

## Changing Flash Floods into Farming Opportunities in Hare 2 Kebele/Village, Shebelle Woreda - Fafan Zone, Ethiopia

Hare 2 Kebele is a drought-prone area characterized by low rainfall and high temperatures and is repeatedly affected by flash floods from the adjacent hills. The major victims of the floods are predominantly those households with farms and pastureland in the low-lying downstream areas. This significantly impacts their livelihoods, as fertile soil is eroded, creating large gullies, destroying their crops, and drowning their livestock. The combined effect renders the farm and pasture lands completely unproductive. The situation gets worse every year from the combined effects of extreme weather events and degradation in the surrounding hills. As a result, an increasing number of households are being permanently displaced as they move to other locations for better livelihood opportunities.

With the technical support of the German Development Agency (GIZ), the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) in close cooperation with local stakeholders has introduced a flood barrier in Shebelle woreda: water spreading weirs (WSWs) to convert the abundance of surface water during floods into a productive resource. Wetlands International carried out similar interventions in the neighboring woreda Gursum. WSW is a simple, but innovative Eco-DRR measure that drastically slows down the speed of the run-off water and facilitates infiltration to the ground and the settling of fertile soil. It also helps to enhance moisture gradients across farming fields, consequently, improving the productivity of the land. Most people in Fafan are agro-pastoralists, and besides landowners, pastoralists will also benefit from the improved pasture around the areas where the WSW was constructed.

Compared to contour bunding and other soil and water conservation techniques implemented in the Somali Region for years, the WSW shows better results – albeit at a higher construction cost. So far, six water-spreading weirs have been completed. It is hoped that the WSWs would be effective in restoring degraded areas and returning hopes to those households who are in despair and considering permanently migrating to other areas.

ERCS, and Wetland International, along with GIZ, are widely promoting WSWs with other complementary soil and water conservation measures such as area closure, revegetation with fruit and fodder trees, and community sensitization. There is a continuous effort to influence the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) to integrate the WSW and other measures in their woreda level plans to scale up the Eco-DRR model for vulnerable woredas of the Somali Region.



*Local beneficiary of water storage restoration project in Harta ali bayle kebele, Mulacle village, Ethiopia.  
Photo credit: Mohammad Hasnain/UNEP*

## The Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP V)

PSNP is the Government of Ethiopia's multi-billion dollar programme which was launched in 2005 with the aim of addressing rural food insecurity, building resilience, and reducing the need for humanitarian appeals. Over the years, the program expanded gradually to cover about 8 million direct beneficiaries from 2.5 million rural households in 40 percent of the country's districts (woredas). PSNP V was launched this year with a total budget of 2.2 billion USD. Some of the target woredas of the Eco-DRR project are also a target of PSNP V programme and it would be a suitable opportunity to influence the public work component to consider Eco-DRR approaches for effective and sustainable risk reduction among vulnerable communities.



Photo 1: Mohamed Dahir Osman – Hare 2 kebele Natural Resource Management Committee member. Photo Credit: Abdifatah Hussein/Ethiopian Red Cross. Photo 2: Devastated farming land by gully formation – Hare 2 Kebele. Photo Credit: Mohammad Hasnain/ UNEP. Photo 3: Water Spreading Weir – Hare 2 Kebele. Photo Credit: Mohammad Hasnain/UNEP.

Mohamed Dahir Osman is a farmer who lives with his family of 9 members in Hare 2 Kebele. He is one of the beneficiaries of the WSW built by the Eco-DRR project. With a mixed feeling of despair and hope, he said:

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*All my relatives have suffered the adverse effects of gully formation and had to abandon their farmlands. They moved to another woreda/district. I also lost almost half of my land, and I am now just holding onto the remaining piece until it perishes. You feel hopeless when you see the massive reddish water encroaching on your land out of nowhere, gashing through your farmland and uprooting crops and breaking blocks of soil and in the end leaving behind a vast and degraded valley. I have seen similar water spreading weir constructed in other kebeles/villages that protected their land. It is beyond our capacity to construct a weir ourselves, and we are grateful that the Red Cross did it for us. This has renewed my hope and I'm motivated to contribute and see that the 'flash flood-monster' is tamed and the fertility of our land returned.*

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Mohamed is also a member of the Natural Resource Management (NRM) committee that was established and trained by the Eco-DRR project. The roles and responsibilities of his committee are described in the community by-laws, which includes sustainable management and protection of the communal enclosure areas. He said that members of the committee will do whatever they can, and they will continue seeking support to expand water and soil conservation measures to lift them out of poverty and out of dependency on food aid.

