Some Examples of Best Practices by Smallholder Farmers in Ethiopia

Book One

Developed By

Hailu Araya Tedla, Yohannes Gebremichael
and
Sue Edwards

Best Practice Association
&
Institute for Sustainable Development
Addis Ababa
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CONTENTS

Acknowledgement ........................................................................................................ v
Foreword ..................................................................................................................... vii
Abbreviations ............................................................................................................. x

1. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 The Aim of This Booklet ................................................................................... 1
   1.2 The Social and Government Structures in Ethiopia .................................... 3
   1.3 The Environmental and Political Challenges for Farmers .................. 4
   1.4 How the Best Practices were Selected .................................................. 5

2. INTEGRATED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT .................................................. 7
   2.1 The Surroundings of ‘Hayq’ – Hailu Araya and Endris Muhammed ........... 7
   2.2 Abreha We-Atsbeha – Hailu Araya ............................................................... 12
   2.3 Ecological Farming Improves Livelihoods – Hailu Araya,
       Habtamu Eritro and Sue Edwards ................................................................. 17
   2.4 The Soil-Maker in the Soilless Landscape – Hailu Araya
       and Anders Olund ...................................................................................... 22

3. WATER RELATED TECHNOLOGIES .................................................................. 26
   3.1 Sub-Surface Drainage: From Threat to Draining, Storing
       and Using Water – Hailu Araya and Yohannes Gebremichael .................. 26
   3.2 From Reclaiming a Gully into Water Reservoirs – Hailu Araya ................. 31
   3.3 Incredible Innovation: From Dreaming for Water into
       Water-Lifting Innovations – Hailu Araya and Ann Waters-Bayer ............. 35

4. ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE .................................................................. 44
   4.1 The System of Crop Intensification (SCI) – Hailu Araya
       and Sue Edwards ....................................................................................... 44

~ iii ~
4.2 Bee-Keeping for Improved Survival and Coping with Climate Change – Hailu Araya, Abreha Gebre Selassie and Ann Waters-Bayer ......................................................... 55

4.3 Growing Apples as a Climate Change Adaptation Practice – Teklehaimanot Medhin ........................................ 65

5. Using Compost Gives Improved Livelihoods with Food Security ........................................................................ 67

5.1 “Compost Makes Us Equal” – Hailu Araya and Sue Edwards ........................................................................... 68

5.2 Extending a Biogas Project from Energy to Food Security and Healing the Soil – Sue Edwards, Hailu Araya and Fentaw Ejigu ........................................................................ 78

5.3 Socio-Economic Advantages of Bioslurry Compost – Hailu Araya, Arefayne Asmelash and Sue Edwards ...................... 85

5.4 One Model Farmer’s Use of Crop Diversification and Integrated Soil Fertility Improvement – Abraham Tiramo ........................................................................................................... 91

6. Environmental Conservation by Local Organizations in Tigray ........................................................................ 95

6.1 The Role of Sacred Places – Hailu Araya .................................. 96

6.2 The Role of Army Bases – Hailu Araya .................................. 100

6.3 School Environmental Clubs – Arefayne Asmelash and Hailu Araya ................................................................. 101

Annex A

A1: Compost Preparation Training Process – Hailu Araya .. 103

A2: Steps to Use in Making Compost – Hailu Araya ............... 105

Annex B: Plants for Bees in Tahtai Maichew Wereda, Tigray – Sue Edwards and Hailu Araya ............................ 113
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Hailu Araya
BPA, PE and ISD
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
FOREWORD

This publication is a first collection of “stories of change” brought about by different actors, mostly farmers, supported by grassroots-based organizations and their friends both within and outside of Ethiopia. These stories of change constitute what is now being referred to as good or “best practices”. These need to be widely shared to stimulate other organizations—local to global, community-based to government—to recognize and support the innate innovative capacity of Ethiopia’s farmers, women and men, youth and students, rural and urban, for a sustainable future for all.

From experience, the founders of the Best Practice Association (BPA) of Ethiopia know that smallholder farmers—female and male, young, middle-aged and older—are the backbone of Ethiopia’s economy through their all-round contribution to the survival and food security of their families, communities and the country as a whole. This is because they are economically, religiously, socially and politically responsible for their own survival.

Ethiopia's agricultural expertise has been built up since time immemorial due to the multi-functional way in which smallholder farmers manage their lives. In this modern and globalized world, farming communities still make up 84% of the total population of Ethiopia. Although many are out of reach of appropriate technologies that could improve their livelihoods, they are not people who sit and wait. They know well that no one from outside can come and solve all their day-to-day problems, however well intentioned the outsiders may be.

Extensive land degradation leading to decreased soil fertility and low agricultural production in Ethiopia, coupled with high rates of population increase with unemployment and under-employment, has resulted in a high level of food insecurity in both rural and urban areas. However, smallholder farmers are trying to cope with their problems by improving on their own practices and innovations using their own resources and what they can learn from visiting, listening...
and discussing with other farmers, including through the radio, as well as local experts. The importance of these different practices and innovations depends on the particular advantages gained and the problems solved, and how they fit within their existing systems.

Other actors in agricultural research and development need to give more time and attention to understand and incorporate these innovations into their research and development strategies and to back up the empirical findings of farmers with scientific studies. This will help these smallholders build on their successes for improved farming and natural resource management systems.

The Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD) is a pioneer in Ethiopia that has acknowledged the value and continues to support the local knowledge intrinsic in smallholder practices in agro-biodiversity and natural resource management. ISD was established in 1996 with the aim of helping farmers rehabilitate their land and improve crop production and livestock management based on ecological principles and helping communities protect and use their natural resources wisely based on their own by-laws.

Prolinnova–Ethiopia\(^1\) (PE) has a similar philosophy, building on the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation (ISWC) project in Tigray that started in 1997 and expanded in 2003 to other parts of the country. Now the PE “family” supports farmer-led joint experimentation together with extension experts and researchers working on and with the farmers’ innovations, practices and priorities, in a process called “Participatory Innovation Development” (PID).

The founders of BPA are people with extensive experience of working in close dialogue with smallholder farmers in various regions of the country. They are also actively involved with the work of smallholder farmers as members of ISD and PE.

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\(^1\) Prolinnova: Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management, a Global Partnership Programme of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)
Some Examples of Best Practices by Smallholder Farmers in Ethiopia

The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of Ethiopia depends on building up successful efforts in agriculture. Ethiopian development is unimaginable without the success of smallholder farming in both rural and urban areas, and especially without focusing on the locally available best practices that can bring Ethiopia’s farming families into the monetized economy.

Many development projects invest millions, but their successes are modest. BPA is interested in assessing, documenting, promoting and scaling up/out best practices that can be done with modest investment suited to the abilities in knowledge and skills as well as resources held and accessible by innovative farmers. Then these improvements can become sustainable. Even more importantly, the very process of innovation can become sustainable.

The new challenges raised by climate change require large-scale dissemination and awareness of “what works” for farmers. These need to be brought to the attention of agricultural specialists, researchers, academicians, policymakers and other stakeholders in and outside the country so that they understand, support and help improve the effectiveness of local practices and innovations for the livelihoods of farming families in both rural and urban areas.

To this end, this book presents a first collection of cases of locally available and successful practices in smallholder farming with the aim of sharing these with a wider public. The information has been brought together for publication with the generous support of the Church of Sweden.

Ann Waters-Bayer
ETC Foundation
Leusden, Netherlands
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>asl</td>
<td>above sea level</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATA</td>
<td>Agricultural Transformation Agency</td>
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<td>BPA</td>
<td>Best Practice Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Development Agent</td>
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<td>DASSC</td>
<td>Development and Social Services Commission</td>
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<td>EECMY</td>
<td>Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIAR</td>
<td>Ethiopian Institute of Agriculture Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPLUA</td>
<td>Environmental Protection and Land Use Administration</td>
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<td>FEPA</td>
<td>Federal Environmental Protection Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTC</td>
<td>Farmer Training Center</td>
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<td>GHG</td>
<td>Greenhouse Gas</td>
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<td>GFAR</td>
<td>Global Forum on Agricultural Research</td>
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<td>GTP</td>
<td>Growth and Transformation Plan</td>
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<td>ISD</td>
<td>Institute for Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISWCV</td>
<td>Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation</td>
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<td>NBPE</td>
<td>National Biogas Program Ethiopia</td>
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<td>PE</td>
<td>Prolinnova-Ethiopia</td>
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<td>PID</td>
<td>Participatory Innovation Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prolinnova</td>
<td>Promoting Local Innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCI/SRI</td>
<td>System of Crop/Rice Intensification</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNNP</td>
<td>Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSNC</td>
<td>Swedish Society for Nature Conservation</td>
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<td>TPLF</td>
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