

## Fostering conservation through community engagement

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As part I of an initiative by CEPF to build capacity among its grantees, I took part in a site visit and learning exchange in Aliyu Amba Kebele, Ethiopia in November 2016. The exchange was organized by the Tropical Biology Association and was hosted by Lem, the Environment & Development Society of Ethiopia (Lem, Ethiopia). The exchange also involved another representative from Sustainable Natural Management Association (SURNAMA). The objective of the exchange was to enhance and share first-hand experiences, skills and lessons on how to effectively engage local communities in conservation work.

I engaged in several activities during the exchange including visiting spring development schemes constructed by Lem Ethiopia with the collaboration of local communities. We also visited the Teter Amba Micro-watershed which is managed by the local communities and has aided them in regenerating local species and planting seedlings. We further visited tree and vetiver nursery sites and held discussions with nursery site workers on their management and follow up of the sites. In addition, we visited local communities involved in goat and sheep rearing for their livelihood improvement. We also held discussions with the local communities regarding their production and marketing of energy efficient stoves and how this benefits them. We further held meetings with Lem Ethiopia officers and discussed the activities they have been involved in through their CEPF-funded project. These meetings enabled us to hold discussions with government officers on how Lem Ethiopia, through its project, has made significant improvement to the local community.

From the exchange, I was able to understand various topics including strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, project development, project delivery, project monitoring and evaluation, fundraising and resource mobilization, effective communication and advocacy. As a result of my participation in the exchange, I will improve on the implementation of my project through the lessons I learnt from the project implementation of Lem Ethiopia. I will further train other staff in my institution by sharing the knowledge and skills I gained from the exchange including how to target beneficiaries and undertaking monitoring and following up on projects.

The regeneration of biodiversity in the Teter Amba Micro-watershed provided me with a concrete example of good practices. Such practices included the planting of tree seedlings and construction of soil and water conservation structures. Through the exchange, I learnt how to design comprehensive and inclusive project activities which address community needs. Moreover, I learnt the effective systems of delivering inputs to the communities and how best to implement, monitor and evaluate projects.