

BIOVISION

Newsletter n° 24



Changing course in global agriculture

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FOOD FOR ALL, NATURALLY

In the slums of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, 200 women have transformed wasteland into a flourishing vegetable garden. This benefits a total of 16,500 people by providing more healthy food. The scientific monitoring of this self-help project is making it possible to adapt the concept to conditions in other regions of the world stricken by famine.
Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision, (project as it was in 2003)

BIOVISION IN RIO

The course towards global ecological farming, animal-friendly husbandry and fairness needs to be set at the Earth Summit in Rio. Biovision is tirelessly committed to ensuring that “Rio+20” strengthens small-scale farms and implements the recommendations of the IAASTD report”. Changing the course of global agriculture also calls for a broadly supported World Agricultural Council that provides regular and independent information on the situation and the development of agriculture to UN organizations, governments and the public worldwide.
www.globalagriculture.org



Round table on a change of course in agriculture at Biovision's information day for media professionals. L to R: Dr Urs Niggli, FiBL; Elly Pradervand, WWSF; Dr François Pythoud, FOAG.
Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

The industrialisation of agriculture has gone hand in hand with an increased destruction of natural resources. Today, 1.7 billion people live in extreme poverty – and most of them are hungry. If we want to feed the world in a fair and sustainable way, we need a change of direction in agriculture.

By Peter Lüthi

At the start of the project, the women were trained in ecological organic farming methods and ways of improving soil using compost, animal manure and drip irrigation. They joined forces to transform theory into practice. At weekly meetings they discussed organisational issues, evaluated the work done, planned their next steps, resolved conflicts and looked for possible innovations. For example, they took the initiative of founding a kindergarten, which gave single mothers the time they needed to work in the garden.

Socially, ecologically and economically sustainable

The scientific part of the project was directed by systems ecologist Johann Baumgärtner. The retired professor is still working on the scientific publication covering the long-term study, but he is already coming to a positive conclusion: “Everything points towards a project in which very modest means have led to considerable progress in all three areas of sustainability”. The results show that this project could well serve as a role model. The fertility of the soil and its capacity to retain water and nutrients were significantly improved, which rapidly enabled a marked increase in biodiversity and very good vegetable yields. “Before the beginning of the project, these women lived in extreme poverty with their children. They suffered from malnutrition and diseases”, says Baumgärtner. This has changed as well.

According to Baumgärtner, the participants rapidly benefitted from growing vegetables – initially using crops for their own consumption and selling any surplus and then, towards the end of the project, even

The Earth Summit in Rio, from 20–22 June, will focus on both the “green economy” and “good governance” as a basis for sustainable development and the reduction of poverty. Furthermore, Biovision is convinced that the consistent promotion of ecological farming is essential. Many factors which are destabilizing the earth are directly or indirectly linked to how food is produced, processed, distributed and disposed of. For example, 30% of all worldwide greenhouse gas emissions are due to industrial agriculture. Moreover, its high dependency on chemical fertilizers, fuels, etc. also increases food prices – and results in more global food crises.

Worldwide, about half of all agricultural land is moderately to severely degraded, a development in which industrial agriculture has played a substantial part. Today, it is responsible for 70% of global freshwater consumption and has led to drastic decreases of groundwater levels in different regions of the world.

From degraded land to a flourishing vegetable garden

A project in the slums of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), supported by Biovision and implemented by our African partner organisations BioEconomy Africa and *icipe**, shows how intensive organic agriculture works in practice. In 1997, a group of 200 widows and single mothers formed a cooperative. Their reason: 5 hectares of wasteland on the outskirts of the city were up for rent. The land seemed worthless and infertile. It had been completely depleted by eucalyptus plantations, stripped bare by goats and washed out by rain. Biovision's self-help project set itself ambitious goals. It wanted to establish a functioning organisational structure, restore the soil without using chemical fertilizers, improve the diet and health of the participating families and alleviate poverty by creating new sources of income. The project was monitored scientifically, and scientists collected input and output data as well as data on social and economic factors over a period of 10 years.

providing meals and selling vegetables in a restaurant set up specially for this purpose. “But the road towards sustainable development was not always straightforward”, Baumgärtner concedes. “Setbacks and progress are all part of the game”. Nevertheless, the women's group succeeded in improving the way they organized themselves and running their business more efficiently. Looking back with satisfaction, Baumgärtner adds: “Thanks to the project, many of the slum women have been able to leave their resignation behind and have found a new perspective on life”.

**icipe*: Insects for food and health, www.icipe.org and www.bioeconomyafrica.org

Cover: Bezulayehu Kassa is a single mother of five in the slums of Addis Ababa. Biovision's vegetable garden project has given her, and 200 other women in a similar situation, a new perspective on life.
Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision



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Exchange between Ethiopian farmers and agricultural teachers from Switzerland in Assosa. Reto Elmer (second from the right): “It is impressive how Ethiopian farmers generate an optimum yield with their scarce resources.”

Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision

ETHIOPIAN-SWISS EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE

Differences and common ground

What can farmers from Ethiopia and Switzerland learn from each other? This question was answered in a remarkable way by a project supported by Biovision. In 2009, Reto Elmer and Andreas Michael, two teachers at the Plantahof educational and advisory centre for farmers, visited a model organic farm in Ethiopia. It had been created by BioEconomyAfrica (BEA) as a practical training centre for sustainable agriculture in Assosa. At the farm, the two teachers exchanged experiences with Ethiopian farmers, who were primarily interested in the teachers’ approach to agriculture and their practical knowledge, particularly regarding fodder production and animal husbandry.

Storing feed for the winter and dry seasons

In summer 2010, the Ethiopian BEA directors visited Plantahof. Together with the Plantahof team, they drew up training modules for an exchange of knowledge. The BEA representatives put haymaking at the top of the list. “Although Ethiopia and Switzerland differ greatly, farmers in both countries face similar challenges”, says Getachew Tikubet from BEA. In the end, drought in Ethiopia and the long winter in Switzerland both create the same problem, says Getachew, and is convinced that the solution is to conserve fodder.

Course in making hay and silage

In summer 2011, seven agricultural consultants from BEA, together with a male and a female farmer from

Ethiopia came to Switzerland. After a one-week introductory course at Plantahof, they all spent a two-week placement with farming families. Hailezagi Woldeselassi, project leader of Biofarm Assosa was the guest of Christine and Peter Baumann in Lohn and then of Catrina and Andreas Allemann in Medels. “What fascinated me most was haymaking”, he said after his work experience. “I’ve learned how to use the scythe and make grass silage.” He considers this an important skill for Assosa, where there is excess grass during the rainy season. “Until now, however, we have not been able to conserve the feedstuff for the dry season”, he explains. After his return, he immediately started experimental silage production. “Because of the climate, I had to make a few adaptations until I could get it to work”, he explains. “Now I want to pass on this knowledge to farmers in the region.”



Peter Baumann from Lohn on Schamserberg mountain (GR) introduces the two Ethiopians Hailezagi Woldeselassi Gebreziher (left) and Gebrekiros Belay Hadera to the various activities of a Swiss mountain farmer. Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision



In Toley (Ethiopia), modern beekeeping using wooden hives instead of traditional containers made out of straw and clay is now being practiced – and is producing three times as much top-quality honey.

Photos: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision

IMPROVED BEEKEEPING IN ETHIOPIA

Sweet business for Toley

There is great demand for honey in Addis Ababa. This is why people in Toley, southwest of the capital city, tried to generate urgently needed additional income with their rural honey. But their honey did not meet the quality requirements of city retailers because most of it was contaminated with beeswax. The reason was that the farming families kept their bees in hives made out of clay and straw. The queen, offspring and honeycombs were all kept together in the same space.

In order to change this, the beekeepers from Toley, together with the *icip*e insect research institute, set about improving their beekeeping methods. They organized themselves into four cooperatives with 30 members each and learned to recognize and treat bee diseases and keep their bees in wooden hives. The honeycombs are hung separately from the queen and her offspring. To harvest the honey, the combs are inserted into a honey extractor. This uses centrifugal force to separate the honey from the wax. Thanks to these modernisations, the beekeepers now produce three times as much top-quality honey. And the pure beeswax is a new product they can market.

“We have big plans for our beekeeping and intend to sell our honey to Addis Ababa and the whole of Ethiopia in the near future”, asserts Dajene Tadessa, director of one of the cooperatives.

Comment

Embarking on a new path together

One in five children in the world is malnourished. This situation is untenable. We could supply enough healthy food to all people – without exploiting the soil, plundering water resources or destroying valuable ecosystems. This was demonstrated by the IAASTD reports published in 2008. It showed that millions of small-scale farms, mainly in southern countries, have the potential to significantly increase yields with eco-intensive methods. Diversified ecological farming systems are better at withstanding the effects of climate change than conventional farming, and efficient irrigation methods can significantly reduce water usage.

Many of the actions that would have to be taken to develop eco-intensive, sustainable farming are already well-known, but others require urgent research. It is not an option, however, to continue with business as usual and ignore the increasing numbers of people who are going hungry, the growing problems of malnourishment and the exploitation of natural resources.

Rio+20 has to choose a new path for future food security. It is therefore crucial that Biovision, together with as many like-minded organizations as possible from both the North and South, press most strongly for a community of states that takes calls for sustainable farming seriously. The recommendations of the IAASTD reports provide strategic directions and options: all countries can build responsible and sustainable food systems based on well-established scientific facts. If we choose this path, no mother in the world will have to put her child to bed hungry.



Prof. Judi Wakhungu

is Executive Director of the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) in Nairobi. From 2004–2008 she was Co-Chair together with Hans R. Herren for the administration and development of the IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development)

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Margherita Hobi from Solduno has decided to donate her inheritance to Biovision.
Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

INHERITANCE FOR BIOVISION

Life comes first

The wilderness starts right behind the house. Various plants flourish here, even palm trees and the odd fig tree. The little nature refuge is not located in Africa, but on a steep slope above Solduno, near Locarno in the Swiss Ticino. Every day, Margherita Hobi climbs the steep slab steps to her realm. She trims a few bushes, prunes spindly branches and conscientiously piles the wood into small stacks. While doing so, she communicates with nature, very often with wild animals that come to her garden from the Monti della Trinità forest. “Primo”, for example, is a stag, that she has already met several times, but she also communicates with roe deer, badgers, foxes and dormice. “The animals pinch my wild plums and elderberries”, she states tolerantly and sums up her philosophy: “Life comes first”.

Everything is interconnected

This conviction sits well with the Biovision Foundation, which has benefitted from Ms Hobi’s support for many years. While she does also donate to other organizations, she resolutely states that “The work of Biovision convinces me most.” She appreciates the way it helps people to help themselves and the way in which it promotes the health of humans, animals, plants and the environment in a holistic way. Ms. Hobi likes to ponder philosophical questions. And she is already thinking, in the midst of her full life, of what will be when she is no longer around. “We all know that we have to depart one day”, she says calmly. And because

it does not make any sense to her to consume everything now, she has decided to donate her inheritance to the Biovision Foundation. “That way, I can be certain that my savings will be used for something that is really in line with my wishes”, she explains. She lets her gaze wander over the small wilderness and adds: “Our earth is so beautiful. To preserve it, we humans have to find a balance with nature. Everything is interconnected. And that is exactly what Biovision takes into consideration in its holistic project approach”.



Information on legacies:

Wenn Sie Fragen haben oder unseren kostenlosen If you have any questions or want to request our free legacy guide, Chantal Sierro at Biovision will be pleased to help you: Tel. +41 (0)44 341 97 19; E-mail: c.sierro@biovision.ch.



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Nejash Habib is looking for mosquito larvae in a water sample. As a mosquito scout, he collects data on the incidence of mosquitoes and informs the population about the origins of malaria and how to protect against mosquito bites.
Photo: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

FROM THE LIFE OF NEJASH HABIB

“A lot remains to be done!”

Nejash Habib stands in front of a mud pond in Tolay, Ethiopia and holds a ladle. A pipe has broken and the water has made the soil soggy. “If cows cross this area, they create holes with their hooves. This creates small puddles in which malaria mosquitoes lay their eggs”, he explains. Nejash is 23 years old and one of twelve mosquito scouts in the “Stop Malaria” project run by the *icipe* insect research institute and Biovision. He plays a key role in malaria control. He raises people’s awareness of the disease and finds out where the mosquitoes that transmit the disease occur, in order to reduce them in a targeted and environmentally-friendly way. Today Nejash is checking whether there are any mosquito larvae in the pond in front of him. “It’s not that simple”, he says. “When larvae detect movement, they hide immediately.” He kneels near the water and quickly immerses the ladle. Yes! He has caught small larvae that can hardly be differentiated by an untrained observer. He patiently explains how he identifies the species and various larval phases. He carefully notes the results on a data sheet. Until the pipe is repaired, Nejash will treat the breeding ground with the environmentally-friendly *bti* bacterium, which decimates the larvae. He tells us that he heard about the malaria club at school. It had always been his dream to fight malaria, because his family suffered a lot because of the disease. “My father and my younger brother died from malaria. But we didn’t know how to fight the disease. This is why he became a member of the club and was soon nominated as its leader. “When I finished school, I needed work. I am the oldest

STEP FOR STEP TOWARDS A BETTER LIFE

Four times health plus information

Biovision projects follow a holistic approach, which enables people to improve their lives. It strives for progress in the health of people, livestock, crops and the environment. This path encompasses applied research, information and knowledge transfer. In the Ethiopian village of Wayu, the inhabitants decided to first tackle the urgent problem of animal health, because most of the plough oxen had died from sleeping sickness and so harvesting had been interrupted. This kicked off a fruitful cooperation between the population and the project team. Together, they managed to control the tsetse flies that transmit the disease, by means of traps. The successful cooperation was then continued to fight malaria. They managed to significantly decrease the incidence of the disease in Tolay in the first two years. In 2011, the population ultimately began to grow flowering plants, to improve beekeeping and honey production (see page 5). This way, the people want to generate an indispensable additional income.

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Weekly livestock market in Wayu (Tolay / Ethiopia)
Photo: Flurina Wartmann / Biovision

child and need to take care of my mother and my eight siblings”, he explains seriously. Luckily, *icipe* was looking for mosquito scouts and Nejash got a job. The young man has ambitious plans for the future. “One day, I’d like to study and eventually work as a scientist in malaria prevention”, he explains and adds thoughtfully, “While we have been able to drastically reduce the number of malaria cases in Tolay, many people suffer from this disease in other areas. We have to help them!” So a lot still remains to be done, concludes the mosquito scout as he sets off on the dusty road to tackle the next sample.



The iCow application wins the Vision 2030 Innovation Award for Agriculture. Su Kahumbu accepts the award in Nairobi.

Photo: Charles Gacheru

iCOW:

Cows go mobile

Kenyan Su Kahumbu is an organic pioneer, businesswoman and farming consultant at Biovision's "The Organic Farmer" magazine. Her latest coup: iCow, a mobile phone app for small-scale farmers that has received several international awards. Mobile phones are very popular in Kenya. Su Kahumbu uses this fact to provide advice to farmers. If farmers send the mating date of their cow and their phone number, they receive timely husbandry and feeding tips. A text message tells them when to dry off their cows and when the calves are due to be born. This helps the iCow recipients to significantly increase the survival rate of their cows and calves.

www.icow.co.ke

COOPERATION WITH SANBERA

Eat a healthy diet and do something good

Sanbera and the Biovision Foundation share the same approach – ecological agriculture is sustainably good for humans and nature. Since the beginning of 2012, 5% of the proceeds of all Sanbera products have gone to Biovision. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks! Sanbera places great value on the origin and cultivation methods of its food supplements. Its products are exclusively plant-based, free from animal ingredients and, wherever possible, based on extracts from organically grown fruit and plants.

www.sanbera.com



Sanbera uses various ingredients for its food supplements, including organic acerola cherries. Each of these cherries contains 30 times more vitamin C than an orange.

Photo: Sanbera

"CLEVER" ON TOUR IN SWITZERLAND

The mobile exhibition visits Basel

Organic or regional? Seasonal or fairly traded? How socially responsible and environmentally sound are my shopping decisions? What impact do they have? The "Clever" mobile exhibition answers these questions, which we encounter on our daily shopping trips. "Clever" is laid out like a supermarket in which you can pretend to go shopping. Products range from food and household appliances to clothing. At the till, you are told how socially responsible and sustainable your choice was. The exhibition supplies you with simple tips for your next "clever" shopping trip. After a successful start to the season in Arth-Goldau and Winterthur, the mobile exhibition will be at the Park im Grünen in Münchenstein from June 28th to September 10th 2012. Clever is open daily from 11 am to 6 pm. Entry is free.

Visit the Clever website www.clever-konsumieren.ch for more information on the supermarket and its tour schedule.



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Stiftung für ökologische Entwicklung
Fondation pour un développement écologique
Foundation for ecological development

Schaffhauserstrasse 18, 8006 Zurich, Tel. +41 44 341 97 18
info@biovision.ch, www.biovision.ch

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