



ERITREA

MISSION

"We aim
at
a better life
for all
Eritreans
especially
the poor"

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UNDP Now

Eritrea Takes First Step Towards a National Anti-Poverty Plan

UNDP, World Bank and UNFPA extend support

Eritrea has begun the initial phase in a process that will lead to the development of a national anti poverty plan, known as Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The first in a series of activities, a poverty assessment has been set in motion since last September, and is on track for conclusion in the early months of 2003. According to Government plans, the target for finalizing the Interim PRSP is July 2003.

The exercise, coordinated by the International Cooperation, Macro Policy and Economic Coordination (ICMPEC) Office, involves close collaboration with line Ministries, other relevant

Government bodies, civil society, representative of local communities and development partners. The initiative will receive technical, advisory and financial support from UNDP, the World Bank and UNFPA.

The objective of the PRSP is to promote poverty reduction and encourage rapid economic growth through medium and long-term strategies that are developed with the broad participation of all stakeholders, including the poor themselves. Based on the results of the poverty assessment underway, the strategy paper is expected to reflect a comprehensive

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Recovering Communities Mark Poverty Eradication Day

Concurrent with the on-going preparations for a national poverty assessment that would lead to Eritrea's first *poverty reduction strategy paper* (PRSP), Eritrean communities, whose sources of livelihood were destroyed during the recent border conflict with Ethiopia, commemorated the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) at Enda Giorgis, about 100 km south of Asmara, on Thursday 17 October 2002.



Their Excellencies Fawzia Hashim, Minister of Justice, Askalu Menkerous, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, Amna Nurhusien, Minister of Tourism, Abraha Asfeha, Minister of Public Works, Kahsai Ghebrehiwot, Governor of Debub Region, senior Government officials, ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corps, heads and staff of UN Agencies, and other invited guests joined the people of Adiquala Sub-Region to mark the occasion.

In this area a variety of projects under the UNDP-supported, Italian-funded Post-War Emergency Recovery (PoWER) programme are in progress.



Mr. Simon R. Nhongo, UNDP Resident Representative, in his remarks to the gathering at Enda Giorgis noted, "the achievement of these projects represents an exemplary partnership between the local authorities of Debub, particularly the administration of Adi Quala Sub-region, the communities of Enda Giorgis and surrounding villages, Refugee Trust, CRIC, the Italian Cooperation and UNDP."



As part of the events to celebrate the Day, beneficiaries together with Refugee Trust International, an implementing partner NGO, displayed sample products of their income generating projects, comprising such activities as bakery, bee-keeping, cotton-knitting, dress-making, family drip irrigation, farming, grain store, hair-saloon, production of hollow blocks, kerosene sale, pottery, poultry and sheep/goat rearing.

Some of the projects financed by PoWER that were visited include a bakery run by 10 female-headed households and several reconstructed residential houses that had sustained total damage by the war.

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FOREWORD



Simon R. Nhongo, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative

It is a privilege and honour for me to write this foreword for the debut of "UNDP Now", which will be published every three months. What makes this first issue even more special is that it is coming out upon the launch of the Poverty Assessment, which will culminate in the production of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for Eritrea in July 2003. At the outset, I would like to thank all the staff of UNDP Eritrea for their dedication to fulfill the mission of the Country Office, which is to, *"aim at a better life for all Eritreans, especially the poor. Uphold the overarching goal of poverty-reduction, by supporting national priorities to build sustainable livelihoods, foster good governance, protect the environment, promote information and communication technology, combat HIV/AIDS and achieve post-conflict recovery"*. Special thanks go also to the members of staff who contributed towards the publication of this newsletter.

Over the past ten years, the UNDP Country Office in Eritrea supported the Government of Eritrea and its people in some key national milestones, starting with the 1993 Referendum, the first post-independence rehabilitation programme, revitalization of the fisheries sector, reintegration of Eritrean returnees from Sudan, drafting of the country's Constitution, drafting of six major legal codes and strengthening of the human and institutional capacity of the Justice System. In the context of a major Public Sector Management Programme (PSMP), UNDP provided key assistance for a functional analysis that resulted in the restructuring/streamlining of the Government's operations. The Eritrean Institute of Management (Embatkalla) was established to provide critical training in financial, personnel, and project management, as well as English language and computer proficiency to public sector employees. The PSMP also supported the development of business enterprises by assisting in the restructuring of the Business License Office, enabling the office to reduce time taken to issue licenses from 5-6 months to less than an hour!

UNDP has also been actively engaged in supporting the preparation of environmental legislation, strengthening national capacities for the management of coastal marine and island resources, establishment of an environmental information system, and the preparation of the National Action Plans (NAPs) to Combat Desertification and Climate Change. More recently, in response to the humanitarian crisis, and the ensuing recovery challenges facing Eritrea, UNDP, in partnership with the Government, and particularly the local governments of Gash-Barka and Debub, the local communities, as well as key bilaterals and NGOs, had the privilege of providing support to the war-affected population to restore their normal livelihoods.

I am confident that the UNDP Country Office and staff will continue to give their utmost in fulfilling the new role of UNDP, as *"the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life, and helping countries build and share solutions to the challenges of i) Democratic Governance; ii) Poverty Reduction; iii) Crisis Prevention and Recovery; iv) Energy and Environment; v) Information and Communications Technology; and vi) HIV/AIDS"*.

Finally I want to take this opportunity to extend my profound thanks and gratitude to all our partners, without whom no progress would have been possible in any of UNDP's endeavours in Eritrea.

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understanding of poverty and its determinants and will define priority policy actions that enable the country to reach its goals for reducing poverty, consistent with the institutional and fiscal capacity of the country. The PRSP will further identify outcomes that can be monitored in a measurable and transparent manner.

The poverty assessment will strengthen the diagnosis of poverty, its causes and consequences, and capture the perceptions, aspirations and priorities of the poor; assess the impact of past policies and programmes on the poor; and feed the results into the formulation of improved poverty reduction strategies, policies, programmes and projects, that better respond to the specific circumstances of the different groups.

The poverty assessment comprises two major components, namely the **Household Living Standards Measurement Surveys (HLSMS)** and the **Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA)**.

The HLSMS, to be carried out by the National Statistics and Evaluation Office, covers both poor and non-poor households. It collects data on household demographics (number, age, gender, etc. of members); housing and assets; household expenditures (including on food, fuel, water, lighting, clothing, housing, transport, recreation, schooling and health care); labour force participation, employment status and occupation; wages and prices of goods and services; and income, transfer payments, savings and loans/debt.

The PPA, on the other hand, will look into the perceptions of the poor, their neighbours, community leaders and local officials on poverty, the constraints faced by the poor, and the potentials that exist to overcome poverty are valuable in understanding the situation on the ground. Often, these perspectives are captured through consultations, participatory appraisals, surveys and/or focus group discussions with these groups, through participatory poverty (potential) assessments. The PPA studies will enable the poor communities to take stock of their assets, skills and strengths, identify the main challenges and priorities, and formulate strategies for tackling these within their communities.



EVENTS

A Local Development Project Starts Rolling in Anseba

A multi-donor project launched to support efforts to fight poverty and promote effective local governance in Anseba Region.

Implementation has commenced of a major Local Development Project (US\$ 5.7 million) in Anseba Region. The project, to be implemented over a period of 5 years (2002-2007), aims to contribute to the reduction of poverty in Anseba as a basis for sustained self-development and is jointly financed by UNCDF, the Belgium Survival Fund (BSF) and UNDP.

The Anseba Local Development Project (ALDP) is an innovative pilot project on decentralisation that seeks to achieve its

NGOs attended the workshop. The workshop intensely debated core issues related to the project and by the end of the day, among other things, a genuine interest in decentralisation in Anseba was revealed. The workshop further discussed the importance of institutionalising the project in the regular functions of the Regional Administration as well as the possibility of replicating the project concept in other Regions of Eritrea – once lessons have been learnt from this pilot initiative.

demand driven approach of the project will ensure that only projects formulated by local communities of Anseba will be supported.



Representatives of Anseba Zone, Sub-Zone and District Parliament at ALDP workshop on 17 and 18 September 2002

goals by providing basic social and economic infrastructure, improving the natural resource base of local communities, and enhancing local human capital endowments. In particular, it aims at ensuring that local government delivers pro-poor public infrastructure and services based on responsive, transparent and participatory planning processes. In the process, ALDP will address the wider institutional issues (planning, finance and implementation arrangements) linked to the continued delivery of the services and infrastructures, and will provide requisite capacity building support.

As part of the project's consultative process, a stakeholder workshop was held in Keren, on 16 September 2002. Representatives of the various partners, including local communities, sub-zobas, Regional Assembly (Baito), Regional Administration, UN agencies, donors and

"In order to ensure that locally prioritised pro-poor intervention needs are identified and implemented successfully," said Susanne Krysiak, UNDP/UNCDF programme Officer, "the project will involve village people and local administrators in a participatory, transparent, and accountable planning, implementation and monitoring system." She further disclosed that the project's operational manual, already translated into three local languages, would be revised annually to incorporate lessons learnt. The Lessons learned would also be systematically documented and put at the disposal of policy-makers so as to inform national policy on decentralisation.

The future is set for ALDP. In 2003 the project's pivotal component, the Local Development Fund, will begin disbursing funds to enable local-level implementation of community-identified projects. The

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According to the implementation schedule, survey fieldwork would be completed by February 2003, and the preliminary results would be available by the end of March 2003. This schedule is proposed keeping in view the need to feed the results into the PRSP, which is targeted to be finalized in mid-2003. Full analysis of the data and preparation of the final reports would be completed soon after around September 2003. This final report would draw upon and fully integrate the qualitative results from the participatory poverty assessment with the quantitative results of the Household LSMS.

...Recovering Communities ...

The very venue where the commemoration took place had seen much of the fighting during the recent conflict; so were most of the people of Enda Gergis and adjacent villages who gathered to observe the day.

When fighting broke out in May 2000, most of the residents of this area were forced to flee their homes - at a time when they should have been putting seeds on the ground for the next harvest. They sought refuge at camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) and stayed there for months until their return following the peace agreement signed in December 2000 by Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the subsequent establishment of the Temporary Security Zone. As they had virtually nothing with them, life under canvas in the IDP camp was very tough; so was the return, because they found most of their belongings looted and their houses destroyed.

The theme of this year's Poverty Eradication Day is "poverty eradication and sustainable development", much in tune with the effort by these communities as they shake off the vestiges of war and struggle to rebuild



COMMENTARY

Linking Poverty Reduction with Environmental Management

Yoseph Admekom

Until recently, environment and growth, environment and population, degradation of natural resources and poverty have been some of the concerns left to over-

simplification. It is true that, in the short-term, social and economic priorities, notably reducing poverty, may create conflict with medium and long term environmental objectives. For example, as population grows and as food insecurity prevails, rapid conversion of all available land to one-type of crop production and intensive application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides may be

an option many societies are forced to take. In the medium and long term, however, the clearing and overexploitation of natural resources would lead to soil erosion, contamination of water, and would result in diminished ecosystem services that undermine agricultural productivity. What should be of utmost concern to the poor is not only access to but also preserving the *quality* of natural resources, whether these are water resources, crop and grazing land, forest products, bio-mass for fuel or other energy sources.

In Eritrea, land degradation, soil erosion and deforestation are at the heart of major environmental problems. This is reflected in the National Environment Management Plan of Eritrea, prepared with wide participation of the society; in the Common Country Assessment (CCA), jointly produced by the Government and the UN System, and in other numerous publications produced over the years. The issue of land as related to the implementation of the Land Proclamation of 1994 was identified as the single most

important factor related to improving land use and in engaging the communities and individuals in meaningful development efforts that benefit all.



Semenawi Bahri: sources of biodiversity, wild life, water, wood, fodder, and tourism.

In light of the above, development planners need to recognize that the poor are the prime victim of any harmful practices affecting the environment and natural resources. Serious consideration should be given to integrate poverty-environment issues into the national/sectoral development frameworks. In this connection, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for Eritrea, currently under formulation, is expected to have a significant environmental component that would include measures to reduce poverty. It is worth mentioning, however, that beside incorporation of environment issues into the national plan, a strong coordinating body with the requisite legal framework would be required to implement programs, enforce laws and regulations, and assess and monitor envi-

ronmental impacts. Hence, the importance of finalizing and proclaiming the draft National Environmental Act.

In the aftermath of the WSSD in Johannesburg, the question of sustainability is gaining more attention. Understanding of the specific relationships between poverty and environment, will lead to effective win-win opportunities and rational ways of dealing with tradeoffs - particularly if communities are allowed to work hand in hand with policy/decision makers. To this end, Eritrea has signed various environment-related conventions and agreements in fulfillment of the global commitments. On the occasion of this year's International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October 2002, a very important message needs to be conveyed that environmental degradation should not be taken as inevitable, or as unavoidable in the stride of economic growth. On the contrary, improved environmental management is key to poverty reduction.

...Recovering Communities ...

their lives and look ahead to a sustainable future.

Refugee Trust, with funding from PoWER, is implementing a multi-sectoral project to assist 5400 households in the Sub-region. During the initial phase of the project, essential inputs were distributed to enable beneficiaries to plant and grow cereals in time for the rainy season. These included 350 oxen, 3000 plough tools, 500 quintals of finger millet and red Taff seeds, 4500 quintals of fertilisers were distributed.

The second phase involved delivery of household utensils,

clothing and replacement of 2400 sheep and goats as well as donkeys to households that suffered loss of livestock during the war.

The third and fourth phases, aimed at creating sustainable means of income. 600 families benefited from distribution of 7,500 chicks. The same beneficiaries attended a three-day orientation workshop and received chicken feed and medicine supplies. In the final phase, over 400 households, mainly female-headed, were assisted to start income-generating jobs. Most of the beneficiaries were voluntarily grouped and provided with resources



EVENTS

Programme for Low Cost Housing Delivery System Begins to Generate Results

In conjunction with the commemoration of the World Habitat Day, 7 October 2002, a UNDP-supported **Programme for Low-Cost Housing Delivery System** celebrated the graduation of its first batch of trainees. The thirty-six (36) Eritrean youth graduates, of whom five were women, received training at the project's training and demonstration centre in Mendefera. The project was launched in July 2001 by the Government of Eritrea and UNDP to pilot and build capacity for the delivery of low-cost houses in Eritrea, through (i) expansion of commercial production of affordable building materials and appropriate technology, (ii) introduction of non-conventional mechanisms of savings and credit to support shelter initiatives in communities, and (iii) development of capacity within government, small-scale entrepreneurs active in the sector, and communities.

HE Asfeha Abraha, Minister of Public Works, Mr. Firouz Sobhani, UNDP Senior Deputy Resident Representative, Dr. Eduardo Lopez Moreno, Senior Settlements Advisor to UN-Habitat, Mr. Medhanie Estifanos, National Project Coordinator and Director General of the Department of Urban Development in the Ministry of Public Works, representatives of NGOs, the National Association of Eritrean Engineers and Architect, the National Association of Eritrean Contractors, and other invited guests, attended the graduation ceremony.

In a statement delivered during the graduation ceremony, Minister Asfeha, noting the project's satisfactory progress and commending all partners involved for a job well done, congratulated the trainees for their outstanding performance and wished them success in their future careers. On his part, Mr. Sobhani took the opportunity to express UNDP's appreciation of the achievements of the pilot project and reaffirmed the Organization's commitment to join hands with other partners to support national efforts in search of a sustainable solution to the increasing demand for affordable housing. He also expressed UNDP's continued support to the national recovery process and the implementation of capacity building initiatives that contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development for the people of Eritrea.

The US\$ 760, 000-project, which received technical assistance from UN – Habitat as well, is executed by the Department of Urban Development.

The project's impact in supplying skilled producers of building materials, introducing low-cost construction technology and creating employment opportunities for IDPs and returnees, is expected to be boosted with the imminent inauguration of a second training and demonstration centre in Barentu. As part of a plan to promote wider application of the programme's approaches and products, the project provided technical support to Swiss Development Co-operation in the construction of 150 low-cost housing units for war-affected communities in the border area of Kisad Eqa in Debub.



HE Abraha Asfeha, Minister of Public Works (right), and Mr. Firouz Sobhani, UNDP Eritrea Senior Deputy Resident Representative, presenting certificate to graduates of low-cost housing programme in Medefera





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EVENTS

Celebration of UN Day 2002 in Eritrea in Pictures

...Recovering Communities ...



worth 3,000 Nakfa per beneficiary, in cash and in kind, to establish small group businesses that could generate an average monthly income of 400 Nakfa per beneficiary. The entire service delivery process involved consultation with all stakeholders, primarily the local people, as they knew better than anyone else what they wanted and how to achieve them. As noted by several participants, the main challenge is in maintaining these activities to a sustainable level so as to guarantee a longer-term livelihood basis for, particularly, female-headed households.

In the area of housing reconstruction, another NGO, Centro Regionale d'Intervento per la Cooperazione (CRIC), constructed 80 residential houses that had been completely destroyed during the war, as well as 58 VIP latrines in the area. On the other hand, Debub Region authorities are finalising plans to rehabilitate 750 partially damaged houses in the area.

In a statement delivered by their representative, the local community of Enda Giorgis and the surrounding area expressed their gratitude for the assistance extended to them as they strive to rebuild their war-damaged livelihoods.

October 17 was designated the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty by the United Nations in 1992, and has ever since been observed all over the world to promote awareness of the need to eradicate poverty and destitution in all countries.

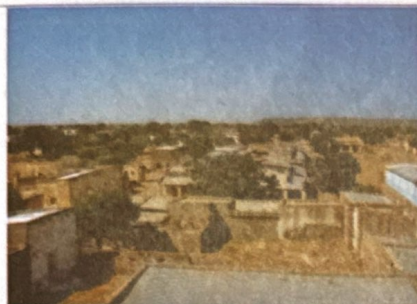




FEATURE

Recovery Effort to Ease Despair in Fateful Om-Hajer

Michael Araya



Om-hajer

west in the Sudan. Om-Hajer, about 500 km away from Asmara, sits on the southern tip of an expanse of fertile soil, supporting most of the town's residents who practice agriculture, rear livestock and engage in local and cross-border trade. Most importantly, sesame and cotton, highly treasured Eritrean cash crops, as well as dura, the most widely used Eritrean food grain, largely grow here. The same agricultural products that the other side of the border produces in abundance also used to be marketed in Omhajer before they were transported inland for local consumption in Eritrea. In short, Omhajer was a vital political, economic and military centre on the banks of Setit River.

But, in contrast with what nature has endowed Om-Hajer with, the border town has also seen most of the tragic history - at least three heart-breaking episodes in the last thirty years alone.

The most recent catastrophe followed the outbreak of the border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in May 1998. The war cost thousands of lives and massive resources on both sides before a peace deal was signed by both countries in Algiers on 12 December 2000. When the Ethiopian troops vacated Om-

Wedged between Eritrea's border with both Ethiopia and Sudan, Om-Hajer and its environs occupy Eritrea's southwestern corner. Just a stone throw across Setit river to the south is located Humera, an Ethiopian border town; so does Hamdaiet to the

town's health centre, two schools, the church and the mosque. Houses were stripped of their roofs, doors, windows and all items of any value. Business establishments were completely looted. With much of the mosque's roofing missing, and the church evidently set on fire from inside, the two places of worship in the town were seriously damaged. Everything of value had either been taken or destroyed. Not even the church's icon, considered a most sacred religious object by both peoples on either side of the Setit River, was spared. Many of the huts were also burned.

Still worse was the psychological trauma and the recurring agony the war and the plunder had inflicted on the residents of Omhajer. Even now, two years after the Ethiopian troops vacated the town, most of its residents have not yet returned home from sanctuary camps in Ghergef, Guluj, Tessenei and other places, and it is unlikely they will do so before a lasting peace is achieved or at least before basic social and economic infrastructures are restored and residential houses are rehabilitated.

Soon after the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), as provided for in the Algiers Agreement, a Rapid Village Assessment (RVA) was conducted. Accordingly, Government, UN and other humanitarian agencies initiated rehabilitation projects in Omhajer, to enable the return of about 7,000 residents of the town. UNDP took part in the initiative through its recovery programme and supported the effort to rehabilitate schools, health centers, shelter, market place, and administration building, under the Post War Eritrean Recovery (PoWER) programme financed by the Italian Government.

Implementing partners in the rehabilitation projects of US\$ 680,000 included two NGOs, namely CESVI and MOVIMONDO, as well as the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC) and the Gash Barka Regional Administration.

CESVI rehabilitated around 450 residential houses that had suffered partial damage, by providing roofing materials, doors, windows and skilled manpower. It rebuilt one primary school, a market place, and the administration building at a total cost of US \$ 250,000. MOVIMONDO rehabilitated a health centre and a health post and provided technical assistance in primary health care (PHC) by bringing in an international expert. As the health centre buildings and facilities were almost totally destroyed, MOVIMONDO not only reconstructed the facilities from scratch, but also built additional blocks and equipped the centers with furniture and medical equipment up to the standard of Eritrean health centers at a total budget of US\$ 300,000. ERREC, with UNDP (PoWER) funding, rehabilitated one junior school at US\$ 70,000 and is currently working on the construction of a water treatment plant at cost of US\$ 50,000.



Om-hajer on return to normalcy

hajer, accordingly, on September 21 2000, after an occupation lasting three months, the once thriving town was left in ruins; it was almost completely destroyed, plundered, deserted and mine infested. Almost none of the permanent structures stood intact. All public buildings were severely destroyed; so were the





AND MORE

...Recovery Effort to Ease Despair in Fateful Om-Hajer

Historically speaking, Omhajer also endured a similar disaster in 1974. It was a massacre associated with a notorious Ethiopian Major, commonly referred to as "Shambel Belew", Amharic for the "Merciless Major". According to survivors of the tragic incident, one early morning, the residents of the ill-fated town were rounded up and herded to Bademit plains on the southern outskirts of the town, for a "town meeting". Mengisteab, one of those who narrowly escaped death on the tragic day said, "Even the elderly, and the sick were hauled to the "gathering". The same source recounted that before fire was opened on the crowd, teargas was applied to make escape impossible, and what followed was mass murder.

The second catastrophe took place just a few months later in 1975, when Ethiopian forces launched an attack from Humera and seized the town from the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) forces. All houses were burned, property looted and the town residents were forced to flee into destitution in Sudan, where most of them lived as refugees for years to come. Ever since, Omhajer was reduced into a mere barrack and remained virtually deserted until the late 1980s when the subsequent unhindered growth of the bush in the area attracted cattlemen from the higher grounds along the Setit and Gash Basin.

After independence in 1991, more people returned home and Om-Hajer had begun to regain its lost self. Houses were rebuilt. New ones were erected. Schools, a health centre and other public infrastructures were established. With farmers starting to plough their land in peace, more investment had flowed in and business flourished. The place had enjoyed the first ever-amicable cross-border interaction and had witnessed unprecedented and unrestricted cross-border movement of people and goods. The town had prospered and boomed... alas, only before the outbreak of the border war, the scourge of which is still visible, and hence the need for further effort to ease despair in fateful Om-Hajer is a reality.

"In order to bring normalcy to the town" said Professor Techeste Ahdernom, UNDP Senior Advisor on Recovery in Eritrea, "it is necessary not only to rehabilitate the social and economic infrastructure including the residential buildings, but also to assist the inhabitants build sustainable livelihoods." "This is the greatest challenge that faces the returning refugees and internally displaced populations", he added.

Poverty Eradication Day in Eritrea in Pictures

A glimpse to the exhibition held on the commemoration of Poverty Eradication Day 2002 by beneficiaries of UNDP-supported Projects at Adi-quala Sub-zone



Pottery



Dress-making



Cotton-knitting

Bee-keeping