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Restoring vitality to Afar region's dry valleys: A beacon of hope and innovation in Ethiopia

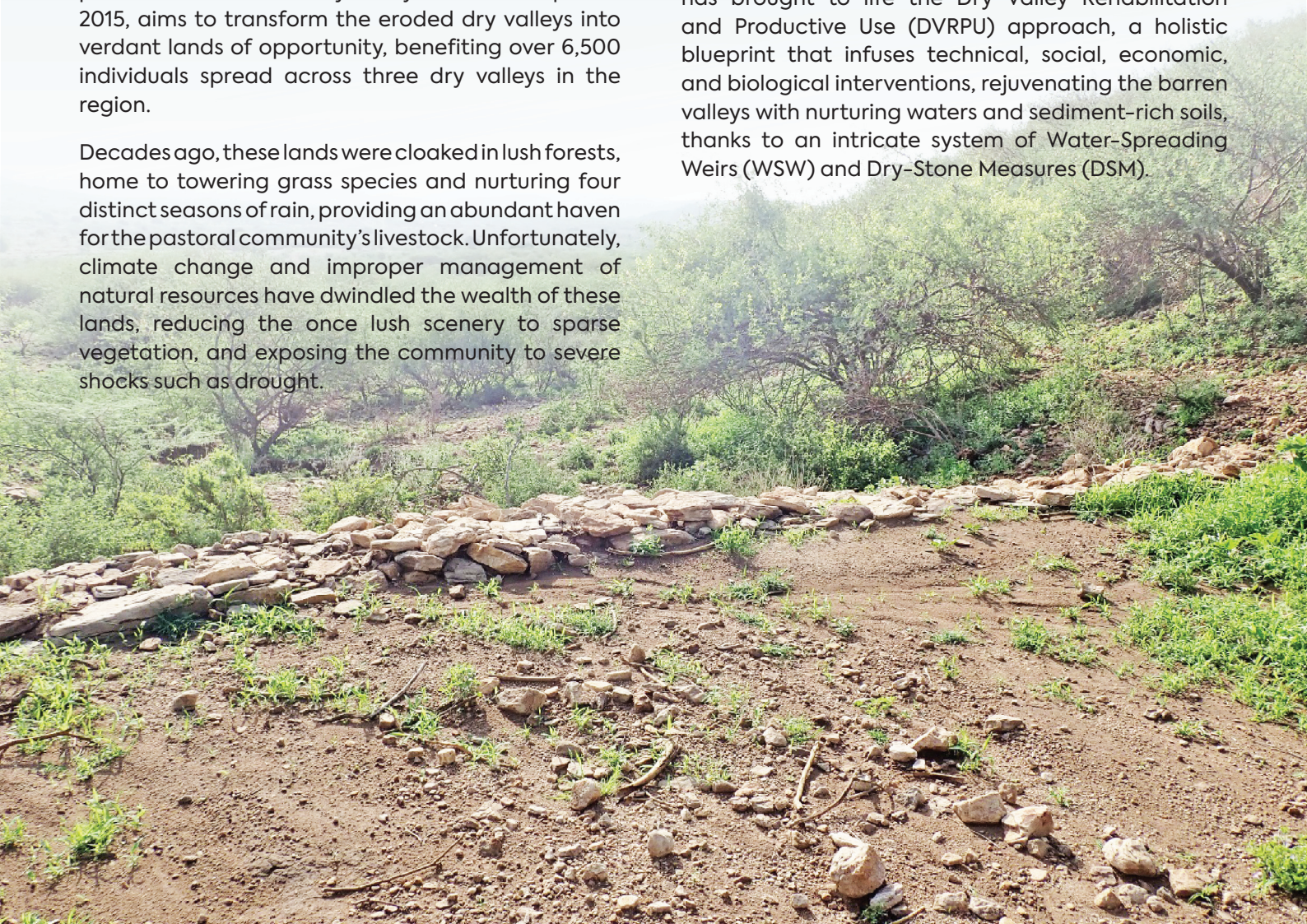
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - In the semi-arid regions of the Afar state, the narrative of land degradation and climate change impact is taking a turn towards rejuvenation and productivity, thanks to the innovative efforts of the Lowlands Soil Rehabilitation Project (GIZ-LSRP) spearheaded by the German development agency GIZ.

The tale begins in Chifra district, situated in the Afar Regional State, a region characterized by its semi-arid climate, erratic rainfall patterns, and a community deeply rooted in pastoral and agro-pastoral traditions. The journey embarked upon in 2015, aims to transform the eroded dry valleys into verdant lands of opportunity, benefiting over 6,500 individuals spread across three dry valleys in the region.

Decades ago, these lands were cloaked in lush forests, home to towering grass species and nurturing four distinct seasons of rain, providing an abundant haven for the pastoral community's livestock. Unfortunately, climate change and improper management of natural resources have dwindled the wealth of these lands, reducing the once lush scenery to sparse vegetation, and exposing the community to severe shocks such as drought.

Facing the adversities head-on, the community initiated coping mechanisms including rain-fed agriculture, although faced with the challenge of unpredictable rain patterns. Acknowledging the magnitude of the issues, local government bodies along with other stakeholders rallied to conserve moisture and curb soil erosion, laying the foundation for greater intervention.

In 2013, GIZ launched the Strengthening Drought Resilience (GIZ-SDR) Program, birthing the Afar Soil Rehabilitation Project (ASRP) in 2015. This project has brought to life the Dry Valley Rehabilitation and Productive Use (DVRPU) approach, a holistic blueprint that infuses technical, social, economic, and biological interventions, rejuvenating the barren valleys with nurturing waters and sediment-rich soils, thanks to an intricate system of Water-Spreading Weirs (WSW) and Dry-Stone Measures (DSM).





Showing efforts of local partners. Photo by Ismael Tessema



Dry stone measure impact; before. Photo by Indris Siraje



Challenge of land degradation. Photo by Indris Siraje



Dry stone measure impact; before. Photo by Indris Siraje



Beneficiary of the restoration. Photo by Indris Siraje

The project has fostered community engagement and collaboration, paving the way for the rehabilitation of entire dry valleys, and crafting a synergy between local communities and governmental bodies.

The initiative's efforts bore fruit with the 2016 production season, revealing promising increases in biomass and grain yield, and fostering food and fodder security for the local communities. The advent of rehabilitated lands has initiated a ripple effect of positive changes, notably in livestock health and market values, fortifying the

region's food security fabric.

"The land is breathing again, clothed in new species of plants, giving us hope and sustenance," shares Mr. Ibrahim Ali, a resident of the Sheqayiboru Village in Chifra district. Echoing his sentiments, a local elder remarked, "We've learned to mend the torn fabric of our lands, thanks to GIZ's guidance, restoring vitality where we once saw desolation."

As the ASRP project illustrates a triumphant narrative, it beckons a comprehensive approach to sustain and magnify its impacts.

The policy roadmap advocates for a coalition of stakeholders from diverse sectors to forge a united front, fostering educational initiatives and integrating technical expertise to build a resilient and prosperous community.

Moreover, the ASRP serves as a beacon of hope and innovation, extending its reach to other lowland areas of Ethiopia, demonstrating a scalable and sustainable model that promises to reshape the livelihoods of pastoral communities across the nation.

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