



digitalGREEN

**Voices from the
Field - Ethiopia**



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Digital Green is an international not-for-profit organization, which uses an innovative digital platform for community engagement to improve lives in rural communities across the globe.

Till date, we have reached more than 640,000 individuals across India and Sub-Saharan Africa in over 7,000 villages producing over 3,500 localized videos in 20 languages.

This is a compilation of stories of some of the many lives we have touched over our journey. These stories have been made possible through the collective efforts of Digital Green staff and our partners, and most importantly, the communities with whom we engage.

digitalGREEN

Vision

A world where all individuals live a life of dignity

Mission

To integrate innovative technology with global development efforts to improve human well being

Values

Humility
Excellence
Accountability
Empathy
Integrity

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Mr. Gebru Dereje: A Teacher and Student



Gebru Dereje, progressive cocoa farmer

Although it is 7:30 AM, Gumer District in Southern Nations Nationals and Peoples' Regional (SNNPR) State is characteristically cold and gloomy. On this chilly morning, about 15 members of a development group in Zizencho Kebele are outside Mr. Gebru Dereje's house, bundled up and waiting for more members to arrive. Mr. Gebru, 67, gave up life in the city to move back to his place of birth, Zizencho Kebele, and become a farmer.

While waiting, some members of the development group explain to the

Development Agent (DA) how busy this season is for both male and female members of their group. Making *kocho* (dish made from the root of false banana plant), preparation of cattle feed, harvesting and preparation of land for vegetables are underway. However, the members consider the video to be screened today important enough to dedicate an hour of their time to be here.

Mr. Gebru says, “we don't mind giving this time, regardless of how busy we are with our chores because an hour is nothing compared to the time we

had to dedicate to learn something earlier [before the video-enabled learning approach was introduced]”.

He says “walking all the way to the Farmer Training Center (FTC) to peer at the action taking place on the demonstration plot over the shoulders of many who have arrived before me was almost pointless, but I went anyway because I was eager to learn ways to increase my farm's productivity”. He no longer has the energy he had when he was young to make the trip to the FTC. Also, since farmers are always rushing against time, they avoid asking too many questions at the FTC so they can get back to work on their farms. Which means they return without grasping the complete information. Hence, “dedicating an hour or so for the DA to come teach us what is important for us is not a sacrifice for us,” says Mr. Gebru.

A lady from the group echoes his sentiments, saying “yes, it is us who are going to go to bed full, it is us who will reap the benefits. This is no sacrifice.”

The group goes indoors to start the video dissemination on potato bed preparation and line planting. At the end of the video, the DA opens up the session to welcome comments and questions from the viewers. One of the questions is, “why is there a difference between the distance within rows for potatoes to be used for seed and potatoes for consumption or commercial use?”

***“ I love teaching others
what I know just as much as I
love learning from them!”***



As a couple of people raise their hands to reply to the query, Mr. Gebru quietly stands up and walks to a different room in his house. He returns, smiling, with two different sized potatoes. He hands the potatoes to the DA so the latter can demonstrate the difference in the outcome of the spacing during sowing and also so the members can differentiate which type of potato is ideal for commercial use. He comes back to his seat, leans in and whispers “see, would I be able to do this if I was at a FTC?” with a proud grin on his face. He adds, “this new way of teaching (through videos) also gives us the opportunity to learn from each other's experience as well.”

"I love teaching others what I know just as much as I love learning from them!" Once the dissemination is over, Mr. Gebru says “intimate discussions like these are not possible at the FTCs or even alone in our own backyard with just a DA. There is too much distraction at the FTCs which hinders the DAs from addressing all our concerns and questions. However, here at the video disseminations, we feel free to ask and even if we forget to ask,

chances are some other person will ask.”

According to Mr. Gebru, the intimate group setting that allows him to ask questions and get clarification on practices being promoted helps him better implement what he learns on his farm. He believes this small group setting also allows farmers to share experiences and learn from each other, which he says might be a huge contributing factor in the adoption of featured practices.

Mr. Gebru, once a teacher in Zizencho Kebele's first public school, returned to farming 20 years ago, relying largely on traditional farming practices his family had been following for years. He also learnt from his neighbors and from the information he got from the kebele. This new video-enabled approach ensures he gets detailed information on practices in a timely manner. He says “The information is provided to us not only at a time convenient for us to watch, but also based on the seasonality of a crop”.

Letebrihen Gidey: Model Farmer and Community Change Agent



Letebrihen Gidey (extreme right) with her three children

M eet Letebrihen Gidey, age 42, mother of three, resident of Medebay Zana village, Hekifen district, Ethiopia.

After her husband passed away in 1998, Letebrihen had to bring up three kids on her own, two daughters aged 13 and 15, and a son who is 18. All three kids study in Medebay Zana Middle School and help their mother on their farm after school. Letebrihen's big dream is to be able to see her children escape the cycle of poverty one day. She believes education is the way out for her kids and insists on them attending school regularly.

Letebrihen is also a leader of the women development group of Fere Kalsi. She has attended Digital Green-enabled video screenings on local best practices and adopts relevant practices featured in these videos. One of the practices she has adopted is intercropping of teff and tomato and line planting of maize. She watched the video and realized that although the new technique did require more effort than the traditional farming methods she is used to, the benefits are immense.

Before watching the video, Letebrihen would sow just teff without line planting during the rainy

season. She did plant tomato as well but months after the teff was harvested, that too during the dry season using irrigation. She recalls having mixed feelings after watching the video, excited about trying it and getting the same benefit as the farmer in the video and anxious to see the results. Letebrihen was convinced enough to practice the new farming technique with the help of her children just a week after watching the video. **“I was able to maximize my land use. This is the first time I produced tomato without using irrigation, as I took advantage of the rainy season. My income during this cropping season has gone up as well because of these two crops I planted simultaneously. I have basically doubled the land I once**

had”, she says triumphantly.

Letebrihen is well known and respected in her community, with many looking up to her for her hard work and resilience. Rather than just rely on teff and tomato, Letebrihen tries to make good use of her land by planting different vegetables and fruits throughout the year. She has biogas electricity as well. Her progressive traits led the woreda-level video production team to feature Letebrihen in one of the videos on integrated crops and livestock farming system. “I was really happy when they asked me if I would be willing to appear in one of the videos. I felt honoured.” She wanted to share her knowledge to help others in her community just as it has benefited her.



Letebrihen and her daughter working in the fields

Letebrihen takes pride in being able to carry out on-farm activities that are traditionally carried out by men. “I want other women to feel they too can do these things.” **She is a woman’s group leader and normally tries to empower and teach women what she knows about farming. However, the idea that she can reach more women to inspire and encourage has been an exciting one for her.** She says, “I remember watching one of the first videos and being amazed at how I am able to learn from this farmer who lives far from where I live. So I am very happy that other people in another village

will be listening to me and watching me. It is such a great opportunity to have.”

With a hopeful smile on her face, Letebrihen says that “the next generation is very lucky because they are able to get modern agricultural information quickly at their doorsteps”.

“Hopefully, next season I will get even more grain per square feet in my field than when I sowed in the traditional manner”, Letebrihen says with a smile.



Niguse Abadi: Progressive Development Agent



Niguse Abadi (center) preparing for a video screening

Niguse Abadi is a lead development agent¹ (DA) in Medebay Zana district of Ethiopia. Niguse, has been using videos to disseminate information, since the start of Digital Green's collaboration with Oxfam American and Ministry of Agriculture in his woreda. Niguse says "initially, I was very scared of using the pico projector for the screening because I thought I wouldn't be able to learn how to operate this device. But after the training and field level support from Digital Green and Oxfam staff, I can operate the pico projector with

ease and confidence for disseminations. I also use it to conduct meeting with DAs."

He says, the pico projector captures the attention of participants and once he has their attention, it is easy for him to facilitate and disseminate information. The fact that topics for the videos were identified through a consultative meeting involving lead DAs, model farmers and the Woreda Office of Agriculture staff reinforces Niguse's belief that the approach will help farmers better.

¹ Government agricultural worker responsible for promoting modern agricultural practices, assisting with their implementation and following up with farmers to gauge their acceptability of the practice

This new approach has saved Niguse a lot of time, since he no longer needs to travel from house to house to explain the new practices. Since the video dissemination method started, his focus has shifted more on providing follow-up services after video disseminations and offering assistance to farmers who are keen on adopting promoted practices. “Earlier, we had to talk a lot. We were out in the fields with the farmers, repeatedly explaining and demonstrating a certain practice. **Now the video does half of the talking, which helps us focus on the farmers, providing**

clarifications and answering any questions they might have. After 18 years of my experience as a development agent, I finally have an amazing training tool.”

Niguse has been using the approach in Hekifen kebele and is convinced that the videos help make his work more effective. “For example, earlier, the practice of line planting and maize line planting was difficult for farmers to understand. They would wait to see if one of their peers understood and implemented it correctly, before they themselves adopt the practice. The videos allow

*“After 18 years of working as a development agent,
I finally have an amazing training tool”*



the farmers to learn about the process and benefits of a certain practice from a peer who has implemented it in a visual and practical manner. The promotional approach has more acceptability since it features their peers. The farmers have been adopting even complicated new methods such as the practice of line planting and inter cropping with ease."

According to Niguse, the approach is inclusive and tailored to the community's needs at a granular level. **"I can tell a lot of thought went into the content of the videos; from usage of the local language to choice of words which can be easily understood by farmers. I am proud to be part of something so progressive".**

Seifu Seyoum: Lead Farmer Inspiring Growth in His Community



Seifu in his field

Seifu collected 60 quintals of wheat from his two and half hectares of land this November - a quintal more than the previous harvesting season. All because he line planted, a new method he learnt from a video produced with support from Digital Green.

Seifu Seyoum is a 48 year old farmer, living with his wife and four children in Girmi Sedere village of Sedere Harbu Kebele, Dawo Woreda. After graduating from high school in Girmi Sedere village, Seifu joined the military and served as a Lieutenant in Addis Ababa. His days in the military

came to an end when the Derg regime collapsed in 1991.

Shortly after he returned to his childhood village, Seifu began farming on the two and a half hectares of land he inherited from his family. He currently has four additional hectares he rents for other farmers.

“If we are assisted by this kind of technology, we can go beyond just thinking of feeding our children.”

The first 16 years of his farming life could barely cover his family's basic expenses. Since the government introduced him to new improved techniques through agricultural extension workers, his yield has improved and his income has increased greatly.

Seifu was among the two model farmers trained in producing and screening videos in 2014. After the training, he has been assisting Development Agents (DAs) assigned in his kebele with community mobilization. Seifu learnt a lot from the demonstration videos; he sowed wheat in lines and applied side dressing as demonstrated. He has adopted five practices from the eight promoted through videos screened for the development group that he belongs to.

Seifu admires the video-enabled approach. He says **“Missing a single screening session makes me feel like I am missing out on valuable lessons. I strongly feel that these videos keep me up-to-date on new technologies.”**

The old method used by the extension workers was more of a lecture based with little practical demonstration, which was not always useful because mostly the farmers did not understand what the extension workers were saying and were also not convinced that the promoted methods were better than their traditional ways.

Using videos is more effective since the farmers can 'see' and learn the practices. Seifu feels his people have progressed considerably due to this



innovative approach. “We are learning new ways. Now it is up to us to change, we can no longer blame others for our failures.”

A farmer from the neighboring village shares how, “after watching the video Seifu features in, farmers in our village are completely convinced of the benefits of teff line planting.” He goes on to say **“since we know and respect Seifu and other farmers in the videos, it is easy for us to trust them and practice what they promote.”**

Seifu is happy that he is making a difference in his community. “With

these videos, the future is brighter. If we continue this approach, farmers who haven't adopted new methods this year will also be convinced to adopt best practices next year.”

In 2015, Seifu hopes Girmi Sedere village will be electrified. He personally hopes to establish a mill store in the village.

Seifu is confident that the success stories he hears of from neighboring villages are also possible in his own community. He says, “if such assistance continues, we could go beyond just thinking of feeding our children”.

Workneh Getachew: Serving Farmers Better Through Locally Produced Videos

“The approach made me love my job”



Workneh Getachew (standing) disseminating a video on onion line plantation to farmers in Weserebi Besi kebele

Workneh has once again found passion in his job. The farmers he works with are ready to learn about improved agricultural methods, all thanks to development agents (DAs) like him using videos to provide trainings, an initiative introduced by Digital Green.

Workneh Getachew lives with his wife and three children in Teji town, a kilometer away from the Weserebi Besi Kebele of Illu Woreda.

Workneh is one of the 185 DAs trained

by Digital Green on using locally produced videos to educate farmers on agricultural best practices. He says soon after receiving the training and getting the equipment to screen the videos, he started screening new methods to a small farming community.

He says “compared to previously used agricultural extension methods of providing trainings, I find the Digital Green approach to be the most effective.” He says the farmers also find the method simple and

interesting. "When we call farmers for training, they first check if we will be showing a video. If we are, they come". He says the adoption rate of many practices that the DAS continually push for is also rapidly increasing.

During the cropping season of 2014, Workneh managed to screen eight videos for seven development groups and nine videos for one group. In Weserbi Besi kebele, 192 viewers watched nine videos on improved and scientific agricultural practices. Of the total viewers, 152 (79%) have adopted at least one of the new practices screened.

Workneh also played a significant role in selecting and guiding the model farmers showcased in the video produced in his kebele.

Workneh says because he consults the farmers in setting up the time and venue to watch the videos, absenteeism is not a serious problem. Typically, he screens videos early morning (7:30 AM - 9:30 AM) before the farmers set out to their fields. Local holidays are also popular screening days since the farmers take the days off from farming work. Two of the frequented screening sites are huge granaries that are privately owned by farmers

who are also members of the viewing groups.

After each screening, Workneh follows up with the farmers who express interest in adopting the featured practices by visiting them in their fields. He also frequently attends development group leaders' meetings. He says he collaborates with model farmers in other informal ways.

Workneh's motivation in putting the approach into practice is not only because it is his job but also because he is a member of the community and cares deeply for the farmers. **"It is not just my conviction," he adds, "this approach has been, by and large, accepted by the farmers and they enjoy being part of the process, which helps me do my job better."** He also says getting these videos in rural areas give the farmers a ray of hope - signifying better and bigger things in store.

"This approach makes my job simple and enjoyable. It helps me understand the people and their concerns better. Integrating my innate understanding of farming with the Digital Green approach can lead to a highly effective extension system", says Workneh.

Global Reach

Our mission is to integrate innovative technology with global development efforts to improve human well-being. By 2016, we aim to reach 1 million farmers across 11,000 villages in India and other parts of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



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Government of India



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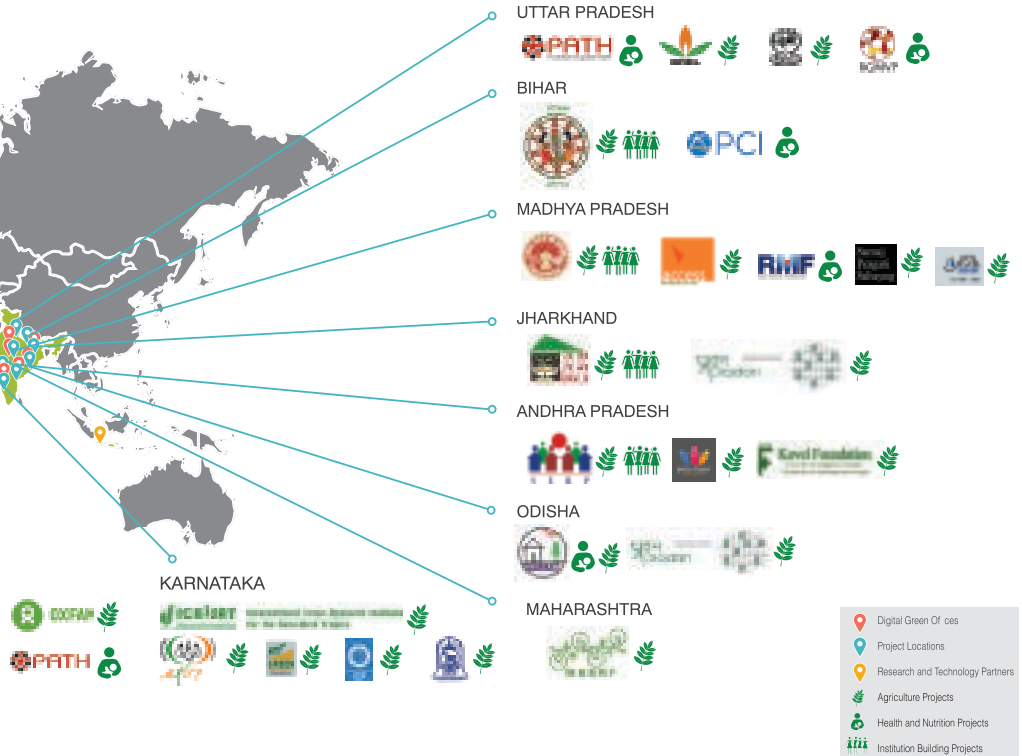


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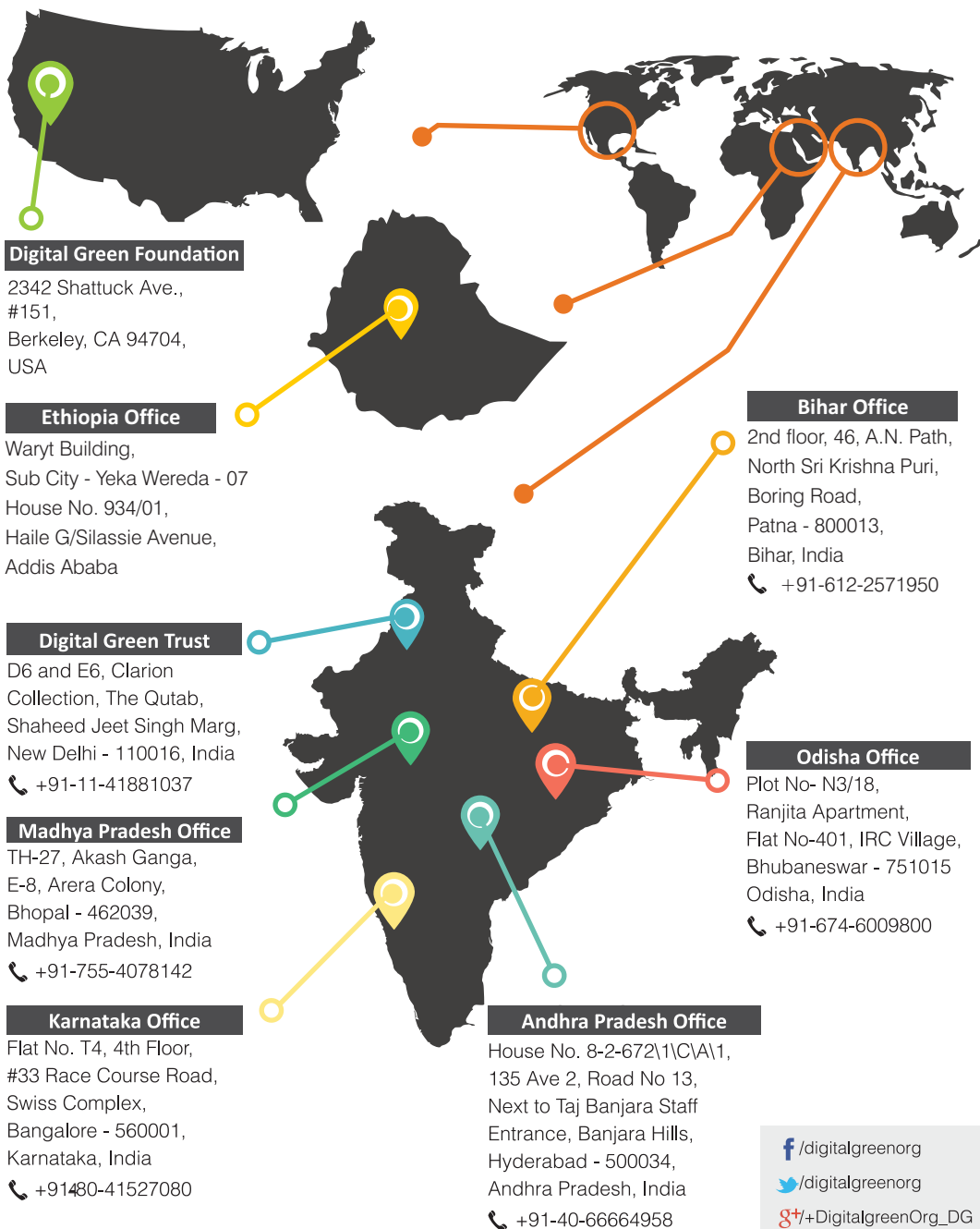
and Network

Our network of partners and communities reaches out to over 640,000 members across 7,448 villages in India (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh), Ethiopia and Ghana.



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