

SOWING THE SEEDS

for Sustainable Food
Systems in Africa

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

PILLAR II

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Authors:

Biovision Africa Trust and Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I)
Implementing Partners

Contributors:

Ms. Venancia Wambua, Dr. David Amudavi

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Introduction

In 2011, the Executive Council of the African Union (AU) took a decision to build an Africa-wide organic agriculture platform. The African Union Commission (AUC) accepted the mandate, launched the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) and established the Continental Steering Committee (CS) as the apex in the governance structure of EOA in Africa whose members serve to provide EOA in Africa and its membership with guidance, oversight and decision-making regarding the operations and activities of EOA Initiative in Africa. , EOA-I has received alot of support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Corporation (SDC) in the framework of the Global Program on Food Security (GPFS), Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SIDA) and from Africa Union Commission - DARBE through funds from EU.

The Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) was established to transform and create sustainable food systems in Africa by promoting ecologically sound strategies and practices among diverse stakeholders in production, processing, marketing, and policymaking, to safeguard the environment, improve livelihoods, alleviate poverty, and guarantee food security.

The initiative entails a holistic system that aims to sustain the health of ecosystems by relying on functional natural cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of synthetic inputs, which have adverse effects on human, animal, plant, and environmental health. With agroecology as its cornerstone for achieving sustainable agriculture, the initiative placed emphasis on all facets of the food systems from production to processing, marketing and consumption with ecological, economic, and social aspects benefits. EOA-I promotes agricultural techniques tailored to local conditions and encouraged practices, technologies and innovations that enhance beneficial biological interactions between various plants and species to build long-term fertility and soil health.

Recognizing the value of conventional, traditional and indigenous

knowledge in creating sustainable agricultural systems, the initiative lays a heavy emphasis on community involvement and information sharing. The EOA-I aims to transform and create sustainable food systems by promoting ecologically sound strategies and practices among diverse stakeholders in production, processing, marketing and policy-making, to safeguard the environment, improve livelihoods, alleviate poverty and guarantee food security.

From its inception, the initiative harbors an ambitious goal to mainstream EOA into national agricultural production systems by promoting agricultural practices that maintain the health and fertility of the soil, conserve water resources, and safeguard natural habitats and ecosystems with respect to the interconnectedness between plants, animals and the environment.

To achieve this goal EOA-I is organized around four objectives:

1. To increase documentation of information and knowledge on organic agricultural products along the complete value chain and support relevant actors to translate it into practices and wide application.
2. To systematically inform producers about the EOA approaches and good practices and motivate their uptake through strengthening access to advisory and support services.
3. To increase the share of quality organic products at the local, national, and regional markets; and
4. Strengthen inclusive stakeholder engagement in organic commodities value chain development by developing national, regional, and continental multi-stakeholder platforms to advocate for changes in public policy, plans, and practices.

This booklet highlights some of the outstanding success stories from direct beneficiaries of the project in the nine countries at farmer, processor, and policy-actor levels and as a reflection of the effective implementation of the project action plan through strong partnerships and beneficiaries' needs-oriented interventions.

PILLAR 2 - INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Under Pillar 2 of the EOA initiative, the information and knowledge were repackaged and translated into formats suitable for spreading to diverse target groups, with a focus on women, youth, and underprivileged groups.

EOA-I partners used video, social media, print media, and other forms of training materials to reach a wide range of audiences for the transfer of knowledge and skills on organic agriculture. Using the rainer of Trainers (ToT) method, Business Development Strategies, and other methods, EOA-I partners also trained key stakeholders to make the knowledge transfer a sustainable partner-led process beyond the tenure of the project.

The initiative and partners worked on creating and reviewing the EOA curriculum for possible incorporation into the national formal education programs. Institutions of higher education have been made aware of EOA curricular programs through seminars, strategic meetings, and thematic lectures.

The best experiences and results on the use of EOA research information and knowledge by the farmers were also documented for reference and learnings to guide the scaling and implementation of similar initiatives in the future.

To promote the adoption and dissemination of organic agriculture practices, EOA-I partners implemented a series of beneficiary-centred knowledge exchanges and awareness creation initiatives, some of which are featured in this section of the publication.







EVIDENCE-BASED FARMER-LED KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES DISSEMINATION

Ethiopia

In Medagudina village, Holeta district, Oromia region of Ethiopia, Workie Shumye has become a local celebrity in the farming community. Workie runs a small farm based on the principles and practices of the ecological and organic agriculture (EOA) program.

Workie grows 19 crops on the farm, including Swiss chard, Lettuce, Habesha Gomen, Green Beans, Faba Beans, Chilli pepper, Carrots, Leek, Garlic, Potato, Beetroot Maize, Lemon, Lime, Avocado, Rue, Rosemary, Garden cress and Ocimum. She blends mono-cropping, intercropping and crop rotation systems to maintain sustainable soil health and continuous output from the plot. For soil nutrition, Workie uses mulching, compost, and farmyard manure to maintain and enhance fertility on the farm. She uses plant extracts from a mixture of chilli and garlic for pest management and sometimes concocts a milk solution to control disease infestation.

Before joining EOA and picking up the practice of organic farming, Workie was a conventional farmer relying heavily on synthetic fertiliser and chemical pest and disease control. While the complexities of environmental damages from the chemicals were lost to her, she struggled to afford these farming inputs that seemed inalienable to her survival at the time.

Without sufficient funds to buy and apply chemical inputs, her produce diminished, and the unquantified income from her farm could no longer sustain her and her family. She joined EOA-I

through the Ethiopian partnership with the Pesticide Action Nexus association (PAN). She was trained on organic farming principles and practices such as soil fertility management, bio-pests and disease control, organic crop management and integrated sustainable mixed farming through the EOA extension system.

Today Workie is a successful lead farmer producing enough food for her family and generating an average income of USD 1,500 a year.

“Feeding my family with healthy food is a priority for me, and what I take to the market is the surplus production,” says Workie.

From successful organic farming, Workie has expanded into an integrated crop, and livestock production where biomass from crop production is used to feed the animals and manure from the cattle is added back to the farm. Through the EOA’s knowledge dissemination strategy, the success of Workie’s farm is evidence drawn upon to provide training and inspiration to more than 300 farmers from around her village and other far parts of the region. There have been a steady increase in the area’s volume of organic produce. As a result, EOA, through the Institute for Sustainable Development (ISD), has organized consumer awareness initiatives and created market linkages that have enabled organic farmers from Holeta to sell their produce in Addis Ababa.





TRAINING AND PROMOTION OF ORGANIC PLANTAIN FARMING CHANGING LIVES OF LOCAL FARMERS IN BENIN

Benin

For years, plantain farming in Benin by smallholder farmers has been a secondary and neglected affair. Most people would leave opportunistic plantain trees to grow with little to no care by the roadside, riverbanks and backyard overgrowth. This is in spite of the fact that commercially, plantain is one of the most in-demand food sources in the whole of west Africa.

According to a survey by Platform of Civil Society Actors in Benin (PASCiB), apathy toward this crop among smallholder farmers is caused by high costs and difficulty in getting plantain seedlings and low yields due to poor cropping practices. PASCiB, a renowned organic agriculture extension not-for-profit organization, also found that most farmers obtained suckers from their peers with little regard for the quality or variety of what they are planting.

With the support of the Ecological and Organic Agriculture Initiative, PASCiB set about to train lead farmers on advanced skills for organic farming of banana plantain on and off-season and seed production. The training covered good agronomic practices, dry weather crop irrigation, plant spacing and seed multiplication in local home nurseries.

PASCiB trained more than 300 banana plantain producers and created a network of farmers in the value chain for ease and collaborative marketing of their produce. Each of the 300 trainee farmers was tasked to recruit, train and support 20 other farmers within their local area.

This knowledge and skills dissemination approach saw the number of highly trained plantain farmers expand, creating new demand for seedlings as well as a bigger supply, thus lowering the cost of seed significantly. Easy access to good quality and well-maintained seed, as well as the skills to properly look after the crop, increased the quality and yield of the banana plantain.

The previously neglected crop was now averaging 2,000 more plantain bunches per hectare compared to previous yields from traditional practices. The sale of both seedlings and mature crop produce has changed the livelihood of the farmers, improving both food security and household income. Farmers who had previously relied on seasonal weather to manage their crops can now manage and produce banana plantain both on and off-season, which guarantees them income.





Rwanda

HEAP COMPOSTING FOR INCREASED PINEAPPLE PRODUCTION AND DECREASED COSTS IN RWANDA

In December 2021, 57 representatives of different groups of pineapple farmers from the Northern and Southern Provinces of Rwanda attended a training of trainers on EOA benefits and practices. The TOT was organized by HUGUKA in partnership with the Rwanda Organic Agriculture Movement (ROAM) in the framework of EOA initiative.

One of the EOA practices presented to farmers participating in the training was heap composting. The trainees were impressed by this practice and recognized it as a solution to the problem of soil fertility management.

“For many years, we have been growing organic pineapples and we have never used chemical fertilizers in our pineapple plots. In the beginning, the harvest was so good that we could get 100 kgs on 10 acres of land and this was every week,” said Nturanyenabo Felicien, one of the trainees and a pineapple farmer since 1997.

Nturanyenabo Felicien continued by saying that in the last 3 years, he could not get the same production as he used to do at the beginning: “The harvest is decreasing every year, and today, I cannot even have 30 kgs on a weekly basis on the same plot I used to harvest 100 kgs.”

Nturanyenabo and his colleagues from both the Southern and Northern Provinces of Rwanda agreed that the use of organic fertilizers is a solution to increase their production.

However, it was very complicated for them to find organic fertilizers. “Before this training, the fertilizer we used to have for our pineapple was farmyard manure and animal waste. However, this one is very expensive and not affordable for every pineapple farmer because we all do not have domestic animals. Those who have them are selling the fertilizer at an estimated price of between 120 and 150 Rwandan francs per kilogram, and the fertilizer for only one pineapple plot requires between 700 kgs and 1 ton of fertilizer every three months”, explained Nyiransabimana Pricilla, chairperson of ABIZERWA Cooperative from Nyarusange Sector Muhanga District, Southern Province.

After the TOT, training participants have gone back home and transferred the skills and knowledge to their respective group members, who are now 1,137 farmers. They all started heap composting as fertilizer for their pineapple plots. By today, they have not yet started harvesting but their pineapple plantations are promising to increase productivity. They also said that heap composting is very cheap because they do not even need to buy ingredients, they only consider the cost of the workforce.





Uganda

ADOPTION OF THE ECOLOGICAL ORGANIC AGRICULTURE CURRICULUM BY TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING IN UGANDA

ESAFF Uganda, an implementing partner under the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I) took on the responsibility to promote the adoption of the EOA curriculum among universities and other institutions of learning. This draws attention to the agriculture extension service in Uganda, which is a major component of agricultural production, but the present capacities and skills of the extension workers are inclined towards conventional agriculture. In order to advance the practice of organic farming, there is a need for the agricultural labour force to undergo re-orientation and re-learning processes in terms of farming practices and further develop their competencies in organic farming systems.

ESAFF Uganda embarked on this assignment and revisited the EOA Curriculum developed in 2014 in order to streamline EOA into education systems under the Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative (EOA-I). ESAFF Uganda developed detailed course content of the existing curricula for the Diploma, Bachelor, and Masters degrees. The campaign behind the review was to increase the adoption of the curriculum by universities and other institutions not only in Uganda but also in Africa as a whole. Once the review was accomplished, the organization conducted a campaign to identify partner institutions to roll out the curriculum.

As such, Lira University, a public university in the country, that was in the process of rolling out an agriculture department at the time, was identified, and bilateral engagements started between the two institutions. On the 12th of October 2022, during its 4th National Organic Week celebrations, ESAFF Uganda paid an official visit to

Lira University, where the course content was officially presented to the Lira University Chancellor, Professor Jasper Ogwal-Okeng. Fortunately, the University Vice Chancellor officially approved the partnership between ESAFF Uganda and Lira University and gave a go-ahead to the team to develop the content into a comprehensive agriculture curriculum for the university following the National Council of Education Guidelines in Uganda. Much as this is only an initial step in increasing the pool of organic agriculture experts in the country, it's the most critical and essential one. Currently, the Lira University team is reviewing the earlier developed course content for processing, and hopefully, by the end of 2023, components of ecological organic agriculture will be adopted for teaching in the university.

Once this process is finalized and the EOA course content is adopted into the university curriculum, more young people will be exposed to EOA farming practices as a means of bringing about a change in knowledge and perspective. Additionally, this will aid in re-orienting the extension services program in the country, with the university producing more extension workers skewed toward agroecological farming practices.

The partnership between Lira University an academic institution, and ESAFF Uganda a small-scale farmers' organization also lays a fertile ground for the interaction between members of the academia and farmers who are custodians of the much-needed knowledge, skills, information and fields for research and learning purposes.



Get in Touch

Biovision Africa Trust (BvAT)
Secretariat and Executing Agency to the
Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative for
Africa
P.O. Box 30772-00100 Nairobi, Kenya
Duduvile Kasarani, Opposite Thika Road
info@eoai-africa.org
+254 20 8632000