

Inception Report

RELIVES: REsilient LIVelihoods and Sustainable Ecosystems in the Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP)



July 2023

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1. Introduction

With the financial support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the operational unit of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), and through CARE Austria, CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia started to implement the three years' project entitled '**RELIVES-Resilient livelihoods and sustainable ecosystems in the Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP)**' in five woredas around the SMNP; namely Debark, Janamora and Beyeda, Adarkay and Tselemit in North Gondar zone of Amhara Regional State.

The project plans to reach a total of 150,700 direct beneficiaries, with a minimum of 70% being women, youth and vulnerable persons. Additionally, we plan to reach approximately 50,000 indirect beneficiaries (men and women) with this project. Indirect beneficiaries will mainly be reached through community awareness raising activities on topics including: changing negative norms towards women economic empowerment, promoting communities to implement sustainable farming, livestock husbandry and land management interventions; watershed management activities and promoting alternative income generating activities.

The implementation of the project started in November 2022 in three woredas; namely Debark, Janamora and Beyeda in 10 intervention kebeles¹; 4 kebeles in Debark, 3 kebeles in Janamora and 3 kebeles in Beyeda. The selection of the kebeles was done with the project steering committee members. Due to security issues the project has not yet started in the two remaining woredas, Adarkay and Tselemit. The Zone-level project steering committee (PSC) approved the decision to work in those two woredas and we anticipate that we will be able to start implementation in September 2023. Based on the latest discussions with the SMNP office the project intends to work in 2 kebeles each in Adarkay and Tselemit and will add one kebele in Janamora.

This inception report covers the period from November 2022-June 2023 and presents the progress of the planned activities during the inception phase. The continuing challenging security situation and political instabilities in the northern Amhara Region, mainly in North Gondar Zone, where the project intervention woredas are located, affected the completion of the planned inception activities as per schedule, mainly the planned assessments. That is why we will submit the summary of the assessments and our analysis of the recommendations by 11th August in a second report.

¹ **Debark woreda:** Miligebsa, Adesgie, Abergina and Argijuna. **Janamora Woreda:** Sakiba, Denkolako and Dibl. **Beyeda Woreda:** Guayit, Medebay and Selewa.

2. Summary of Project Status

During the eight months inception phase of the project, the project finalized all the preparation works. The project started by recruiting the project staff for the project coordination offices as well as assigned part time (LOE) staffs both at CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia offices. Required materials like office furnitures (chairs, tables, shelves), laptops and desktop computers, a printer, LCD projector, and photocopier were successfully procured. In addition, required inputs/materials for nurseries such as different types of seeds, seedlings, polythene tubes were purchased to be partly distributed before the rainy season in June. All procurements were done based on the guidelines of ADA, CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia.

A Memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the regional government sector bureaus, CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia was developed and signed, and distributed to respected government sector bureaus and offices at regional, zone and woreda levels. Additionally, the project conducted project launching workshops with government representatives from the regional level to the kebele level to gain a common understanding among key stakeholders on project objectives, outcomes, project implementation strategies and roles and responsibilities. The regional-level workshop was facilitated and led by CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia jointly with the Regional Finance and Economic Bureau; the zone/woreda/kebele level launching workshop was led and facilitated by ORDA Ethiopia, jointly with respective Finance and Economic offices.

In the inception phase, the project also established regional, zonal and woreda-level steering committees who are responsible to provide guidance, facilitate and coordinate implementation at different levels. Following the project launching workshops, the zone and woreda-level project steering committee (PSC) members selected a total of 10 (4 in Debark, 3 in Janamora and 3 in Bayada) intervention kebeles. The kebeles were selected with clear criteria set and agreed upon with PSC members, which are further elaborated in the next chapter.

3. Project Initiation and Preparation Works

3.1. Establish and Equip Project Coordination Office

ORDA Ethiopia established a project coordination office at Mekan Birhan town, the capital of Janamora woreda. The office might move to Debark town due to its centrality. The project coordination office is equipped with all the required materials and supplies.

3.2. Recruitment

All the planned and required fulltime and part time staffs were recruited in accordance with CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia's Human Resource Manual. ORDA Ethiopia recruited a total of 14 (5 technical and 9 operations) fulltime staffs who are based at project

coordination site at Mekan Birhan town, including a Project manager (1), MEAL officer (1), income generating activity (IGA) and micro finance officer (1), Livelihood officer (1) and NRM/watershed officer (1), Personnel and logistics officer (1), Storekeeper (1), Project accountant (1), Cashier (1), Office attendant (1), Office guards (3) and Driver (1). CARE Ethiopia recruited a “women empowerment and gender officer” (1) full time staff who is based at the project coordination office at Mekan Birhan town.

CARE also completed the recruitment of 12 interns (all university female graduates), who will start in July 2023. Three will be based in Debarq, Janamora and Bayada woredas each; and two will be based at CARE Bahir Dar Office. The interns will work together with project technical and operations teams under the supervision and guidance of CARE’s women empowerment and gender officer (technically) and project manager (operationally).

3.3. Procurement

The planned and required materials, supplies, services, and logistics have been procured in compliance with ADC’s and CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia’s procurement procedures and policy. ORDA Ethiopia purchased different office materials including chairs, tables, shelves; laptop and desktop computers, a printer, LCD projector, and photocopier machine; agriculture-related tools and inputs such as various types of seeds (crop and seedlings), polythene tubes, etc. Similarly, CARE Ethiopia also procured laptop computers.

CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia use a list of different vendors selected and stored in its database after conducting a series of assessments, which are updated or changed on a yearly basis and/or could be changed any time if found necessary for the benefit of the organization. Those who meet the requirements will be registered in CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia’s vendor list and provided with vendor IDs.

The procurement process was conducted in compliance with ADC’s procurement policy and procedure. The project’s procurement unit oversees and assesses the vendor’s offers. A committee evaluates and selects the offers based on the evaluation criteria set for the purpose.

3.4. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) With the Amhara Regional Government Relevant Sector Bureaus

Following the signature of the individual project implementation agreement (IPIA) between CARE Ethiopia and CARE Austria, CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia signed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with regional government Bureau. The Regional Bureau of Finance (BoF) is the responsible entity coordinating and facilitating the signature of the MoU between relevant government sector Bureaus, CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia. For the RELIVES project, the MoU was signed between Regional Bureau of Finance (BoF); Regional Bureau of Women, Children, and Social Affairs (BoWCSA); Regional Bureau of Agriculture (BoA); and Regional Bureau of Tourism (BoT). While the BoF will coordinate and oversee the overall implementation, monitoring and evaluation of

the project, BoWCSA, BoA and BoT will provide technical assistance and collaborate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the various activities of the project. The signed MoU document was shared with the respective North Gondar Zone departments and Debarq, Janamora and Beyeda Woreda sector offices accordingly.

3.5. Project Launching Workshop

CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia and the regional Bureau of Finance conducted a one-day project launching workshop in Debarq town on February 7, 2023. A total of 64 (15 women) persons participated, including Amhara government regional sector bureau representatives, zonal department heads, woreda steering and technical committee members, representatives of the SMNP office, ADA officials, CARE Ethiopia head office and field office staffs, ORDA Ethiopia head office and field project staffs. In the launching workshop, the project's goal/objective, expected outcomes and outputs, planned activities, project working modality and integration and coordination approaches were presented and discussed.

During the workshop, the regional, zonal and woreda government representatives appreciated and acknowledged the initiative of CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia and long-term support of the ADC in contributing to the Simien Mountain National Park's protection and development. The government representatives at all levels expressed their commitment, ensured to provide the expected level of support and to strive at all levels to achieve the intended results of the project. Finally, Mr. Friedrich Stift, ADA Managing Director, who attended the workshop made a short final remark.

ORDA Ethiopia jointly with Woredas Finance Offices conducted a one-day project launching workshop with 124 (24 women) relevant representatives of woreda governed sector offices, woreda project steering and technical committee members, as well as selected intervention kebele administration and community representatives. The overall project goal/objective, intended outcomes and outputs, planned activities, and project implementation modality were presented to participants by ORDA Ethiopia teams. Each woreda's chief administrator shared key messages and expressed their commitment for the successful implementation of the project.

3.6. Establishment of Project Steering Committee (PSC)

CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia jointly established project steering committees (PSC) at different levels from woreda to regional level. While CARE Ethiopia is leading and responsible for establishing regional level project steering committee, ORDA Ethiopia facilitated and coordinated the establishment of zone and woreda level project steering committee. Project steering committee members were selected from the respective project signatory bureaus, zone departments, EWCA and SMNP Office, and woreda offices and other relevant sectors bureaus/offices for implementation of the projects. Term of reference (ToR) with details of roles and responsibilities of the project steering committee members were prepared and shared for action.

The regional level project steering committee (PSC) has 14 members comprised of representatives from Bureau of Finance; Water & Energy; Cooperative Promotion Agency; Women, Children, and Social Affairs; Agriculture; Livestock and Fishery; Environmental & Wildlife Protection Authority; Employment and Training Agency; Tourism; EWCA; Austrian Embassy Addis Ababa Coordination Office for Development Cooperation; HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Ethiopia (SEGORP project); ORDA Ethiopia; and CARE Ethiopia. The head or delegates from bureau of Finance is the chairperson of the committee, and the Senior Project Manager from CARE Ethiopia is the secretary of the steering committee. The regional PSC has an advisory role, facilitates coordination and collaborations, creates conducive working modalities/environment for the implementers, follows and reviews the progress and proper implementation of the project plans, looks for additional resources/efficiency and effectiveness, looks for necessary output adjustment, when necessary, regularly evaluates synergy and complementarity of resources in the project area and uses learnings to increase the impact of interventions. The regional PSC members will conduct meetings and joint field monitoring visits on a bi-annual basis. Following the first meeting, the regional PSC members conducted joint field monitoring visits in each woreda and discussed with zone and woreda government sector office representatives, kebele administration representatives, communities/beneficiaries and project field staffs. During the implementation of the project they will continue to participate in project site observations and discussions not only to identify the contribution of the project activities, changes observed, limitations of the project activities and challenges encountered but also to seek solutions together. We also expect that the steering committee members will share/scale up learnings from the project in non-RELIVES intervention zones in the region.

The Zone level project steering committee has 15 members comprised of Zone chief administrator or a delegate; heads or representatives from department of Finance; Water & Energy; Cooperative Agency; Women, Children, and Social Affairs; Agriculture; Livestock and Fishery; Environmental & Wildlife Protection Authority; Employment and Training Agency; SMNP Office; Culture and Tourism; Debarq University; HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Ethiopia (SEGORP project) and ORDA Ethiopia. While the zone chief administrator or delegate is the chairperson of the committee, the Project Manager from ORDA Ethiopia is the secretary of the steering committee.

The zone project steering committee will facilitate and coordinate the project implementation at the zone level, oversee and support the implementation of the project interventions in the respective woredas, review the project's progress and provide guidance to improve the project's performance, inform the technical steering committee to address technical issues. The PSC will receive/seek project implementation updates and concerns from the Woreda steering and technical committees and make appropriate decisions on the concerns.

The zone level project steering committee members will conduct meetings and joint field monitoring visits on a quarterly basis. During the meeting, the project's performance will be presented and discussed along with the coming quarterly action plan. Following the meeting, the project steering committee will conduct joint field monitoring visits in each

woreda and meet and discuss with woreda government sector office representatives, kebele administration representatives, communities/beneficiaries members and project field staffs. It is also expected that the steering committee members will have the responsibility of sharing learnings and scaling up learnings in non-RELIVES project intervention woredas in the zone.

The woreda level project steering committee has 10 members comprised of woreda chief administrator or a delegate; heads or representatives from office of Finance; Water & Energy; Cooperative Agency; Women, Children, and Social Affairs; Agriculture; Livestock and Fishery; Environmental & Wildlife Protection Authority; Employment and Training Agency; Culture and Tourism; and ORDA Ethiopia. While the woreda chief administrator or a delegate is the chairperson of the committee, the project manager from ORDA Ethiopia is the secretary of the steering committee.

The woreda project steering committee's role is to coordinate and manage the quality of project implementation at the grassroot level; provide support to the kebele administration team at the field level from planning up to evaluation of the project; prepare and share sector-based project updates; develop checklists during field supervision and produce reports after field-level support; attend regular meetings, workshops, and project planning, monitoring, and evaluation exercised; prepare consolidated Woreda adaptation plans; review and monitor project implementation at the woreda level; review and prioritize project plans; ensure sustainability of project achievements in collaboration with appropriate sector offices; ensure the planning and implementation of the project activities in line with the National park management guidelines; and address any administrative issues related to the park management and the neighboring community.

The woreda level project steering committee members will conduct meetings and joint field monitoring visits on a monthly basis. During the meeting, the monthly project performance status and upcoming monthly action plan will be discussed and the committee members will conduct joint field monitoring visits in the intervention kebeles.

3.7. Establishing Technical Committees

Woreda-level technical committees comprised of government sector offices' technical staff/experts have been established and is actively engaged in project implementation together with project field staff. The technical committee has 9 members: team leader of Water & Energy; Cooperative Agency; Women, Children, and Social Affairs; Agriculture; Livestock and Fishery; Environmental & Wildlife Protection Authority; Employment and Training Agency; Culture and Tourism; and ORDA Ethiopia. While the agriculture office is the team leader of the committee, the Project Manager from ORDA Ethiopia is the secretary of the technical committee. The roles and responsibilities of the technical committee include: providing technical support during the implementation of the project interventions in the respective kebeles; addressing technical recommendations forwarded by the woreda steering committee; conducting field level supervision and reporting on the implementation progress and concerns (if any) to the woreda steering committee; ensuring the project activities are included and aligned with the sectoral plan at kebele and woreda level; and draw lessons from the project and work on scaling up of good practices.

3.8. Intervention Kebeles Selection

Woreda steering committee members discussed and proposed the intervention kebeles using the criteria set such as accessibility, park boundary, proportion/share of female-headed households and of households which have lost their assets due to the recent conflicts in northern Ethiopia, kebeles with high population density, level of vulnerability, impact on livelihoods through park restrictions (like loss of grazing areas), proximity to wildlife corridors, former/ongoing ADA intervention area/other donor programs, and interest of the community.

The zone level steering committee members approved the proposed and selected intervention kebeles. Currently, the project selected a total of 10 intervention kebeles in three woredas (Debark, Janamora and Bayada). From the 10 selected intervention kebeles, 4 are in Debark, 3 are in Janamora and 3 are in Beyeda. Below are the names of the selected intervention kebeles in each woreda.

No.	Project intervention woreda	Name of selected intervention kebeles
1	Debark	Miligebsa
		Adesgie
		Abergina
		Argijuna
	Sub-total	4
2	Janamora	Sakiba
		Denkolako
		Dibl
	Sub-total	3
3	Bayada	Guayit
		Medebay
		Selewa
	Sub-total	3
Grand total		10

4. Summary of Progress of Project Activities

Outcome 1: Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services are Well Protected through Community and Stakeholder Involvement in Restoration and Rehabilitation and Conservation Measures in the SMNP and Surrounding Kebeles.

Output 1.1: Increased Engagement and Involvement of Communities in Restoration, Rehabilitation and Conservation of Natural Resources, Biodiversity, and Ecosystem.

Activity Cluster 1.1.1. Support Communities to Identify, Establish and Manage Watersheds, Including Developing a Watershed Development Plan.

1.1.1.1. Establish/ strengthen watershed management committees (Including Registration, Development, Endorsement, and Use of Community Bylaws)

After identifying the intervention kebeles, the project team selected 10 watersheds in ten kebeles jointly with the woreda technical committee members and natural resources experts. In the selection of the watersheds, the team considered physical accessibility, farmers' willingness to participate in the development works, irrigation potential, number of beneficiaries who would benefit from the watershed, adjacency to park and government interest as criteria. The selected 10 watersheds cover a total of 5714.74 ha of land and a total of 4,863 (1,099 women, 173 (92 women) people with disabilities) people's livelihoods rely on the natural resources of these watersheds. It is expected that all the 4,863 people living around the watersheds will benefit from the watershed development works directly or indirectly.

No.	Project woreda	Selected kebele	Watershed name	Area (ha)
1	Debark	Miligebsa	Zengwa	748.29
		Adesgie	Chinchit	663.44
		Abergina	Setochmetaya	636.54
		Argijuna	Kebero Mider	1344.44
Sub-total		4		3,392.71
2	Janamora	Sakiba	Yemisrach Marziba	486.58
		Denkolako	Debela	392.41
		Dibl	Keyit	451.17
Sub-total		3	3	1,330.16
3	Beyeda	Guayit	Tiruye wonz	328.56
		Medebay	Addis Lemlem	455.84
		Selewa	Mushera Marefia	206.91
Sub-total		3	3	991.31
Total		10	10	5,714.74

Following the selection of the watersheds, the project also established watershed committees with members from the local community who will be responsible for the facilitation, coordination and management of the watershed development works and for the administration of the watershed after development. All community members living

around the watershed participated in the committee members' selection through a vote. Each watershed has 13 committee members, which makes a total of 130 (40 women) watershed committee members.

1.1.1.4. Support Watershed Management Committee Members in Preparing and Implementing Watershed Development Plans

The project provided capacity development training to a total of 90 (11 women) watershed committee members and 63 (18 women) woreda and kebele experts on preparation of watershed development plan and overall integrated watershed development approaches for 3 days from June 3-5, 2023. The project team will work with the community on increasing the representation and leadership role of women in the committees. Then government staffs provided technical support during the preparation of development plans. All 10 watershed committees successfully developed their own watershed development plan.

1.1.1.5. Mapping and Analysis of the SMNP Dynamic Developments Over the Past 20 Years

An analysis of land use and land cover change of the past 20 years of SMNP was conducted using satellite imagery. CARE Ethiopia conducted the mapping, and government staffs and ORDA Ethiopia project staffs participated in the development of land use and land cover change maps during on-site verification of land use in the area. This assessment will help produce land cover maps and will inform future planning. Major findings and recommendations are currently being discussed and analyzed by the project team.

1.1.1.8. Capacity Development of Watershed Management Committees on Sustainable Land Management, Soil and Water Conservation, Watershed Development and Planning and Financial Management

During the capacity development training provided to 90 (11 women) watershed committee members and 63 (18 women) woreda and kebele experts, knowledge and skills on watershed management was also covered, specifically sustainable land management, soil and water conservation, watershed development and planning and financial management. While the PSC members and kebele officials monitor the implementation of the watershed development plans, they will be able to check how much the participants of that training retained from the knowledge and skills taught to them.

Activity Cluster 1.1.2. Support Communities in Implementing Sustainable Land Management Interventions and Adapting to Climate Change

1.1.2.1. Support Communities to Treat Degraded Communal Land, Farmland and Forest Area With Biophysical Measures (Physical Soil and Water Conservation; Hillside Terrace, Cut-Off Drain, Waterway, Gully Rehabilitation, Check Dams, Micro-Basin and Basin)

The project, jointly with the watershed committees and local government, started the implementation of watershed development works based on their plan. To date, a total of 20.6 ha of land have been treated with physical measures in the 10 selected watersheds. The physical soil and conservation work included the installation of 12.4 km of soil facing stone bunds, 6.1km of soil bunds and 116m of bench terraces. To date, a total of 32.8 ha of land were selected for biological measures including the plantation of different seedlings of forest trees. The community (only adults) contributed with free labor and used their own hand tools to support with the physical and biological measures in the watershed.

In this inception phase the treatment mainly focused on communal land and agricultural lands. The project team supported the process by providing technical know-how, hand tools and seedlings for the nursery sites (42,500 Acacia Abyssinica, 27,565 Deccurens 26,800 treeluser and 19,833 grass seedlings for forage). The Woreda agriculture officer and project watershed officer not only supported the committees with the selection of adequate structures, or identification of the location and design of those structures, but also with the selection of type of seedlings, in timing the plantation, and conducting preparation works such as excavation of pits and spacing between seedlings.

1.1.2.6. Water Scheme Construction/Rehabilitation for Wildlife and Domestic Use

To decrease human and livestock movements inside the park for search of water, and to improve accessibility of potable water in surrounding communities, the project will support with development (construction/rehabilitation) of 16 springs to bring water to the communities. During the inception phase, the project identified 6 potential sites that will be constructed for domestic water supply systems. The selected sites are located in three woredas (1 in Janamora, 3 in Debark and 2 in Beyeda 2). Before the construction of the water schemes an environmental impact assessment will be conducted.

Activity Cluster 1.1.3. Support Communities in Improvement of Sustainable Livestock Production and Productivity

1.1.3.3. Provision of Improved Field Seeds, Vegetable Seeds, and Introduction of Soil Acidity Treatment with Lime, Crop Rotation, Manure/Compost, and Other Conservation Agriculture Practices

Before the distributions, the woreda technical committee and the field project staffs developed project targeting criteria that had to be approved by the woreda PSC, CARE Ethiopia and ORDA Ethiopia senior experts to make sure they align with the project objectives and expected outcomes. Criteria included i) community or households living in the watershed nearby areas, ii) households with members of VSLAs, iii) households committed to managing agricultural lands, iv) households with low economic status (extremely poor), v) female headed households, vi) households with persons with disability, vii) households whose resources were highly affected by the northern war conflict, viii) and households with resource poor youths.

The procured seeds include 38.86 quintals of garlic seeds, 50 quintals of malt barley, 200 quintals of lime and 295 quintals of potato tuber. In total, 1,135 households (641 female headed households, 50 households with persons with disabilities and 236 households with poor youths) received seeds. 534 households (327 female headed households, 34 households with persons with disabilities and 103 households with poor youths) received potato tubers; 167 households (40 female headed household, 5 households with persons with disabilities and 19 households with poor youths) received malt barley seeds; 382 households (272 female headed households, 11 households with persons with disabilities and 106 households with poor youths) received garlic seeds; and 52 households (2 female headed and 8 households with poor youths) accessed lime seeds.

The distribution considered the suitability of seeds for the beneficiaries' farms, the farmers' interest, suitability of location (cluster seedling approaches) for agricultural extension. Before the distribution a one-day discussion and orientation was conducted with the selected farmers for them to prepared their lands (soil moisture improvement techniques, sowing techniques, etc). The kebele level development committee² checked the land preparation of the farmers before distributing the seeds. The distribution system is designed to be revolving, meaning that the beneficiaries return the same number of seeds that they received to the kebele level committee after one agricultural season or production season. The returned seeds are then given to other community members living in the kebeles for the next agricultural season or harvesting season based on the eligibility criteria of targeting.

Output 1.2: Increased Engagement and Involvement of Local Government and Stakeholders in Restoration, Rehabilitation and Conservation of Natural Resources, Biodiversity and Ecosystem.

Activity Cluster 1.2.1. Support Local Government to Identify, Establish and Manage Watersheds, Including Development of Watershed Development Plans

1.2.2.3. Support Establishment /Strengthening of Public, Community Managed Tree Nursery Sites (Material Support, Technical Support)

ORDA Ethiopia jointly with local governments selected three community-led and managed nursery sites in three woredas, in Miligebas (Debank), Melba (Beyeda) and Deresgie (Janamora) kebeles to provide climate resistant seedlings for trees and fruit plantations. The nursery sites will increase availability of seedlings and contribute to the project's efforts to promote reforestation by the targeted communities. The project provided material and technical support to strengthen the nursery sites which includes polytene tube, various tree seeds, hand tools (shovel, pickaxe, carts, watering cane). During the inception phase of the project, a total of 300.000 seedlings were transferred from the nursery sites to selected watersheds for plantation.

² established by the government and comprised of kebele administration representatives, teachers, Development Agents, Health Extension Workers, among others.

Outcome 2: Livelihood Options for Women, Youth and Vulnerable Groups are Diversified and Improved While at the Same Time, Gender Equality, Climate-Resilience and Sustainable Natural Resource Management are Enhanced.

Output 2.1: Increased Income Generating Activity Opportunities, Knowledge and Skills for Women, Youth and Vulnerable Persons

Activity Cluster 2.1.1: Increase Capacity of Women, Youth and Vulnerable Persons and Households that Are Willing to Move Out of Parklands to Engage in Income Generating Activities, While Supporting Communities in Changing Social Norms that are Hindering Gender-Equitable Practices

2.1.1.1. Support the Establishment/strengthening of Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA)

Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA) are an entry points to not only empower the community in their agency and relationships, but also economically by increasing their financial literacy, such as savings culture and practices, managing credits/loans, engaging in profitable income generating activities to increase household income, etc. To this end, during the inception phase of the project, ORDA Ethiopia jointly with the woreda government sector offices (women, children and social affairs, cooperatives, etc) established a total of 149 VSLA groups with a total of 3,494 (1,879 women) members, with each 23 members on average. VSLA kits with registration books, passbooks, plates, saving boxes and calculators were provided to all VSLA groups. For close technical support the project selected 10 (2 women) village level facilitators in 10 kebeles. VSLA members elected their own management committee members - 5 for each VSLA group. A total of 745 (338 women) VSLA management committee members were elected.

2.1.1.2. Training and Capacity Development of VSLA Management Committees on VSLA Methodology and Financial Literacy

The project provided training to all 745 (338 women) VSLA management committee members from 10-15 June 2023 on the VSLA methodology and financial literacy. As a result, the VSLA management committees gained skills and knowledge to manage their respective VSLA groups effectively and efficiently. To date the 149 VSLA groups saved a total of 57,347.00 ETB (\$1,062) and plan to start providing loans to their VSLA members in the coming 2-3 months.

2.1.1.15. Support Female Graduate Internship

The project recruited 12 female university graduates as interns³ to support the project implementation.

Activity Cluster 2.1.2 Support Government Efforts to Accelerate Marginalized Groups' Engagement In Income Generating Activities And To Challenge Social Norms that are Hindering Gender-Equitable Practices

³ 3 based in Debarq, 3 based in Beyeda, 3 based in Janamora and 3 based in Bahir Dar

2.1.2.1. Develop Beneficiary Selection Criteria Jointly with the Woreda Steering Committee and Technical Working Groups.

The project staff, jointly with the woreda steering committee and technical committee members developed a set of selection criteria for the identification of VSLA members who will be supported with an income generating activity (IGA). The criteria include: extremely poor households, female-headed households, households with a person with a disability, households highly affected by the northern war and conflict, and households with resource poor youths. Other criteria that can be combined with the latter criteria enumerated include people who live in geographic areas around the park that are difficult to access, people living in and around the park boundary, community or people living near the watershed areas, level of vulnerability, impact on livelihoods through park restrictions (like loss of grazing areas), proximity to wildlife corridors, households with VSLA members, and households committed to managing the agricultural lands well.

Households or individuals who meet a combination of the criteria and get the approval from the woreda project steering committee are eligible. Depending on the nature/type of services or support, a beneficiary or a household might get either only one service or support or more. To increase the project's impact, almost all selected/eligible beneficiaries or households will have the chance to get or access more than one service or form of support.

2.1.2.3. ToT training and Capacity Development to Relevant Government Staffs on VSLA

A five-days training of trainers (ToT) was provided for 9 (2 women) government staff and 10 (2 women) Village Agents (volunteer people that support VSLA groups) to capacitate the VSA members. The training covered VSLA methodology and facilitation (formation, bylaw development, savings and lending procedures, record keeping, social fund management, and share-out calculation) skills. The trained technical government staff cascaded the training to 745 VSLA management committee members (5 members from each of the 149 VSLA groups) for five days between 10th-25th June 2023. The training created awareness on the VSLA methodology and strengthened the management skills of committee members.

2.1.2.6 Market Assessment on Promising Income Generating Activities (IGA)

CARE Ethiopia with ORDA Ethiopia conducted a market assessment in Debark, Beyeda and Janamora woredas from May 23-June 2, 2023. The specific objective of the assessment included i) to identify income generating activities (IGA) that are particularly suitable for youth and women, ii) to look into IGAs that have the potential to contribute to environmental protection, iii) to identify the potential opportunities, threats and expected obstacles to develop effective IGAs, iv) to assess cooperatives' effectiveness, organizational and management structure and v) to promote tourism in the area and creating market linkages that can expand the communities' benefits from tourism activities.

The assessment comes with major findings and recommendations that are currently being discussed within the project team.

Outcome 3: Capacities of EWCA/SMNP in Inclusive Participatory Approaches are Enhanced and Coordination Mechanisms at Relevant Regional, Zonal, Woreda and Kebele Level are Improved.

Output 3.1: Enhanced capacities of EWCA/SMNP Administration in Utilizing Inclusive Participatory Approaches

Activity Cluster 3.1.1. Training and Mentoring EWCA/SMNP Staff in Utilizing Inclusive Participatory Approaches

3.1.1.1. Conduct Partner (including government stakeholder, EWCA, SMNP, community Based Committees/cooperatives) Capacity Assessment

CARE Ethiopia with ORDA Ethiopia conducted a partner capacity assessment (PCA) with selected government staffs at Zone and Woreda levels. The objective of the assessment was to assess the existing technical capacities of the staff, and identify technical, managerial, coordination and collaboration gaps of partners at zone, woreda and community levels.

The assessment was conducted in Debarq, Janamora and Beyeda from May 17-23, 2023. At the Zone level, the assessment covered zone administration, Agriculture, Livestock Development & Promotion, Finance, Livestock, EWCA/SMNP Management and Tourism Offices. At woreda level, Woreda administration, Women, Children and Social Affairs, Agriculture, Cooperatives, Livestock, and Finance offices. The assessment's findings and recommendations are currently being discussed among the project team.

Output 3.2: Strengthened EWCA/SMNP Coordination Mechanisms at Regional, Zonal, Woreda and Kebele level

Activity Cluster 3.2.1 Support and Strengthen the Coordination of EWCA/SMNP and Relevant Government Entities Activities at Regional, Zone, Woreda and Kebeles Levels

3.2.1.1. Quarterly Review Meeting with Kebele Representatives.

A quarterly review meeting with kebeles representatives and woreda steering committee members was conducted from April 12-15, 2023, in each capital of the intervention woredas. A total of 80 (17 women) persons participated in the meetings. A major outcome was the agreement reached on the preparation works and selection criteria for beneficiaries.

3.2.1.2. Zone bi-annual review meeting with woreda steering committee.

A zone bi-annual review meeting took place on June 23, 2023 to evaluate the project's progress and discuss the implementation plan of the next six month. A total of 13 (2 of them women) government staffs and 5 project staffs (3 from ORDA head office and 2 from the project office) attended that meeting.