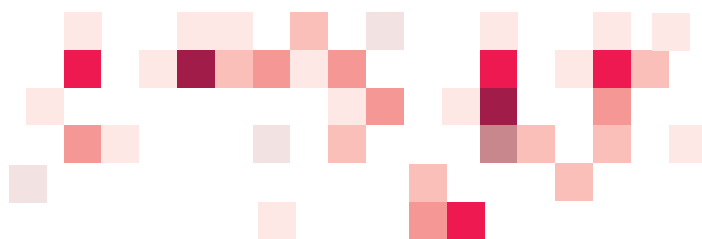


**INNOVATIVE APPROACHES
TO UNCCD IMPLEMENTATION:**
ERITREA'S EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL MOBILIZATION





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“Every Eritrean should consider a tree as a very important part of our culture... Hence, when we remember our martyrs, when a baby is born and baptised, during weddings and burial ceremonies, and when an important personality visits, we should accompany these activities with the planting of trees”.

Honourable Arefaine Berhe, Minister of Agriculture,
the State of Eritrea

Setting the scene

Situated in northern East Africa, Eritrea borders Sudan to the West, Ethiopia to the South, and Djibouti to the Southeast. It is located along the Red Sea and has a total land area of approximately 124 320 km². The country has a complex landscape, characterized by vertical zoning that comprises a whole range of climatic features from semi-desert to high-mountain environments and by a wide range of land uses. Eritrea lies in the Sahelian Zone of East Africa, which is subject to frequent, prolonged drought.

In Eritrea, as in many countries in Africa, the main forms of land use are agriculture and pastoralism. Approximately 80% of Eritreans earn their living from economic activities related to the land. Since agriculture is the most important sector of the Eritrean economy, accounting for most exports and most of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the demand for arable land and land for grazing, forestry, wildlife, tourism and urban development is increasing. Sustainable Land Management (SLM) is therefore of critical importance for national development processes because of its overarching contribution to improving livelihoods, reducing poverty and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The challenge

Land degradation poses one of the most compelling developmental challenges to Eritrea. The Central and Northern Highlands are worst affected. Factors contributing to land degradation include population pressures, climatic conditions, inappropriate cultivation and irrigation systems, soil erosion, and overgrazing. In addition, deforestation is one of the biggest threats to the country. For example, it takes a staggering one hundred poles (250 – 300m³ of wood biomass), to build a typical, traditional highland home (*hidmo*).

Inarguably therefore, land degradation impacts food security, poverty reduction, and sustainable livelihoods. Notably, the droughts that the country has experienced, which have exacerbated food crisis and shortages, have been largely attributed to land degradation and desertification.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the people of Eritrea are implementing innovative measures to address land degradation and broader UNCCD-related issues. Through social mobilization, the Government is providing a platform for partnership to address land degradation in a novel way.

Organizing for innovation: the national greening campaign

The national greening campaign is at the core of the Government's strategy to address land degradation. Through an accelerated and sustainable afforestation programme, the Government is encouraging and assisting individuals, communities, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to engage in UNCCD-related activities. It allocates substantial funds to afforestation programmes, under the overall guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture.

'Green clubs' have been established in various schools, communities and other institutions. These will serve as information, education and communications centres, and for sharing experiences with other schools and surrounding communities involved in the national greening campaign. Every year, thousands of students from all Eritrea's high schools participate in the summer student campaign - mainly in soil and water conservation and afforestation activities. Moreover, village and community-based forest enclosures have been established in many communities. Local communities and individuals are actively participating in community afforestation and soil and water conservation programmes, as they begin to appreciate the socio-economic benefits of such activities.

Using energy-saving technologies to save natural resources: improved cooking stoves

In Eritrea, every household has a simple home-manufactured oven made of clay. This traditionally-made stove - the *mogogo* - has been used for cooking for centuries. Besides their inefficiency in terms of energy consumption, these traditional stoves use large quantities of wood. They are also environmentally unfriendly due to the large amounts of smoke they produce which poses a tremendous health hazard - particularly to the women and children.

Through research and development efforts by the Ministry of Energy and Mining and other key partners, an improved version of the *mogogo* has been developed. This new model combines the advantages of the traditional *mogogo* design with advanced technology that has improved the energy efficiency of the *mogogo* from below 10% to over 50%.

It is worth noting that local craftswomen have been engaged in the design, testing and installation of these improved, smokeless stoves from the outset. A major programme is being undertaken to disseminate the use of these stoves in rural areas. In fact, today, many women in rural areas are producing such stoves and accruing income from the sale and installation of the technology. This is of great benefit to women since they shoulder the responsibility of fuel wood collection and cooking.

The benefits of the improved *mogogo* include:

- enhanced energy efficiency that reduces deforestation, green house gas (GHG) emissions, agricultural residues and dung burning;
- improved economic and environmental benefits by saving the time and effort in wood collection, reducing expenditure on firewood, and creating employment in villages where the *mogogo* is manufactured and installed;
- more time devoted by women to alternative livelihood activities and by children to learning and extra-curricula activities; and
- improved health of women and children due to a clean, smoke-free cooking area.



“Women ... play an essential role in the management of natural resources, including soil, water, forests and energy ... and often have a profound traditional and contemporary knowledge of the natural world around them”

-The World Bank

Planning for the Oscars: recognizing individuals' achievements

Popularly known as 'Oscars', the Academy Awards reward excellence in many aspects of motion film-making, such as acting, directing and screenwriting. The Government of Eritrea is planning to introduce an Oscar-type system to reward outstanding individuals, communities, students, religious institutions, government and NGOs, for their contribution to addressing land degradation through activities such as tree planting and terracing to enhance ecosystem services, increase agricultural productivity and enhance food security and the livelihoods of rural populations.

By giving public recognition, the award system will also create an incentive for community and public action by raising people's awareness of UNCCD-related issues, and by mobilizing the resources needed to address them.



The media: raising public awareness

The Government has embarked on a media campaign to promote public awareness of afforestation and natural resource management. For example, ERI-TV has broadcast programmes on the causes and impact of land degradation and ways to address it in four languages: Tigre, Tigrena, Arabic and English. Similarly, radio broadcasts have been aired in 10 local languages, as part of a drive to promote adult education.

Communication tools have been developed to support this process. A newsletter (in Tigrena, Arabic and English) and magazines have provided extensive media coverage of campaigns related to afforestation and natural resource management, on a regular basis. Since the media can rely on national and international satellite coverage, its impact in terms of promoting public awareness of UNCCD-related issues has been enormous.

Working together: the role of the Global Mechanism (GM)

At the core of the GM's support to the Government of Eritrea is the strengthening the capacities of local dryland communities, through awareness-building programmes. Utilizing grant resources, the GM has supported media campaigns and the production of awareness-raising materials.

The overall objective of the GM's support is to conduct a strong advocacy campaign to successfully mainstream the UNCCD into national development processes and to encourage community investment in SLM. This initiative has been well received at the highest political level and has been acknowledged by the President of Eritrea.

The GM's Community Exchange and Training Programme (CETP) provides a unique framework for systematic exchanges between local communities on indigenous techniques and practices to combat land degradation and desertification. Through the CETP, the GM has supported community exchanges to increase awareness of the existence of the improved

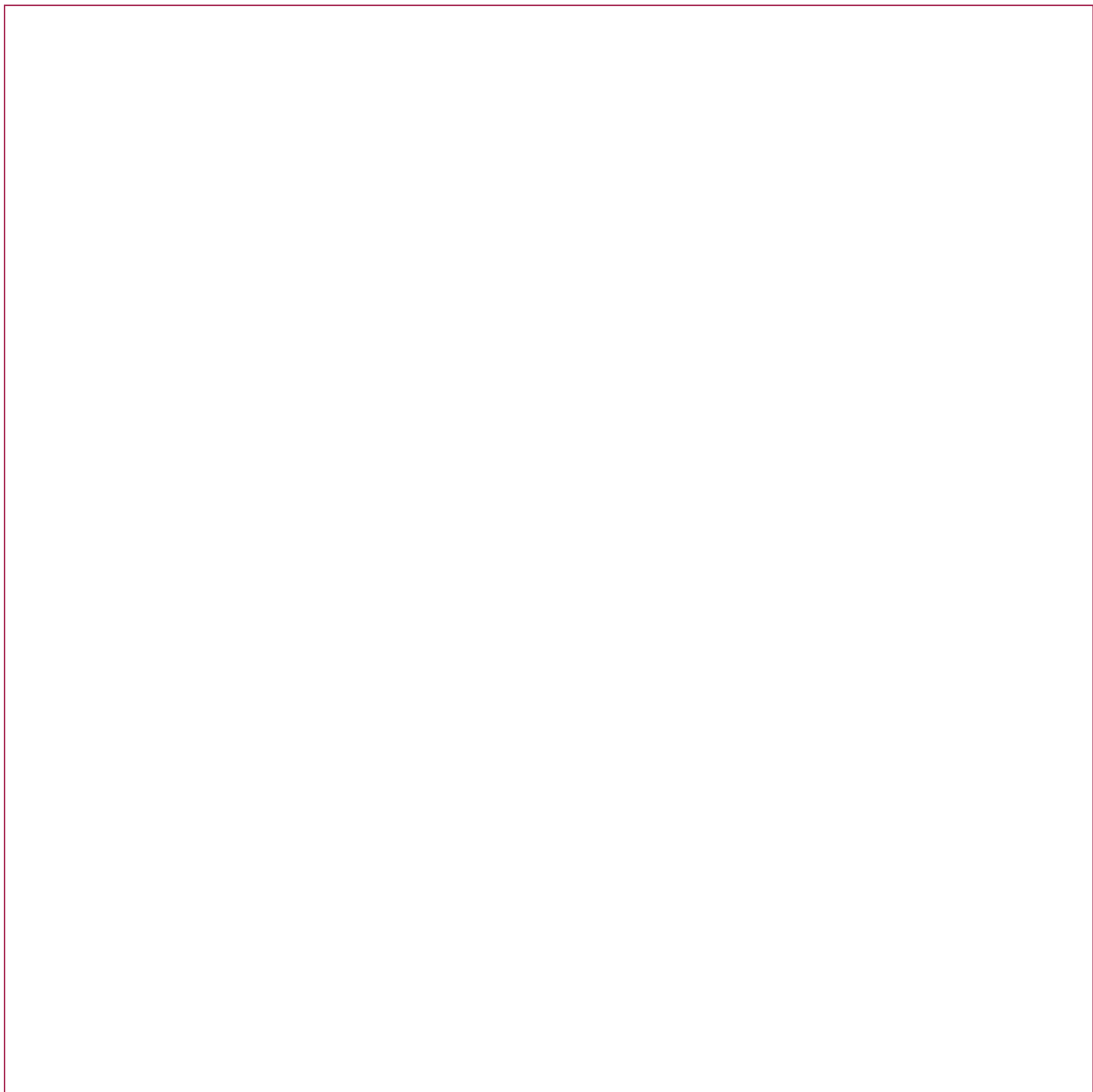
mogogo stove and provide skills training on how to manufacture the stoves. These training sessions have targeted extension workers from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Department of Energy and selected departments, NGOs and individuals.

In addition, the GM is supporting the Government of Eritrea in mainstreaming UNCCD/SLM issues into poverty reduction processes and strategies and in brokering partnerships to mobilize resources for UNCCD implementation. In its future programming, the GM will seek to work with the Government to identify and access innovative sources of financing.

Achievements and lessons learned

- Significant achievements have been made through the national greening campaign. In many communities, there is increased awareness of SLM. Tree planting by individuals is now becoming a culture of patriotism and affection in Eritrean society. It is therefore not surprising that Mr. Hagos Dirar, a 75 year-old, single-handedly planted 65 000 seedlings in remembrance of the 65 000 martyrs.
- In recognition of the efforts of the Eritrean people, H.E. President Isaias Afewerki has declared 15 May National Greening Campaign Day. Strong leadership and political will at the highest decision-making level has proved to be essential for the national greening campaign.
- The success of social mobilization largely depends on a demonstration of mutual benefit, trust and accountability.

In conclusion, social mobilization in afforestation and conservation programmes countrywide requires a significant level of investment, for instance in basic farm equipment. In order to sustain this campaign, Eritrea needs further support from its partners to galvanize and aggregate the full potential of individuals and communities to address the challenges posed by land degradation and desertification.





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