

Watershed Management and Food Security in Ethiopia - A Case Study of the Boji Watershed, West Shewa -

- Poster -

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Food security – interrelated with high population growth, overexploitation of natural resources, and widespread poverty – is a priority in Ethiopia. In the Ethiopian highlands, food insecurity is compounded by reliance on archaic agricultural systems, vulnerability to natural disasters, lack of land tenure security, and land fragmentation. Common interventions include public works programmes designed to counter food shortages, generate income, and promote conservation.

This study evaluates the appropriateness of public works programmes for improving food security and reducing land degradation. The Boji Watershed Development Project – designed by the Ethiopian government in 1995 to implement large-scale soil and water conservation measures (SWC) with a Cash-for-Work approach (CFW) – is the representative case study. Climatic and environmental conditions in the 5,000 ha watershed, located in the highlands of West Shewa, are favourable for agriculture. But, rapid population growth contributes to land degradation and increases competition for food.

Using rapid rural appraisal methods (RRA), the study assessed the Boji project's effectiveness at stabilising degraded land, ensuring acceptance and maintenance of conservation measures, and encouraging adoption of measures beyond the scope of the project. The evaluation was based on indicators related to project planning and implementation (objectives, geographical coverage, targeting, participation, cost effectiveness), results (choice and quality of works, sustainability), and impacts on beneficiaries (created assets, payment, food security).

This study found that planning and implementation was the most important phase, but was significantly affected by financial constraints and initial rejection by the local population. Local participation in planning and consideration of conservation, people's needs, and community impacts are crucial for acceptance and dissemination of conservation measures.

The main factors determining project results were targeting, design and quality of conservation measures, cost effectiveness, and long-term impacts. The Boji project did not create sustainable assets. If large-scale public conservation efforts are to be sustainable, they must be balanced with asset production and income generation. Project success was also limited by external factors, such as political environment, lack of land ownership or tenure security, and overuse of communal land. Long-term impacts on beneficiaries could not be assessed since the project was not yet completed. It appears that implemented activities may be maintained by farmers who observe tangible benefits. Farmers appeared unlikely to adopt SWC beyond the scope of the project or be able to manage their natural resources in a more sustainable manner. This study suggests that most public works programmes in Ethiopia are

appropriate neither for significantly reducing degradation nor improving living standards. Like food aid, they can create dependency that undermines self-help capacity of recipients. Farmers need to take more initiative rather than relying on outside agents to solve local problems. But farmers can only invest in their future given an enabling political context. Despite more than twenty years of food and development aid, Ethiopia has made almost no progress towards food security, leaving millions of people food insecure year after year.