WeForest
Making Earth Cooler

Desa'a
Ethiopia

Mid-year report 2021

Forest restoration to reverse land degradation and poverty

In the highlands of Tigray, WeForest is restoring and protecting dry afromontane and bringing water back to this region, which is directly threatened by desertification coming from the north and east, and lifting rural communities out of extreme poverty.

Since war broke out in Tigray in late 2020, the communities and our team have faced considerable challenges. We are delighted to report that not only are they safe, but that despite the restrictions to travel, communication and transport of goods and materials, there has been amazing restoration progress made. The security situation has also improved in recent weeks.

Since January 2021, a further 3632 hectares of forest – a significant overachievement on our original goal of 2800 hectares – has been identified and mapped for restoration. Preparation and planting activity is currently underway.

2021 goal:
3632 ha

An estimated
3.5 million
trees planted, growing and protected

Under restoration to date:
9656 ha

An estimated
9.4 million
trees planted, growing and protected

Project's goal by 2030:
38 365 ha

An estimated
37.3 million
trees planted, growing and protected

What's new in Desa'a?

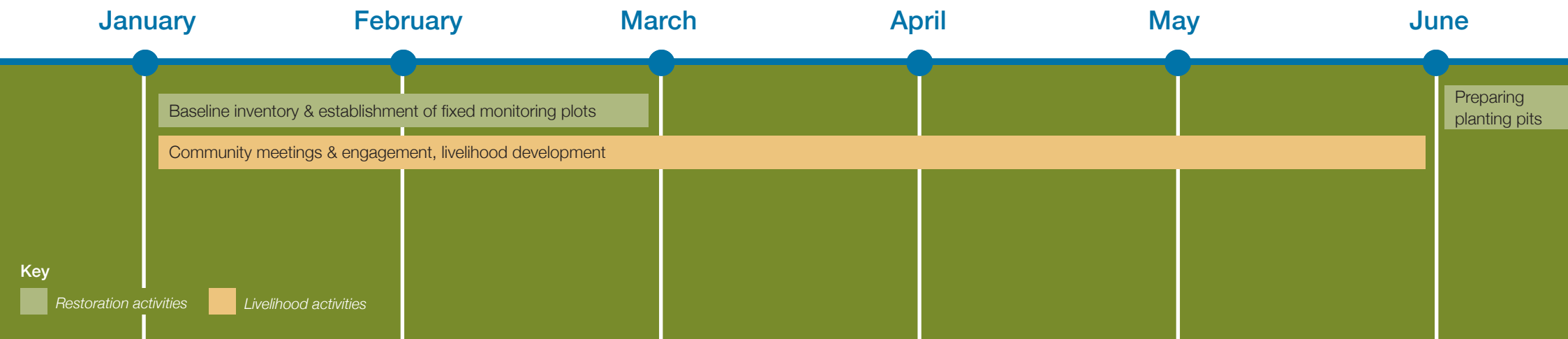
Recent highlights from the field

Of the new 3632 hectares of forest that have been mapped as either conservation or buffer zones for restoration, the conservation zones cover around one third (1127 ha). As well as supporting new trees to grow through ANR, light planting will take place here. The buffer zones cover the remaining 2505 ha and will undergo more intensive planting and restoration, including the construction of soil and water conservation structures. Across the whole area, 34 plots have been designated as permanent monitoring plots, and baseline vegetation and soil carbon data have been collected.

So far, 2242 deep trenches covering 9km have been constructed and can hold 6726m^3 of rainwater – that's enough to fill almost three Olympic-sized swimming pools. Stone and soil bunds to reduce soil erosion and filter the water have also been built, and the foundation work is underway to build two gabion check dams – small barriers made of gabion baskets bound together – to slow down water flow.

Since January, over 350 000 seedlings planted in 2020 were watered to sustain their growth during the dry season, and nearly 118 000 trees have

The rainy season is several weeks late this year, and planting has just begun. Seven tree nurseries have been preparing 711 200 seedlings. 275 960 planting pits with micro-basins have been dug in critical zones to conserve rainwater for the new seedlings.

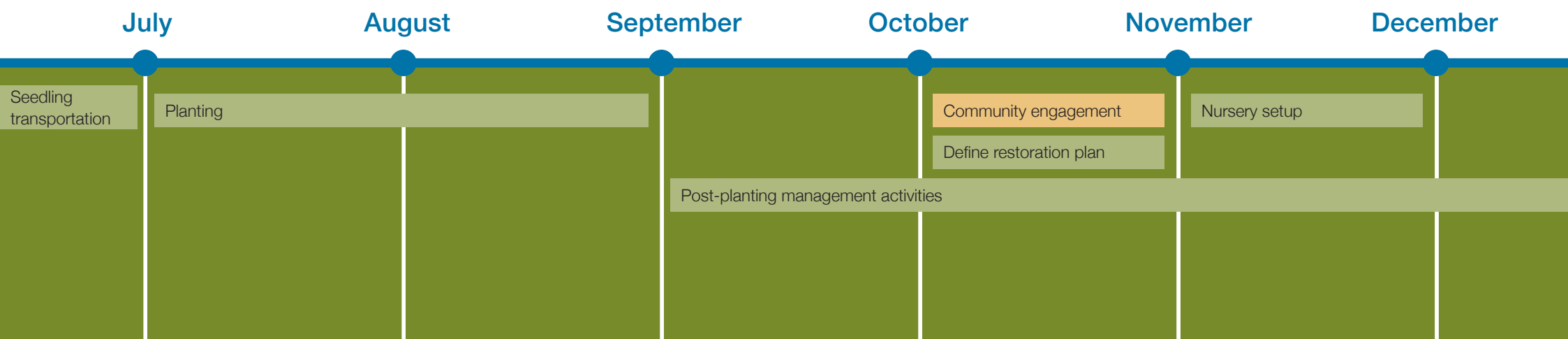


A hectare of land has been officially granted to WeForest from Atsbi district for the the ‘queen-rearing hub’, and the site has been prepared with the planting of bee forage species and other trees. Beehives will be installed, together with storage areas and shade, and then the process of splitting existing colonies into two or more hives and rearing new queens for each new colony will begin!

been pruned. Pruning is an essential part of helping the trees grow faster and has an extra benefit: sustainably harvested firewood. Over 3500 households received the pruned branches that they can use or sell for extra income that could earn a family an extra US$37, which is more than half a month’s average income in the region. It took almost 56 000 donkey loads to transport!

While progress on restoration has been able to take place, much of the livelihoods programme for generating sustainable income is delayed due to restricted access to local markets to procure equipment and animals (sheep and poultry) while the security situation is unstable. Nevertheless, 1449 households in 4 villages have received solar lamps, and the ‘queen-rearing hub’ we’re establishing to tackle the shortage of bee colonies is well underway (see left).

As the Desa’a project is long-term until 2030 and WeForest is committed to the communities and activities here, any shortfalls in timing or progress will be evened out once the planned activities are able to resume in earnest. Though the core livelihoods programmes were delayed, the communities here were nevertheless the focus of some more immediate and short-term support this year: find out more at Global Giving.



What's next?

- Analysis will be carried out of data collected from the new restoration sites in 2021 – species composition, vegetation density, biomass and soil samples – to estimate the accumulated carbon in the soil, among other indicators.
- Site selection and planning for 2022 restoration sites (4234 ha target).
- Distribution of poultry to 400 women-headed households.
- Distribution of 295 bee colonies.
- Training on the use and maintenance of solar lamps for 1449 households in 4 villages.
- Establishing schools' environment clubs at 2 schools.

How do we know our restored forests are growing and making an impact?

Every hectare under restoration is mapped with GPS points to generate polygons (areas on a map) that are assigned to sponsors. Permanent monitoring plots are established in our sites and our forestry and science teams conduct surveys to monitor progress of biomass growth, tree density, survival rate and species diversity, among other indicators. Where social impacts are also critical, we measure socio-economic indicators such as the number of beneficiaries, people trained, and income generated from forest-friendly livelihood activities.

Please visit our **Why and How** webpage for more information.

Stay up-to-date with our interactive Desa'a map, and check out the latest photos from the project on Flickr!

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