



EMPOWERING COUPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT: HOMESTEAD AREAS

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1. INTRODUCTION

As global challenges of food security and environmental degradation intensify, effective strategies for sustainable land management (SLM) become more crucial than ever. In Ethiopia, changing climate and extreme weather threaten the livelihoods of poor households, with women facing exacerbated risks due to income disparity, limited opportunities, and societal norms. Sustainable land management (SLM) practices like water retention and erosion control hold promise in building resilience, large-scale evidence of their effectiveness is lacking. Our baseline survey reveals some households use SLM practices, perceiving productivity benefits, but participation skews heavily towards men. Time constraints and limited access to information, often channeled through male-dominated public works, may hinder women's adoption of these potentially life-saving strategies. SLM study was conceived to investigate these dynamics and identify solutions to empower women and strengthen Ethiopia's climate resilience. The study assess the impact of the intervention, specifically focusing on training women to amplify their participation in SLM and explore the effects of participating couples, examining whether

collaborative efforts between spouses yield a more substantial impact. This learning brief underscores the transformative influence of couples' training within the context of SPIR II's SLM intervention.

2. IMPORTANCE OF COUPLES TRAINING IN SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION

While limited land availability challenges food security in Ethiopia's Harrarghe zone, empowering couples through targeted SLM training offers a promising solution. Despite limited farmland, the backyard spaces have often been covered by other cereals and there are no vegetables and fruits. Consequently, there is a concerted effort to revitalize homestead gardens, recognizing their significance in diversifying food sources and promoting the consumption of nutritious produce. The initiative involves advancing organic farming practices through the use of compost, composted-manure implementing integrated pest and disease management practices.

The training program imparts essential skills in land management, compost preparation and application, beds and pit preparation, aiming to enhance soil health and encourage collaborative efforts between spouses to yield more effective results.

3. THE KEY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF SLM COUPLES TRAINING

A comprehensive training cascade, starting with Trainers of Trainers (ToT). Subsequently, training sessions were cascaded for development agents, community facilitators, and health extension workers. Finally, randomly selected couples underwent a comprehensive four-day training program covering land preparation, compost preparation, beds and pit preparation, planting of fruit trees and vegetables and ensuring effective knowledge transfer and maximized program impact. The couples also received instruction on gender awareness, proper use of farm tools, and the management of vegetable seeds and fruit seedlings. Following the training, development agents closely monitored the couples to ensure the application of acquired skills and to assess whether any additional support was needed.

CASE STORY

Harvesting Hope: A Tale of Transformation and Resilience

The following two inspiring stories showcase how the couples transformed their lives through training and improved land management practices.

In West Harrarghe, Oromia, Mohammed Yuya and Indiya Hassen, parents of six children, relied on farming for their livelihood. When two of their grown-up children got married, they shared their land, leaving the couple with only a small plot of land. Recurrent droughts and floods rendered their farmland unproductive, causing financial strain and difficulties in providing for their family. Mohammed's constant illness further hindered their income, limiting them to selling Khat from their reduced farmland. In 2021, they joined the government's PSNP program.

In August 2023, Mohammed and Indiya attended a couples' training as part of SPIR II sustainable land management (SLM). The training equipped them with valuable skills in pitting and bed preparation for fruit trees and vegetables growing. Although they had not considered growing vegetables in their backyard before, the training provided insights into managing their small plot and producing vegetables using compost and composite manure. Beyond technical knowledge, the training strengthened their relationship in supporting one another.



Nejuma and Nemonu, the delightful children of Mohammed and Indiya, are captured savoring the goodness of fresh vegetables harvested from their very own backyard.



Indiya, Mohammed, and Nejuma are captured diligently tending to their home garden.

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"We have learned many techniques for planting vegetables and fruit trees and compost preparation for our farm. What stands out is that it increased our collaboration at home. In our home, there is no longer a division of duties. We support each other very well. Sometimes I stir the fire for her to cook, and she supports me in watering the avocado trees and vegetables," said Mohammed.

Post-training, they planted vegetables and fruit trees on their farmland, resulting in a successful harvest of vegetables. Selling surplus products like Ethiopia Kale, carrots, and Swiss chards earned them 2,700 birr. Indiya expressed their satisfaction, "We were all happy about our vegetable harvest. Previously, we only ate vegetables occasionally, but now we regularly consume them. We sold the surplus production, providing us not only with diversified meals but also income. We will continue planting vegetables and hoeing, mulching and watering fruit trees that we planted after the training."

Nejuma, the fifth child, attends 7th grade and aspires to become a doctor. She enjoys cooking and tending to the backyard vegetable garden after school. Nejuma shared, "My parents are happier and healthier since they became engaged in planting vegetables. They support each other well, and they feel hopeful about the fruit trees and vegetables they planted."

Similar to Mohammed and Indiya, Jabiro Kediro and Bedriya Hassen, a couple with four children, grapple with sustaining their family on a relatively small plot where they cultivate forage for their six cattle. Two years ago, they joined the PSNP program, seeking essential support, especially when Jabiro faced financial difficulties after a temporary job as a security guard in a preserved forest.

The PSNP became a lifeline for them, prompting them to diversify income sources by planting avocado and elephant grass. With two milking cows, they now earn 120 birr per day from milk sales. The safety net support allowed them to halt the sale of calves when their single cow gave birth. Presently, with six cattle, two providing milk, they save money from milk sales and have invested in two goats, planning to sell them during festive and profitable seasons.



Jabiro and Bedriya pictured with their sons at their farmland.



Jabiro and Bedriya are pictured nurturing their avocado tree.

In August 2023, Jabiro and Bedriya underwent comprehensive training in backyard gardening, covering planting, caring for, and managing fruits and vegetables on their farmland. The training proved highly advantageous, fostering shared knowledge among participants and facilitating mutual support. Actively applying the acquired techniques, they now cultivate various crops, including carrots, beets, Ethiopian Kale, and Swiss chard. The positive impact on their family's nutrition is evident as their children relish the fresh vegetables.

"The training opportunity granted me and Bedri a similar understanding of planting and managing home gardening. This will help us support each other and provide all the necessary care for it," says Jabiro.

Encouraging other couples to engage in similar training programs, they emphasize its significant contribution to supporting families and enjoying a more diverse range of food at home.

"I was curious about the kind of training they wanted both of us to attend. After completing it, I understood the necessity of involving both of us, and it was worth it. Our children now enjoy eating fresh vegetables. I strongly encourage other couples to attend the training as it provides a valuable opportunity to support one another," says Bedriya.

The ongoing challenge for Jabiro and Bedriya is to secure regular access to seeds, which would be immensely beneficial for them and other families, ensuring continuous vegetable production. Jabiro and Bedriya have become sources of inspiration for positive change in their community, their lives continuously evolving through hard work and dedication.

4. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

The training program successfully reached 1,300 couples, equipping them with valuable skills in land management and vegetable production. They planted a variety of vegetables and fruit trees in their backyard, using the acquired knowledge. These efforts not only contributed to diversifying their meals with homegrown produce but also enabled some couples to sell surplus products in the market. Both couples actively collaborated in cultivating their backyard, fostering a joint commitment to sustainable land management practices.

5. KEY LEARNING

Several key lessons emerged from this intervention, highlighting the importance of optimizing land use, collaborative responsibility, income diversification, knowledge empowerment, and nutritional impact.

1. Optimizing land use in Harrarghe Zone:

Despite owning small plots of land, the majority of farmers in Harrarghe Zone often underutilize their backyard space. Harnessing this untapped area could prove beneficial, allowing farmers to cultivate vegetables to diversify their diets and generate additional income by selling surplus produce.

2. Collaboration and shared responsibility:

The success stories of Mohammed and Indiya, as well as Jabiro and Bedriya, highlight the importance of collaboration within a family. By breaking traditional gender roles and sharing responsibilities, they not only enhanced productivity but also strengthened their relationships.

3. Diversification of income sources:

Both families learned the significance of diversifying their income sources. Joining government programs like the PSNP provided a safety net, and the additional training empowered them to explore new avenues such as planting fruits and vegetables, leading to improved financial stability.

4. Empowerment through knowledge:

The training programs, specifically SPIR II sustainable land management and backyard gardening, equipped the families with practical skills in planting techniques, compost preparation, and overall land management. This knowledge not only increased their agricultural productivity but also empowered them to make informed decisions for their livelihoods.

5. Nutritional and health impact:

The families witnessed positive changes in their health and nutrition by incorporating fresh vegetables into their diets. This highlights the direct correlation between agricultural practices and the well-being of individuals and families.

6. Collaboration:

Internally, all thematic areas of SPIR II, including health and nutrition, gender, livelihood, and natural resource management, worked collaboratively to deliver comprehensive SLM training for couples.

Each thematic area played a pivotal role in preparing trainees across health, nutrition, gender and livelihood aspects of SLM. Externally, SPIR II forged partnerships with the government to facilitate the training. The relevant government staff at Kebele and Woreda levels underwent capacity-building initiatives to enhance their skills and contribute effectively to the program.

6. CHALLENGE

Despite its success, the program faces challenges like limited seed access and environmental vulnerabilities, requiring further interventions.

1. Limited access to resources: One persistent challenge is the struggle to secure regular access to seeds. This obstacle hinders continuous vegetable production and remains a concern for families like Jabiro and Bedriya. Addressing this challenge is crucial for sustaining the positive changes achieved through the training programs.

2. Environmental factors: The initial struggles faced by Mohammed and Indiya due to recurrent droughts and floods emphasize the vulnerability of farmers to environmental factors. Climate resilience measures need to be integrated into training programs to help families adapt to and mitigate the impact of such challenges.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To overcome remaining challenges, concrete recommendations call for securing seed access, integrating climate resilience, fostering knowledge sharing, and implementing holistic training programs.

1. Seed access programs: To address the challenge of securing regular access to seeds, local authorities, NGOs, and relevant stakeholders should collaborate to establish seed banks or distribution programs. This would ensure that families like Jabiro and Bedriya can continue their vegetable production without interruptions.

2. Climate-resilient agriculture: Training programs should incorporate modules on climate-resilient agricultural practices. This includes techniques to cope with and adapt to changing weather patterns, ensuring sustainable farming practices despite environmental challenges.

3. Community knowledge sharing: Encourage families who have benefited from training programs to share their knowledge and experiences with others in the community. This peer-to-peer learning approach can create a ripple effect, fostering positive changes on a broader scale.

4. Holistic training programs: Develop comprehensive training programs that not only focus on agricultural techniques but also emphasize the broader aspects of family well-being, including health, nutrition, gender, and interpersonal relationships. This holistic approach can lead to more sustainable transformations in communities.

In conclusion, the success stories of Mohammed and Indiya, as well as Jabiro and Bedriya, serve as inspiration for resilience and positive change. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the recommended measures, communities can further enhance their capacity to overcome shock and build sustainable livelihoods.