

Coffee for conservation

Protecting forests by growing a thriving forest coffee value chain



 Ethiopia



Table of contents

About this project	2
Improving forest management	4
Increasing sustainable agricultural practices	6
Improving livelihoods	8
Coffee production and marketing	8
Honey production and marketing	10
Increasing access to finance	10
Building capacity and expertise	12
Impact	14
Lessons learnt	15
Conclusion	15
Personal stories	16
Abdi Bori cooperative	16
Solomon	18
Getachew	19

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Front cover photo: A member of the Abdi Bori cooperative harvests forest coffee. Read the Abdi Bori cooperative success story on page 18.

About this project

This learning paper details the strategy, approach and impact of the Landscape-based Sustainable Forest Management and Coffee Value Chain Development for Resilient Livelihoods project.

Taking a landscape-based approach, the project aimed to protect natural resources while promoting economic opportunities for local communities in the ecologically critical Ilu Ababor Zone of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia.

It serves as a successful example of integrating environmental stewardship with livelihood improvement, demonstrating a path towards a sustainable and resilient future for communities and ecosystems alike.

Led by Farm Africa, the project was implemented in partnership with government agencies and local communities across four woredas (Ale, Becho, Didu and Mettu Zuria) of Ilu Ababor Zone, Ethiopia from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024. Engaging

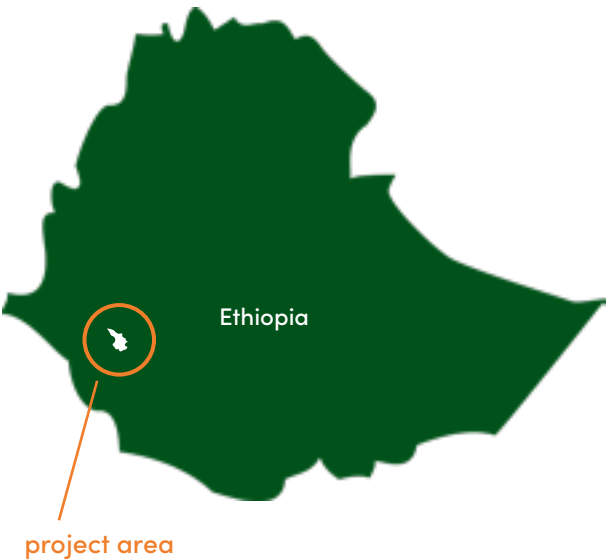
with 15 kebeles across the four woredas and working with 19 Participatory Forest Management Cooperatives (PFMCs), the project strove to balance forest conservation with improving the livelihoods of over 4,000 community members, including 751 women.

Project aim

To protect natural resources in the region while promoting economic opportunities for local communities through an improved coffee value chain.

Key objectives

- 1. increased forest conservation through improved forest management practices
- 2. increased adoption of improved and sustainable agricultural practices by smallholder farmers
- 3. improved livelihoods of communities living around the forest through diversified income sources
- 4. improved institutional capacity of stakeholders



¹ECFF (Environment and Coffee Forest Forum) Coffee production systems in Ethiopia.
²Ethiopia's Coffee Export Generates \$1.45 Billion in Annual Revenue. Ethiopian Monitor, 8 July 2024.

Context

Coffee is vital to Ethiopia's economy, providing income for 15 million households and generating 24% of the nation's export income.¹

In the 2023–2024 fiscal year, Ethiopia exported 298,500 tonnes of coffee, resulting in USD 1.43 billion revenue, with major markets in the USA, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Belgium and Germany.² The country's coffee exports are showing significant growth, with exports in the first eight months of the 2024/2025 fiscal year already exceeding 257,000 tonnes and generating USD 1.226 billion, exceeding initial targets by 152% in volume and 134% in value.³

Around 95% of Ethiopian coffee is produced by smallholder farmers, with coffee accounting for half of their agricultural income.⁴

Coffee is produced under four systems: forest coffee, semi-forest coffee, garden coffee and plantations, with smallholders contributing to the first three.

These smallholder systems integrate coffee with food and cash crops, providing opportunity for biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration, especially in the ecologically critical Ilu Ababor Zone of Oromia region, where Coffea arabica is an indigenous plant and semi-forest coffee farms cover 10% of the land.

With its rich forest ecosystems, Ilu Ababor Zone plays a critical role regionally in water regulation and globally in carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. However, these forests are under intense pressure as increasing population, dwindling fertility of agricultural land and limited livelihood opportunities drive deforestation.

Farm Africa has been working with communities in the region since 2015, together seeking ways to reconcile resource protection and livelihood needs. This effort has led to the establishment of a robust network of PFMCs, enabling local communities to collaborate with the local government – Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE) – in forest management. Central to the PFMCs' role is forest conservation and development of sustainable forest enterprise, especially the development of the area's forest coffee value chain.

³Ethiopia's coffee exports hit US\$1.23B in eight months surpassing targets. Food Business Middle East and Africa, 18 March 2025.
⁴Ethiopian coffee: productionsystems...compliance. Journal of Agriculture and Food Research Vol 19, March 2025, 101695



A member of the Abdi Bori Participatory Forest Management Cooperative harvests forest coffee.

Improving forest management



Forest under the protection of Abdi Bori PFMC.

By implementing practices that preserve and protect forest resources, the project worked to safeguard biodiversity, reduce deforestation and promote ecosystem health.

Improving forest management practices was essential to maintain the environmental integrity of the Ilu Ababor Zone and its communities.

Activities undertaken to promote better management practices included:

- establishing a multi-stakeholder platform to enhance collaboration and assist Participatory Forest Management Cooperatives (PFMCs) by engaging key law enforcement agencies such as the Oromia court, justice office, Environment Protection Authority, OFWE and the police
- facilitating forums to address community conflicts over forest borders
- increasing local availability and survival rate of tree seedlings by establishing six nurseries, distributing 58 kg of forest seeds and delivering training for 61 nursery staff (including 25 women) on seedling production and conservation, with some groups earning income through the sale of seedlings
- conducting training on bamboo seedling production for 60 participants, covering best practices in bamboo cultivation for coffee-drying mats, to reduce the cost of transporting materials from other regions
- reducing dependency on the natural forests for timber by encouraging farmers to plant small-scale, fast-growing woodlots as a livelihood enterprise, supporting the establishment of 18 woodlot-producing groups and mentoring members to convert 52.75 hectares of deforested land near residences into forest woodlots
- promoting the use of energy-efficient stoves for household cooking as a cleaner burning and more sustainable alternative to forest gathered fuelwood
- mentoring 19 groups to establish enterprises as producers of these stoves, enabling production and sale of 1,795 stoves locally at an affordable price.

Outcome

Through interventions that addressed both conservation and livelihood needs, significant strides were made in improving forest management.

The conflict resolution forums and multi-stakeholder meetings provided a platform for dialogue among key stakeholders, including PFMC members, local communities, government authorities and conservation groups. These discussions led to a revision of PFMC bylaws to ensure they align with national forest policies, addressing gaps, clarifying roles and enhancing compliance with legal frameworks. The updated bylaws now better reflect sustainable forest management practices, equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms and strengthened community agency in conservation initiatives.

This fostered a groundswell of support for forest conservation activities. For example, improved practices in seedling production, coupled with prospects of new livelihood opportunities, led to a surge of afforestation, with 360,036 seedlings being produced and planted to cover 2,435 hectares of open land with an 85% seedling survival rate, in line with the project's targets.

Adoption rates for energy-efficient stoves were also encouraging, with the percentage of households using energy-efficient stoves increasing from 18% to 66%, surpassing the project's end target of 30%.

“Now, 1.5 hectares of my farm are fully covered with these trees and there are so many tree lots around locally.”

Solomon Mekonnen
Grevillia tree woodlot owner

[Read Solomon's story on page 18](#)

2,435

hectares of open land planted with tree seedlings

85%

of tree seedlings planted on open land have survived

66%

of households using energy-efficient stoves to reduce firewood consumption up from 18% in 2021



Increasing sustainable agricultural practices

To enable harmonious coexistence between forest resources and farmlands, the project promoted sustainable, climate-resilient farming practices among smallholder farmers.

By adopting these practices, farmers could enhance their income while protecting the natural environment. Sustainable coffee and honey production, for example, allow for profitable farming without harming native vegetation, supporting the preservation of forest resources.

These efforts not only benefit the farmers directly through increased productivity and resilience to climate variability but also contribute to conserving soil health and water resources.



Sustainable coffee and honey production can be profitable without harming forest resources.

The long-term goal was to establish an agricultural system that complements forest ecosystems, allowing agricultural productivity and forest health to thrive together, thereby fostering both environmental and economic sustainability for the region.

Activities undertaken to promote climate-resilient farming practices included:

- providing training from zonal experts on climate-smart agriculture (CSA) to 96 farmers and government technical staff (including 42 women)
- providing training on agroforestry practices, specifically managing multi-purpose trees like avocados and bananas, to 102 individuals (62 men, 40 women), who shared their knowledge with 479 farmers in their communities, leading to the distribution of 1,322 grafted avocado and 600 banana seedlings to 193 farmers, including 78 women
- collaborating with regional authorities and university professors to pilot the conversion of coffee husks into products like vermicompost and briquettes
- training a youth group of 43 members on these processes and providing mentorship for the launch of a compost production, poultry raising and banana farming enterprise using the compost
- providing training on vegetable production to 65 individuals (47 women) and distributing 10 kg of vegetable seeds for home gardening.

Outcome

Over the lifetime of the project, the percentage of farming households implementing climate-smart techniques increased from 49% to 76%.

Uptake of home gardening and vegetable production also increased significantly, with 63% of surveyed households indicating they had home vegetable gardens compared to 53% at the start of the project.

A corresponding rise in average household income was also indicated, with average annual income from vegetable sales increasing from ETB 1,245 in 2021 to ETB 6,506 by early 2024. Significant inflation over the period impacted the real value, however. Even so, after adjusting for inflation, participant households achieved a real value gain of ETB 3,491, an increase of 280%.

76%

of farming households now implementing sustainable practices

up from 47% in 2021

280%

increase in household income from vegetable production

since 2021, adjusted for inflation

Improving livelihoods

Recognising the economic vulnerability of communities reliant on forest resources, the project promoted development of forest-friendly income streams.

By strengthening and diversifying forest-friendly income streams—such as through coffee value chain development and other compatible economic activities—the project helped communities ease unsustainable levels of dependency on forest resources.

Coffee production and marketing

Working in partnership with Participatory Forest Management Cooperatives (PFMCs), the project undertook a wide range of activities to support development of the area's coffee value chain.

To highlight the importance of effective leadership in cooperative success, an experience-sharing visit was arranged to enable PFMCs to learn from high-performing cooperatives like Abdi Bori and Aba Gemta PFMCs.

To improve production, training was provided in coffee plant rejuvenation and quality maintenance techniques and Coffee Quality Inspection Committees (CQICs) were established to control the quality of forest coffee. A total of 723 farmers used these methods to rejuvenate 537,884 old coffee trees.

To improve harvest and post-harvest techniques, 1,137 farmers received training on harvest techniques, drying methods and storage, while materials such as 1,400 jute sacks and bamboo drying mats were distributed to meet quality standards and improve market readiness.

To enhance coffee processing and maintain high standards, the project helped set up a guarantee fund in collaboration with Sor Geba Union. By mitigating financial risks, the fund enabled the Union to provide loans to PFMCs without collateral. With this access to finance, PFMCs were able to purchase processing equipment

“We have proven that the coffee of Ilu Ababor can compete in the national and international market.”

Abebe Adem

Chairperson of Aba Gemta cooperative, Didu woreda

and marketing support, enabling them to send a total of 168.6 tons of coffee to the central market, with 98.5% meeting export quality standards, and PFMC members receiving dividends from their sales.

To improve storage and quality control and to provide easy market access, PFMCs were supported to build aggregation centres, five of which were completed with cooperative member contributions.

To improve coffee business operations, PFMC leaders received training in business management, quality control and certification processes. This empowered them to create effective business plans, enabling them to access

loans and achieve cooperative status, essential for official coffee business operations. Six PFMCs completed qualification requirements, allowing one PFMC, Bonsa Kashe, to sell 15,708 kg of coffee, generating ETB 3,285,000 (approx USD 58,800).

To improve marketing, the project promoted connections through exhibitions, allowing PFMCs to promote coffee, honey and cardamom products, creating market linkages.

To create access to premium international markets and provide new revenue avenues, the project facilitated organic coffee certification for PFMCs, which included rigorous training on sustainable production practices and record-keeping.

“Prior to the project, our limited knowledge meant we had to sell our coffee to local traders at lower prices. Now we’ve taken control and are the ones negotiating and determining the coffee prices.”

Abde Musa

Member of Abdi Bori cooperative

read the story on page 16



Girma Legesse now secures good prices for his coffee by selling through his cooperative's established market connections.

99%

of coffee meeting export quality standard

up from 73% in 2021

44%

of coffee meeting speciality grade standard

up from 20% in 2021



Mulugeta Tefesse has opened two shops selling forest coffee and honey.

Honey production and marketing

With Ethiopia being the largest producer of honey in sub-Saharan Africa, the project introduced beekeeping as a forest-friendly enterprise with good market prospects.

A training-of-trainers programme equipped 124 farmers (including 48 women) to train 563 others, fostering widespread skill-sharing in beekeeping practices.

Experience-sharing visits involved 46 farmers and government staff, and 150 beehives (100 modern, 50 transitional) were distributed to 42 farmers (16 women) under a 50% cost-recovery agreement. The resulting funds of ETB 176,000 (approx USD 3,150) enabled the purchase of 125 more hives through a revolving fund, praised by the Zone Cooperative Office.

With this support, some PFMC members entered honey markets.

Increasing access to finance

To boost financial access, especially for women, 14 new Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) were established across six new intervention kebeles, totalling 36 active VSLAs with 785 members (including 718 women).

The project supported these groups with essential tools, including saving boxes, padlocks and registration books, while training 329 members

(including 39 men) in VSLA operations, leadership and business skills. Currently, collective VSLA group savings have grown to ETB 1,243,976 (approx USD 22,200), with 583 women accessing credit for activities like poultry farming and coffee retail.

Three VSLAs from the previous phase were merged into licensed cooperatives, gaining ETB 737,671 (approx USD 13,200) in combined capital. This funding enabled 222 women to access loans for investments in sheep husbandry and poultry production.

In addition, the project conducted gender equality and women's empowerment training for 47 participants, including 33 men and 14 women from district and kebele levels. The training aimed to promote gender equality as a transformative agenda, covering gender concepts, empowerment, stereotype challenges and strategies for advocating behavioural change in communities.



As a member of Gudina Badiya Savings and Loan Cooperative, Bekelu secured a loan of ETB 14,500 to purchase a heifer. Shortly after, the heifer gave birth, enabling Bekelu to generate income through the sale of milk. With the combined value of mother and calf now approximating ETB 35,000, Bekelu is confident she can repay her loan solely through the sale of the calf.

Response to COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 support was given to 74 affected individuals, providing hygiene materials and food essentials. This aid improved hygiene, nutrition and overall well-being amid market disruptions, and was widely praised by local officials for its positive impact on vulnerable families.

Outcome

Remarkable progress in livelihood improvement was achieved through these activities.

The most dramatic gains were made from the improvements to the coffee value chain, which saw the average annual household income from coffee, among those engaging in coffee production, rise by ETB 10,976 (adjusted for inflation; approx USD 190) over the course of the project: a 45% increase.

Promotion of honey production also showed promise, with average annual household production of honey increasing by about 30 kg and average income from honey rising by ETB 1,985 (adjusted for inflation).

Gaining access to finance is vital for enterprises of any scale, and can be especially difficult for women. The project's VSLA model provided an effective means to bridge this gap, with 583 women accessing credit for small enterprises like poultry farming or coffee retail, and 97% of surveyed households indicating they had accessed loans from their VSLAs, compared to only 45% at the start of the project.

Central to this project's approach is the development of community-led leadership, managed through the PFMC infrastructure. To assess competency gains from these interventions, the Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT) was utilised to evaluate competency gains among 10 PFMC leaders.



“With all these diversified sources of income, I now feel safe with sustainability and food security.”

Getachew

Read his story on page 19

Photo: Farm Africa / Medhanit Gebremichael

The OCAT evaluated five core competencies: leadership, property management, forest management, business development, and women's empowerment and indicated a growth in average scores from 41 to 60.5 (48% increase).

45%

increase in annual income from coffee among coffee producers

since 2021, adjusted for inflation

29%

increase in household income from honey

since 2021, adjusted for inflation

97%

of households able to access financial services

up from 45% in 2021

Building capacity and expertise

To ensure sustainability, the project worked to empower local institutions, government agencies and community members with the tools needed for effective resource management, sustainable practices and long-term project impact.

Building government staff capacity

The project conducted a Knowledge Aptitude and Practice (KAP) assessment to identify skill gaps among government experts offering community extension services, aiming to enhance service quality.

Based on the findings, tailored training programmes in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), sustainable natural resource management and biodiversity were developed to improve service quality.

Three training rounds were delivered by Mattu University professors to 178 participants (including 22 women) from key government sectors, including the Environment, Forest and Climate Authority, and the Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise.

The project also organised two visits for government staff: one to learn about market systems and Sharia-compliant credit in Amhara, and another on sustainable coffee

production and biodiversity conservation. These visits strengthened participants’ ability to apply sustainable strategies.

Zonal platforms brought together 67 participants to discuss illegal logging and 58 for a workshop on biodiversity and park development.

Policy forums also promoted collaboration on value chain issues and conservation strategies, driving actionable results in forest conservation and resource management.

Action research and learning

The partnership between Farm Africa and the Tepi Agricultural Research Institute is centred

on advancing spice and forest research in the Ilu Ababor Zone to boost spice productivity and promote sustainable agriculture. The research is funded with ETB 732,500 (approx USD 13,100), with Farm Africa covering 75% and the research institute 25%.

The initiative supports ginger and black pepper cultivation in Ale, Didu, and Becho districts. Demonstration plots were created to showcase best practices and a capacity-building session trained 21 participants on production, management and post-harvest practices. A field day facilitated knowledge exchange, with initial outcomes showing increased spice yields.

Outcome

Results from the Knowledge Aptitude and Practice (KAP) survey of 56 government staff revealed an increase in average KAP scores from 65 to 73 over the project’s duration, reflecting improved knowledge and attitudes toward conservation

This progress strengthened institutional capacity for sustainable resource management, enabling better planning, enforcement and community engagement in conservation initiatives.

Improved knowledge also fostered livelihood diversification, such as eco-friendly agriculture and sustainable forest use, boosting household incomes.

These efforts contributed to long-term environmental protection by promoting climate-smart practices, reducing resource depletion, and ensuring that local communities benefit from sustainable natural resource management.

12%

improvement in knowledge, aptitude and practice scores for government staff providing community extension services



Impact

By working collaboratively with forest-reliant communities, the project was able to successfully integrate environmental stewardship with livelihood development.

Over the lifetime of the project, real gains were made in livelihood development, as measured by household dietary diversity scores and annual income, while at the same time reducing the average annual deforestation rate.

Reduced deforestation rate

Using ArcGIS data to monitor changes in the project area forest cover over time, the average annual deforestation rate at the start of the project in 2021 was calculated at 0.07 hectares/year. By 2024 that rate had fallen to 0.04 hectares/year, a 43% reduction.

Increased household income

Comparison of average annual total income of surveyed households from the start of the project (ETB 38,390 / approx USD 690) to the end (ETB

51,011 / approx USD 910) showed a 33% increase. Significant inflation, however, compromised the real-value of this gain. Despite this undermining factor, adjusting for consumption related inflation, households achieved an 18% real-value gain.

Improved nutrition

The household dietary diversity score (HDDS) assesses a household's access to a range of foods and is a widely accepted method for benchmarking household nutrition.

Average household dietary diversity scores from surveyed households moved from 5.7 at the start of the project to 7.2 at the end, a shift that moved the surveyed community from the medium to high dietary diversity category, according to FAO guidelines.⁵

"In 2022, I succeeded in producing 340 kg quality coffee, which had never happened in my life. Supplying this to my cooperative, I earned ETB 72,000. The earning from the local market for this amount would have only been ETB 20,000.

"Prior to the project, I had only three beehives. My annual harvest from the traditional beehives had been only 25-30 kg. Now, having the transitional and modern hives, we transcended production to 120-125 kg a year. We delivered quite a lot of quality honey to the market and earned more than ETB 35,000.

"I have a lot to provide for my family with now. We have adequate access to foods including meat, honey, fruits and vegetables. We get light in our house, which is generated from a solar panel. We also use solar energy to cook food. This is a big change from using a kerosene lamp and firewood."

Fikru

Aba Gemta Participatory Forest Management Cooperative

Lessons learnt

Key lessons and success factors from this project that can inform future programming include:

Building on previous interventions improves performance

The project benefited from previous initiatives like the Bale Eco-region REDD+ project, building an integrated Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approach that supported community-based forest management and biodiversity conservation. Future programming should prioritise continuous learning from prior experiences and phase interventions to improve performance.

Local leadership ensures efficiency and sustainability

The project emphasised locally led development by involving government offices in participant selection, training and procurement. With only two project staff coordinating efforts, government staff led activities, ensuring cost-effectiveness and the continuation of initiatives after project completion.

Local ownership and capacity building facilitate access to technology

The project addressed technology challenges by fostering local capacity and cost-sharing mechanisms. Members committed to refunding 50% of material costs to cooperatives, enabling others to access modern tools like beehives. Similarly, energy-efficient stoves were produced and sold by youth groups, expanding access and creating economic opportunities.

Integrated participatory interventions lead to better results

The project demonstrated that combining conservation efforts with livelihood improvements through a participatory approach is effective. Farm Africa's PFM approach successfully achieved forest conservation while increasing community income from non-timber forest products like coffee and honey.

Conclusion

The Landscape-based Sustainable Forest Management and Coffee Value Chain Development for Resilient Livelihoods project has significantly improved livelihoods in forest-dependent communities by enhancing sustainable coffee production, conserving biodiversity and promoting climate resilience.

Strengthened community management, market access and reforestation efforts have ensured sustainable impact, fostering economic stability while preserving forests for future generations

The approach provides a model for successful integration of environmental stewardship with livelihood improvement, demonstrating a path towards a sustainable and resilient future for communities and ecosystems alike.

⁵FAO (2013). Guidelines for measuring household and individual dietary diversity, Rome.

The rise of Abdi Bori Participatory Forest Management Cooperative

In 2012, Mulugeta Tefesse became a founding member of Abdi Bori PFMC. Now chairman of this highly successful cooperative, he reflects on the journey.

In 2011, Mulugeta Tefesse started managing coffee on his father's farmland in Ale woreda of Ilu Ababor Zone. The next year, he eyed a Farm Africa initiative that was establishing community-led cooperatives to manage natural forest while also producing coffee. Seeing the potential benefit to his own coffee enterprise, he became a founding member of Abdi Bori PFMC.

Through the cooperative, Mulugeta received training on production techniques to improve his coffee yield and quality. He applied the knowledge he received and the results surprised him. When his coffee was sent to a coffee laboratory for quality grading, it achieved the prestigious 'specialty' grade for the first time.

Now the Chairman of Abdi Bori PFMC, Mulugeta recalls the misgivings people had for the PFMC initiative in those early days. "Many believed

that the primary objective of the PFMC was to undermine the community's ownership and rights to utilise the forest," he explains. As a result, the Abdi Bori PFMC established with only 52 members.

"Open communication, transparency and education played crucial roles in overcoming initial resistance," says Mulugeta. "Our dedicated members ensured the success of the cooperative by safeguarding the forest (2,682 hectares), tending to coffee trees, striving for high-quality coffee production, and building a coffee store using our cooperative's own resources," Mulugeta explains. "As a result, new people started to join us. We now have 234 members, including 88 women."

Mulugeta recalls 2017-18 as a pivotal time for the young cooperative and for him personally. Farm Africa began working closely with the cooperative and Mulugeta received training on cooperative business management, coffee quality and marketing. Now married, he used the knowledge to secure a ETB 45,000 loan from a youth fund



"Thanks to the knowledge we acquired with the support of the project, we are now skilled and capable of independently managing our coffee business without relying on external support."

Mulugeta Tefesse

Chairman, Abdi Bori Participatory Forest Management Cooperative

to help him invest in his enterprise and buy a piece of land. He started supplying coffee to the cooperative in larger volumes and initially earned about ETB 50,000, then ETB 90,000 annual income within two years (2018 and 2019). He has continued repaying and receiving rounds of loans since then.

With continued mentorship through this current project phase, Abdi Bori PFMC has achieved remarkable success, selling an impressive 155,578 kilograms of top-quality coffee over the past four years.

The PFMC has also managed to establish its own coffee processing facility specifically for washed coffee, enabling them to cater to the growing demand for both washed and natural processed coffee.

In 2023, the cooperative secured an Organic and National Organic Programme licence with the support of the Farm Africa project. This enabled the group to engage in sustainable production of coffee, leading to the earning of a premium amounting to ETB 983,744 (approx USD 17,600).

In the same year, Abdi Bori PFMC became the first cooperative, among the 105 PFMCs under the administration of Oromia Forest and Wildlife Enterprise in Ilu Ababor and Buno Bedele Zone, to receive a certificate of recognition for Exceptional Performance in Forest Management and Livelihood Improvement from the Oromia Region Environment Protection Authority.

Mulugeta is quick to acknowledge that most of his income stems from his relationship with his cooperative:

"Without the cooperative, it could have been difficult to reach where I am now. More than 80% of my annual income is linked to Abdi Bori PFMC where I continuously supply quality coffee and receive good prices and better income."

He attributes his success to the technical and business skills he acquired through the project and the market outlet created by the cooperative:

"I follow daily updates of international coffee prices on websites and use the information to decide buying and selling prices based on the trends, unlike other traders. I do the same for my cooperative and we are successful."



Coffee drying at Abdi Bori PFMC.



Members of Abdi Bori Cooperative gather with Chairman Mulugeta Tefesse (front left) to welcome visitors.

Solomon shares his story



Solomon Mekonnen in the Grevillea tree woodlot he has grown.

By planting a fast-growing woodlot, Solomon Mekonnen is growing his income and restoring his land at the same time.

Solomon Mekonnen lives in Ale Ceriobe woreda in Illu Ababor Zone, an area known for its forest coffee production. "I have been producing coffee and crops for years. However, different from my usual practice, I have managed to grow a new type of plant, Grevillia tree, and I am excited.

"I had never thought I would have this tree in my farm land. I used to assume that planting Grevillia was only for the rich and for business firms. We farmers in the village know the market demand is high and is highly profitable, but we considered it as something we cannot have easily.

"Thanks to the Farm Africa staff, who encouraged me, I have become a farmer with 500 Grevillia trees. It has been only three years, but one and a half hectares of my farm is fully covered with these trees.

"Through the project, I have become a member of Salewongus cooperative and we work together and protect our natural forest. We fulfil our

responsibilities not to cut trees. Instead, we are planting trees. We have a nursery site where we produce seedlings and make money by selling these seedlings.

"I am also growing coffee under my Grevillia trees. Coffee trees need shade and the Grevillia trees are protecting them from too much sunlight, helping to improve the quality of my coffee. In the near future, I will start keeping bees and producing spices to diversify my sources of income further.

"Before, our village was very much degraded, but now you can find so many woodlots growing here and there. My brother Ofga, for example, has also entered the Grevillia growing business."

The once-barren sites of the brothers' woodlots are now covered with Grevillia and coffee trees, providing habitat for birds, monkeys and other wild animals. Their woodlots will be marketable soon, generating income. In addition, within a couple of years, they are expecting good yields from the 600 coffee trees they have planted.

Getachew's experience

Getachew Ayana first started working with Farm Africa in 2012, when he became a member of Abdi Gudina Participatory Forest Management Cooperative (PFMC). Currently, the group manages forest lying on 900 hectares of land with a boundary near Getachew's village.

Together with his fellow farmers in the cooperative, Getachew protects the forest from deforestation and has observed that the condition of the forest they manage is improving. It's a relief, as growing mismanagement of forests near his village had become a concern.

"According to our forefathers, it was tradition that individuals would be given a certain part of the forest to ensure conservation. People would collect coffee or wood in controllable ways."

Getachew feels the change in mindset started when new government regulations denied the community access to the forests.

"As our livelihoods have always been dependent on the forest products, people started exploiting. Clearing of trees dramatically increased. The Government's intense control could not prevent it as people needed to survive somehow."

Getachew feels that with agreements now in place that allow the community to use the forest sustainably in return for a commitment to protect it, the forest cover has started to regenerate.

"Now, we can harvest wild coffee with the consultation of the PFMC and the forest conservation advisory committee; we can also harvest cardamom, natural gums, cinnamon

"Now we have managed to improve our livelihood, I have constructed a better house and I'm sending three of my children to school without being worried about their clothes and food."



As a member of Abdi Gudina Participatory Forest Management cooperative, Getachew helps to sustainably manage 900 hectares of landscape near to his village.



and house construction materials. As we can use the forest resources, we have the feeling that we should protect it."

Getachew's PFMC has helped him access markets for his coffee as well. He has started to get good prices as the cooperative is directly connected to national buyers. He is also earning dividend income as a cooperative member.

With improved seeds supplied to him through the project, Getachew was able to enhance his vegetable production capacity, which earned him nearly ETB 18,000. He also now has cattle, sheep and goats.

The project has also helped him secure three beehives to produce honey, a major commodity in Ethiopia, and is coaching him on the planting of a woodlot of Grevillia trees, a fast-growing timber tree with strong market value.

Getachew reflects on the changes brought to his life: "With all these diversified sources of income, I now feel safe with sustainability and food security."



Diversified farming is boosting household income and nutrition in forest-reliant communities in Ilu Ababor Zone, Ethiopia.

To learn more about this project, please contact the Farm Africa Ethiopia team:

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