

“Market is not a problem for my organic fruits and vegetables”- Fekadu Kebede

Fekadu Kebede is a smallholder farmer living in Medagudina village of Walmera district in Oromia region, Ethiopia. Farming is the mainstay for his family. He grows vegetables, cereal crops, fruits and medicinal herbs in his farm which is close to one hectare. He inherited the farm from his parents who have been farming for several years using conventional farming practice with the use of agrochemicals for plant protection and soil fertility enhancement purposes.

Mr Fekadu has been implementing the conventional farming he learned from his parents until he attended, for the first time, a training on Ecological Organic Agriculture which was organised by the Institute for Sustainable Development in the year 2015 with supports from SDC and SSNC.

After he took part in the training, he became formally involved in the practical and field based training sessions organised for farmers in his village. He was receiving regular follow up visit and support by ISD’s field officer based in Holeta. Mr Fekadu said that he started vegetables production with the use of organic inputs in his 300m² plot – on the side of his bigger farm to make sure that the production system works before implementing it on a wider area. Once he found out that it was effective in terms of yield, and managed to cut the use of toxic and costly agrochemicals; he expanded it to a 1000 square metre plot where he grows a number of crop types.

As you walk through his organic plot, you will see fruit trees, vegetables, medicinal herbs, and other crops planted in rows and mixed intercropping systems where some of the crops are planted as trap crops. Crop rotation is also one of his main practices which he mentioned can help him in maintaining his soil health and reduce pest and disease incidents. Mr Fekadu mentioned that he learned the systems of crop intensification from the trainings given via ISD. His farm can be an example of properly maintained agroecosystem which mimicked the natural forest systems where trees, shrubs, herbs, grasses and other plants are found and functioning (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_Nhf3O4cx0&t=13s). His practices are examples for most of the farmers in his villages by improving agriculture production, food and nutrition security and resilience to climate changes.

Intercropping is a cropping technique in which farmers grow two or more crops simultaneously in the same piece of land in row patterns with the objective to

maximize crop productivity in a given space. Smallholder farmers who have small plots use such practices as part of their production systems.

Crop rotation is the practice of planting different crops sequentially on the same plot of land. Crop rotation is done to help enhance soil fertility and optimize nutrients in the soil. It is also used as a cultural practice to combat pest, disease and weed pressure.

Mr Fekadu said that his small organic plot is a source of food and cash for his family. "I harvest surplus fruits and vegetables and part of my harvest goes to my customers" said Mr Fekadu when asked about consumption and his surplus produces. He mentioned that market have never been his problem as his customers come to his farm to collect vegetables, fruits and herbs. He told us that he is making a significant amount of cash from his small and organically managed plot.

With technical support from ISD, organised farmers in his village are processing organic certification via locally based participatory guarantee system. As it has been tested in different parts of the world, PGS is found to be an effective and easy certification scheme for smallholder farmers. Mr Fekadu and his fellow farmers are making a vital progress towards PGS based certification.

Crops grown in Mr Fekadu's small organic plot include Enset, Ocimum, Ethiopian aroma hops(Gesho), maize, Swiss chard, Kale, tomato, rue, peach, rosemary, Koseret (*Lippia abyssinica*).