OVERVIEW

The USAID funded SPIR Program, led by World Vision in a consortium with CARE and ORDA, is intended to help households in the PSNP4 program achieve food security for their households through a combination of savings, diversifying their sources of income through income generating activities (IGAs), and skills training that can help them graduate from food assistance. SPIR supports 526,444 direct project participants in the Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR regions of Ethiopia. The public works program implemented through SPIR teaches PSNP4 HHs the climate adaptive practices that will help them increase their productivity and food security. This complementarity is core to the success of the collaboration between the GoE and the USAID funded SPIR Program.
The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) supports the poorest and most vulnerable households in Ethiopia with food or equivalent cash assistance while also building the infrastructure to serve these households in the future. Through the PSNP4, GoE requires every productive member over the age of 18 to participate in 5 days of public works programs in order to receive 6 months of food rations. Partnering with the SPIR Program, PSNP4 public works participants receive food rations while also learning the skills they need to exit the safety net program and graduate into longer term food security. This dual strategy of supporting HH food sufficiency while cultivating the knowledge and skills to promote PSNP households into longer term food security is the central strategy of both the PSNP4 and SPIR Programs.

In Sororo Kebele in the Highlands of West Hararghe, the hillside is scarred by a degraded land that has been cultivated for generations through harmful agriculture practices and open grazing that has left the land denuded, infertile, and unproductive. The soil is unable to retain moisture, water rolls down the hill and floods the lowlands, and farmer produce less than 2-3 quintals of maize and sorghum per harvest, barely enough to feed their own families much less sell on the market.

SPIR has worked in the Tukale watershed for a little over a year. Working with district level extension agents, the program has leveraged the public works program to help farmers regenerate the watershed that surrounds the Kebele through a combination of physical and biophysical approaches. Public works participants have learned hillside terracing (physical) and cut deep steps into the hillside. These bench terraces are leveled, tilled, and fertilized with compost to regenerate the natural productivity of the soil. Stone faced terraces support the soil bund and elephant grass and pigeon pea are planted for livestock fodder. This serves multiple purposes including preventing soil and water erosion, promoting water retention within the bench terrace, and providing animal fodder for livestock. Each terrace is then planted with maize or sorghum and intercropped with haricot beans, which is one of the value chains selected by the SPIR project for this region.

The benefits of the public works program extend well beyond earning each PSNP participant 6 months of food rations. By learning how to regenerate degraded land through the natural resource management approaches promoted by SPIR, farmers are applying these practices within their own fields and regenerating land that has been unproductive for up to a decade.

**KATEMA FELEKE**

In the words of Katema Feleke, the woreda level Natural Resources Team Leader “before applying the bench terracing technique, the yield from this land was between 2-3 quintals, or 200-300kg. Now each parcel of land is generating 10 quintals of maize.”

For farmers who have relied on food assistance, literally quadrupling their productivity in one cropping season is a game changer. Even non-PSNP4 households have seen the benefits of the approach and are now learning from their PSNP4 neighbors how to apply the methodology on their own farms. Moreover, the Government extension workers who have received training from SPIR are transferring this knowledge to all the households in their respective woredas and kebeles, effectively scaling this methodology and its benefits across the hillside. The entire community shows great pride in taking what was only a year before completely wasted land and turning it into some of the most productive in the region.
Walking across the Gulti Watershed, one would hardly know that less than a year ago, this hillside was nothing but dirt and rocks. The lush hillside is home to dozens of species of grass, trees and indigenous plants that grow on this communal land. After closing the land to the public, the SPIR project worked with the government natural resource management officers to implement both physical and biological measures to regenerate the land and to reduce soil erosion. The main use of this communal land is to provide livestock feed for the households surrounding the area. An added benefit from protecting this landscape is to prevent erosion and flooding in the lowlands.

Through joint planning with woreda and community level officials, the SPIR Project implemented a holistic strategy for watershed management in order to regenerate denuded land. After closing the communal land to grazing for over a year, the project planted native species of trees supported by stone-faced terraces that improves moisture retention by increasing water infiltration, which in turn tree growth. Over 2500 seedlings of Juniperus procera from native species, and 3500 Gravillea robusta and 200 Casuarina equisetifolia seedlings from the fast growing exotic species were produced in a nursery and transplanted to the watershed. Additionally, forage plants and canopy crops were planted, and short ditches dug to promote water retention and to reduce soil erosion.

Within one year, the entire hillside has been entirely regenerated. Species that had not been seen on the hillside for over a decade have started to naturally regenerate. To support the continued conservation and productivity of the farmlands in this sub-watershed, the SPIR program promoted the use of early maturing and drought resistant seeds and taught climate smart practices such as intercropping to PSNP4 participants. Farmers now grow a short cycle sorghum (5 months) alongside a drought resistant variety of maize for 3 months, both inter-cropped with haricot bean. In this way, SPIR is protecting the long-term resilience of communities by building healthy ecosystems that will support HH food security into the future.