

Melca's Land Recovery Process

➤ *The Case of Telecho*

MELCA Mahiber is actively engaged in a community centered land recovery process. To this effect MELCA has devised participatory mapping mechanisms such as participatory three dimensional modeling (P3DM), sketch mapping and eco mapping. All forms of participatory mapping are intended to revitalize and mobilize indigenous local knowledge for better natural resource management. The participatory mapping mechanism is also meant to ensure the passage of bio-cultural knowledge to the next generation.

Telecho, a locality found in Oromia Region, West Showa zone, Welmera woreda, is one of the areas where Melca Mahiber has conducted its participatory sketch model mapping for land recovery and traditional seed preservation.

The land recovery process and traditional seed preservation training at Telecho was facilitated by visitors from MELCA Mahiber, EthioScope and Institute of Sustainable Development (ISD). The facilitators arrived in Telecho on the 7th of February 2010 to stay with the community of Telecho and help them work on the mapping and discuss about seed issue, for about five days.

On the first introductory day, the meeting with the Telecho community commenced by sharing of stories of the past, Present and how it could be in the future. During this session, members of the community stressed on the fact that in the past there used to be many wild fruits and animals and they used to eat from the forest.



Pic1. *The Telecho Community Members*

Local community members stated that massive cutting down of forest trees started with the coming to power of the Derg regime, in the early 1970's, and the deforestation followed by massive land degradation continued at an alarming rate thereafter. A representative of gathering of the community said “ we have come here to regain the land not for our selves but for the future generation- let us work together to rehabilitate our land”

After detailed discussion on the purpose of the gathering and the participatory mapping, the actual sketch mapping process began with the active involvement of elders, youth and women. The mapping is done on large base sketch maps of about 2x3 meters provided by MELCA. The original sketch maps provided by MELCA show only the boundary, roads and path ways as well as rivers and streams of Telecho.



Pic2. Community Members Doing the Mapping

Community members are expected to show, on these maps, what Telecho looked like 30-40 years ago, and what it looks like today, on separate maps. After observing the differences between the two maps, they also draw a third map that shows their desired future Telecho.

As such the first task of Telecho community members was to identify and place their present location and other main locations on the map and then to illustrate what it looked like 30-40 years ago.

When preparing the map of Telecho 30-40 years ago members of the community participated by drawing and coloring locations where there had been forests, perennial rivers and wild animals with the guidance of elders. Another map showing the current features of Telecho was also prepared in a similar manner but with more ease and less guidance by elders.

After the two maps were produced, participants from the community as well as the visitors observed alarming differences between the two maps. Generally, the map of the past showed tall and beautiful grasses, forests and many varieties of trees and wild animals in them, rivers and springs. The map of today, on the other hand, showed degraded land with many gullies, eroded farm lands, bare arid land as well as river courses having no water. There are also no signs of water where there had been springs before.

Looking at the two maps, members of Telecho community began expressing and sharing their feelings. At this moment one of the member said “ I felt very bad doing the maps because we can see how our land looked like and how it is now. But I am



also happy because I now know what we have to do”. Another member of the community expressed his feelings saying “ before there was forest; now there is only bare land. In the first map there were lots of water with

Pic3. Community members with their maps the rivers flowing all year. Now some of the rivers have dried and others are on the way to dry. We have also lots of gullies and eroded land”.

Thereafter the community members produced a third map showing their desired future. This third map is very much similar to their map of 30-40 years ago. During their presentation of the maps the Telecho community expressed their firm determination to work toward curbing the problem. As one of the community members rightly said they are committed to recover the land not only for themselves

but also for the future generation. They said “ ---if we want to deal with issues we have to first know and confront the existing reality. Then we know what is expected of us to deal with the issues.”

Every visitor who participated on the occasion was impressed by the impact the participatory mapping occasion had on the Telecho community. The fact that the process has helped the community members to look at their history and to see how their land has been affected is easily observable.



Pic.4 Members of the community presenting their maps

The other issue discussed during the gathering was the issue of traditional seed versus improved seed. Among the ideas raised by the community members regarding the two seed varieties, the one shared by the majority was the idea that improved varieties generally give a good harvest the first one or two years and then “tire” quickly.

Members of the community stressed the advantage that traditional varieties have over the improved ones supporting their arguments with facts. They said traditional seeds last longer in the stores, do not require artificial fertilizers, and they are by far more suitable for healthy living than the improved ones.

Especially women participants were active in the discussion about the seed issue. On that occasion around 20 women gathered and shared experiences about how they select, store and preserve their traditional seed. They all talked about how the traditional seeds are important compared to improved seeds. *"Traditional seeds are my grand parents. I don't want to loose them as no one wants to loose his/her parents. Seeds are our life"* said Elsa Abate, a farmer



Pic.5 Gathering of Telecho Women

who came from Woreilu, Southern part of Ethiopia. She came to be part of this experience sharing program. She confidently spoke how the traditional seed is healthy with no harm in the long-run and it can resist any of the diseases. She strongly argued that women are the main actors in keeping the traditional seeds as well as in other farming activities.

The community also did one map for seeds. It was mind blowing for them and the participants. It told them how much they lost. Members of the community stressed the notion that the community is determined to save their traditional varieties of seed and to restore their land. And to do this effectively to the desired level they need support from the concerned government and non government actors.

Finally Melca, ISD and Ethiopia Organic Seed Action (EOSA) assured the community that they would continue to work together in Telecho to build the capacity of the community and help them recover their land.