

Sustainable Land Management



2001 program mid-term review - An inspection after three years' program work

By Felix Nicolier

The first detailed description of the Sustainable Land Management program in Eritrea, its content and its partner organizations, appeared in the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development's report for 1999-2000. In January 2001, representatives of the project's partner organizations met on the spot to obtain information about the progress that has been made.

The mission team, consisting of the donor organizations at the University of Berne and the Syngenta Foundation, as well as representatives of the various ministries in Eritrea, concluded that good progress had been made - in spite of the difficult conditions caused by tension with neighboring Ethiopia - with reference to the three principal components:

- Research and development in sustainable land use, particularly on issues of soil and water conservation
- Support for specific local and regional development projects and initiatives
- Promoting Eritrean institutions that are active in the field of sustainable land use

Particularly worthy of mention is the fact that the various local development initiatives, such as constructing wells and building schools and clinics, were successful above all because the local people and local authorities were listened to and integrated into the search for solutions. Another success is the fact that countless farmers in the 2.7 km² area around the Afdeyu experimental station have now laid out the type of terrace that produced the best results in the test facilities, in terms of conserving the soil and holding back water (further details on the program approaches and previous and future activities can be found in the main article).

These results are due to the high degree of professionalism shown by our partners, who have not only provided a state-of-the-art quality of work but also identify strongly with their work and are often willing to carry it out in the most difficult living conditions in the project regions.

So far as the specialists and teachers in Asmara are concerned, it must be emphasized that although many young people were conscripted into the army, the staff members who remained continued to pursue their planning and teaching activities. The experts delegated from Switzerland were able to conduct their specialist courses successfully, so that in the current year a further two courses have even been organized and conducted by our Eritrean partners.

Due to the fact that all of our partner organizations are devoting their efforts to village development in all priority areas and often in very isolated communities in Eritrea, and in addition have not been discouraged by the delays caused by the war situation, a close partnership and in many cases even friendship has developed. On the one hand, this makes it easier to work together, while on the other it also makes it possible to speak in plain language in difficult situations.

This highly satisfactory outcome, benefiting everyone involved, shows that a common project run by very different partners - such as the rural population in a developing country, local researchers, state officials, Swiss scientists, and a foundation run by a private company - is indeed capable of doing a very fruitful and successful job.