

Organic

Creating a Better Environment for Life

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SDC Guests' organic farm visit around Holeta area

Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) is a pillar-based initiative in line with a decision of the African Union (AU) to mainstream EOA into national systems by 2025, in order to improve agricultural productivity, food, culture, market access and sustainable development in Africa. The Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD), mandated to implement the EOA in Ethiopia has been carrying out the EOA Project ever since the establishment of the EOA initiative in 2011. The Organization has launched two projects since 2011 aimed at implementing the EOA initiative. One is the Swedish government-sponsored SSNC-EOA Project, and the other, the Swiss backed SDC-EOA Project. Over the years these two organizations have been working hard to expand the EOA among smallholder farmers in Tigray, South Wollo, Oromia and SNNPR

Recently, senior Swiss government officials visited smallholder farmers in Welmera Wereda, Oromia Region, a project implementation area. The objective of the visit was to review the overall process of the project and observe its impact on the farmers to date. The visit was conducted in Bekeka and Welmera Choke kebeles in Welmera wereda. The visitors from the Swiss Development Cooperation, the main project donor, included Tamara Mona, Swiss Ambassador to Ethiopia and South Sudan, Christian Frutiger, Head of Global Cooperation, Manuel Etter, SDC's Head of the Africa Division, Davide Vinganti, Head, International Cooperation, Addis Ababa, Daniel Valenghi, First Secretary, SDC, and Mr. Amsalu Abate, Programme Officer, Addis Ababa. They were accompanied by Mr. Dadi Amsalu, representative of Welmera woreda administration.

ISD Executive Director Mr. Ghebremedhin Belay welcomed the guests and explained how the organization began EOA and what activities had been undertaken so far. He thanked the Swiss Government and SDC for its continued support for implementation of EOA.

Ms. Azeb Worku, Value Chain & Market Development coordinator, then gave a brief summation of the progress of the project, including how many farmers are involved and benefiting from it, the types of vegetables the farmers produce using compost, and market linkages created for them. After the briefing the guests visited the fields of three farmers in Bekaka kebele and another farmer's field in Welmera Chokie kebele. They noted the variety of vegetables and wheat crops that the farmers had grown using natural farming methods.

The farmers told the guests that they are preparing compost and vermicompost and spreading them on their fields so



that their land can yield good and healthy crops. One of the female farmers, Fekade Tulu, asked how she started EOA, said "A few farmers were selected by our kebele (the smallest unit of administration similar to a district). We received training organized by ISD on how to produce crops using natural farming methods. Subsequent to the training I prepared compost and began growing vegetables on a small plot of land. Prior to preparing compost I had used chemical fertilizers for both vegetables and crops as I was skeptical about the compost until I began to understand its use and benefits. After I started making compost, however, I obtained more quality products than before. Observing the promising results, I persuaded my children to use compost and myself began using it in large quantities. Noting the improved results, I became more and more involved with growing vegetables. I also make vermicompost and my land is now completely free of chemicals since I am utilizing natural farming methods. ISD has created market linkages for us and we sell our products in Addis Ababa every other weekend, observing a positive change".

Farmers Getu Balcha and Dereje Assefa whose fields are close to that of farmer Fekade informed the guests that they were obtaining healthy produce by using natural fertilizers. They said that the fertility of their land was improving and that they produce a variety of vegetables and crops by utilizing natural farming methods and following relevant guidelines. They prepare and apply compost and vermicompost on their fields, producing good and healthy vegetables and crops since they follow a chemical-free process. The farmers told the visitors that they had undergone many positive changes since they started producing their crops and vegetables in line with EOA principles. The soil on their fields was now being kept fertile and their crops and vegetables were healthy. They further affirmed that their market had grown and that their livelihoods had changed for the better since they began selling their produce through market linkages created by ISD.

Another farmer whose field the guests visited was Wondwossen Alemu, a young man of 23 years whose parents were also farmers. He had taken over his family's land on completing 12th grade and had started producing a variety of vegetables and wheat through application of EOA farming methods. Explaining how he began EOA he said, "After receiving training from ISD on how to make compost I started making both compost and vermicompost. After observing how other farmers were preparing it, I began to use it extensively. I now use compost for an area of 1.25 ha and this has yielded satisfactory results. I presently produce a wide range of vegetables". Farmer Wondwossen also said that he has produced wheat by using irrigation methods. He said that one reason for the change and increase in production was the application of intercropping, row planting and crop rotation.

At the conclusion of the visit the guests expressed their satisfaction at the extensive EOA based development activities and stressed their hope that the number of farmers utilizing EOA methods would continue to grow and that EOA activities would be strengthened. They emphasized that the farmers should work hard to achieve more results.



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Ethiopian 2nd UPSCALE Project/National Multi Actors Communities (MAC) Meeting



A national meeting organized by the ISD-UPSCALE project took place at the LISAK Resort in Debrezeit, Oromia Region from 3 to 4 June 2022. The main objective of the gathering was to bring out the potential for wider engagement, collaboration and adoption of push-pull technology and to select members of the Multi Actors Communities (MAC) management committee to facilitate coordination of MAC. The Ethiopian MAC platform was established in September 2021 by engaging key stakeholders identified from private and government sectors and applying a multidisciplinary approach.

The meeting began with words of welcome from Mr. Gizaw Gebremariam, ISD Programme Manager and MAC management secretary. He was followed by Dr. Hailu Araya, Chairperson of the MAC Committee and Director of PELUM Ethiopia who



thanked participants for their attendance and commitment and highlighted the achievements and plans of MAC. Mr. Ghebremedin Belay, ISD Executive Director then delivered his remarks,

officially opening the MAC meeting and enumerating the current challenges to the agricultural sector and emphasizing the need for interventions on EOA. Following this, a brief overview of the first year of the UPSCALE Project was presented by Mr. Gizaw Gebremariam. He noted that the project, begun in 2021, was aimed at improving the food security and livelihood resilience of beneficiary farmers through push-pull technology. He listed major activities undertaken during the first year, including: a baseline study; farmer and area selection; provision of input supplies to farmers; capacity building training for farmers, Development Agents and agricultural experts; creation of the MAC Platform and yield



assessment in the selected areas.

The next speaker, Mr. Alemayehu Gemechu from the Extension Directorate in the Ministry of Agriculture, elaborated on various strategies, including digital extension support and a new multi-stakeholder intervention and mandate zonation approach which he stated were instrumental mechanisms in the extension system. He said that to date, 33,000 mobile tablets had been purchased and distributed to grass-root structures. He also mentioned the possibility of ISD involvement in the zonation-based intervention on PPT and other technologies.



Dr. Fredrick Aikla from Maseno University, Kenya made a presentation on the nature of value chains and market integration regarding PPT crops with the main focus on the seed system. He informed the meeting that the seed system value chain comprised individuals

and various institutions which were involved in marketing seeds. The issues of production of quality Desmodium seed in Ethiopia for export was noted as an action point which MAC needs to discuss with the Ministry of Agriculture and concerned institutions with a view to preparing a detailed plan for production of the seed.



Dr. Hailu Araya presented the MAC Plan for 2022 which was reviewed by participants. Issues considered important were suggested for inclusion in the Plan, such as a briefing for policy makers on various aspects of PPT. Another suggestion was the active promotion and preparation of a schedule for farmers' "Field Days".

2nd “Indigenous Futures Thinking” Walking Workshop



For generations residents of Boru Selassie 07 Mesal kebele Farmers’ Association had a tradition of maintaining the ecological environment and producing a variety of agricultural products to feed their families. As a result, their locality was well protected ecologically and their land covered by natural vegetation. In pursuit of expanding farmlands, however, subsequent deforestation activities destroyed vegetation, leaving the locality exposed and this led to soil erosion, loss of soil fertility and drought, causing heavy rainfall and water shortages. Over time productivity of farmlands decreased to the point that currently, farmers are unable to secure food independently. To make matters worse, successive governments enforced the use of chemical inputs and industrial fertilizers so as to ensure food security but this only worsened the situation by leading to extensive eradication of nutrients in the soil. Planting of eucalyptus trees by farmers did not have the desired effect and only served to wash out nutrients in the soil. Coupled with water shortages, farmers were thus unable to obtain much subsistence.

In 2018 ISD, in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) initiated the SEWOH Project to address the dire predicament of the Boru Selassie 07 Mesal Kebele community. The project, undertaken from 2018 to mid-2021 achieved commendable results, and was aimed at implementing agro ecological farming in order to rehabilitate the locality. Midway through the project, in November

2020, an initial ISD Walking Workshop involving the target community and stakeholders, was conducted and attempted to integrate scientific and traditional knowledge approaches. Workshop participants were required to take walks in the community to learn about and observe the environment and ecology and, on the basis of their



observation, form ideas on how to integrate scientific and indigenous knowledge so as to help the residents mitigate the effects of adverse climate change, sustain their livelihoods and increase resilience.

Following on from the first workshop, a second ISD Walking Workshop was held in the Melbourne Hotel and in Boru Selassie community between July 14-16, 2022. The



objective was to consult with the Boru community and stakeholders on whether the measures/system designed during the first Walking Workshop have been successfully implemented, what the impact has been and what further action needed to be taken to further institutionalizing and strengthen the system.

A total of 43 persons, including 7 females, attended the workshop, drawn from district and zone agriculture and administration offices, the zone tourism office, zone finance and economic development office, women, children and youth representatives, selected SEWOH project beneficiaries and community representatives from nearby farmers associations in Jaree and Haik. ISD was represented by senior staff, including Gizaw G/Mariam, Deputy Executive Director and Programme Manager, Asrat Mengesha, Finance Head, Samuel Ephrem, IT Expert, and Endris Mohamed and Alemu Asfaw, Community Facilitators/Experts in Dessie ISD Branch Office. Dr. Fasil Gebeyehu, ABN Coordinator also attended and made a presentation on Indigenous Future Thinking.

After listening to a report on the main activities of the first Walking Workshop and being apprised of the vision and mission of the Futures thinking Walking Workshop, participants formed two groups to discuss issues related to social and ecological challenges to communities, ways of implementing sustainable agriculture and effective farming practices, and how to ensure sustainable social and environmental improvements. The two groups found that integration of modern and traditional knowledge was gradually being affected, and that the community had conducted different activities in order to reinforce cultural and social experiences and to ensure gender equality and meaningful youth participation. However, efficient land usage and management was still an issue that had to be addressed.

On the second day of the workshop a Walking Workshop was conducted in Boru Selassie in which all workshop attendees participated and observed the local environment and ecology. They were organized in three groups with each given a theme to ponder during the group members’ walkabout. The themes were: current challenges Boru community faces in relation to social and cultural perspectives; missing trends and challenges associated with family life and economic situations; and challenges the Boru community over agriculture and natural resource management.

Findings of the first group dwelt on the social and cultural crisis affecting the Boru community, emanating from the recent war in the north. The war had had a huge and negative impact on the community, witnessed by the physical destruction of institutions, the loss of farming assets, disappearance of the previously solid work ethic, the interruption of schooling, and the degree of distrust, tolerance and empathy prevalent in the community. The second group, focusing on challenges to agriculture and natural resource management, found that agricultural production and grazing land had decreased due to extensive forestry, that farmland was being eroded by flood due to farmers’ inability to build check structures; and that the increase in the number of eucalyptus trees planted was drying up water wells, causing a scarcity of potable water and forcing the displacement of residents. The third group, focusing on challenges associated with family life and economic situations, found that relations between parent and child had reached a breaking point. Young people had stopped their schooling and helping their families and had left their homes, preferring instead to go abroad in search of work. Relations between husband and wife were also strained and lack of family counseling was having a negative effect on the children’s upbringing and psyche.

Workshop participants were of the opinion that, while ISD had implemented various exemplary developmental and economic activities in the Boru community, the organization should also increase its efforts to assist in family life and to instill positive relationships between husband and wife and parents and children. Participants also recommended that: more effort should be made to increase the knowledge of the community on various aspects and that emphasis should be placed on providing the necessary training to community units. On the agricultural front it was emphasized that farmers should continue growing varieties of existing crops and that partners should address the issue of how research should be conducted on farmers’ lands.

