



TALES FROM TIGRAY:

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

Land in Tigray's rugged mountains is scarce, and many farm sizes are very small. Many women, especially widows, and young people who have little access to land struggle to produce enough to feed their families. With funding from Irish Aid and the UK Department for International Development, Farm Africa worked directly with nearly 6,400 women and landless young people in Tigray's Ahferom woreda, providing them with the knowledge and skills to successfully bolster their food security and incomes through farming and rearing livestock.

This collection of personal stories accompanies a series of six booklets focusing on each of the project's key components:

1. Integrated watershed management
2. Fruit and vegetable production
3. Poultry production
4. Goat and sheep rearing
5. Honey production and marketing
6. Small-scale irrigation



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“POVERTY CAN BE DEFEATED THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND HARD WORK.” – HADAS AREGAWI

Like so many other women in the kebele of Tsemri, Hadas Aregawi used to struggle to eke out a living from her small patch of land whilst her husband looked for work as a labourer in nearby towns.

Hadas’ face brightened when she told us about her goats. After a local committee selected Hadas for support, she received three vaccinated goats and training in goat rearing from Farm Africa. “After we completed the training, a purchasing committee and I went to the market, where I was allowed to select three she goats. I selected three pregnant sheep, had them vaccinated and happily took the sheep home.” Hadas successfully managed to grow her herd, and was able to pass on three goats to another woman in need, creating a cycle of improved prosperity.

Hadas’ herd continued to grow. “After I transferred the three goat kids, all of them began to deliver twins consecutively. Since then, I have sold 15 goats and I have six now.” This injection of cash allowed Hadas’ husband to return home and set up his own farming business. “He now rents land and grows teff and finger millet in our own kebele using fertiliser,” says Hadas.

“Unlike in the past, we have no food shortages, we eat three times a day. Milk products as well as vegetables are now in our daily diet. We can now afford to go to the health station if we are sick. More importantly, we can afford to educate our children.”

The family’s newfound purchasing power has also allowed them to invest in honey production. After seeing the success of beekeepers supported by Farm Africa, Hadas and her husband decided to invest in their own hive, which so far has earned them with ETB 1,000, and they are planning to make the transition to a modern hive soon.

Alongside their growing farming portfolio Hadas is investing money into a savings and loans association, “We save ETB 100 a month with a saving group in our local community that has 12 members.”

Hadas concluded: “We could not have succeeded if Farm Africa just gave us three pregnant goats and went away. The training, the vaccinations, frequent visits, advice and encouragement the community facilitators have given us were absolutely necessary for us to succeed in our efforts. They have also given us new skills and created in us strong belief that poverty can be defeated through knowledge and hard work.”





“THAT MADE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN OUR LIVES.” - AREGAWI GEBREMESKEL



At just 22, Aregawi Gebremeskel has achieved a lot in his short farming career. As he looks over his land, he seems optimistic about his future and proud of the decisions he has made to get where he is today. Aregawi hasn't always felt this way: he faced a challenging childhood. “My father and my mother are farmers but they are often sick and too old to work and feed a family of eight people. There was little to eat and going to [secondary] school was unthinkable for me”, remembers Aregawi.



After dropping out of school, Aregawi worked as a day labourer, moving from place to place working on large farms. This provided Aregawi with a stable income, but his decision to leave his family in poverty always haunted him. Upon his return to the family farm, Aregawi set about improving the productivity of the smallholding by manually delivering water to his farm

from a local pond. This method proved too time-consuming and labour-intensive, with Aregawi seeing little return from his efforts.



Aregawi's life was transformed when he, and ten others, received a motorised water lifting pump and accompanying training on how to use the new kit effectively and how to grow vegetables. “Things changed dramatically when Farm Africa provided a water lifting motor pipe for us ten farmers”, says Aregawi. “I then started growing varieties of vegetables that include garlic, onions, tomatoes, cabbages, spinach, beetroot, carrots and peppercorns. I have sold vegetables for over ETB 10,000 in one production year alone and still have vegetables worth ETB 15,000 at home.”

farming. With his brother now back in school and the family eating three meals a day; this transition has allowed Aregawi to lift himself and his family out of poverty. “I'm very much encouraged to continue growing vegetables and benefit myself and help my family. Many other people have been benefiting from the motor pump provision but people here see me as a model because I work very hard. I made the right decision not to marry before I could fend for myself, but it seems the time is coming for me to be someone and of course get married.”



Small-scale irrigation facilitated Aregawi's step-change from subsistence agriculture to profitable



“We now live a better life because we had access to a motor pump, training and follow-up of Farm Africa community facilitators. That really made a big difference in our lives.”



“THERE IS NO GOING BACK.” – TIHRAS ZENEBE

For many years Tihras Zenebe lived a decent life, with a healthy income and happy children. Her situation became precarious after her husband died in 1998, leaving her to provide for her five children alone. In dire economic straits, Tihras started working as a day labourer on a large farm to make ends meet. This in turn proved problematic, as nobody was on hand to look after her children. Her children often missed school because they were hungry or couldn't afford the necessary school supplies.

After being selected to take part in Farm Africa's sheep rearing project, Tihras received three pregnant sheep and training on how to care for them. Her hard work nurturing her sheep paid off as her flock grew. "To my pleasure, the sheep gave birth to four and I transferred three of them to another woman a year after their birth as I had promised to do."

"I currently have nine sheep including the three I received from Farm Africa. I have sold 23 sheep so far and have bought a cow and chickens from the sale of the sheep."

Tihras credits Farm Africa's long-term support as crucial to her success, "Farm Africa's community facilitators initially organised three-day training on goat and sheep husbandry. After I received the sheep, they visited me regularly and advised me on how to build a clean shelter for the animals, to have them vaccinated and other important things I didn't know before."

Drought hit Tigray hard in 2016, causing widespread food insecurity. Historically, women's socio-economic position in Tigray made them more vulnerable to drought and other weather extremes. Tihras' hardy sheep flock proved to be a boon: unlike the majority of people living in her community,

Tihras didn't have to rely entirely on government support to survive the drought. "During this time, I received animal feed from the government, but I also sold some of the sheep and bought grain for family consumption."

With her confidence and hope for the future restored, Tihras concludes "Thanks to Farm Africa, I'm now well established and see a brighter future. I can continue supporting my children to be educated without any more support from others. There is no going back."





“NOW I SEE A BRIGHT FUTURE.” – GEBRE HAILESELISSIE

Before working with Farm Africa, 37-year-old Gebre Haileselassie used to leave home for long periods to work as a labourer on faraway commercial farms. Despite Gebre’s best efforts, the income he earned wasn’t always enough to put food on the family table.



“My family suffered a lot when I was away, due to a shortage of food. So I came back home and spent my time idly, often angry and frustrated,” says Gebre.

Life changed when Gebre was selected to take part in Farm Africa’s beekeeping project. “Farm Africa first gave us a three-day training in beekeeping and organised experience-sharing visits for us. After that, we were given two modern beehives with two bee colonies.”



Gebre has now tripled his number of hives. With his increased purchasing power, he is better able to provide for his family, “My family and I now eat better food, including honey and vegetables. During the drought last year, we could afford to buy food grain from the market in the nearby town. We have bought house furniture and utensils and saved ETB 10,000 in the bank. Two of my children now go to school and we have no problem buying them the school materials they need.”



“What is most important for me is the lessons I learnt in the beekeeping project with Farm Africa. I have learnt that one doesn’t need to inherit property from his/her parent to lead a successful life. I have not inherited land from my parents, but that cannot stop me from being successful if I have knowledge, the right attitude and skills. It is now a matter of time before I become one of the well to do people in the kebele.”



“Now I see a bright future. My short-term plan is to transfer my three traditional beehives into modern beehives and increase my income. In the long run, I plan to expand my beekeeping business and sell the product in cities where honey is sold for better prices.”





Farm Africa / Mintesnot Kasa

“WE ARE WITNESSING DRAMATIC CHANGES HERE.” – PRIEST GEBREGZIBHER GEBREMESKEL

“These lands, including the hills you see, were dry and barren with little or no vegetation on them”, recalls Priest Gebregzibher Gebremeskel, looking over the lush fields of his lifelong home, Betegebez kebele. “Some farmers tried to grow crops, but the land did not yield enough to sustain the lives of the farmers and their families. People here, including my parents, lived in extreme poverty. There was little or nothing to eat and most farmers migrated to other places.”

Since 2005, the local community, various government agencies and Farm Africa have been working together to improve the local environment, “The community started engaging in conservation activities with the help of the government’s Safety Net Programme. Check dams were built and limited water became available”, Gebregzibher reports. “Farm Africa organised training for members, and gave material support that included varieties of grasses used for soil and water conservation activities.”

As the community has reaped the benefits of an improved environment, conservation efforts have since gone from strength to strength, “The situation began to change as the watershed management work intensified. A watershed committee was established and delineated 114 hectares of land for conservation activities. The activities included area enclosures, building hillside terraces and planting varieties of grasses to protect the soil from erosion.”

These changes created tangible, profound changes to the local ecosystem that underpins the vast majority of local livelihoods. “Soil erosion decreased, and forest coverage and the fertility of the soil increased”, Gebregzibher explains. “Farmers started exploiting the improved situation by using irrigation to grow mostly vegetables. Gullies became farm lands.”

Watershed restoration has benefited over 800 people in Geberezbher’s local area. “Farm Africa provided a water lifting motor pipe for eight farmers, including me. I used irrigation on my half hectare of land on which I planted maize, tomatoes, cabbages and spinach, the seeds for which I had received from Farm Africa. Many farmers including me are also growing fruits such as mangoes, avocados and papayas, which we received from Farm Africa. Nobody has ever grown or even thought of growing fruits here before.”



“I BELIEVE I HAVE SET A GOOD EXAMPLE TO MY COMMUNITY.” – MULUGETA GEBEREYOHANES

Mulugeta Gebreyohanes was selected as a beneficiary of Farm Africa’s bee package in 2013, a move that helped his family escape poverty. He said: “Life was so difficult for me as I didn’t have any means of living. My parents’ piece of land was too small and almost unproductive.”



“My wife and I also chose to engage in the bee project for many reasons. One of the reasons was that the locality is suitable for beekeeping. Secondly, I had an interest in beekeeping from a young age. I have also seen for myself how profitable beekeeping using modern beehives could be. When Farm Africa first provided me with two modern beehives and two bee colonies I thought it was a godsend.”



“Farm Africa gave me training focused on modern beekeeping. I used one of the modern beehives for breeding bees and the other one for honey production. Farm Africa’s Community Facilitators visited me frequently and gave me technical advice in my beekeeping work. They also organised experience sharing visits for us beekeepers so that we learn from each other as well.”



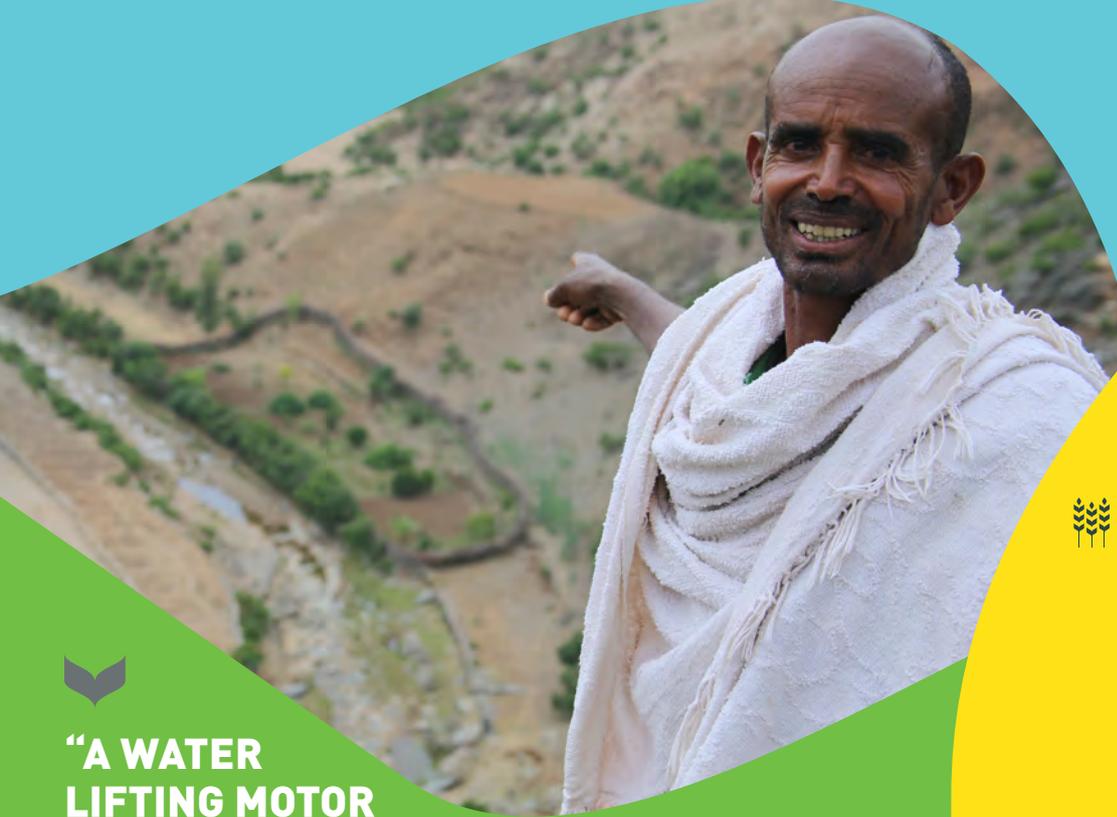
“I have bred eight colonies, three of which I sold for about ETB 4,000. I have benefited a lot from the sale of honey as I have been able to harvest as many as 40 kilos from each modern beehive. I have bought a good breed cow from the sale of honey. I’m happy I could buy a cow because I could feed my children both honey and milk, something they had never seen on their plates.”



“I believe I have set a good example to my community as well. About 50 households in my locality are now engaged in beekeeping following my example, though they are not as lucky as I am to receive support from Farm Africa or any other organisation. My plan for the future is to expand my business and get more profit. This is just the beginning and it’s possible to keep 30 or more beehives in the future. I also aspire to offer training to other less lucky farmers who have shown great interest in beekeeping. I believe if I could do it, they can too. I’m now confident that this can be done even in the absence of support from Farm Africa.”



Mulugeta's family



“A WATER LIFTING MOTOR PIPE SOLVED OUR PROBLEMS.” – GEBREMICHAEL GEBREMESKEL

Gebremichael Gebremeskel’s fortunes have changed since working with Farm Africa to implement small-scale irrigation. “I have a very small plot of land down near the river, which was unproductive because I couldn’t buy fertiliser. We just watched the river flow by our farmland as it was too deep to irrigate our land. I produced just two quintals of sorghum, wheat or teff a year, which was hardly enough to feed my family. As I didn’t have any other income, I couldn’t send my children to school or afford to go to health facilities when we were sick. We lived a miserable life.”

“Then, Farm Africa provided a water lifting motor pump and farming tools to serve 15 very poor farmers including me who have land adjacent to the river to start irrigation farming. We were also given training on irrigation farming. Once we received the training, the pumps and the tools, we started irrigating our individual farms turn by turn.”

“I have benefited a lot over the last two years since I started using the water pump. Last year I grew tomatoes, onions, garlic, cabbages, spinach and peppercorns and earned over ETB 23,000. This sum does not include the vegetables we used for home consumption.”

He continued: “My family and I have seen tremendous changes in our lives. My children were never allowed to go and take food from the kitchen; they ate what their mother gave them when available. Now, they can take whatever amount and eat till they are full. We now have new items added to our daily diet, such as meat and vegetables. I have bought oxen and the number of my goats has reached 20 as I do not have to sell them to buy food like I did in the past.”

“I have now learnt that it is not the size of the land that matters most. A lot can be produced on a small plot of land if it is well managed. In the last two years we have earned more produce and more money than farmers who have larger plots but do not use irrigation. We were also less affected by last year’s drought as most of us had some money to buy food for our families. Farm Africa’s community facilitators follow-up and support has contributed a great deal to our success.”

FARM AFRICA

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