

**SOME EXAMPLES OF BEST
PRACTICES BY SMALLHOLDER
FARMERS IN ETHIOPIA**

BOOK ONE

DEVELOPED BY

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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 agrobiodiversity 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–Ethiopia¹ (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.

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)

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
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ABBREVIATIONS

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