

## 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.

### Suitability maps, Nile Goblet open GIS tool and Happy Strategies guide adoption of technological innovation

Best practices for rainwater management in the Ethiopian Blue Nile are related to crop livestock and trees that increase water availability or productivity within the watersheds, such as soil and water conservation, small scale irrigation, fertility management, or livestock management. Many of these practices, however, are not adopted because they have been promoted in locations where they are not suitable, or have not been combined in ways that benefit farmers.

The NBDC developed a suite of tools and approaches to help farmers decide which technological innovations might suit their needs best. It is a procedure that looks at bio-physical suitability criteria, selects locations where the criteria are met and derives practice suitability maps out of it. The Nile Goblet tool is an open source GIS tool that allows easily to make suitability and feasibility maps without prior GIS knowledge. It is a very flexible tool that in principle allows mapping any land or water management practice for any location of the world, and helps consider combinations of practices. These tools present windows of opportunities based on expert knowledge of what communities could do. When combined with action on the ground and local knowledge, in a participatory manner, they complete the picture. The 'happy strategies' game is one of these complementary participatory tools. It can enable a dialogue between communities, non-governmental

organizations and local government agencies around rainwater management practices, so as to validate the maps and come up with a feasible plan on the ground.

Discover the Nile Goblet tool at: <http://nilebdc.wikispaces.com/Nile+Goblet+tool+and+training> and the Happy Strategies game at: <http://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/24999>

### WAT-A-GAME participatory natural resources management planning in Ethiopia

The project has identified several challenges to effective planning and implementation of rainwater management interventions in its three sites, (Jeldu, Diga and Fogera) including poor coordination and communication between actors, lack of a bottom-up and participatory community planning.

To address these, the NBDC piloted the use of WAT-A-GAME, a participatory planning tool, as a starting point for looking at RWM issues is a landscape scale. In a series of workshops, participants identified bottlenecks, ran simulations of water management, policy design and education initiatives and discussed their findings. The use of games in NBDC is seen as a crucial approach to stimulate conversation and problem-solving on complex rainwater management issues. Read more about NBDC's use of WAT-A-GAME at: <http://nilebdc.org/2013/01/20/wat-a-game-fogera/>



## Digital Stories: Capturing and communicating research

Digital storytelling refers to short films composed of digitized still and moving images, sound and text. NBDC researchers are experimenting with the use of digital stories for participatory monitoring and evaluation. After a training workshop in November 2012, NBDC partners in Diga, Fogera and Jeldu received digital cameras and started collecting pictures and developing digital stories to monitor the progress of pilot interventions and to share insights and lessons across the three sites.

## Embedding Nile BDC messages and results in Ethiopia's development policies and practices

In February 2013, the NBDC convened the fourth meeting of the National Land and Water Management Platform to review progress and directions for the coming phase of NBDC. The workshop reflected on past work – approaches developed, research findings, key messages – in order to prioritize future interventions. Over 60 participants from partner organizations and other governmental, research and non-governmental institutions participated to the two-day workshop and reviewed and discussed key messages



Participants also reviewed series of approaches and methods developed by the NBDC to assess their potential application in other contexts and initiatives centred around land and water management. These included: innovation platforms, biophysical/economic and integrated modeling, games (Wat-A-Game, Happy Strategies), GIS, Goblet tool and suitability maps,

participatory hydrological monitoring, digital stories, participatory video and local planning processes. Future NBDC priorities emerging included: repackaging research in accessible ways for farmers, policy-makers and other organizations; focusing on capacity development; finding practical ways to bring farmers' and scientists' voices together in crafting common approaches and discourse; addressing the regional gaps between local level work and national level engagement; and joining forces with existing initiatives that can reinforce the messages of the NBDC such as the Sustainable Land Management program.

## Rhetoric versus realities: Rainwater management in the Blue Nile Basin of Ethiopia

Ethiopia has invested extensively in rainwater management interventions over the last 40 years, but often with disappointing impact. A new approach is clearly needed, but what could it be? The CPWF report 'Rhetoric versus realities' highlights livelihood issues that need to be considered if RWM activities are to be successful; it concludes with six recommendations: 1) Shift the focus of targets from outputs to outcomes; 2) Enhance monitoring and evidence collection on RWM with a focus on impact and sustainability; 3) Revitalize and capitalize on the development agent system; 4) Strengthen local institutions' roles in natural resource management; 5) Move towards more meaningful participation; 6) Open lines of communication to foster innovation capacity.

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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, Wollega University, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Water and Energy. More information: Alan Duncan ([a.duncan@cgiar.org](mailto:a.duncan@cgiar.org)) and Simon Langan ([s.langan@cgiar.org](mailto:s.langan@cgiar.org)) [www.nilebdc.org](http://www.nilebdc.org)

