

# Organic

*Creating a Better Environment for Life*

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## Advocacy workshop on the SEWOH Project

The SEWOH (One World No Hunger Project, begun in 2018 and concluded in June 2021, was a transnational project implemented in Ethiopia, Benin, Ghana and Zimbabwe. With support from Bread for the World and SwedBio, African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and ISD launched the project in Ethiopia with the aim of strengthening the ability of local communities to save and preserve biodiversity. Among the major objectives of the SEWOH project in Ethiopia, implemented in collaboration with the Boru Silassie-Mesal community in South Wollo Zone, Amhara Region, were: to increase seed variety in targeted areas; revive and document traditional knowledge; strengthen community advocacy and lobbying to influence policy on smallholder agriculture; and develop various advocacy and communication products showcase the impact of the project.

With the above objectives in mind, ABN and ISD organized an advocacy workshop from August 7-8 at the Melbourne Hotel in Dessie. Those attending included senior representatives of various departments of South Wollo Zone Administration and woreda administration, agricultural experts, senior staff of ISD and ABN, a senior researcher from Wollo University, NGOs, CSOs, Development Agents, farmers participating in the SEWOH project, as well as women's groups. The main objective of the workshop was to develop an advocacy approach on the issues mentioned above, to include development of a report detailing research findings, implementing joint campaign activities, and submitting policy recommendations at national, regional and international levels. It was also intended to develop, publish and translate policy briefs, media reports, films, newsletters and messages, and to prepare a policy brief with recommendations on indigenous

seeds, knowledge and land use. The workshop format included panel presentations, plenary sessions, group work and workshop evaluation.



The workshop was opened by Mr. Gizaw Gebremariam, ISD Deputy Director and Programme Manager. He welcomed the participants, stating that the workshop's recommendations were expected to be based on lessons learned during implementation of the SEWOH project.

He then invited Mr. Yimer Yemam, a Group Leader in South Wollo Zone Infrastructure and Design Department to make the opening remarks. Mr. Yimer explained how the workshop would contribute to multi-faceted efforts in modernizing underdevelopment systems to increase agricultural production. He stressed that the government was involved in these efforts by implementing activities in a participatory and synergetic manner.

Dr. Fassil Gebeyehu from ABN then took the floor, stating that ABN worked closely with government authorities and relevant stakeholders and the media so that partner proved seeds but accounted for less than 10% of seed supply, and the informal seed system which played a key role



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in the national seed security system, accounting for 90% of seeds used by smallholder farmers. Mr. Yimer informed the gathering that the Ethiopian agricultural research system had developed more than 664 varieties of 50 different crop types, and that according to research, farmers usually preferred traditional varieties to better withstand environmental stress. He furthermore elaborated on the Community Seed Bank (CSB) system. In this system seed multiplication, production, storage, exchange, marketing, selection and breeding is coordinated by organized farmers so as to facilitate access to diverse seeds. He said that CSBs could also ensure effective implementation of farmers' rights and could develop into centres for experimentation and innovation regarding seeds.

In his presentation, Mr. Mohamed Abegaz from the South Wollo Zone Land Use Department argued that administering rural land with a land use plan was a necessary step to curb environmental degradation and increase crop production and productivity. He intimated that the Amhara Region rural land administration was working to accomplish this by issuing a proclamation, regulations and directives on rural land administration and usage.



The proclamation recommends using any rural land with 60% slope area for forestry, perennial plants and development of forage for animals. A structure had been developed extending from region to kebele level involving a participatory land use plan to be implemented on farms at all administrative levels.

In the final presentation, Mr. Hailu Tadesse from South Wollo Zone Culture and Tourism Department explained the importance of indigenous knowledge (also known as cultural knowledge, traditional knowledge, local knowledge and public knowledge), to local communities. He said that indigenous knowledge covered such areas as indigenous seed preservation, natural resource conservation and use, agriculture, organic fertilizer preparation, child raising and conflict resolution. Regarding the latter, "Abegar", a ancient traditional conflict resolution mechanism was still being practiced in local communities. Mr. Hailu said, however, that although Ethiopia has a cultural policy which aims to study, protect, promote and develop the cultures of its different nationalities, the policy has failed to address the role of traditional conflict resolutions mechanisms such as "Abegar" and should be revisited.

Participant farmers from South Wollo Zone fully participated in plenary and group discussions, describing how the SEWOH project had impacted their lives and livelihoods. Some of them greatly appreciated that ISD and the SEWOH project had helped secure their knowledge on the importance of securing and preserving their seeds to help combat the effects of climate change. Others pointed to the fact that the project had helped them in researching



and reviving lost traditions, knowledge and seeds in their communities. Yet others agreed that the project had helped them to improve family relations and make for tolerance and peaceful coexistence in their communities.

A number of important lessons and drawbacks were pointed out in relation to the SEWOH project. These included: lack of adequate technical and infrastructure support for the project; lack of sustainable finance for activities which are dependent on NGO support and assistance; and weak support from and integration with existing government structures such as the extension and research system. This less than adequate support had kept CSBs from playing an important role in seed conservation and diversity in South Wollo Zone. There was a general consensus that the drawbacks needed to be addressed in a systematic and effective manner.

Among major policy recommendations on seed, land and indigenous knowledge tabled by the workshop: government provision of policy support to the informal seed system and subsidization of research and development on the promotion of the informal seed system; the need for policies to be promulgated to ensure the right of farmers to their own seed varieties; institutionalization of CSBs through establishment of relevant structures at all administrative levels and allocation of human resources; incorporation of CSBs in all agricultural development strategies; the need for uniform federal law application on land use plans in

all regions and strengthening land use institutions at all administrative levels; implementation of a policy mechanism to integrate and harmonize different development interventions with the existing land use plan proclamation; implementation of a government land use plan policy to incorporate values of indigenous knowledge systems; and promotion of and support for traditional conflict resolutions mechanisms to be reflected in the existing culture policy.

The workshop was closed by Mr. Ali Seid, Head of South Wollo Zone Agriculture Department, who thanked the organizers and presenters for ensuring its success. In particular he noted the presentations made by several speakers, including Mr. Gizaw Gebremariam, Dr. Fassil Gebeyehu and Mr. Hailu Tadesse. Mr. Gizaw Gebremariam's comments on restoring social values and maintaining sustainability of local values and cultural norms to pass on to future generations was of paramount importance. He said that, as elaborated by Mr. Hailu Tadesse, it was fascinating to learn about the untapped cultural potential in our various communities and the possible contribution of indigenous knowledge to science. He emphasized the critical importance of environmental protection and the development of land use plans. He furthermore stressed that it was fundamental to restore indigenous seed varieties and protect biodiversity along the lines of the SEWOH project. He said that the goal of the ABN and One World No Hunger Initiative, as expounded by Dr. Fassil could serve as the foundation for further activities in the Ethiopian context.



## Major activities undertaken by ISD during the period January – June 2021



ISD successfully implemented a number of activities planned for the period, while a few others are ongoing. A 2-day national seminar aimed at sharing experiences in agro ecology in 7 countries in Africa was undertaken, involving major stakeholders. Those attending included national scientists, agriculture experts, senior staff from ISD, PELUM Ethiopia and CARI. Also in attendances were farmers, women and youth groups involved in programmes run by ISD and PELUM Ethiopia who were specifically working on and advocating for agro ecology. Women farmers implementing “push pull” and vermicomposting practices were also present. The workshop attempted to maintain a rough balance between male and female participants. It was observed, however, that some farmers involved in Trench gardening were unable to attend.

A draft strategy for facilitating Community of Practice per country is currently under preparation and will be presented at a workshop later in the year. The process for developing collaborative tools needed to implement the strategy has however, begun. A draft national advocacy strategy was drawn up after discussions with CSOs and is being reviewed prior to release of the final version. Selection of two initiatives for evaluation by ISD and partners was completed through a participatory approach, while further initiatives on two sites, Hawassa and Guder

are currently being revised, to be included in the next period July – December 2021.

At the national level ISD’s AVACLIM project was developed in collaboration with partners and key stakeholders working on agro ecology project activities. These included government and non-government organizations such as the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization (EARO), PELUM Ethiopia, PAN Ethiopia, MELCA Ethiopia and the African Biodiversity Network (ABN). Such relationships with stakeholders are vital to encourage them to include project activities in their extension systems and policy plans. Close working relationships were also developed with Hawassa Zuria District Agriculture Office and Guder area agriculture office.

A few planned-for activities, although begun during the period January-June 2021 are expected to be completed during the next Action Plan period (July – December 2021). These include: completion of the development of collaborative tools required to implement the draft strategy for facilitating the Community of Practice per country, to be shared with partners, training of local partners in the use of the multi-criteria assessment tools; and organization of national meetings to discuss and adapt the indicators and evaluation method and to define the data collection protocol in each country.

## Training workshop on collection and growing tree seedlings, nursery site management and vegetation production

A three-day training workshop on collection and growth of tree seedlings, nursery site management and vegetation production, was conducted by ISD in the town of Dire Dawa. The purpose of the workshop, held from September 5-7, 2021 was to equip members of Cultural Biodiversity Clubs with relevant knowledge and skills to engage in tree seeds collection, nursery site management and vegetation production. Participating were senior staff from ISD, forestry and horticulture experts from Dire Dawa Administration Agriculture Office, senior staff of Dire Dawa Administration Education Office, and members of Cultural Biodiversity Clubs from various high schools. The workshop format consisted of presentations of study papers, plenary sessions, group discussions/experience sharing, and practical work at nursery sites.

The workshop was opened by Ato Fekadu Senbeta, Dire Dawa High School Director, after which Ato Gizaw Gebremariam, ISD Deputy Director and Programme Manager enlightened the participants on the meaning and importance of Cultural Biodiversity in today's world, with particular reference to the

Ethiopian context. He was followed by Ato Shimelis Tegegne, ISD Senior Nutrition Expert who explained the aims and purpose of the training and what was expected of the trainees on returning to their respective schools.

Various presentations were made by experts from the Dire Dawa Agriculture Office. A paper on tree seeds collection, preservation and storage and preparation of tree seedlings was presented by Ato Adissu Delelegne, Forestry Expert. Ato Zewdu Abegaz, another Forestry Expert delivered a paper on nursery site management, after which Ato Feyisel Abdi, a Horticulture Expert presented a brief on nursery site management.

Following the various presentations,





participant trainees were divided into two groups to conduct practical activities at various nursery sites in Dire Dawa. At these sites, the trainees were educated on how to prepare nursery beds and on how to grow tree seedlings. Practitioners who were on hand gave detailed explanations on efficient methods of managing nursery sites. Vegetable seeds and four types of agricultural tools were then distributed to CB clubs of eight schools.

The workshop was closed by W/O Muluka Mohammed, Head of the Dire Dawa Education Office, who provided the participants with a description of cultural, social and political condition prevalent in Dire Dawa. She ended her remarks by commending ISD for organizing such a worthwhile and important workshop and for selecting Dire Dawa to host the event.



