

Bringing the dead to life



Workers taking care of seedlings at Bala nursery site in Raya Azebo

BY EMNET ASSEFA

MEKELLE-Hussein Mohammed, 43 is a farmer at Raya Azebo Woreda of Tigray region, he says only few rich were taken to graveyards to be buried but the rest were left where they were, many of his neighbors died because of the drought in the area. "The time was terrible to remember, food was scarce, every thing was dry and had nothing to feed our cattle, so we fed them dry stem, and water was a dream."

Hussein says most people he knows then have died and the number of death then was very great that it felt like there isn't any one left on earth. He was hired as a secretary for the regime which helped him in getting two packs of cereals to

feed him self and his family.

He also says has it not been for those two packs of cereals, him and his family including his wife and a son could have been a history.

This whole story happened about 23 years ago because of a drought that have taken lives of many and left us with dry land with nothing green.

Sitting under a papaya tree in a compound at Eyob primary school feeling the cold wind brushing your face, smelling the lemon plucked from a tree right where you are and looking this whole green grass and shade, you doubt any of that stories, that has just been told.

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Bringing...

The papaya, mango and orange trees are some of the fruits of the land rehabilitation and watershed activities done by the Restive Society of Tigray (REST) in Bala Kebele of Raya Azebo woreda.

The irrigation of water to grow these trees in the school compound come from the mini-dam made 4.5kilo miters away from Eyob primary school. The water conserved from rain fall during the rainy season has helped in making the dam in which many farmers use for irrigation to grow vegetables and fruits in few hectares of land.

REST being one of the members of the Population, Health and Environment-Ethiopia consortium (PHE), it implements the integration approach of population, health and environment. According to the presentations made for journalists who have participated in a field visit to these areas, reproductive health education focusing on population, HIV/ Aids and reproductive health is given to school children so that they could teach their families.

Soil and water conservation including forestation activities bring back the natural forest resource that have been damaged years ago and got dry because of the changes on the climate.

The people living in the area participate in seedling in tree nursery sites run by the REST environment protection project in Raya Azebo woreda, Bala nursery site.

The seeds cultivated are used for protected forestry areas and fruit and vegetable seeds for the farmers to plant them on their farms. About 1.8 million seeds get to be cultivated in the area. The protection activity here is done by REST and the local government.

Here the integration is through trainings given to workers about family planning, HIV prevention, seedling skills and other health issues. The workers are



Rehabilitating area after conservation activities in Raya Azebo

now can grow different vegetables and fruits on their own farm, they are being given trainings to change their nutrition contents Yesak told journalists.

REST in collaboration with the local government set adult education centers in which adults are reached with family planning and other health related educations.

Food insecurity is a main problem in the woreda because of its long history of drought, and food for work program in line with farmer's trainings of irrigation use to sustain their farms and involving the community in environment protection works is expected to solve it.

At a mountain high, in a place called Maykuyeha debreberhan, Wokera, where everything you see is rocky, even

Reserving forests from the touch of human beings and animals (gully treatment) that are damaged and turned to a dry land are now rehabilitating and the land is now reviving, as result, dead trees are coming to life and the livelihood is improving. As the land revives and the forest gets better in few years time, REST has a hope that there will be conducive environment for bee keeping and youth with no farming lands could have bee hives and produce honey as a source of income according to the coordinator.

paid through food for work programs.

Our next visit took us to another mini-dam made with a watershed approach that keeps rain water flow to one place by structuring its path. It has a capacity of containing 500 cubic meter water that can be used to irrigate 30 to 60 hectares of land. About

160 farmers benefits out of this land.

Gulecheba water shade is one of the mountainous areas in which environment protection activities are carried out. Here, we stand over a hill between an artificial dam and farm that is irrigated by the water from the dam. The place is surrounded by mountains that small plants are growing and covering its dry and rocky land.

REST coordination of Raya Azebo woreda, Yesak Desta says different soil and water preservation activities done in this area which caused for formerly dried streams are now being regained. "And we soon hope that problems of water for drinking, farming and other proposes will be solved. A huge hectors of land is preserved from the reach of human beings and Animals and as you can see it is rehabilitating itself."

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Environmental conservation and erosion control are done through terracing; bunds and trenching clearly show that the efforts are working.

Sanitation, hygiene, HIV/AIDS awareness, nutrition are integrated here, mainly nutrition as the farmers

the houses are made out of stone. We have walked in a House owned by Teklebirhan Hilesilase and Tsadkan Belay with their three children.

"I am glad we are now planning our family, my wife is healthy, we send our kids to school and I would say we have gained a lot out of it," says Teklebirhan.

Their home is structured neatly, with a great effort put by his wife, Tsadkan; a kitchen that uses a traditional stove that can be used to cook three things at a time sharing the same power, a toilet cleanly kept. This whole thing may seem a normal thing for many, but it is not usual to find all this close to modern living in such a very rural area.

With a briefing given to the visiting journalists by REST health coordinator of the area, Mehretabe, environmental protection is integrated with health and population here. "Water catchment activities here would go down to some place and become a stream so it is must that we do a sanitation work here to protect the water, so every family here has toilets. We also have to balance population with environment." The group from the media also told that where ponds are there for irrigation, malaria privation and use of bed nets lessons are given to people.

Through all the work, it is clearly seen that every bit of human life depends on nature and it is environment and protecting it answers every question. With all the efforts there, nature soon will turn its face back to us and everything will go back to what it once was, and history will be told, being said "this place used to be dead."

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Other Skills:	Demonstrable experience in computer office programs like MS Word, Excel
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