

Toward sustainable forest conservation <Part 3>

Achieving both "Forest conservation" and "Livelihood improvement"

This issue discusses the titled topic based on the author's experience engaged as a long-term expert in "Participatory Forest Management Project in Belete-Gera Regional Forest Priority Area Phase 2" (2006-2009), which is the predecessor of the on-going project in Ethiopia. The project organized a forest management association, called *WaBuB* for each sub-village, and aimed to create a forest management framework by exchanging forest management agreements including forest boundary maps and management rules. In the case of the Belete-Gera forest, there were issues such as "low literacy rate of residents", "no experience of group activities", and "rapid deforestation due to agricultural land expansion". Therefore, the project considered that it was appropriate to strengthen capacity necessary for collaborative planning carefully by applying a social barrier to prevent excessive forest utilization by signing an agreement (see the figure below).

Since *WaBuB* was already organized in the 2 pilot sub-villages during Phase 1, it was required in Phase 2 to develop a mechanism to expand *WaBuB* to all 124 sub-villages in the Belete-Gera forest area, and to achieve both "forest conservation" and "livelihood improvement". It was expected that livelihood improvement activities were not only to provide incentives for participation in forest conservation, but also to reduce the burden of forest usage by obtaining new income sources. In addition, it was deemed desirable to have a strategy capable of accumulating various experiences by the group, in order to strengthen the forest management capacity of *WaBuB*. Therefore, as a measure to improve livelihoods that could be offered to all villages, the project introduced a method of Farmer Field Schools (FFS) developed by FAO to strengthen farming skills and group activities. An agricultural extension worker conducted a session once a week for one year and practiced methods of cultivating horticultural crops and seedlings. In the

following year, trained farmer facilitators conducted FFS sessions to other groups. Many of the farmer facilitators were young people and women who could read and write. By acquiring confidence and trust in the villages through FFS, it was observed they became actively involved in forest management activities by supporting village heads.

In addition, most of the Belete-Gera forest region has coffee trees growing naturally, and many residents are obtaining cash income by harvesting forest coffee traditionally. Focusing on this point, measures were proposed to produce value-added coffee from "environmentally conscious forests", and to achieve forest conservation simultaneously. It became possible to sell the product with premium payment, through acquiring certification such as "Rainforest Alliance".

On the other hand, when spreading these activities throughout the Belete-Gera area, it was beyond the scope of the Oromia Forestry Enterprise, the counterpart organization, and the project itself had to inevitably lead the activities. All 124 *WaBuB* were established by the end of the project completion in 2012, but the framework set-up was incompletely handed over to the Ethiopian side, which was responsible for "forest monitoring" and "formulation of management plans" based on the signed agreement. The successor project focusing on forest coffee is underway. In addition, since 2017, activities targeting highland areas have been added, where is no forest coffee and deforestation is in progress, and where AAI is involved in.

Looking at the situation after about 8 years, there has been little support for *WaBuB* by the Ethiopian government side. Without that, awareness of monitoring and rule compliance might diminish. However, in the forest coffee area where the project is continued, monitoring by cooperative internal audit is carried out, which leads to strengthening organizational capability contributing to forest management. It is said that it takes time to achieve results in a forest-related project, but it is considered that strengthening organization cannot be realized in a short time. Improving individual ability and consciousness also takes time. This is not only brought up by forest conservation activities, but it is accumulation of various experiences of collaboration within the community, and available funds and support would be important factors to provide such opportunities continuously.

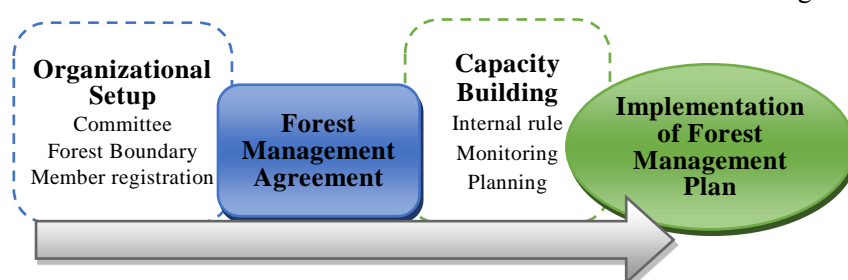


Fig. The Schematic Flow of *WaBuB* Establishment and Implementation of Forest Management Plan