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FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA  
MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT



# Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Biodiversity and Forestry Programme (BFP):  
Protecting Nature to Protect People





# Growing Change

How Tigist Niguse and the Opi Cooperative Made a Difference for Their Community

Located in SWEPR

TIGIST NIGUSE

LEADER OF OPI COOPERATIVE GROUP

Tigist Niguse, a resident of Selam Ber Kebele in Sheka Zone, has lived her entire life in the area. Before joining the Opi Cooperative, Tigist faced significant financial challenges, working tirelessly to support her family through activities such as brewing local liquor, performing household chores, and assisting her husband on their farm. Despite her efforts, she struggled to make ends meet:

“I had a lot of problems in my life before. I was worried about how I would feed and raise my children, and this was when the cooperative started.”

In 2022, Tigist became the leader of the Opi Cooperative Group, comprising 50 women who collaborate to generate sustainable incomes. The group engages in diverse activities, including agricultural best practices, managing a seedling nursery, and selling seedlings to farmers, investors, and other buyers. Tigist reflects on their journey: “When we first established the cooperative group, we were overwhelmed. We were talking about how we were going to do it and if we would be able to do it. We were eager to work and now enjoy our responsibilities. My responsibility is to lead the cooperative, to support and motivate the women of the association, and bring them forward.”

The Biodiversity and Forestry Programme (BFP) played a pivotal role in supporting the cooperative, providing financial assistance, technical support, equipment, materials, and training. The government identified 50 women and allocated land for their activities, laying the foundation for the group’s success. Tigist notes the impact of this support: “There was a lot of change after we started working together. Through our work, we changed our lives, bought our children school supplies, and paid for their schools in September. I think the upcoming sale will improve, and we will generate more.”

The members of the cooperative have also benefited from comprehensive training, enhancing their skills in areas such as leadership, teamwork, and seedling cultivation:

“We’ve taken trainings. One of the trainings was about what a cooperative is and how to work together. Before being appointed as the leader of the cooperative group, I also received individual leadership training. In addition, a zonal agricultural expert came and showed us the planting process of seedlings and how to take care of them. With these trainings and support, we’ve been able to grow and sell seedlings.”

However, challenges remain. The cooperative faces resource limitations, including inadequate equipment and a lack of access to market connections. Watering seedlings by hand from the river is physically demanding, and Tigist highlights the need for a water pump and additional tools: “When we are getting water from the river to water our seedlings, we strain our bodies from carrying the water. We need a water pump. We also have a shortage of equipment. We bring different farming devices from our husbands to add to the ones we have here. We also lack proper market connection.”

With continued support and determination, Tigist and the Opi Cooperative are paving the way for sustainable livelihoods and a brighter future for their community.

We changed our lives, bought our children school supplies and paid for their schools in September.





# Uniting for Conservation

How the Southwest Forest Alliance Platform Shaped Natural Resource Management in Sheka Zone

Located in SWEPR

**DANIEL ABERA**

EXPERT IN BIODIVERSITY SECTOR,  
SHEKA ZONE AGRICULTURE  
DEPARTMENT

Daniel Abera has been working in the Biodiversity Sector of the Sheka Zone Agriculture Department since 2020. His role encompasses the conservation and development of biodiversity resources, with a focus on endangered species, as well as overseeing ecosystem management to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

Before the establishment of the Southwest Forest Alliance platform, collaboration among stakeholders in the region was fragmented. Various sectors engaged in forest and biodiversity management operated in isolation, with limited coordination or communication. As Daniel explains:

“There are different sectors, such as the energy sector, working on the forests in the area. They work in scattered places and ministries. Before the establishment of the platform, there was no way to know what they worked on and no platform to come together to exchange. For example, large-scale investments were approved without proper impact assessments, resulting in significant deforestation and environmental degradation. Investors are mainly concerned with their goals and not about the impact of the investment on the environment. And there was no way to discuss these decisions together.”

Established in 2022, the Southwest Forest Alliance Platform is a collaborative initiative between the regional government and GIZ. It aims to address critical challenges such as deforestation, land degradation, and biodiversity loss in the South West Ethiopia Peoples’ Region. This communication platform fosters partnerships and dialogue among diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, private sector actors, and other relevant entities committed to forest conservation and sustainable land management.

The platform has catalysed significant improvements in forest and biodiversity management. Daniel highlights its transformative impact:

“While the work of various organisations is to conserve forests and natural resources, there is no synergy between them. The platform has become a way of creating synergy between stakeholders and relevant actors, where they come together to discuss.

Previously, there has been very little accountability for the deforestation that was taking place. If deforesters were caught, the penalty was too small, and even after the punishment, they continued using the land. But now the Environment Protection Proclamation, developed by GIZ, is in the process to be established. Once that is approved and enacted into law, actions will be judged according to that law. With this, deforesters will be punished with prison sentence as well as land confiscation, which is followed by restoration of the deforested forest lands.”

Another milestone is the formulation of a comprehensive restoration plan, devised by the platform’s working group. This plan now serves as a guiding framework for natural resource restoration and management activities across the region. Daniel affirms its importance: “This is not a simple achievement. The results will soon be visible in the conservation of the natural resources.”

Despite these successes, challenges persist. Limited resources for sustaining the platform and high staff turnover in various sectors threaten continuity. However, the platform remains a promising model for coordinated and sustainable conservation efforts in the region.

This is not a simple achievement. The results will soon be visible in the conservation of the natural resources.





# Strengthening Conservation and Community

Protecting Chebera Churchura National Park through Collaborative Support

Located in SWEPR

FANTAHUN BILATE

HEAD OF SOUTHWEST ETHIOPIA PEOPLE'S REGIONAL STATE CULTURE, TOURISM AND SPORTS BUREAU

Fantahun Bilate, head of the Southwest Ethiopia Peoples' RegSo,re, Tourism and Sports Bureau since 2022, plays a critical role in coordinating cultural, tourism, and sports activities to ensure effective service delivery to the community. His responsibilities include overseeing the implementation and management of programs and projects within these sectors.

Before the Biodiversity and Forestry Programme (BFP) began its support, the Bureau faced numerous challenges. As a newly established region, the Southwest Ethiopia Peoples' Region grappled with a lack of coordination following its separation from the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region. This disorganisation resulted in inefficiencies, unmet objectives, and inadequate management of Chebera Churchura National Park (CCNP).

One of CCNP's most pressing issues is the persistent human-wildlife conflict, where wildlife encroaches on farmland, destroying crops in the surrounding communities. Resource shortages exacerbate the situation, impeding the implementation of recommended measures to address the problem.

"Here at CCNP, the protection of wildlife is strong, and its population and diversity are also high. That's why the elephants are pushing out and entering the lands of communities, destroying farmlands. So, there is work and studies being conducted on this matter. It was GIZ who supported the study. When the research was finished, there was a shortage of resources to implement it. Another challenge is the lack of proper infrastructure inside the park."

BFP provided vital support to the Bureau, including resources, staff training, and the development of essential management documents.

"The project's support began with the old SNNPR region, and a large number of booklets, numerous documents, leaflets, and brochures were developed and distributed. In addition, documents have been prepared that contain information about the park, to create awareness, including the public as well as higher officials, about how the park should be protected. This includes the General Management Plan of CCNP and a community engagement strategy document. This has been a great support to this bureau."

Chebera Churchura National Park also received substantial financial and technical support.

"The project has made a huge impact in supporting the park. The park has an area coverage of 1,410 km<sup>2</sup>, with wildlife scattered in different places. To assess and cover this area, outposts were built inside the park for rangers to rest and monitor, and watchtowers for enhanced viewing of the park, among other material and technical support. And by using the management plan, we conduct restoration and replantation activities in some areas of the park. As a result, the population and forest coverage have increased. Wildfires, illegal farming, and deforestation activities have lowered on a large scale."

Wildfires, illegal farming, and deforestation activities have lowered on a large scale.





# Empowering Conservation

Maeza's Commitment and the Impact of SMART Technology at Nech Sar National Park

Located in SWEPR and Oromia

**MAEZA KEBEDE**

RANGER AT NECH SAR NATIONAL PARK

Maeza Kebede Zula has devoted nearly a decade to conserving Nech Sar National Park, serving as a ranger since 2015. As the leader of the ranger team, she plays a pivotal role in safeguarding and managing the park's resources. Her dedication often requires her to work unpredictable hours, frequently exceeding the standard eight-hour shift, underscoring her unwavering commitment to her mission.

Prior to the adoption of the SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) tool, managing Nech Sar National Park was fraught with challenges.

## Documentation

relied on cumbersome paper-based methods, which were time-intensive, error-prone, and susceptible to loss. Maeza recalls: "Before SMART, it was difficult to keep track of ranger activities, monitor illegal activities effectively, or present concrete evidence of enforcement actions."

The introduction of SMART marked a transformative change. By replacing traditional methods with a reliable digital system, the efficiency and accuracy of data collection and reporting improved significantly. Maeza and her team can now record and upload detailed reports, including photographs of illegal activities, enhancing accountability and bolstering enforcement efforts. This innovation has not only streamlined ranger operations but also deterred recurring offenses, contributing to the park's long-term conservation goals.



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## From Awareness to Action

Endrias' Journey on Environmental Protection and Climate Change

Located in SERS

ENDRIAS ISRAEL

STUDENT AT NECH SAR SCHOOL

Endrias, a top-ranking student known for his academic excellence and positive relationships with peers, has embraced a transformative journey on environmental protection and climate change. His routine of studying, helping classmates, and participating in school activities now includes environmental stewardship.

Before an awareness campaign on environmental protection and climate change, Endrias and his peers were largely unaware of these critical issues. He recalls growing up without understanding the severe effects of climate change, such as the persistent droughts affecting his region: "There were a lot of problems in our area, especially drought and extreme wind. Our school used to get torn apart by the wind. After the campaign, we planted seedlings and took care of them. Each of us in the seventh grade has our own plant that we care for and water every day. They have now grown, and we are using them for shade."

The campaign, supported by experts, included training on climate change concepts, risk identification, and mitigation strategies, as well as the practical value of ecosystem services. Hands-on activities, such as planting seedlings and creating water-retention basins, equipped students with actionable skills to implement at school and at home.

"I implement what I learned, not only in the schoolyard, but also in my father's house where I live. I plant seedlings and keep the garden area clean by digging holes and burning the garbage thrown away. I'm also teaching the kids in my neighbourhood what I have learned. We plant new trees and care for existing ones together."

To sustain this momentum, school clubs in two kebeles received technical support to establish regular mini-media programmes focusing on environmental awareness.



Each of us in the seventh grade has our own plant that we care for and water every day. They have now grown, and we are using them for shade.





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Read more about  
the project here

