

Shewaga Mamo

Shewaga is the head of her household in Selen-Wuha Kebele, supporting four family members. Separated from her husband, she has been raising her children alone.

She recounted that her village was located just 2 km from the border with the Amhara region, making it a frontline battleground between the Ethiopian Defense Force (EDF) and the Tigray People's



Liberation Front (TPLF). Heavy weapons were used by both sides. One day, a shell struck her house, partially destroying it. She and her two children were injured but survived. After that terrifying incident, she fled and lived in displacement until the peace agreement was signed.

When she finally returned home, she found that all her belongings had been looted. Nothing was left. She struggled to find even daily food for her children. Her husband had abandoned the family, leaving her entirely responsible for their survival. Unable to cope with the situation, she eventually moved into her father's home with her two children. Her father happened to be one of the project's target beneficiaries who had received agricultural inputs.

During this period of deep hardship, the project introduced the idea of organizing vulnerable women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Shewaga embraced the opportunity and helped establish the *Birhan Self-Help Group*. She also participated in SHG strengthening training. Each member contributed ETB 20 per week. With 22 members, the group saved ETB 440 weekly, accumulating ETB 10,360 (~\$92.45 CAD) in six months. In addition to their savings, the project provided a top-up of ETB 30,000 (~\$268 CAD).

After this support, Shewaga requested a loan of ETB 20,000 from the group. Due to high demand among members, she was granted ETB 10,000 for three months. She used the loan to purchase 30 chickens, which she now raises as her income-generating activity.

She explained that the ETB 30,000 injection significantly strengthened the group's financial capacity, enabling members to access loans and start small businesses much earlier than would have been possible through savings alone. Without the top-up, she said, they would have had to wait a year or more before accessing meaningful loans because their weekly savings were very small.

She expressed deep appreciation for the project's support, sharing that the opportunity to start her poultry business has restored her hope and eased her psychological stress.



Shewaga Mamo SHG Member at Selen-Wuha Kebele

Ato Degsew Mekonnen

Ato Degsew Mekonnen is one of the project participants from Amsale-Genet Kebele, Ethiopia. He lives with his wife and nine family members. He received food crop seeds, cover crop seeds, hand tools, and goats through the project.

He explained that he had lost all his household assets during the armed conflict and had been unable to farm for two consecutive years. There was no food to eat, no source of income to support his family, and no peace to ensure safety and security. After the peace agreement between the Federal Government and the Tigray fighting forces, the community finally experienced some relief from the constant sound of heavy weapons. However, Degsew still had no means to restart farming because he lacked seeds, tools, and food for his family. It was at this critical moment that the project reached out to him and selected him as a direct participant.

When asked how he benefited from the project, Degsew said that the support enabled him to immediately resume his agricultural activities. Before the intervention, his family ate only once a day, and even then, only one type of food. There was no possibility of diversifying their meals or accessing a balanced diet. After receiving Teff and Sorghum seeds from the project, he began producing both crops. As a result, his harvest improved, and so did his family's daily food intake. "My family now eats three times a day," he said proudly.

He was also asked about the Conservation Agriculture (CA) innovation. "CA was new to me and to our area," he explained. "When it was first introduced, it seemed impossible because we had never practiced anything like it." However, after a series of trainings on CA principles, he became convinced and decided to apply the approach to his own land. He used a 20m x 20m plot to plant Sorghum, covered the soil with plant residue and grass, and also planted the cover crop Labla.

Degsew described CA as highly useful, saving both time and energy while improving soil health. He added that this year they received very little rain during the second planting season, and most crops in the area dried up. Yet his CA-managed plot remained green and productive. "The CA approach is

very impressive. I expect a better harvest from this small plot than from my larger plots that are not under CA. I plan to expand CA to the rest of my land,” he said.

He also received two goats from the project in the first year. They have since multiplied. His wife, who is responsible for caring for the goats, now manages a herd of six. Degsew sold one goat to cover urgent family expenses. His wife is also a member of a Self-Help Group (SHG) in their Kebele and participates in weekly savings. “She will soon be able to take a loan and start a small business,” he added.

Degsew expressed deep satisfaction with the positive changes the project has brought to his life and his family’s well-being. He shared his warm gratitude to the supporting and implementing partners.



*Ato Degsew Mekonnen at Amsale-Genet
Kebele*