



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/bench-terracing-steps-resilience-youth>

Bench Terracing Steps Up Resilience in Youth



Relief Society of Tigray

The Hawzien Digum watershed in Tigray, which was previously uncultivated, after landless youth used bench terracing to reclaim the land for farming.

In Ethiopia, the lands that are most vulnerable to drought are also home to the people most vulnerable to food insecurity. In one such area, the northern region of Tigray, tens of thousands of people rely on food assistance to get through lean seasons.

Tigray's topography poses unique challenges for agricultural development. For one, it's diverse, ranging from high, rugged mountains to deep gorges and lowland plains. This diversity makes for little arable land and complicates irrigation expansion. The long distances between cultivable land and water sources compound these difficulties. Furthermore, surface temperatures have been increasing for more than two decades, accelerating soil erosion and recurrent drought. This year's rainy season (March to April) got off to a very dry start, resulting in wilted crops and below-average rainfall totals.

To help overcome these challenges, a Feed the Future project, implemented through USAID's Office of Food for Peace local partner, Relief Society of Tigray (REST), is working in 12 districts of the region. The project aims to meet immediate food needs and to empower landless youth to stand on their own two feet well into the future. The project provides young Ethiopians with food and cash in exchange for their labor on natural resource management projects, such as bench terracing.

Bench terracing minimizes soil erosion and water run-off. It involves the construction of a series of level, or nearly level, strips of land running vertically across a slope. When the strips of land are built to be inward sloping, the bench terracing enables the soil to better retain moisture. This technique of land development transforms marginal lands into cultivable plots.

The Feed the Future project also creates new opportunities for landless youth to gain access to irrigable farmland. The sites for terracing are selected based on their proximity to water sources, making them productive year round. Once the terracing is completed, the rehabilitated hillside plots are distributed among the landless youth. The project then helps the new farmers get started by providing training on land management and improved seeds and fruit seedlings to enable them to produce high value crops for their own consumption and for income generation. This year, nearly 1,500 hectares of farmland were created through the youth public works, empowering 5,800 food assistance beneficiaries to start farming for themselves.

By creating new arable lands near water sources, Feed the Future, through USAID and REST, is helping thousands of previously landless youth to become independent farmers with sustainable food and income sources. Their self-sustaining production of food and income will better enable these young Ethiopians to cope with drought and other shocks in the long term.