



The 3rd International Forum
on Water and Food
Tshwane, South Africa
November 14 – 17, 2011



Co-hosted by:



Fighting poverty through innovations in small scale irrigation and resource sharing: The case of Mada-jalala resettled community in the Blue Nile Basin of Ethiopia

BHARAT SHARMA¹, MULUGETA LEMENIH¹, BIRHANU ZEMEDIN¹, DEBORAH BOSSIO¹ AND TILAHUN AMEDE¹

¹International Water Management Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

b.sharma@cgiar.org

Session: Basin stories, L2I

Key Message

Even in the least developed and remote rainfed areas inhabited by the poorest communities in Ethiopia, innovative and equitably shared use of small water resources can generate sufficient income to meet immediate family needs. For this, local indigenous engineering skills need to be combined with effective community institutions and access to local markets.

Summary

The reconnaissance field visit undertaken by the NBDC team to Diga (Oromiya province, Ethiopia) was an eye-opener when all of a sudden we entered the innovative small-scale irrigation water use by a resettled community called *Mada-jalala* (meaning stream of love). About 486 of the poorest households (6000 people) under famine and drought conditions were resettled in 2003 on an ex-state farm (Didesa) located about 1,000 km away from their original settlement in eastern Ethiopia (Hararghe). The apparently productive land of about 100 ha was found to be mostly unproductive dry land. However, thanks to the downstream availability of a small perennial stream, their traditional land and water

management skills and the urgent need to innovate for survival, the community was able to convert about 10 ha of the land into a very productive irrigated area. They engineered a number of infrastructure systems (diversion channels, flying super-pass ways, and rainfall retention) and institutional environment for benefit sharing that helped them face their challenges. Currently, the 10 ha irrigated land spread along the stream bank is equitably shared by more than 400 households (250 m² / household) and well managed by the community.

Some of the interesting dimensions of this community innovation are:

- i. The capability of the community to self-organize and successfully manage land and water allocation.
- ii. The remarkably engineered irrigation channel systems using local materials and well accepted water sharing practices.
- iii. Using the available water and very small plots of land for diversified, market linked high-value agriculture.
- iv. Openness of the Mada-jalala community to sharing their skills and experiences.



WATER DIVERSION CANALS IN MADA JALALA SMALL SCALE IRRIGATION SYSTEM INCLUDING THE WATER SUPER-PASS (FLYOVER) OVER THE RIVER BANKS IN THE MIDDLE (PHOTO BY BHARAT SHARMA, BIRHANU Z)