanitation measures. In this regard some community members have attained the status of being models from whom others can learn a lot.

MELCA is currently searching for resources to resume its PHE project in Bale zone.