

Comprehensive Targeting Learning Paper

CONCERN
worldwide

ENDING
EXTREME POVERTY
WHATEVER
IT TAKES

Main lessons learned from Concern Worldwide's experience in Ethiopia as part of the REGRADE II programme

Households can sustainably meet their basic needs and have improved coping strategies through strengthened livelihoods which place value on the natural environment.

Context

In Ethiopia, the Amhara region continues to face security issues due to the armed conflict that began in April 2023 between the regional militia and the Ethiopian government. During 2024, this escalated across the region particularly affecting the Gondar zones where Concern operates. The conflict has led to loss of life, widespread gender-based violence, damage to social services and severe disruption of the local economy. Two years after the Pretoria agreement, unrest still looms in parts of the Tigray region, with millions remaining at high risk of food and nutrition insecurity due to drought.

During 2025, 8.6 million people across 125 woredas¹ in Oromia, Somali and South Ethiopia regions, are expected to face 'severe' drought conditions during 2025. This will exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation across the country with the Humanitarian Response Plan only 31.2% funded as of September 2024². Many pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in Southern Ethiopia have yet to recover from the extended La Niña driven drought of 2021 to 2022, remaining vulnerable throughout the primary rain season between October and December.

The overall economy remains fragile due to the aftermath of COVID-19 and other global shocks (including the Russo-Ukraine war and the war in Gaza). Ethiopia succeeded in finalising an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which has averted a potential debt crisis. At the end of July 2024, the Ethiopian Birr was floated, and currency exchange restrictions were relaxed, which led to a significant official devaluation and an impact on inflation, although the Central Bank has recently claimed measures instituted have reduced inflation to around 16%.

Programme Overview

The REGRADE II programme, funded by Irish Aid, is a long-term development initiative being implemented in the districts of East Belessa, Kinfaaz, and West Belessa, located in the Central Gondar Zone of the Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. It is designed to improve the well-being of individuals living in extreme poverty, particularly the most vulnerable households within the targeted areas. This integrated and long-term programme focuses on enhancing livelihoods, health, and nutrition, while also promoting gender equality, addressing climate change, and being sensitive to conflict dynamics. A key component of the programme is the Graduation Approach³, which offers a comprehensive and well-sequenced package of support aimed at achieving the following outcomes.

- **Outcome 1:** Households living in conditions of extreme poverty targeted for graduation have improved food and nutrition security.

¹ Ethiopia's administrative divisions.

² [Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2024 | Financial Tracking Service](#)

³ [Graduation Programming | Concern Worldwide](#)

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- **Outcome 2:** Increased asset ownership and human capital through access to diversified livelihood options.
- **Outcome 3:** Improved access to affordable, accessible, and appropriate financial services and increased savings.
- **Outcome 4:** Improved social cohesion and social capital, including the status of women.
- **Outcome 5:** Improved environmental protection and community resilience to climate shocks through watershed management and sustainable use of natural resources.
- **Outcome 6:** Crisis-affected households can meet their immediate needs related to a disaster/shock within the targeted programme location.
- **Outcome 7:** Evidence and learning from REGRADE II to advocate for replication and influencing policy and practice.

To achieve its intended outcomes, the programme is implementing a range of interventions, including watershed management practices, income-generating activities, provision of climate-smart crop seeds, capacity-building trainings, and climate adaptation activities. It also supports the establishment and strengthening of savings groups, as well as Mother-to-Mother and Father-to-Father groups.

REGRADE II's interventions aim to enhance the quality of life of people living in extreme poverty by strengthening existing livelihood resilience, introducing new income diversification activities, promoting watershed-based natural resource conservation, and fostering collaboration with government bodies and local civil society organizations to ensure ownership and sustainability. Using a participatory wealth ranking-based targeting approach, a total of 2,771 programme participants were identified, these include: 1,571 from cohort I (January 2023 to June 2025) and 1,200 from cohort 2 (July 2025 to December 2027).

The Approach

The targeting approach is a critical component of the REGRADE II programme, designed to ensure that resources reach the intended beneficiaries; households identified as living in extreme poverty based on their social and economic conditions.

Geographical targeting:

Concern's 'green lens' aims to achieve long-term climate change and sustainability objectives, contributing to fostering the economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which community well-being relies. Using this green lens, Concern identified the target geographic areas based on hazards (including drought, crop pests, and hailstorms), vulnerability, and capacity assessment approaches and techniques. It considered the frequency, speed of onset, and duration of occurrence to understand the magnitude, nature, and behaviour of hazards in the intervention areas, and the level of community vulnerability, the threats, and cumulative negative impacts on the natural environment and the community.

Concern carried out general zonal targeting in Central Gondar woredas in January 2023 (cohort 1) and February 2025 (cohort 2), followed by a contextual analysis in 5 vulnerable woredas in the selected zone (central Gondar zone in this case). The analysis revealed which woredas were experiencing the most frequent shocks and have often been dependent on humanitarian assistance from the government and aid agencies, including Concern. Several other

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criteria included hotspot priority classification⁴ of the government, INGO, and UN partners, acute humanitarian needs, and the Meher crop assessment report recommendations.

Based on these criteria, Kinfaz, West, and East Belessa woredas were selected for the REGRADE II programme interventions. Significant proportions of the communities and households in these woredas were found to be living in conditions of extreme poverty with weak resilience capacities and vulnerable to frequent climate shocks.

Within the 3 selected woredas, community watersheds were then selected based on key criteria:

1. The degradation levels (specific watersheds in a woreda could be more degraded than others).
2. Levels of food insecurity (to decide what options are suitable).
3. Protection of potential areas.
4. Specific objectives (water, flood protection, major reclamation, and others).
5. Manpower and resources availability.

Programme participant targeting:

The approach employed participatory wealth ranking following key steps:

- Sensitization and registration of residents.
- Conduct consecutive mass meetings with the community and community representatives.
- List local means and values of ranking based on local perception of residents.
- Carry out 'actual' wealth ranking exercise based on the local criteria.
- Analysis of wealth ranks and identify the most vulnerable and poorest households.
- Validation and approval of selected programme participants from the administrative body at local Government level within the Agriculture and Finance Ministry offices.

Note that additional criteria including female headed households, landless married youth, households with 5 or above dependents, the elderly and chronically ill and engagement in the Ethiopian government's Productive Safety Net (PSNP) programme, were also considered as selection criteria.

Lessons Learned

Community capacity: The experience demonstrates that communities have significant capacity when given the opportunity to make decisions on matters that affect their lives and livelihoods. Empowering communities to lead

⁴ [FAO Hunger Hotspots](#)

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fosters stronger ownership and better outcomes. Therefore, during the targeting process communities decided who will be involved in the program and who will not.

Minimal or no external interference: Currently, with limited or no formal local government structures at the community level, all matters are addressed through traditional knowledge and social justice practices, with limited or no influence from political leaders. The result of the targeting process for cohort 2 has been notably better in terms of transparency and the exclusion of errors in comparison to cohort 1 in which political leaders had influence under the guise of community representation.

Community acceptance: Implementing such activities directly with the community has significantly increased acceptance of Concern Worldwide. As a result, both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are actively safeguarding Concern Worldwide and its staff amidst the prevailing security challenges.

Increased community involvement: The programme is making notable progress in building community institutions capable of managing broader programme responsibilities, contributing to long-term sustainability. Community watershed committees are evolving to cooperative structure levels, enabling them to take on expanded roles that benefit the wider community.

Recommendations:

- Promote collaboration with the local Government. Authorities to adopt this wealth ranking based community targeting approach and institutionalize it to a wider scale and beyond the REGRADE II programme areas.
- Carry out an assessment to draw more learning and documentation of best practices in targeting of programme participants for future programming.
- Apply the same targeting approach with other programme interventions; the practice is easier to apply in livelihoods and recovery projects.
- Identify opportunities to tailor the approach for emergency response interventions such as non-food item (NFI) distributions and multipurpose cash distribution activities. This will ensure to a greater community engagement, reduce inclusion and exclusion errors.
- Train relevant programme staff to carry out such selection methodology for in-house capacity enhancement.

Testimonials

Climate-smart crops:

Mulu, a 56-year-old farmer in the Sera Community Watershed has 7 children, including 3 daughters. For more than 10 years his family faced challenges due to climate disasters including a lack of rain, poor soil fertility, and limited access to technologies that can cope with unpredictable weather. *"I used to plant a long-cycle local sorghum variety. When the rain stopped early, the crop would not grow well. Even in a good year, I only harvested 500 kg from 0.5 hectares of land."* As a result, Mulu often had to sell his livestock and other productive assets to cover basic needs including food, land rent and health insurance.

Through Concern's comprehensive targeting process, Mulu was selected to participate in the REGRADE II programme. *"This was a fantastic opportunity that allowed me to receive various forms of support to transform my life and livelihood."* A home case worker visits his family twice a month to help carry out their household plan, which focuses on improving income and health. He also receives monthly conditional cash transfers, which are a stable source of income to support household expense with the support of life skills and business management training.

Most importantly, Mulu received an improved climate-adaptable sorghum seed variety called melkam, released by the Amhara Agriculture Research Centre which grows faster and requires less water. *"Melkam sets grain before the rain stops and is shorter in height; from the same 0.5 hectares, I now harvest more than 1,000 kg which is double what I used to get."*

Home Gardening:

Nigusie, a 48-year-old man, and his wife, Zewudie, live in the Sera community micro-watershed of West Belessa with their 5 children, 4 girls and 1 boy. Prior to joining the REGRADE II programme, Nigusie did not have access resources that would allow him to start an income-generating activity. Backyard gardening was not common in their area, and the family had limited options for nutritious food at home. After being selected as a participant, Nigusie received a range of integrated support. *"I have learnt a lot from the ongoing coaching and follow-up sessions with Concern case workers. They have helped me to make my own decisions to cultivate home gardens and to start goat and sheep production."*

Prior to receiving seeds as part of the programme, Nigusie was trained on vegetable management and seed-bed preparation. Nigusie and Zewudie also participated in Father-to-Father and Mother-to-Mother nutrition and health education sessions, helping them to improve their feeding practices. *"After I received the training and seeds, I used the primary rainy season to grow vegetables at home. As a result, there is now a greater variety of meals at the household level."* In addition to improving their diet, the family now earns an income by selling vegetables at the local market. *"I use the income to buy additional spices like salt and cooking oil,"* he said. The positive results of his gardening efforts also influenced others in the community.

Nigusie is now planning the future. *"I will continue cultivating vegetables in backyards as much as I can. I am planning to get a small plot of land accessible to water so I can produce vegetables at least twice a year for both market and household consumption."*