HELVETAS

CAPABILITY STATEMENT



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STRENGTHENING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

Exposure and vulnerability to climate change is a global concern but is particularly challenging in highland areas such as Northern Amhara. At Helvetas, we understand resilience as the ability to anticipate and cope with the adverse effects of climate and disaster risks. Our experience shows that through a systemic, multi-stakeholder approach with capacity building at its core, resilience can be strengthened through a set of adapted and localized measures that link development, rehabilitation, and relief.

ABOUT HELVETAS

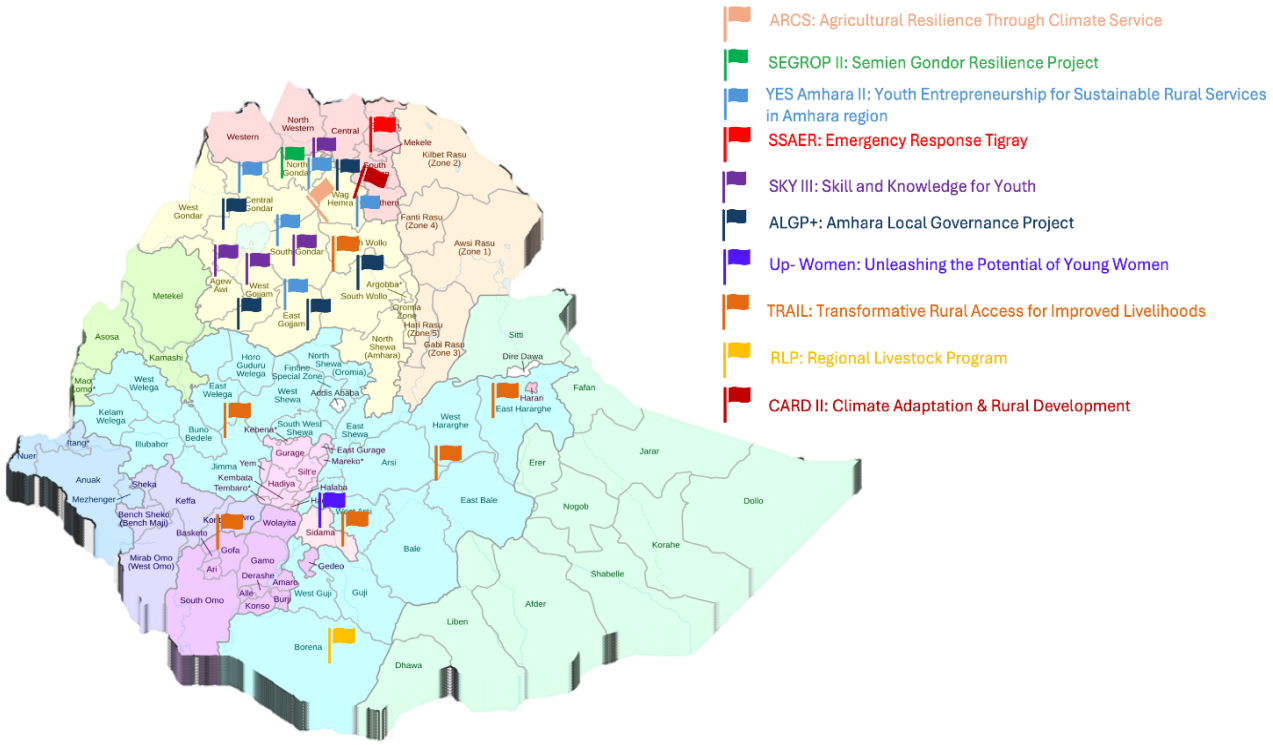
Helvetas is committed to a just world in which all men and women determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner. Helvetas is an independent organization based in Switzerland with affiliated organizations in Germany and the United States.
Helvetas supports poor and disadvantaged women, men and communities in about thirty developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

HOW WE WORK

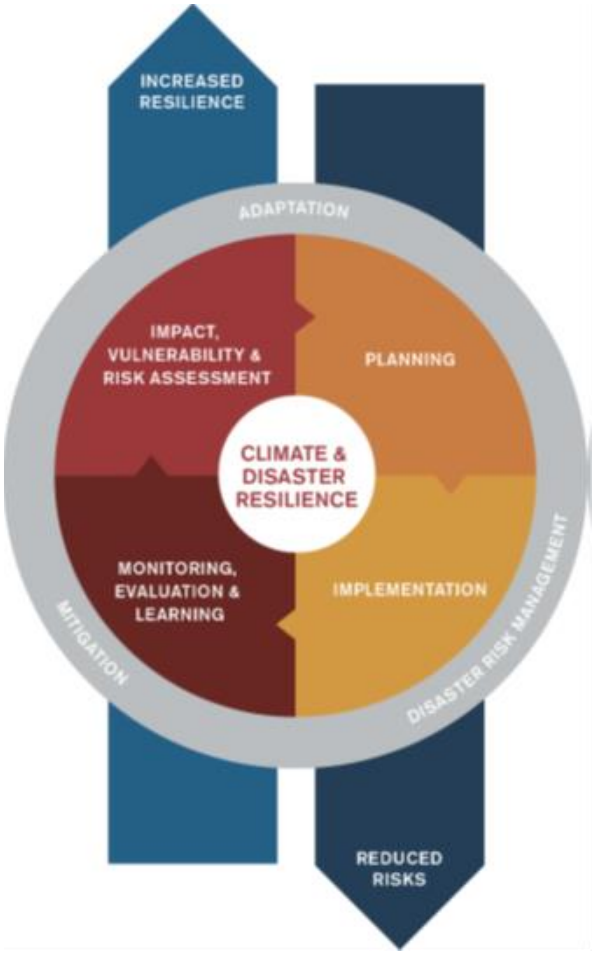
We support women and men in taking charge of improving their livelihoods in a sustainable manner and in working together as partners. The impact of our work is the product of a three-pronged approach: project work, thematic and methodological advice as well as policy dialogue at local, regional and international levels.
We are convinced that development can only be effective if the conditions of long-term engagement are met. We have gained a wealth of experience from more than six decades of working in more than 30 countries.

ABOUT HELVETAS ETHIOPIA

HELVETAS Ethiopia has been supporting development goals in the country since 1976. Starting with agricultural vocational training and extension in Northern Ethiopia, since 2002 it has evolved into an increasingly large and thematically comprehensive portfolio of projects in the agricultural and education sectors, in WASH and skills development & employment, but also in rural infrastructure and road bridges. Working with a nexus approach, capacity and experience has also been acquired in emergency response.



CLIMATE AND DISASTER RESILIENCE IN A NUTSHELL



Helvetas supports disadvantaged people in improving their water and food security while strengthening their resilience to climate and disaster risks, in both rural and urban contexts. The resilience of people and ecosystems is strengthened through locally led action, improved capacity and accountability of public, civil and private actors, and more global cooperation based on climate justice.

Helvetas projects follow the main steps of the adaptation cycle, a process that starts with an assessment of climate and disaster risks, continues with participatory planning and implementation of resilience measures, and ends with monitoring of progress to inform future improvements and ensure accountability.

For Helvetas, resilience is first and foremost a capacity: the ability to anticipate, prepare for, cope with and recover from disasters and crises without destroying livelihoods for the future. For our work and the sustainability of our projects with partners, this means that we need to be aware of the climate and disaster risks in our project areas. Based on the analysis of climate and disaster risks, specific measures need to be taken in all projects.

Figure 1 CDR in Helvetas Strategy 2025-28

A climate and disaster risk always consists of several components: the actual natural hazard, vulnerability to the natural hazard, and exposure. While determining the natural hazard and exposure requires primarily environmental considerations, vulnerability is defined by social, economic and political factors.

To strengthen the resilience of individuals or village communities, it is essential to be aware of all these factors and to assess the most effective ways to reduce risk by addressing one or more risk factors. Vulnerability can be reduced through capacity building, exposure through nature-based risk reduction solutions, and in some cases, it is possible to influence the hazard directly, for example, drought risk reduction through proper soil management.

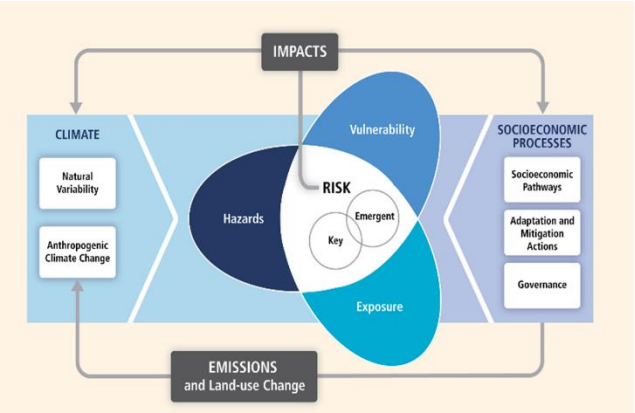


Figure 2 The Risk Propeller, Fig 19-1 IPCC AR6 (2022)

MAINSTREAMING AT COUNTRY PROGRAMME LEVEL

In line with Helvetas' global strategy and vision, Helvetas Ethiopia's work focuses on securing people's basic rights, creating new opportunities for work and income, and strengthening good governance at all levels. In particular, the basic rights to food and water, as well as better opportunities for work and income, are areas that are severely affected by climate change and increasing disaster risks. And good governance in the face of climate change means integrating climate knowledge and risk awareness at all levels of government.
Ethiopia already has a challenging climate and geography, and climate change will only add to the challenges of sustaining livelihoods. There is a need to mainstream climate disaster resilience into all HELVETAS projects. Building staff capacity through regional training and risk assessments that incorporate climate projections is key. As the level of risk depends not only on the natural hazard, but also on exposure and vulnerability, including social, economic and political factors, project design also incorporates Do No Harm principles and extends the resilience focus beyond water, food and climate projects to harness the potential for adaptation and mitigation opportunities.

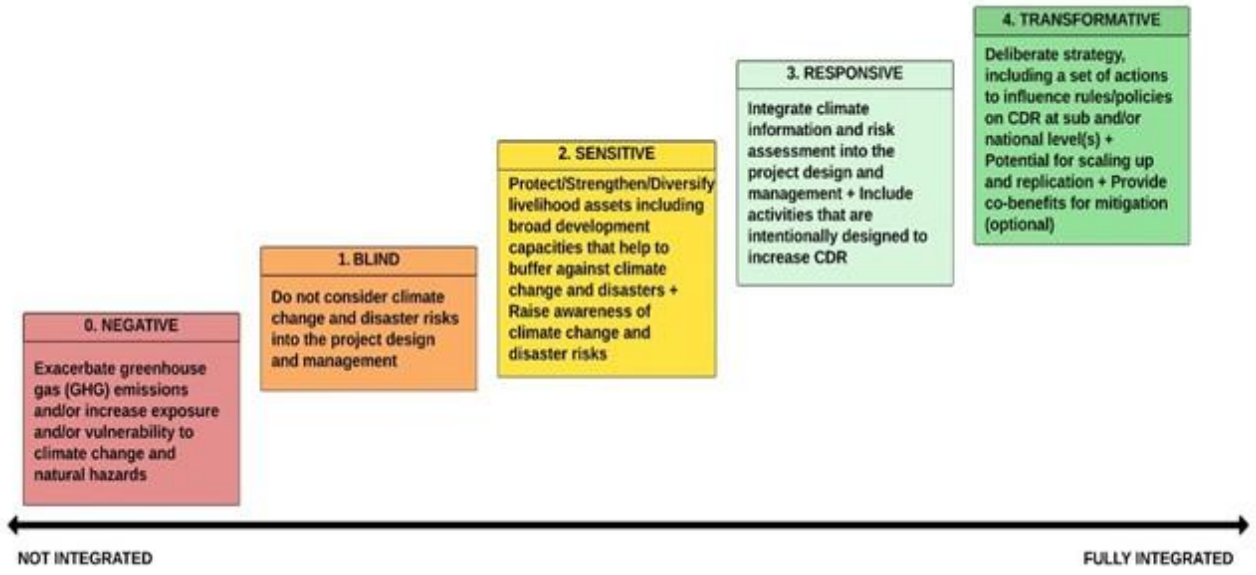


Figure 3 The CDR Integration Marker, Helvetas 2025.

It is an institutional goal of Helvetas globally and Helvetas Ethiopia to integrate climate-resilient development into their strategic frameworks and to establish internal accountability structures and processes to track progress. To this end, all country programmes are being trained to integrate the climate marker into their monitoring system and to track the degree to which climate resilience is being mainstreamed at programme and project level.
The country programme and all ongoing projects will be assessed annually for their level of mainstreaming of climate and disaster resilience, and all projects will be supported to move to the next higher level, with the minimum level of climate sensitivity, aiming at responsive or transformative action to address climate and disaster risks.

HELVETAS has and will continue to work for systemic change at three interrelated levels. First, it empowers rural and urban communities to manage ecosystems responsibly and demand quality services for sustainable access to water, food and infrastructure. Second, it motivates and supports public, civil society and private sector partners to act inclusively and sustainably. Finally, it seeks to facilitate conducive policies for climate-resilient development and the empowerment of marginalized populations. By integrating these approaches, HELVETAS aims to build community resilience, improve livelihoods and promote sustainable change that benefits the most vulnerable.

STEP BY STEP AT PROJECT LEVEL

In order to build resilience to climate change and disasters, and to address existing local risks with appropriate measures, while being aware of the risk of maladaptation, each project goes through a series of steps in planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and replanning.

Analysing local risks

Disaster risks and climate impacts vary locally. Therefore, preparedness and adaptation must be locally adapted and locally planned, based on prior capacity building of all stakeholders. Climate and disaster risk assessments are key to any planning phase. Different assessment methods have been used according to local needs and partners' priorities:

- Project managers and partners have been trained in the Climate Fresk method to deepen understanding of causes and impacts, based on the best available science from the IPCC.
- The Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (CVCA), originally developed by CARE, was used in the planning phase of SEGORP II. This highly participatory approach was complemented by our own analysis of regional climate projections for the coming decades.
- An initial rapid needs assessment was complemented by a more in-depth and participatory community risk and needs analysis, which guided the planning of the CARD project, considering social, economic and environmental parameters.



Picture: Project teams and partners trained in Climate Fresk methodology

Tailor-made capacity building

Participatory planning

A sound understanding of the causes and effects of climate change is necessary in order to identify appropriate and effective solutions. Based on the climate and disaster risk assessment, Helvetas supports stakeholders at all levels in developing tailor-made risk reduction and adaptation plans. This involves identifying and prioritising the most appropriate adaptation measures based on the local context, and mobilising funding to support these adaptation and risk management efforts.

- All projects are based on multi-stakeholder coordination, involving civil society, farmers' groups and authorities at different levels.
- For SEGORP, participatory planning is a prerequisite. Training of trainers is key to sustainability, and the process involves thematic experts from different sectors to ensure a multidisciplinary approach. This is followed by field-level assessments with the active participation of civil society representatives, community-based organisations and farmers representing different community members from poor, middle and marginalised groups. This stakeholder collaboration results in integrated climate risk assessments and the development of comprehensive disaster risk profiles for each woreda.
- In CARD II, participatory planning also begins with vulnerability assessments at the kebele or watershed level. This analysis is carried out by the watershed committees in collaboration with government partners. It leads to watershed development plans, which are jointly agreed by all stakeholders and serve as the basis for all further activities. The plans are also the basis for joint monitoring and evaluation.

Strengthening knowledge is a key principle for sustainability and success. Particularly in the area of climate and disaster risks, traditional knowledge is no longer sufficient to correctly assess situations caused by climate change. Helvetas Ethiopia is aware of this and invests heavily in the training of its project teams and partners.

- CARD and SEGORP teams and partners have been trained in the Climate Fresk methodology to understand the latest climate science.
- Capacity building and training for all partners and stakeholders is a key element of our work. CARD II trains government officials and community members in climate and disaster risk analysis and in developing adaptation measures that are appropriate to the context and priorities. The same is true for SEGORP II, with an additional focus on disaster preparedness and early warning systems.



Picture: Farmers trained in analysing weather parameters

Developing and prioritizing options

Typically, there are various technical options for reducing climate or disaster risk and strengthening resilience. Of course, it is not only the effectiveness of a measure that matters, but also its financial viability, social acceptability and potential for sustainability. Inclusive and participatory processes are therefore important to consider all these aspects from the different perspectives of all stakeholders.

In a well-managed process, Helvetas also ensures that both short-term disaster preparedness and long-term measures are considered. In a region as affected by poverty and immediate needs as this one, there is a certain and understandable tendency to privatise short-term measures. However, in order to sustain livelihoods in the long term, it is imperative that we also take a long-term view. A good example of this is afforestation, where fast-growing trees can quickly lead to more timber and income, but in the long term can completely upset the ecological balance.

And even when well-planned and supported, there are contextual changes that lead to further adjustments. It is important that project planning and budgets can be handled flexibly using the crisis modifier mechanism.

Implementation and monitoring in partnership

From the design to the implementation of an intervention, we adopt a partnership approach and work with multiple stakeholders to find sustainable solutions. This is particularly important in a context of constant change, especially due to climate change, but also due to social and economic processes that also affect the project.

Flexibility and joint adaptive planning with all stakeholders is therefore important. But also, flexibility in the tools used to assess risks and changes. It is therefore very important to us that we involve our partners as much as possible in every phase of implementation - from planning to implementation to evaluation - and that we repeatedly evaluate the results achieved together.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (CARD)

Client/Funding Source	DF Norwegian Fund
Key Partners	Departments of Agriculture, Livestock Resource Development, Women and Children Affairs, Zone Cooperative offices, Sekota Dryland Research Center, Woreda offices.
Duration	CARD I: 2016-2020 CARD II: 2021 - 2025
Volume	1.4 / 2.5 Mio. CHF

Climate resilience and food security in Wag-Hemra Zone

This remote area is hampered in its development by its isolation and limited economic potential, coupled with ongoing environmental threats to the rural community, in particular prolonged drought and erratic rainfall, which could negatively affect environmental rehabilitation and food security.
The project aims to achieve the following results

- Improved and equitable food security for rural households
- Increased economic empowerment of rural men and women, including youth and marginalised groups; and
- Improved government policies and services in line with the needs, rights and priorities of rural communities.

CARD will strengthen the sustainable management of scarce resources through the introduction of improved climate-smart practices in agriculture and livestock and will support marketing capacities and linkages with cooperatives and the private sector.

As the area is highly affected by unemployment and emigration, it is important to target women and youth. The Social Analysis and Action approach has enabled communities to reflect on their social and gender dynamics and has led to the empowerment of women.

Sustainability is achieved through a **Climate Adapted Village approach**. It ensures that communities remain at the centre of all processes and that the micro-watershed in which the community is located is the unit of planning and implementation. The vulnerability and needs assessment consider social, environmental, climatic and economic factors and is the basis for the structured process leading to the implementation, monitoring, sharing and upscaling of adaptation and livelihood improvement measures.



Capacity building in book keeping for economic empowerment

Results

Key achievements of this ongoing project to date are: More than 18,000 disadvantaged community members have been involved in resilience-building activities and report an increase in productivity and/or income as a result of the agricultural practices adopted. This positive change is linked to several interventions: A very important factor is the **improved access and quality of nutritious seeds** for different adapted crop varieties for more than 3000 households, which have increased their production by 30 and up to 50% according to official government

reports. Up to 30% **reduction in wood consumption** following the introduction of energy-efficient cook stoves, with a corresponding reduction in deforestation rates.

There has been good uptake of newly recommended practices, including permanent gardening and seed systems:

- Livestock management is being improved by increasing access to fodder and improved poultry, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable households, which are very often female-headed. To date, the project has provided nearly 3,000 Koekoek chickens, an improved drought-tolerant variety, as well as improved sheets, targeted at female-headed households, and another improved goat for vulnerable households.
- At the organisational level, the legal establishment of watershed cooperatives and the creation of self-help groups focused on financial empowerment have been very successful.
- Wide acceptance is also evidenced by the government's positive endorsement of these practices, as well as the proactive measures taken by partners to integrate the practices into their annual plans.
- Based on the Social Analysis and Action approach, the promotion of gender and social justice has led to empowered community reflection and dynamics, with women gaining greater recognition and access to better positions in local organisations. More than 500 community members, organised in 13 SAA groups, have been trained and led to these results.

The project has improved the income-generating skills of young people, women and people with disabilities. They are supported to engage in viable enterprises and by diversifying their income opportunities, they should become more resilient to shocks and crises.

- Since the start of the project, 1640 self-help group members and 761 women, youth and people with disabilities have been trained in income-generating activities. 100% of all who received training and loans were engaged in viable businesses at the end of the period.



- The creation of business opportunities for 49 youth in 10 small and medium enterprises was supported. Young people were trained and supported to engage in rural enterprises such as tree nurseries, livestock, poultry, irrigation and garment production.
- More than 40 local government representatives were trained in technical and management skills, as they are also partners in implementation. They have been trained in the Climate Village approach and in social analysis and action, as well as in concrete practices of risk assessment and climate-smart agriculture.

Key Insights

Traditional social and especially gender inequalities and exclusionary structures can be addressed through a carefully facilitated discussion process. Initial resistance to women's empowerment can be transformed into support by demonstrating the opportunities for the whole community.

Seed producer cooperatives play a key role in the production, distribution and availability of drought-tolerant seeds, which are scarce in rural areas.

Learning by doing, through training, demonstration trials and experience-sharing events such as community field days, is the most effective way to improve adoption of new practices.

Government partners play a key role in supporting and implementing activities at both zone and kebele levels. Building on the training provided by the project, they are also pillars of sustainability.

SEMIEN GONDAR RESILIENCE PROJECT - SEGORP

Client/Funding Source	ADA Austrian Development Agency, Helvetas
Key Partners	North Gondar Zone Administration, Concern Worldwide
Duration	SEGORP I: 2021 - 2023 SEGORP II: 2023 - 2026
Volume	CHF 4 Mio.

Cross sectoral community resilience and empowerment

Helvetas, Concern Worldwide and the North Gondar Zonal Administration have formed a strategic partnership that brings together complementary skills to address the complex nature of poverty in the zone. The overall objective of this second phase of the project is to strengthen household and community resilience to climate change through the development of adaptive, absorptive and transformative capacities. The project has defined the following specific expected outcomes

- Communities build resilience to climate shocks through early warning, disaster preparedness and sustainable natural resource management.
- Increased agricultural diversity and productivity through climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agricultural technologies and practices.
- Community organisations have gained capacity for resilience and adaptation to climate change

Our theory of change is based on the belief that household and community resilience to climate change can be strengthened through interlinked systems. We work in parallel in the areas of improved natural resource management and strengthened disaster risk reduction, improved livelihoods, improved market access, improved nutrition and strong women's empowerment. The project aims to directly reach at least 13,000 households or 70,000 people.



Terracing in North Gonder

Results

The **integrated and participatory climate risk assessment** and the development of **disaster risk profiles for each woreda** are successfully underway, laying the foundation for climate and disaster risk-sensitive planning and management. Three woredas, Debark, Janamora and Beyeda, have completed and adopted their plans and are working with them.
The profiles include climate projections for North Gondar Zone. Based on the best available scientific information, these climate projections highlight important local and regional trends in climate change and guide effective adaptation strategies.

In partnership with the West Amhara Meteorological Centre, SEGORP II is **supporting the dissemination of weather information to places beyond the reach of the centre**, and we are also strengthening local data collection. For example, the Kiremt rainfall forecast for 2024 has been disseminated to 63 partners, strengthening local early warning efforts. On the other hand, 15 rain gauges have been installed to support farmers' monitoring and crop calendars.

If a disaster cannot be prevented, SEGORP is also active in **emergency relief.** Following a major landslide, the project provided unconditional cash transfers to more than 200 households, 25% of which were headed by women. The timely assistance played a crucial role in saving lives and helping families return to their homes.

Promoting **climate-smart agricultural practices** plays a vital role in ensuring the resilience of communities and smallholder farmers:

- **Land rehabilitation and sustainable management practices** are showing results in terms of increased yields: wheat from 1.2 to 1.5 tonnes per hectare, barley from 1.6 to 1.8. In total, more than 140 hectares of land have been rehabilitated in just one year, and further efforts are underway.
- A partnership with the Gondar Agriculture Research Centre (GARC) is paving the way for **scaling up drought-tolerant crops** such as teff, sorghum, sweet potato, vegetables, Irish potato and beans by identifying the best performing varieties for the target woredas.



- Improved and diversified agricultural production is expected to lead not only to higher incomes, but also **to improved nutritional status** and health of the population. For this reason, nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices will be promoted in the field and combined with cooking demonstrations at nutrition corners in several health posts.

There is no sustainable resilience without **functional and strong organisations** at all levels and at all stages of planning and implementation.

- As the basic planning unit is the watershed, functional **watershed user cooperatives** are key. To date, 13 cooperatives have been established and legalised with project support, and management committee members have been trained, including 77 women and 12 people with disabilities.
- Ninety **Village Economic and Social Association** groups have been formed in 18 water sheds, with more than 2000 members, 70% of whom are women and people with disabilities.
- Strengthening **community-based organisations** is a key strategy to achieve sustainability. 30 community-based organisations have been trained and supported, of which 18 are community watershed associations, nine are kebele-level women's associations and three are savings and credit cooperatives.

SEGORP II also promotes training and support for income-generating activities that enable diversification, a key strategy for resilience.

- Ram fattening is an important **income-generating activity**, enabling 120 households to earn half the minimum annual household income in just three months. The project financed 70% of the cost of four rams per household, while the remaining 30% was covered by households through watershed cooperatives using a revolving fund mechanism.
- **Improved access to credit for marginalised** individuals and groups is a key achievement at the village level. Savings mobilised and distributed as loans enabled more than 1,500 people to access loans and start activities.
- **Formal and on-the-job training** is provided to address different types of training needs. Of the more than 8,500 participants in formal training, almost half (46.5%) were women who actively participated in capacity-building sessions designed to enhance their skills and empower them. In addition, more than 14,000 women participated in short on-the-job training, particularly in soil and water conservation measures.

Last but not least: Thanks to its **gender-sensitive approach**, SEGORP is able to reach out to women, integrate them into all its activities and support them to take on leadership positions. To date, more than 14,000 women have been reached, and about 50% of the watershed user cooperatives and VESAs now have women in leadership positions.

Key Insights

As poverty and vulnerability to climate risks in this rural area have multiple determinants, the focus on systemic change and cross-sectoral coordination is key to positive progress. The SEGORP approach works in parallel on

- Improving food systems by integrating innovative practices of climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture.
- Promoting sustainable management of natural resources, with a focus on soil and water.
- Strengthening community organisation and providing capacity building and close collaboration with authorities.

One of the key lessons learned is the importance of **government ownership** of the project, similar to the successes seen with block grants, particularly in the watershed approach to ecosystem enhancement. Government ownership builds capacity by providing opportunities to gain new knowledge and experience. From planning to final implementation, this ownership ensures effective implementation. In addition, focusing on system-level change allows government to focus on long-term sustainability rather than short-term gains.

Involving the private sector and market actors is also key. Strengthening the link between farmers and private companies leads to improved input supply and market access.

An **inclusive approach to participatory planning** not only improves the accuracy and relevance of assessments but also promotes local ownership and accountability. Therefore, participatory planning remains a cornerstone of our project implementation strategy and is systematically applied wherever necessary to support sustainable development outcomes.



SUSTAINABLE USE AND CONSERVATION THROUGH COMPENSATION FOR ECO-SYSTEM SERVICES - SUCCESS

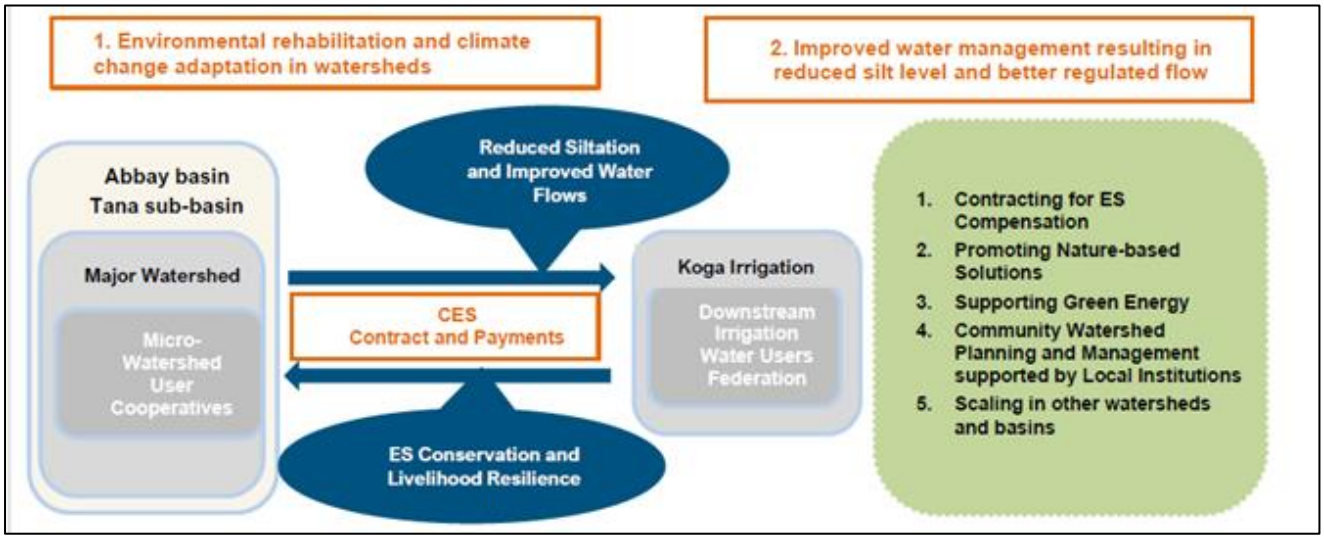
Client/Funding Source	RESET Plus Innovation Fund, HELVETAS own funds
Key Partners	World Resources Institute (WRI), Abbay Basin Administration Office (ABAO), Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE)
Duration	Phase I 2021- 2023 Phase II 2024
Volume	748,000 CHF



From a major threat to a win-win situation

Land degradation is a widespread problem in Ethiopia, contributing significantly to low agricultural productivity, rural poverty and long-term food and water insecurity. Like most of the Ethiopian highlands, the Tana sub-basin of the Abbay Basin, located in the Amhara region, is severely degraded, affecting the ecosystem services (ES) of the landscape.

The SUCCESS project proposes a **compensation mechanism** that incentivises upstream farming communities to restore, protect and use their land sustainably, thereby securing the land's ability to provide ecosystem services such as water storage and provision, and reduced erosion and sedimentation.



The Koga watershed in the Tana sub-basin is a prime example where such neglect has led to overuse and overexploitation of natural resources. In addition, unsustainable land use practices result in persistent and worsening soil erosion, deforestation, degradation of river water quality, siltation at the Koga dam site, and reduced or uncontrolled water flows for irrigation. This threatens water, food and livelihood security.

To compensate the upstream communities, organised in Watershed User Cooperatives, for this additional effort, they agreed with the downstream Irrigation Water User Association on a wide range of financial and in-kind compensation options.

Key Results

The Compensation for Ecosystem Services (CES) model was piloted for the first time in the region and showed promising results in the five watersheds where it was introduced:

- Multi-stakeholder platforms were successfully established at each key level: zone, woreda, watershed and community.
- All the necessary management tools have been developed and successfully tested: watershed management plans, water quality and flow monitoring, guidelines for community agreements.
- Capacity building has been carried out and training manuals developed for further dissemination.
- The establishment of watershed user cooperatives and irrigation water user associations has been supported.
- Achieving more than 30% female participation demonstrates successful gender mainstreaming, ensuring that women are actively involved in decision-making and activities. This contributes to a more balanced and sustainable community engagement with ecosystem services.

Key Insights

Ongoing efforts include watershed conservation to reduce sedimentation and extend infrastructure lifespan, livelihood diversification for food security, and sustainable farming to boost productivity. Continuous monitoring through participatory M&E ensures progress and adaptation.

A high percentage of willingness to pay among ecosystem service users indicates recognition of the value of ecosystem services, which ensures financial sustainability. Similarly, a high willingness of providers to provide services and accept payments indicates effective incentive mechanisms and trust in the compensation system, leading to long-term conservation and improved livelihoods.

A functioning financing mechanism ensures sustainable ecosystem services, while reduced sediment yield in pilot watersheds demonstrates the success of conservation practices, improving water quality and infrastructure longevity. Both outcomes demonstrate effective project interventions and long-term environmental benefits.

The high number of watersheds and kebeles interested in establishing the CES mechanism demonstrates strong community commitment and willingness to adopt ecosystem service initiatives, ensuring wider participation and success.



Photo description.

MORE INFORMATION

- Helvetas Ethiopia Webpage
- Helvetas Ethiopia publications on climate and disaster resilience
- Climate Adaptation and Rural Development (WH-CARD II)

OUR EXPERT/S

Our team consists of highly professional and committed thematic experts and project managers with many years of experience. Meet the team here:



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WHAT WE CAN OFFER

Together with our expert colleagues from Helvetas headquarters we can offer a broad-based expertise working from the local to national, regional and international level – combining science, policy and practice. We support and advice in design, formulation, implementation and also monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects in the areas of climate and disaster resilience and sustainably food systems. We also offer experience in the development of context-specific analytical tools and methods and delivery of tailor-made trainings.

WE ARE SUPPORTED BY

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