

# Organic

*Creating a Better Environment for Life*

ISD Newsletter  
August - September 2022  
No. 26







## Learning from the Root Program at Mekdela wereda

Learning from the root program is the Institute for Sustainable Development, (ISD) initiative and it literally means reconnecting the young people with the local communities through oral and practical learning approach. It is the four-day entry into the experiences of local community village. It is an environmental awareness program that imitates the forgotten oral and indigenous knowledge teaching approach and therefore it uses wise elders as teachers and interpreters of nature. The knowledge stored in peoples' memories and activities is expressed in stories, songs, folklores, proverbs, totems and taboos, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws local language and taxonomy, agricultural practices, equipment, materials, plant species and animal breed. The knowledge is shared and communicated orally by specific examples and through culture. Elderly people mainly hold this knowledge.

Accordingly, this year, in August, 2022 learning from the root program activities have been conducted in Mekdela wereda, South Wollo zone, Amhara region. The participant students and teachers were drawn from Kokebe Tsibah and Bole high schools from Addis Ababa, Holeta High School from Oromia, Afar High school from Afar, Hottie, Masha high school and Shashe elementary school from South Wollo zone, Amhara region. Each host family received 5 participants. The participants stayed in the host families for four days and learned in four thematic areas, i.e., family and home management, seed collection and reservation, social life of the community and the practice of their sustainable agriculture.

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A Publication of  
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On the first day of arrival at Masha town, Masha High School and Shashe Primary school together with ISD organized welcoming and orientation session for the participants. On this session, Masha High school director Ato Yimam Kassaye welcomed the guest participants and opened the session. Ato Yimam explained to the guests about the culture of the community of Mekdella woreda and specifically that of 02 Kebele community of the Mekdella woreda.

During the arrival, the community of the kebele welcomed the participants and gave general information about their community by their representatives and elders in the community. After the introduction of the participants to the community, the participants were distributed with stratified random distribution to their hosting families. The host families expressed their happiness and said that they are ready to receive the guests as members of their family and try to commit their responsibilities and promises. Finally, the hosting families took their guests to their villages.

The stay of the participants in the community is to learn experientially by different approaches. Guide in the form of Format was prepared and given to the participants to help them as an entry tool to interact with their host families. The format has guiding questions about the seeds, agriculture practices, social/marriage, ceremonies, cultural foods, dressings, music instruments, stories, sayings, etc./ and about family and home management. The participants use this format simply as a guide to help them for interaction and based on this they learn everything in their families. Additionally, the men participants spent the whole day with man of the family and involved in different activities of farming, looking after the cattle, and other activities so that they learn experientially and feel what the life of the male farmers look like. The female participants also spend their time with female members of the family. The female participants did all the activities which the females of their host families' members do. They fetch water, firewood, go to the market, clean the houses, cook the food, etc.





The participants spent the night with their family members by listening storytelling, sayings and cultural playing. The participants write down and take notes on all what they learnt and finally prepared individual reports showing that they learnt seriously and followed the purpose of the program.

During the stay of the participants in the community, ISD team visited them to see whether they are participating as the designed program and given orientation. Some participants are also interviewed on board with what they are doing daily to know their feelings and status of change.

At the end of the stay program in the community, half-day feedback session program was conducted with all the participants, their host families, the local authorities (Woreda and Kebele). During this session, highlights of the purpose of “Learning from the Root Program” were explained to strengthen the understanding of the program by the stakeholders and the participants. The host families and the participants expressed their feelings while they stayed together

This program was planned to create opportunity to bridge students and teachers from different cultural and ecological back ground with rural community and particularly with elders for experiential learning. In this unique process of experiential learning, participants got opportunity to meet wise elders (both male and female elders) and interacted with environment through observation and working everything the members of their host families doing a routine activity. Participants documented and produced individual and group reports. Additionally, they forwarded their feedback during feedback session and promised to share what they learnt from the community to their peers when they back to their schools.

The participants experienced life of the rural community. Life of the rural community is disciplined, time bounded and holistic. As they are coming from different parts of Ethiopia, they shared their experiences each other as well, their culture, traditional practices and so on.

The students and teachers have learnt and documented the knowledge and practices of the rural community.





