

News from the Nile Basin Development Challenge

Water scarcity and land degradation strongly affect the livelihoods of millions of households in the Nile basin. Agriculture is predominantly subsistence, low-yielding and rain-fed. To meet the needs of the growing populations and restore the landscapes, we need to reverse the land degradation and improve productivity.

The Nile Basin Development Challenge (Nile BDC) is funded by the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the Ethiopian highlands through a landscape (watershed) approach to rainwater management.

This news sheet provides information on some key events in the life of the project.

Inception workshop ...

The January 2010 workshop was used to kick-off the CPWF Nile BDC research program. Thirty participants from the four NBDC projects joined the workshop. During the workshop, participants worked further on their output logic models and shared their thoughts on the main practice changes and corresponding knowledge, attitudes and skills changes and strategies that their projects aim to address. Cross-project interactions and topics were identified and discussed, and project groups began work on their Milestones, modifying their Gantt charts as needed. Some of the main implementation cross-basin topics and possible ways to address these were discussed. Throughout the workshop, participants got a sense of what the CPWF core values are, how the CPWF is implementing this new phase, and how it is different from the first phase concept.

The four NBDC projects have also developed matrices of cross-project overlaps, synergies, areas of sequencing and areas to work together. The teams also developed criteria for site selection within the sub-basin, namely Socio-economic status, RWM challenges, Agro-ecologies, Production systems, Market access, and Diversity of actors (type, numbers, etc.). Based on these criteria, three sites - Jeldu and Diga Woredas (Oromia regional state) and Fogera (Amhara regional state) were selected for landscape level detailed studies.

We also made inventories of other Nile Basin RWM related on-going initiatives, mapping them to our

activities. Participants also shared their expectations from the learning 'Nile 1' project led by Doug Merry as most proposals designed their work plan with the assumption that there will be an inventory and synthesis of past lessons at the early stage of this phase.

Prior to the Inception workshop, the NBDC team conducted a pre-inception workshop to create a common understanding of the different Nile BDC projects and how they interact with each other and with similar external initiatives. It was also about creating strong linkages to produce the expected outputs and outcomes while efficiently using the available staff and budget.

Field Trip to Jeldu ...

In June 2010, twenty NBDC team members travelled to one of the selected research sites – Jeldu in the Oromia region to:

- Gain a first team insight at the watersheds and brain storm with the local officials and partners at the district level;
- Make a rapid assessment of opportunities and the challenges, including the land use/cover change at some sample locations in the woreda.



The team concluded:

- a. The local institutions are relatively weak. There is little ongoing effort to mitigate widespread land degradation owing to the unremitting steep slopes, improper land management and weak social capital;

- b. Indications are that the woreda will become entirely food insecure if the current system continues without interventions to arrest land and water degradation;
- c. There are several initiatives by external institutions that do not seem to have found appropriate niches in local systems;
- d. The Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research and the African Highlands Initiative did some work in the neighboring district to improve production systems and livelihoods which could be transferred to NBDC sites. There is interest from local officials of the Bureau's of agriculture, water and land, and from NGOs and other potential stakeholders (e.g. GTZ) to collaborate with us.

Assembling baseline information ...

In July and August, we conducted a site specific survey and rapid diagnosis in the three selected research sites: Jeldu, Fogera and Diga. We have collected the available biophysical and socio-economic data about the sites and their watersheds and assessed the level of awareness of local actors (farmers, communities, Woreda and NGO staff) in rainwater management strategies. The team captured detailed information on how the different watersheds in the landscapes function (biophysically and socially), how different landscape components are interacting and how changes in one component could bring about direct and indirect changes in others. The roles, responsibilities, interactions and the working arrangements of a range of actors involved in rainwater management related research and development investments were also assessed. The teams used key informant interviews, focus group discussions and field observations to gather relevant information in each Woreda.

Partnership formation ...

As a cross-cutting program, we pursue the integration of projects as a central strategy. The lead institutions, ILRI and IWMI, have been forging partnership arrangements with a wide range of actors at various levels. In the last three months, we have been in close interaction with major local government and NGO partners essential for successful project implementation. In general, we are building two types of partnership: 1) with organizations

who will directly engage in the project, sharing responsibilities and the funds; and 2) with organizations from the wider network, for whom we add value to what they already do, and who will participate in consultations and as targets for influence. We have signed MOUs with most of these close partners and started to collaborate in the field. Many will join the September Launch Workshop in Addis Ababa.

Communication ...

With the ILRI knowledge management and information services team, we are working up a communications strategy and adopting a set of day to day tools to support the work of the projects. We will integrate these as far as possible with what the CPWF is doing. The draft strategy will be discussed at the Launch Workshop. A set of communication briefs about the project have also been prepared.

We have given attention to our internal communication, encouraging team members to use a set of sharing and interaction tools. These include a wiki (<http://nilebdc.wikispaces.com>) to support information sharing and reporting, and a Yammer network for interaction (<http://www.yammer.com>). We will capture all significant project outputs in a public repository (<http://mahider.ilri.org/handle/10568/2296>) for wider access. Currently, we mainly use these tools to support interactions in the core team, to help in the September workshop planning, and for information sharing.

We plan to establish a project web site with links to important sites like that of CPWF and IWMI. We plan to start with an attractive 'blogging' platform that allows us to quickly and easily present our work.

Launch workshop ...

From 28-30 September, we will organize a planning and launch workshop in Addis Ababa. We will use this workshop for teams to share their progress and plans with each other and the CPWF (day 1), to officially launch the Nile BDC and get buy-in from policy makers and institution leaders and seek feedback (day 2), and to distill insights for future activities (day 3). The launch will be attended by a wide range of partners as well as senior representatives from Government.

The Nile Basin Development Challenge (NBDC) is funded by the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF). It aims to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the Ethiopian highlands through a landscape approach to rainwater management. It comprises five linked projects examining: 1) Learning from the past; 2) developing integrated rainwater management strategies; 3) targeting and scaling out of rainwater management innovations; 4) assessing and anticipating the consequences of innovation in rainwater management systems; and 5) catalyzing platforms for learning, communication and coordination across the projects.

The NBDC is implemented by a consortium comprising the International Livestock Research Institute, International Water Management Institute, World Agroforestry Centre, Overseas Development Institute, Nile Basin Initiative, Stockholm Environment Institute, Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute, Catholic Relief Services – Ethiopia, Oromia Regional Research Institute, Amhara Agricultural Research Institute, Bahir Dar University, Ambo University, Nekemte University, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Water and Energy.

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