

# Promising practices

## Empowering landless youth by distributing hillside land



**Hillside land distribution to landless youth has been undertaken since 1999 in Hawezien District, in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia. Results are encouraging, providing inspiration for others.**



### Aims of the project

The overall aim of REST's work is to decrease the number of food insecure people in Tigray. To achieve this goal, this particular project aims to;

- **support** landless youths in income generating activities through seedling plantation and bee-keeping,
- **contribute** to halting soil and land degradation through environmental rehabilitation and natural resource management,
- **decrease** migration to urban areas.

The project targets landless youth, which comprise 25% of the total inhabitants in the district. In Hawezien, 360 landless youth have received a total of 90 hectares of hillside land.



### WHY FOCUS ON LANDLESS YOUTH?

Overpopulation is a major problem in Tigray, and land is becoming very scarce and fragmented. Land size per household is 0.5 to 1.5 hectares in highland areas, and 2 to 3 hectares in the lowland. Due to the scarcity of land, the regional government has halted reallocation or redistribution of land. This means that farmers, particularly the youth, who were not old enough to get land in the land reallocations, have no future in farming. They have to migrate to urban areas to seek other means of survival, or they are forced to depend on their parents. Thus, they are not able to be productive and active participants in the farming systems in their communities.

Relief Society of Tigray (REST) is a local organization, working to combat food insecurity and to reverse environmental degradation. REST aims to reduce the unemployment rate among youth. One of the strategies practiced by REST is distribution of hillside land to landless youth, after first establishing structures for soil and water conservation. The rehabilitation and distribution of hillside land both reverses the environmental degradation in hillsides, and creates income sources for the youth.

This "Promising practice" is one example of the many development projects funded by the Development Fund of Norway. A "promising practice" is not a blueprint for other projects. However, the Development Fund believes this particular experience provides insights that are relevant elsewhere, provided care is taken to adapt to local circumstances.

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## Interventions, management and benefits



### What are the project interventions?

Interventions are undertaken to obtain maximum benefit from the distributed land, for the youths themselves and for the whole community. These are:

- **Planting of different trees:** *Lucenia leucocephala*, *Sesbania secant*, *Eucalyptus camadulensis* and *Olea africana*. All have different traits, and together provide both sources of fodder and building materials that can be consumed or sold. Mostly, the youths prefer the eucalyptus, because it grows fast and demand for it is high in the local or regional market.
- **Bee-keeping:** The youths are also engaged in bee-keeping activities. With the increased tree planting, there is more available flowers and pollen.
- **Water** tanks or ponds are constructed for watering the seedlings.
- **Soil and water conservation** structures are constructed by free labor contribution from the whole community. This is done to encourage and motivate the youth for further development, to cover the expenses of land preparation, and to motivate them to manage their land properly.

### How do they manage?

The youth groups have formulated their own bylaws as rules and regulations. The bylaws regulate:

- **How to protect** the land from encroachment of livestock and how to punish people who let their livestock graze on the protected land. Each member contributes 0,50 USD per year for the guard.
- **How to maintain** terraces made in his/her plot each year.
- **How to manage** the trees, including pruning, weeding, and watering. This is included in the bylaws because the beneficiaries are mutually dependent on each and every one of them maintaining their plots.

### What do the youth get out of it?

- Beneficiaries get a **land ownership certificate**, in the same manner as regular farm land. This makes the project sustainable and motivates the youth to develop long term plans.
- The youths are able to **maintain their roots** at their place of origin as well as continue their established social relationships.
- The youths can support their future **families**.
- They are **not forced to migrate** to urban areas to seek work.

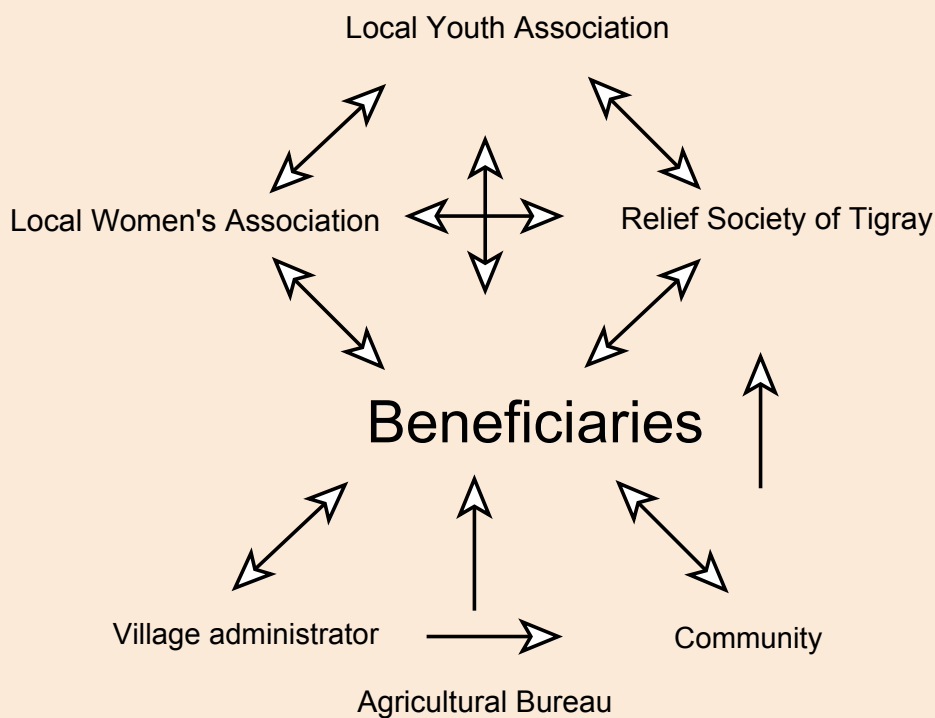


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## Collaboration and partnership



### Who collaborates?

To achieve the aims of the project, government and civil society organizations are participating at different levels (village or regional) with defined responsibilities:

- **Beneficiaries (youth):** Each individual youth assesses, identifies and prioritizes his/her needs through written or oral communication to his/her association at the community level. The beneficiaries as a group also formulate rules and regulations on how to manage their land in collaboration with other stakeholders. Together, they develop bylaws or legislation in order to avoid misuse of the land. For instance, to conserve the vegetation and biodiversity, fodder has to be cut, carried away and fed to the livestock. Penalties are therefore imposed on anyone leaving livestock to graze inside their land. The youth are responsible for decision making, monitoring, evaluation and implementation of the activities.
- **Associations:** Most communities have local youth and women associations. These forward their members' needs and make suggestions to the village representatives. The village representatives forward their suggested activities to the sub-district council to discuss and decide in collabo-

ration with the associations. The associations also develop criteria for selecting youth beneficiaries.

- **The surrounding communities:** The communities themselves suggest what communal land should be distributed. They also contribute free labour in order to undertake soil and water conservation activities on the distributed land, which further encourages the youth to engage in rehabilitation and income generating activities.
- **Village administration:** The villages distribute the hillside land to the beneficiaries according to the selected target groups and criteria, as well as register the ownership of the land to the beneficiaries.
- **Agricultural bureau:** The bureaus' extension workers provide technical support at district and village level, such as training to beneficiaries on how to grow trees and on the management of forest and integration of different components, such as beehives.
- **Relief Society of Tigray:** REST provides and facilitates provision of input and training for the beneficiaries. They also arrange experience sharing among the groups of beneficiaries.
- **Regional Government of Tigray:** The government provides land certificates to the beneficiaries.

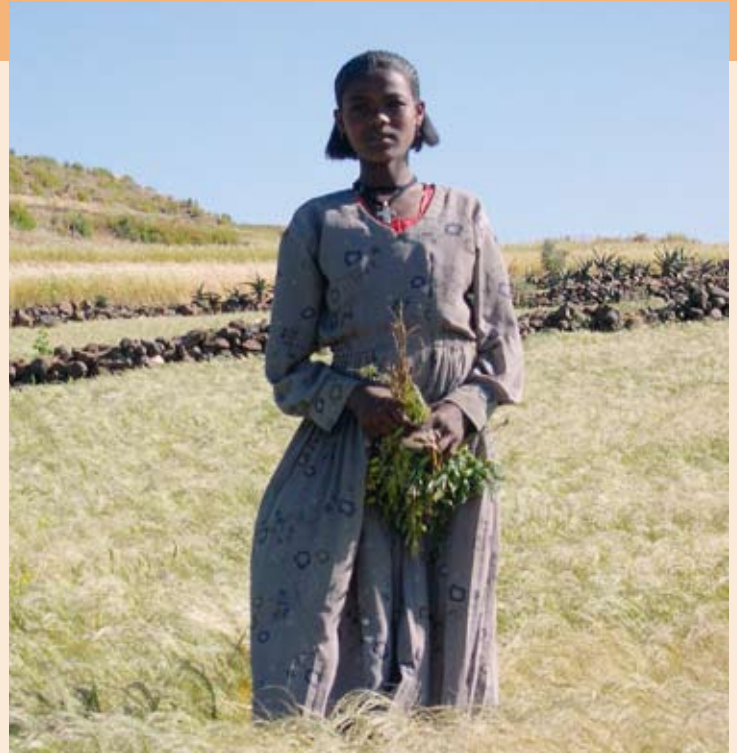


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## Impacts, challenges and lessons



### What are the impacts?

REST monitors impact by interviewing beneficiaries and by analysing secondary data from the agricultural bureaus. So far, the youths are clearly benefiting from the interventions:

- **Fodder** (grass and leaves) for animals is available every year after the rainy season. On average, each person gets 10 bales of grass per year.
- **Eucalyptus** is both used by the youths themselves, and sold in the market. On average, each beneficiary gets the equivalent of 60 USD per year from selling eucalyptus.
- **Honey** production provides each beneficiary with an income of 50-90 USD per year.
- **Shrubs** are used for firewood and fencing in a controlled manner.

### What are the challenges?

- **High demand of land** by the beneficiaries, because of scarcity of treated hillside land to be distributed to the youths.
- **Low survival rate** of seedlings due to prolonged drought in the region and scarcity of water in the area.
- **The number of landless** youths is still increasing.

### What lessons are learnt?

- **Organizing the youths** in producer and user groups is vital for the success of a program.
- **Collaboration** between civil society actors and government at local and regional level, is important to formulate policies and bylaws for sustainable land management.
- **Integration of short and long term** activities such as planting tree seedlings, fruit crops and bee keeping is vital for continued economic benefit.
- **Partnership** between NGOs and local actors is essential for the success of a project.
- **Targeting youth** is important to decrease urban migration and sustain rural livelihoods.
- **Training** is necessary to develop skills to make a project successful.



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