



Reversing the Flow

The challenge

Climate variability and land degradation are disrupting water and land systems across East Africa and the Horn. Communities in Sudan, Kenya, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia face recurrent droughts, floods, and degraded soils. Despite these pressures, frontline communities hold deep knowledge of seasonal patterns, landscape behaviour, and practical responses. Yet resources and decision-making powers still sit mainly with national or international actors. This disconnect weakens long-term adaptation outcomes.



Half-moon bunds for landscape restoration, Isiolo Kenya
(Photo by IMPACT)

Our approach

The Reversing the Flow (RtF) program responds by shifting resources and leadership to local communities. Across five countries, RtF enables community structures to take charge of climate adaptation, restoring degraded landscapes, and shaping district and national programs and policies. In Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, and Bangladesh, where community structures are already active but under-resourced, RtF strengthens their ability to lead real climate action. GOPA MetaMeta is the knowledge partner for this RtF program.

The goal

The goal of the Knowledge Partner component of RtF is to build a strong, coherent learning system that enables hubs (local NGOs) and communities to

lead climate action. Our role is to help transform RtF's locally led adaptation practice into a structured cycle of learning, reflection, documentation, and influence. We support hubs in capturing their own knowledge, distilling patterns across countries, and turning these insights into practical resources that guide implementation and strengthen community ownership. Through targeted accompaniment, cross-country exchange, and facilitation of policy and programming dialogue, we help ensure that community priorities translate into programme decisions and institutional change. We also aim to strengthen results measurement by integrating community-defined indicators, landscape evidence, and reflexive monitoring into a shared framework. This enables hubs, RVO, and partners to demonstrate what locally led adaptation achieves and to guide future investments and scaling of the RtF approach.

Project name	Knowledge Partner for the Reversing the Flow program
Project region	Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh
Financed by	Government of the Netherlands (Through Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO))
Implemented by	GOPA MetaMeta
Duration	Jan 2024 – Dec 2028
Partners	APDA, ORDA, IMPACT, MIDP, TUPADO, SOS Sahel Sudan, Friendship, Uttaran, APIL, tiipaalga.

Key highlights

- ✓ 5-country locally led adaptation program with strong presence in East Africa
- ✓ Functioning cross-country learning architecture with embedded routines for documentation, reflection, and synthesis across all hubs
- ✓ Launch of individual knowledge and support plans per hub, ensuring tailored, responsive, and context-specific learning support.



- ✓ GIS, Remote Sensing, and community monitoring tools introduced to communities and local NGOs
- ✓ Establishment of policy and programming dialogue formats creating a pathway from community insights to policy influence.
- ✓ Kick off of local research grants linking communities and local NGOs with local universities

Examples of our success

Within the first 24 months of the project we:

- ✓ Strengthened collaboration across 10 hubs in 5 countries, establishing trust-based working relationships and regular learning cycles
- ✓ Facilitated 3 cross-country learning events enabling hubs to jointly analyse community practices and refine RtF-wide approaches
- ✓ Supported the production of 56+ knowledge products and learning outputs, including blogs, cases, field reflections, and early synthesis materials.

Voices from the field

“Normally donors do the work, now we can solve our own problems, and with less money”

Jackson, Mosul Community Member, Kenya

“We have learned the purpose of unity. When we come together as a community, we can do great things with our land”

Tom, Mosul Community Chairman, Kenya

Impact story

When ORDA Ethiopia first introduced the Reversing the Flow (RtF) approach in Koti Kebele, Ethiopia, the community faced a daunting set of challenges: deepening gully erosion, declining soil fertility, shrinking water availability, and limited livelihood opportunities. Youth struggled to find work, women had few economic pathways, and land degradation was advancing faster than past interventions could reverse. Yet within these challenges lay a strong desire among residents to reclaim their landscapes and shape their own future. In December 2024, the Community Situation Initial Assessment (CSIA) became the turning point. For the first time,

community members collectively mapped their problems, identified the specific pressures affecting each watershed, and outlined practical steps they believed could restore their environment. The process revealed something powerful: residents already knew the exact locations where erosion could be controlled, where water could be harvested, and where reforestation had the greatest chance of success. What followed was a shift in confidence and ownership. Community members proposed rehabilitation measures, discussed fair distribution of resources among watersheds, and highlighted priority needs such as water access and youth livelihoods. Women and marginalized groups were intentionally brought into decision-making spaces. New committees were established to oversee activities, and residents began preparing for reforestation, gully rehabilitation, and income-generating initiatives. The early phase of RtF in Koti Kebele shows that when communities are trusted and resourced to lead, empowerment accelerates. Community members now see themselves not as beneficiaries, but as the primary stewards of a long-term restoration effort that they designed and will sustain.



Koti Kebele Community in Ethiopia (Photos by ORDA)