



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/pastoral-communities-adapt-sustainable-land-management-practices-improve-livelihoods>

# Pastoral Communities Adapt Sustainable Land Management Practices to Improve Livelihoods



USAID/PRIME

Huda Dubno shows off one of the many indigenous species returning to the land his community cleared of an invasive plant.

Fertile land is essential for smallholder farmers and pastoralists. Poor soil health leads to low agricultural productivity, affects the nutritional quality of food and forces pastoralists to migrate to seek water and food for their animals.

In Ethiopia, only six percent of the land is irrigated and poor land management practices have led to severe land degradation for decades, which has been especially detrimental to small-scale pastoralists. As part of the Feed the Future initiative, USAID and Mercy Corps are working with pastoralists in Ethiopia to restore degraded lands by implementing sustainable land management practices. Part of this effort involves facilitating participatory discussions to enable rangeland councils to prioritize their needs, mobilize communities and ensure that various resources such as water and grasses are properly managed.

One of the more serious culprits behind Ethiopia's land degradation ironically arose from a well-intended effort to shore up soil quality. More than 20 years ago, mesquite was introduced to some of Ethiopia's lowland areas to reduce soil salinity. This highly invasive plant quickly overtook native plant species and threatened livestock both by reducing pasture availability and providing shelter for predators. Since it was introduced, mesquite has severely degraded vast areas of grazing land, leaving pastoralists struggling to obtain proper nutrition for their livestock and exacerbating migration.

Huda Dubno, a pastoralist in the Afar Region of Ethiopia and a participant in the program, has experienced firsthand the challenges of degraded grazing lands. "When my sheep and goats entered into the prosopis [mesquite] area, we could not find them and they would be eaten by predators," he explains.

Huda had no choice but to move his livestock to a different area to find better pasture, taking him far from his family. Even then, the quality of the grazing area did not provide enough nutrition for his animals, and low milk production among the herd left him unable to adequately feed his children.

Frustrated by his situation, Huda seized the opportunity to become involved in his local rangeland council, and was elected as council chairman. Eradicating mesquite was a top priority for the council, and Mercy Corps provided training and hand tools to help pastoralists achieve this end. Under the leadership of the rangeland council, Huda's village joined six neighboring villages to clear mesquite from 120 hectares of grasslands.

Since joining this Feed the Future-supported program, Huda and his community have seen extraordinary success. They are witnessing the restoration of native plants as well as healthier and more productive livestock because of improved grasses, all of which are resulting in more income-generating opportunities. Throughout the Afar Region, the program has reached five rangeland councils and mobilized communities to clear over 310 hectares of mesquite-invaded land.

Huda's camels have become stronger after just six months of grazing in the newly cleared rangeland, and their milk production has increased, enabling him to earn more money and provide for his children. With the improved conditions of the rangelands, he hopes that his livestock will continue to flourish and that eventually he will be able to sell animals, in addition to their milk, so he can invest in his children's education as well as new agricultural endeavors.

Huda's story is an example of how coordinated land management can help local groups identify problems and implement effective solutions. "We think about how we can continue to manage the rangeland in the future on our own. The most important thing we learned was how mesquite grows and how we can manage it as a community," Huda says. "This will help us create change and better provide for our families."

*The Pastoralist Areas Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) activity is a five-year, \$62 million USAID-funded effort implemented by Mercy Corps as part of the Feed the Future initiative, designed to increase household incomes and enhance resilience to climate change through market linkages in Ethiopia's dryland areas. [Learn more.](#)*