
“Feed the World:” Inundo Development and Farming God’s Way Training in Ethiopia

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In April 2023, as the lead trainer for Inundo Development model farm, I, together with my wife, Kerry Wiens, travelled to Ethiopia for a “Farming God’s Way” training. Based in South Africa, we have been involved with agricultural training in Africa for thirteen years and are passionate about training farmers in sustainable, Christ-centered methods of agriculture. We founded the Inundo Development farm to showcase the abundance that can come from the land when God is seen as the ultimate sustainer of life and when God’s good creation is stewarded effectively.¹ At the time, we were returning to Ethiopia to work again with the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church to equip their leaders to grow food.

April rains had arrived in the southernmost part of the country. On the long drive from Addis Ababa to Jinka in the south, we found ourselves staring out of the window of the Land Cruiser at hundreds upon hundreds of small farms intricately laid out along hillsides and flat plains. What we observed concerned us greatly. Previously fertile farmland was deteriorating and suffering from catastrophic erosion. Farm fields were either hemorrhaging water and soil or were completely waterlogged with huge sections under stagnant pools of standing water. Not one river along the route was running clear; Ethiopian lakes were dark brown with the silt from agricultural land. In some cases, communities were divided by massive rifts in the landscape caused by erosion. Emerging crops were weak, sparse, and prone to stress and disease.

Upon arriving in Jinka, the weeklong training began with fifty farmers and leaders in attendance. One of the first sessions involved the current challenges facing Ethiopian small-scale farmers. The list of challenges was long and the discouragement on farmers’ faces was evident. The challenges were also widespread and did not discriminate according to economic means, climate, or location. Farmers were facing the same challenges across the southern part of the country. These challenges included land degradation, drought, loss of fertility, low yields, erosion, pest and disease pressure, weed control, cost of fertilizer, lack of access

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to seed, and limited availability of land.² Participants shared that the younger generation no longer sees agriculture as a thriving concern. Communities of farmers struggle year after year with the same issues. More and more of the younger generation are abandoning farming in order to provide for their families. The older generation of farmers is concerned about the future of food production in Ethiopia and the disintegration of rural life.

While many of the fifty participants listed challenge after challenge, a realization began to dawn on us. Through training, empowerment, and mindset change, almost all of these challenges can be addressed. Yes, the training room in that small compound in Jinka had an air of heaviness, but that atmosphere was about to change as the participants began to grasp how much God has provided a way for them through all these challenges. The message of “Farming God’s Way” is that God is reconciling all things to

2. Gebeyanesh Zeressa, Debela Feyssa, Dong-Gill Kim, and Bettina Eichler-Löbermann, “Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a Smart Agriculture,” *Agriculture*, MDPI 11.3 (February 2021): 1. <https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture11030192>.

1. To learn more about Inundo, see <https://inundo.org/>

himself and bringing healing and restoration not only to spiritual hearts but also to the land, plants, and food systems. This message has significant implications for rural contexts throughout Africa and beyond.

Zerssa, et al. state:

Agriculture is the backbone of the Ethiopian economy and it contributes about 50% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and more than 80% of its exports. Furthermore, it is one of the main employment sectors with about 80% of the country's population depending on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods.³

The same report summarizes that 95% of Ethiopia's main crops are produced by smallholder farms.⁴ When we consider the widespread challenges that small-scale farmers are facing in Ethiopia, 95% highlights the tremendous vulnerability of the Ethiopian food system. If current challenges bring the food system to a breaking point, there will be total collapse.

We recognize that Ethiopia has unique attributes compared to other African countries. Yet, when it comes to agriculture, there continue to be many shared realities between Ethiopia and other countries across the continent. The African continent as a whole relies heavily on the agriculture sector and percentages as reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization indicate that 80% of the food supply in sub-Saharan Africa is produced by smallholder farmers.⁵ Ethiopia is a good case study from which to draw implications.

In the report on Ethiopian agriculture, the critical issue is defined. Smallholder farmers cultivate on average less than 0.90 hectare (ha) per farm.⁶ Maize yields on those small allotments have been recorded on average as low as .35 ton/ha up to 2.6 tons/ha.⁷ The *Farming God's Way Trainers Reference Guide* records that an average African family needs 1.25 tons of maize to fulfill their yearly calorie requirements.⁸ The crisis is evident! In most cases, farmers are not able to grow the basic calorie requirement for their yearly family needs, especially if they have smaller farm allotments. This shortfall creates a yearly food debt in communities. Year after year communities are not growing what they need to survive let

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alone thrive and create business opportunity.

Surely, this reality is not what God originally intended for Ethiopia! God is a God of abundance and thriving. Moses reminded the Israelites of God's character in Deuteronomy 8, "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills... But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth" (Deut 8:7-9, 18a).⁹ The agricultural lands in Ethiopia and the rest of Africa ought to be providing abundantly for Ethiopians to a point where people lack nothing. God wants to empower people to produce and increase their wealth for the benefit of thriving communities but that is not the current reality. Something is broken and a solution is needed. What, therefore, is the solution to the food debt: food aid, imports, more access to land, more and better GMOs?

The agriculture report states that potential yields for maize in Ethiopia should be more than 7.8 tons/ha, which has been obtained on farm trials. Yields could actually be more than 3 times what people are currently harvesting and likely even more. God's wonderful creation is able to produce far more than is currently being realized. The shortfall is significant and this evident crisis in Ethiopian agriculture is repeated all over Africa. Farmers are not able to produce the yields that the land is capable of by God's incredible design. Food production is the foundation of rural economies and low yields directly impact food security.¹⁰ Why are we seeing such shortfalls in yields across the African continent?

We have worked with farmers from all over Africa: Ethiopia,

3. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 1.

4. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 1.

5. Smallholders and Family Farmers, https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Factsheet_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf

6. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 3.

7. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 3.

8. Dryden, "Farming God's Way Trainers Reference Guide (2009)," GW Dryden, South Africa, farming-gods-way.org

9. Zondervan NIV Study Bible (Full rev. ed.), K. L. Barker, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

10. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 3.

Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, and South Africa. In all those connections there are remarkable similarities in the cultivation practices. Land is heavily ploughed each season. Mulch cover on the soil is not a priority. Little emphasis is given to organic inputs and mono-cropping is a standard practice. The results of these cultivation practices include increasing loss of carbon in the soil, loss of biomass, increasing acidity, reduced water retention capacity, soil compaction, high levels of erosion, decreasing fertility, loss of soil microbiology, increased drought susceptibility that all result in significantly reduced productivity.

By contrast, Zerssa, et al. recommend an integrated approach to soil fertility management in agriculture, which includes reduced tillage, crop residue management, crop rotation, and compost and manure management.¹¹ The recommendations are exciting, but there are significant challenges to implementation. Lack of adequate knowledge and skills in farming communities is a major constraint.¹² Inefficient transfer of knowledge and skills is also a challenge. Zerssa, et al. also suggest that smallholder farmers fear the adoption of new practices. Their recommendation is that "Holistic approaches are needed as a basis for appropriate future strategies towards sustainable agriculture and rural welfare."¹³

It has certainly been our experience over the last thirteen years that holistic approaches to transformation are necessary for transformation in Africa. Skills development alone is not sufficient. We recall experiences where traditional potions of "umuthi" were left in a "Farming God's Way" demonstration garden in Bhekulwandle, South Africa to scare off the food growing initiative and its staff.

To Western thinkers, a small bag of potion in your vegetable garden may not be a big concern. But to Africans this type of action triggers years of cultural memories and fearful experiences. Many are aware that the intention of the potion is for harm, and they fear serious repercussions will result. Joseph Ogbonnaya explains:

The incorporation of traditional beliefs into every aspect of African life creates a pervasive atmosphere of fear and superstition. In African thinking there is no division between religion and life, body and soul, natural and supernatural as one sees in Western thought. What this means is that humankind is best seen as a life-force interacting harmoniously with life forces in the universe namely: God, the deities, the founding ancestors of different clans, the ancestors and other living/dead of the family and tribe.¹⁴

11. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 7.

12. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 13.

13. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a-Smart Agriculture," 2.

14. Joseph Ogbonnaya, "Religion and Sustainable Development

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While the highest ideals of traditional beliefs may be the harmonious interaction of all spiritual forces with human beings, the lived experience of people is more often disharmony, distrust, and jealousy. This lived experience limits the adoption of new ways of thinking. To effectively overcome the challenges in the transfer of knowledge and cultural fear of change, trainers and facilitators must be willing to engage in dialogue around African traditional thinking and graciously provide ways of honoring the beauty of the culture, while wisely addressing areas that are creating injustices and oppression for people.

Farming God's Way integrates skills development with management principles and spiritual engagement.¹⁵ It is a tool that addresses the whole person—spiritually, socially, mentally, emotionally, and physically. The learnings are organized into three functional areas: Biblical, Management, and Technology. The learnings are further organized into subject areas called keys. The keys are intended to unlock areas of potential in people's lives. All three areas with their keys must be incorporated into a Farming God's Way training.

The biblical area leads people on a journey of discovering God's incredible provision through creation and our role as human beings to work in partnership with God in caring for and wisely utilizing the natural resources God has provided. There are moments of heart reflection which lead people to consider how they are living their lives and the choices that can be made to enter into the abundance that God promises. Learners are equipped with a new resilience to stand firm, no matter the obstacles or opposition that come their way. The biblical teachings are applied directly to agriculture and teach transformative values.

The management area teaches people how to think about being an effective businessperson. The ultimate goal of any Farming God's Way farmer is to make a sustainable profit so that they can use their successes to reinvest in their businesses, provide for their families, and be contributors to their community.

The last learning area in Farming God's Way involves

in Africa: The Case of Nigeria," *International Journal of African Catholicism* 3.2 (2012): https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1231&context=theo_fac

15. Dryden, "Farming God's Way Trainers Reference Guide (2009)," GW Dryden, South Africa, farming-gods-way.org

technology. The technology of Farming God's Way teaches people to cultivate in a way that brings increasing fertility. It introduces people to recent sustainable methods of farming, including minimum tillage, soil cover, crop rotations, homemade organic compost, precise and deliberate application of inputs as well as carefully executed plant spacing. The methods are comparable to conservation agriculture,¹⁶ but with Farming God's Way there is so much more. The uniqueness of Farming God's Way is that the methodology is adapted to small-scale farmers and does not require any heavy investment by a first-time farmer. Farmers are taught to use all the natural resources that are readily available in their farming communities. The methods are scalable from a small 1-meter by 2-meter micro-garden to multiple hectares of cultivation.

Returning to the story of our visit to Jinka in southern Ethiopia, we fast forward to Day 4 of the training. There had been significant discussions around all three areas of Farming God's Way: biblical, management, and technology. People were beginning to see that there are God-given solutions to each one of their challenges. After the first session on Day 4, a man stood up with an incredulous look on his face. There had just been a lively discussion on weed control and people were amazed that mulch cover could have such a profound impact on controlling weeds. The man began an eloquent verbal contribution, "I have been farming for over twenty years and I have never been taught these methods. Even last year, we had government representatives in our community teaching us to continue the conventional methods we have used for generations. Why has no one given us this message before?" There was much agreement that followed from the rest of the group. After a long pause, he continued with one more question, "Why are you so late?"

The question came out of a heart of longing. Everyone could sense the realization and regret of years and years of futile toil on the land. One man in a small town in Ethiopia presents an indictment on the global church. Why is this message of hope and transformation through agriculture so late in getting to Ethiopia?

In this article, we have summarized peer-reviewed research that recommends the modification of methods of cultivation in Ethiopia for the benefit and revitalization of the country's food systems. We have introduced a tool called Farming God's Way that combines all the current research with a holistic approach to transfer of knowledge and mindset change. What is the delay in getting this to the ends of the earth?

Our journey of the last thirteen years has been learning deeply the Farming God's Way tool and increasing our ability to teach it effectively. There have been four trips to Ethiopia. In South Africa, the fruit of the work has been the accreditation of three fully equipped Farming God's Way trainers (at minimum a three-year-journey), and the engagement of almost forty leaders at various stages of their accreditation journey. We are part of a

16. Zerssa, Feyssa, Kim, and Eichler-Löbermann, "Challenges of Smallholder Farming in Ethiopia and Opportunities by Adopting a Smart Agriculture," 8.

All too often the church engages in ministry that involves the proclamation of God's love and redemption for all people but does not engage practically in the plight of the rural poor. We teach people about God but then send them away hungry to buy their own food. Jesus' answer to us is, "You give them something to eat." ... What if part of our global mission was to feed the world?

network of seventy-five accredited Farming God's Way trainers worldwide who are intentionally investing in building leaders who can pass this message on. Yet, it does not feel like enough. We need more workers for the harvest. Our experience of inviting the Western church to engage in the area of agricultural missions is one of disappointment and delay.

What would Jesus say about this delay?

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

But he answered, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6: 35-37).¹⁷

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What if part of our global mission was to feed the world? How seriously do we take Jesus' instruction to feed the people? And how do we feed the world without engaging in handouts that create dependence? We encourage significant dialogue about how our theology of missions should include issues around land and soil stewardship, food security, and hunger. Inundo Development farm is poised to be a resource for all those wanting to engage in such dialogue.

17. Zondervan NIV Study Bible.