

Report on Field Visit to FFF Projects in Lalibela Town

Administration

1. Project Site Background Information

Futaro Fund for Forests ((FFF) is undertaking most of its forest development, sanitation, environmental protection and seedling multiplication projects in Lalibela, a small town in northern Ethiopia. The town of Lalibela is surrounded by a rocky and dry area. It is one of Ethiopia's holiest cities and is a center of pilgrimage for much of the country. It is located in North Wollo Zone of the Amhara regional state at 2,500 meters above sea level. Lalibela, previously known as Roha, is named after King Lalibela. It had remained the capital city of Ethiopia from the late 12th century to the 13th century.

This rural town is known across the world for its monolithic churches, which play an important part in the history of rock-cut architecture. Though the dating of the churches is not well established, most are thought to have been built during the reign of King Lalibela during the 12th and 13th centuries.

The churches of Lalibela were hewn out of the solid, red volcanic tuff on which they stand. As a result, they seem to be of superhuman creation - in scale, in workmanship and in concept. Some lie almost completely hidden in deep trenches, while others stand in open quarried caves. A complex and bewildering labyrinth of tunnels and narrow passageways with offset crypts, grottoes and galleries connects them all.

Out of the 11 rock hewn churches 4 are completely free-standing, attached only to the surrounding rock by their bases. Although their individual dimensions and configurations are extremely different, the churches are all built from great blocks of stone, sculptured to resemble

normal buildings and wholly isolated within deep courtyards. They represent, as one authority has put it, the ultimate in rock-church design.



Most of FFF operational areas are located around rock hewn churches of Lalibela-
UNESCO World Heritage Site

Once the thriving and populous capital city of a medieval dynasty, the passing centuries have reduced Lalibela to a village. From the road below, it remains little more than invisible against a horizon dominated by the 4,200-metre peak of Mount Abuna Joseph.

2. Brief project profile of FFF

Futaro Fund for Forests (FFF) is an international NGO, which was established in 1998 in Japan and opened Ethiopia office in 1999 in Lalibela.

Genesis of the NGO

In 1994, Mrs. Kaori Niitsuma met Futaro, an infant owl in front of a rock hewn church in Lalibela. Futaro was abused by local children and became on the verge of losing his life. Mrs. Kaori talked to the children and helped the pity owl. After a while, she traveled around Ethiopia to

look for the forest where Futaro can live. During her trip, she realized the serious deforestation of Ethiopia and strongly recognized the necessity of reforestation. This is how FFF's activities started in Lalibela town.

FFF has been working in Lalibela for 12 years focusing on natural resource conservation, ecological recovery, tree planting, environmental education and sanitation system management. With the cooperation of the local people, the Ethiopian government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), FFF has greatly contributed to improve the lives of the people in Lalibela.

3. FFF's major areas of development engagement

3.1 Sanitation activities

Previously, the town of Lalibela had not been as tidy and clean as it should have been as one of the major tourist destinations of Ethiopia. One could see a huge amount of garbage strewn all over the town. Consequently, environmental pollution had been rife leading to the occurrence of diseases.

FFF has been working for sanitary improvement program since 2002. In the first stage of the program, people collected household garbage and threw them into the disposal holes in accordance with the guidance of the local government body. FFF followed the rules and customs of the area and supported such efforts with the necessary materials and fund. However, the sanitary situation has not improved for years. Therefore, FFF shifted the sanitary program into community participatory approach to establish more effective sanitary system. Accordingly, FFF prepared garbage collection holes and plastic burning drums. It also organized nine sanitary groups in each village and selected group leaders. The

groups have been provided with a series of trainings on dry waste management.



In addition, FFF has installed 80 steel-made dust bins across the town for the disposal of organic and inorganic wastes. FFF also gives various prizes to the cleanest village with a view to further

encouraging community-based sanitary activities.



“We’ve strong support from FFF” say sanitary group leaders

3.2 Forestation projects

3.2.1 Large scale reforestation

FFF launched large scale reforestation program in 2004 with a view to expanding forest coverage in five Kebeles of Lalibela town and five Kebeles of Bugena Woreda. Under this project, FFF identifies degraded areas, makes them green and eventually hands over them to the community or concerned government bodies.

The project activity includes, among others, site selection, soil and water conservation measures, hill side terracing, building of micro catchments and trenches, planting of indigenous and ornamental trees as well as fodder development.



Forest developed by FFF at Medge (outskirts of Lalibela town)

3.2.2 Nursery Development

Under this project, FFF helps the expansion of nurseries for the production of seedlings. Currently, seedlings are produced in nurseries located at Shemsheha, Simeno and Kenkenit areas. Seedlings are

planted by local labors, who are also responsible to water and guard the nurseries. The farmers assigned at the nurseries also cultivate various fruits and vegetables, which they distribute to hotels and market places in the town.



Seedling bed at Simeno



FFF staff supervising Simeno nursery

To take Simeno nursery (a site 6 k.m away from Lalibela town) as a case in point, 350,000 seedlings were nurtured at this site during the months of July and August, 2010. There are 11 laborers at Simeno, which also develops various vegetables such as lettuce, cabbage, carrot, beetroot, garlic and tomato.

Some of the beneficiaries of this project stated that they are using the income that they generate from the nursery to subsidize their regular farming activities on their own plots of land. Ato Abe Melese, one of the beneficiaries who is a farmer by profession, describes the seed multiplication project as “promising” in terms of income generating and environmental development. He says Simeno nursery site was a stony

and bushy area previously. But now, he proudly says, “we have turned it into a productive land through a traditional irrigation system.”



Farmers at Simeno nursery enjoying the fruits of their labors

3.3 Green Campaign

FFF encourages the individual efforts of residents, who are engaged in the cleaning and greening of Lalibela town, through the provision of financial assistance and other necessary logistics. Some 46 persons are involved in such endeavors. One of the green campaigners, embraced under FFF project, is priest Shewangezaw Melke. Shewangezaw has a versatile personality. He is a full-time priest at *Bete Georgis*, one of Lalibela’s ancient churches registered by UNESCO as world heritage. He is a painter. He is also a traditional tutor with over 40 students attending church and liturgical education.



Shewangezaw the tutor

Shewangezaw the painter

The priest, together with his students and the support from FFF, amazingly turned a garbage dump area that lies on 8,527 sq. meter into a paradise like green park, which is just adjacent to the tourist attraction church of Bete Georgis. Priest Shewangezaw has planted on the area over 10,000 trees of various species including grevillea, casuarina, jacaranda, carissa, acacia saligna, Olea Africana, etc.



Shewangezaw the green campaigner

3.4 Environmental Education

FFF has organized environmental clubs in three elementary schools in Lalibela town; namely: Neakutelab, Getergie and Lalibela primary schools. Through these clubs, it has been providing practical education to students under the motto “Greener and Cleaner Lalibela”. Students in the three schools cultivate tree seedlings and vegetables under the instruction of their teachers.



Students at Getergie primary school watering tree seedlings

They also conduct experience sharing field trips to government-run nurseries and waste disposal places in order to enhance their insights on how they can best contribute to the conservation of their environment. The clubs in the three schools also conduct essay, drawing and poetry contests about environment among students in a gesture to promote the cause of a protected and developed environment.



Environmental promotion poster in Lalibela primary school



Ato Sisay-staff of FFF promoting the core principles of environmental protection

Conclusion

FFF has been working in Lalibela for the past 12 years focusing on natural resource conservation, ecological recovery, tree planting, environmental education and sanitation system management. Over the years, it grew 1,500,000 seedlings, planted 890,000 trees and installed 3 water tanks. It also constructed 4 forest parks, gave environmental awareness raising education to over 5,000 students, built 5 classrooms in 3 elementary schools and installed 8 rain water reservoir ponds.

In close collaboration with the local people, the Ethiopian government, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), FFF is indeed contributing its share to the betterment of the life of people especially at the grass-roots level in Lalibela town and its environs.