

Report on:

# UU Farmers' Exchange Visit in SCASI Wolaita Sites



International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT)  
September 2024  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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# Abbreviations

CASI	Conservation Agriculture based Sustainable Intensification
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
DF	Development Fund
SCASI	Scaling Conservation Agriculture based Sustainable Intensification in Ethiopia
SIRARI	Sidama Region Agricultural Research Institute
SMN	Sidama Media Network
TDA	Terepeza Development Association
UU	Ukama Ustawi

## Introduction

Farmers' Exchange Visit took place on August 29, 2024, in Ajora Kebele, Boloso Bombe, Wolaita Zone. The event was organized under CIMMYT's Ukama Ustawi (UU) and Scaling Conservation Agriculture-based Sustainable Intensification (SCASI) projects. Funded by the CGIAR Initiative on Diversification in East and Southern Africa, UU focuses on promoting climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices, such as crop diversification, water management, and soil health improvement, to enhance food security and build resilience to climate change across multiple African countries, including Ethiopia. SCASI, supported by the Development Fund of Norway, aims to scale Conservation Agriculture-based Sustainable Intensification (CASI) practices, including minimum tillage, mulching, cover cropping, and intercropping, in combination with enhanced crop management techniques, to boost crop yields and soil health while minimizing environmental impact.

Both projects have made significant progress towards supporting farmers through training, demonstration of the different practices, and community networks. The UU Farmers' Exchange Visit basically initiated to capitalize on these achievements by facilitating cross-regional knowledge exchange between Sidama and Wolaita region farmers. Through field visits, peer learning, and discussions, the event highlighted the effectiveness of CASI practices in Wolaita, which can potentially motivate Sidama farmers to implement similar practices that can help them to enhance productivity, improve their soil health, and increase their resilience to climate change in their own communities.

## Objectives

The primary objectives of the UU Farmers' Exchange Visit were threefold. First, the visit sought to provide farmers and agricultural experts from Sidama region with firsthand experience of CASI practices that have been effectively implemented in Wolaita region. It was intended to demonstrate the practical benefits of CASI/CSA practices, including practices leading to improved soil health, increased yield, and enhanced resilience to climate variability and change. Second, the visit aimed to facilitate a robust exchange of knowledge between farmers from different regions. By sharing their experiences, challenges, and solutions, participants were encouraged to learn from each other and adopt best practices tailored to their specific contexts. Finally, the event aimed at building strong network and relationship among farmers, extension agents, and agricultural experts. These relationships are crucial for sustaining ongoing learning, collaboration, and the broader adoption of CASI/CSA practices within and beyond the participating communities.

## Participants

The exchange visit brought together a diverse group of 120 participants, comprising 50 farmers from Sidama, representing the various UU project sites, and 30 farmers from Wolaita, specifically from the kebeles where the SCASI project is being implemented. In addition to the farmers, the event featured contributions from subject matter specialists from the Bureau of Agriculture, Development Agents from each kebele, as well as experts from TDA, SIRARI, and CIMMYT. Their presence not only enriched the discussions, but also facilitated valuable exchanges of insights into CASI practices and benefits.

Moreover, the event involved media personnel from Fana FM and regional television stations in Sidama and Wolaita, who documented the interactions and exchanges, ensuring the knowledge and experience to a wider audience. This collaborative gathering thus not only fostered knowledge exchange among farmers, but also promoted broader community awareness about CASI/CSA practices for further engagement.

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

The exchange visit began with a formal opening session that set the tone for the day's activities. Tilahun Tadesse from the TDA welcomed the participants and provided an overview of the SCASI project. His remarks emphasized on the importance of sustainable intensification practices and the role of events like this in promoting knowledge exchange and collaboration among farmers. Following Tilahun's introduction, Mr. Azache Adamo, the head of Boloso Bombe Bureau of Agriculture (BoA), delivered remarks on the significance of the exchange visit. He highlighted the potential impact of such knowledge-sharing initiatives on regional agricultural development and encouraged participants to actively engaged in the day's activities. Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw from CIMMYT also addressed the participants, providing insights into the UU project's goals. He underscored the critical role of CASI/CSA practices in enhancing agricultural sustainability and resilience, framing the exchange visit as an opportunity to observe and learn from the successful implementation of these practices in Wolaita.



## Field Visits and Observations

The field visit was a core component of the exchange visit, offering participants a practical opportunity to observe CASI practices in action. Participants were divided into two groups to visit different farms within Ajora Kebele. The visit was structured to ensure that key topics related to CASI practices were thoroughly covered. These topics included the benefits of CASI, the challenges associated with its implementation, and the potential for integrating CASI into community-based development approaches such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmers Field Schools (FFSs).

During the farm visits, participants were introduced to a range of CASI practices, including minimum tillage, mulching, the use of green manure and cover crops, crop diversification, fodder integration, vermicomposting, agroforestry, and soil and water conservation (SWC) techniques. These practices were demonstrated as essential strategies for improving soil health, stabilizing crop yields, and building resilience to climate change. For example, farmers observed the benefits of mulching with maize straw, which helps to retain soil moisture, suppress weeds, and enhance soil fertility. Additionally, the integration of legumes such as common bean and pigeon pea into cropping systems was highlighted for its role in nitrogen fixation and soil fertility improvement.

The farm visits also provided an opportunity to discuss the challenges associated with implementing CASI practices. Participants shared their experiences with the learning process involved in adopting new practices, the labor requirements of certain techniques and the initial costs associated with materials and/or inputs. The discussions also emphasized the importance of mindset shifts and continuous learning to overcome production barriers. Furthermore, the potential for integrating CASI practices into SHGs and FFSs was explored, with participants discussing how these community-based approaches could strengthen the dissemination and adoption of sustainable farming practices.

The facilitators also used probing questions to engage participants, such as asking them to reflect on the benefits they gained from implementing CASI practices, the impact on their household's food security and income, the difficulties they faced in implementing these practices, and the role that SHGs/FFSs could play in supporting wider adoption within their communities.



### Quotes from Ato Frew -Host farmer

*“Pigeon pea intercropping with others is just an application of urea fertilizer; it can be intercropped with maize, taro, ginger, and many other crops. It is food for us, feed for our animals, and it increases our soil health.”*

*“Vermicomposting takes a shorter time (25-40 days) compared to the traditional composting method that requires 2-3 months.”*

### Quotes from Ato Atalo- Host farmer

*"My land was poor, dry, and easily eroded. I only harvest maize, which wasn't even enough for my family's green maize consumption. Now, from the same land that once couldn't sustain us, I can produce about 32 quintals of maize for both home consumption and market."*

*"No more maize stalk for livestock feed; we now use it as soil cover and plant multipurpose shrubs and grasses for land management and fodder. The residue decomposes and adds another layer to the soil."*



## Local Lunch

Following the morning farm visits, participants were invited lunch -a traditional local dishes made from a variety of locally grown crops. The meal provided shows not only a cultural experience, but also an opportunity to reinforce the importance of crop diversity the diversified the local dietary habit of the farming communities. There are different cereals, legumes and root/tuber crops in local food systems. Participants were also encouraged to identify the the recipes from the crops, which sparked discussions about the nutritional and economic benefits of integrating diverse crops into farming systems. Some of the identified crops were taro, sweet potato, Irish potato, yam, maize, beans, enset, pepper, ginger, pigeon pea, teff and garlic. This segment of the day underscored the link between agricultural practices and food security, highlighting how CASI practices contributed to the production of a wide range of crops that are vital for sustaining local diets.



## Plenary Session

The afternoon plenary session was a pivotal moment for reflection and discussion, providing participants the opportunity to share their insights and consolidate the lessons learned during the morning's activities. Facilitated by Tilahun Tadesse, the session began with a summary of the field visits in morning and the overall farmer-to-farmer interactions. Representative farmers from the four woredas were then invited to reflect on the key takeaway messages from the visits.

One of the significant insights shared during the plenary session was that CASI practices are not limited to cereals but can also be effectively applied to root crops such as taro and yam. This broadened the participants' understanding of the versatility and adaptability of CASI practices across different crop types. Farmers who were new to CASI practices expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn about these practices, which helped them in recognizing the potential benefits of similar practices to their own farming systems.

The session also highlighted the importance of preserving landraces alongside CASI practices. Participants noted that the integration of improved and traditional varieties with sustainable practices not only leads to better yields, but also helps to maintain local food cultures and tastes. One farmer from Hawassa Zuria, who is also a church leader, spoke about his commitment to disseminate the lessons learned within his community, leveraging his influence to promote the adoption of CASI practices.

The plenary session also provided a platform for open discussion about the challenges encountered during the visit and how participants plan to implement what they had learned. Some farmers mentioned the difficulties of accessing inputs and the additional labor requirements of certain CASI practices. However, the overall consensus was that the benefits of CASI far outweighed these challenges. Participants also forwarded valuable suggestions how to improve future exchange visits, including the need for more diverse farm visits, increased follow-up support, and greater involvement of extension agents to facilitate the dissemination of knowledges.



## Key Lessons Learned

The UU Farmers' Exchange Visit provided valuable insights into how CASI practices can be expanded and adapted for wider use. Here are the key lessons learned:

- i. **CASI works across different crops:** CASI practices are effective not only for cereals but also for root crops, i.e. taro, sweet potato, Irish potato, and yam. This allows farmers to apply such practices across various types of farming, making it more adaptable to their specific needs.
- ii. **Overcoming short term challenges for long-term gains:** Although farmers noted challenges such as higher initial costs and increased labor, the long-term benefits, i.e. improved soil health, higher yields, and greater resilience to climate changes, make the effort worthwhile. Continued training and resources mobilization will help farmers overcome these initial challenges.
- iii. **Importance of soil health and farm layout:** CASI practices such as mulching and composting were shown to significantly improve soil fertility and reduce weed pressure, emphasizing the importance of focusing on soil health. Additionally, strategic farm design, including proper crop-multipurpose tree placement and intercropping, was found to be critical for maximizing resource use and building resilience against environmental challenges.
- iv. **The power of peer learning and community leadership:** The exchange visit highlighted the value of farmers learning directly from each other. Sharing experiences helped participants to understand how to adopt CASI practices in their own contexts. Additionally, community leaders, including religious figures, played a critical role in promoting the adoption of new practices. Their influence can drive wider acceptance and encourage farmers to experiment with the new methods.
- v. **Community networks for sustainability:** Integrating CASI practices into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmers Field Schools (FFSs) helped create strong support networks. These community-based systems provided a platform for shared learning, collaboration, and sustained use of CASI practices.

## Wrap-up and Closing remarks

The UU Farmers' Exchange Visit concluded with closing remarks from Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw and Birhan Abdulkadir. Both speakers emphasized the critical importance of maintaining soil health as a foundation for improving crop productivity and resilience to climate change. They expressed their appreciation for the active participation and collaboration of all those involved, including the visiting and host farmers, SIRARI researchers, BoA experts, and the organizing teams from TDA and CIMMYT. The closing remarks also underlined the commitment of all stakeholders to continue supporting the implementation of CASI/CSA practices. The event was recognized as a significant step forward in promoting the adoption of CASI/CSA practices and enhancing sustainable agricultural development in the participating regions.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The UU Farmers' Exchange Visit successfully achieved its objectives of facilitating knowledge exchange, strengthening relationships, and promoting the adoption of CASI practices. The event highlighted the potential of CASI practices to improve agricultural sustainability across diverse farming systems, particularly in resource-limited and climate-vulnerable areas. The key lessons learned during the visit provide valuable insights for the continued promotion and scaling of CASI practices.

To build on the success of this exchange visit, the following recommendations are suggested. First, it is essential to continue organizing similar exchange visits in the future to sustain the momentum of knowledge sharing and collaboration among farmers from different regions. These visits should be complemented by ongoing support for farmer-led trials, enabling farmers to adapt CASI/CSA practices to their specific contexts. Additionally, leveraging media coverage can help raise awareness and encourage broader implementation of CASI/CSA practices. Strengthening community-based approaches, such as integrating CASI/CSA into SHGs and FFSs, will also be crucial for scaling up these practices. Finally, follow-up visits and support should be provided to ensure that the lessons learned during the exchange visit are effectively implemented and sustained.

# Annexes

## Media Coverage

The UU Farmers' Exchange Visit received significant media coverage from Sidama Media Network (SMN), Fana FM and Wolaita TV. Throughout the day, multiple farmers and experts were interviewed about the benefits of CASI/CSA practices and the objectives of the event. The media coverage will play a critical role in raising awareness about CASI/CSA and its potential impact on agricultural sustainability. Interviews focused on the positive outcomes observed in Wolaita due to the implementation of CASI/CSA practices, such as improved soil fertility, increased crop yields, and enhanced resilience to climate variability. The coverage also highlighted the collaborative nature of the exchange visit, showcasing the importance of cross-regional learning in advancing sustainable agriculture.

### SMN news coverage on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2024

On August 30, 2024, SMN provided news coverage in the Sidama language, airing a segment that lasted 4 minutes and 40 seconds (between 18:40 and 23:20 in the YouTube [link](#)) three times throughout the day. The message covered in the SMN news, translated by Dr. Daniel Markos, is summarized in the following paragraphs.

**Link to the news coverage:** <https://youtu.be/0hjasR0li9g?t=1121>

The first host farmer, Firew Aldada said that “it has been three years since I began implementing multiple components of CASI/CSA practices on my plots. I have seen improvements in soil fertility and better erosion control. As a result, a plot that used to yield 75 kg of maize now yields 150 kg. This is a significant change”. Another host farmer Atalo mentioned that “I gained various products from a small plot of land due to the diversification of my farm”.

Visiting farmer Samuel Garo from Bilate Zuria, Sidama region remarked that “we observed many positive practices that are not present in our area. For example, mulching the fields is uncommon in our region. I have learned about its benefits today”. Another visiting farmer, Ermias Bunge, stated, “I took local maize, aerial yam, and banana seeds/seedlings from this visit from the host and the humble farmer Firew Aldada. I realized that mulching helps to reduce weeds, and the labor required for weeding, while also enhancing soil fertility”.

Dr. Zerihun Yemataw, the director of the Hawassa Agricultural Research Center, announced that we need CASI/CSA practices in hotter areas, areas that frequently experience rainfall variability and moisture stress. Such practices help to minimize crop failure and improve soil fertility.

Finally, the news concludes with remarks from Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw, scientist at CIMMYT-Ethiopia, who explained that CIMMYT operates in 168 countries worldwide, focusing on maize and wheat-based cropping system improvement. CASI/CSA technologies and practices have been identified through research and CIMMYT also endorses the components of climate smart agricultural practices; for example integrating legumes with maize and the importance of mulching. Soil health enhancement and climate change adaptations are also included.

\*CASI = Conservation Agriculture based Sustainable Intensification

\*CSA = Climate Smart Agriculture

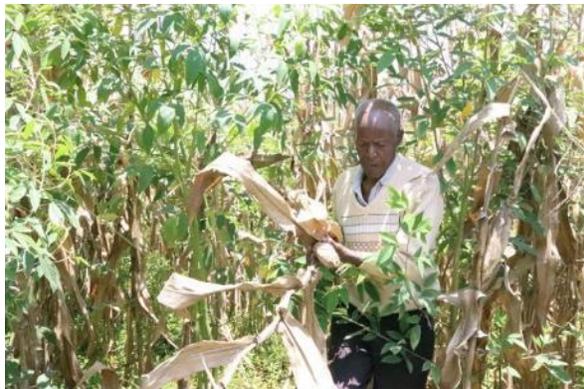
## Program

Time	Activity	Facilitators
9:30	Arrival of UU farmers from Sidama to Wolaita, Boloso Bombe, Ajora Kebele	SIRARI team
10:00-10:30	Welcome messages & Introductions	Tilahun Tadesse - TDA (Welcome, introduction of participants, and overview of SCASI project) Guest of Honor - BB BoA Head Dr Tesfaye Shiferaw - CIMMYT (about UU & exchange visit) Birhan- CIMMYT (program & grouping)
10:30-1:30	<b>Farm Visit Sessions</b> Guided tour of CASI practiced farmer demonstration plots and explanations by host farmers. The groups will switch & visit two farms. (1hr & 15 min per session, 10 min to reach the farms)	
10:40-11:55	<i>Farm visit #1</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group 1: Frew Aldada Farm</li> </ul>	Merihun Nadew – TDA Dr Daniel Markos - SIRARI
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group 2: Atalo Farm</li> </ul>	Afewerk Tekle - TDA Dr Gizachew - CIMMYT
12:05-1:20	<i>Farm visit #2</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group 1: Atalo Farm</li> </ul>	Afewerk Tekle - TDA Dr Daniel Markos - SIRARI
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group 2: Frew Aldada Farm</li> </ul>	Merihun Nadew – TDA Dr Gizachew - CIMMYT
1:30-2:15	Local lunch & refreshments	TDA team
2:20-3:50	<b>Plenary Session:</b> Reflections & Q&A	Tilahun – TDA Abdu & Birhan- CIMMYT
3:50-4:00	Wrap-up & closing remarks	Dr Tesfaye Shiferaw - CIMMYT

## Selected Pictures



*Host farmer Mr. Frew showing the CASI practices for the visitors.*



*Host farmer Mr. Atalo showing the CASI practices for the visitors.*



*Farmers Frew offering landraces of maize grown through the SCASI practices for farmers attending the field visit from Sidama region.*



*Farmer Frew showing the production of vermicompost for the visitors.*



*Host farmer Mr Atalo interacting with visitors at his farm.*



*Ato Firew Aldada demonstrating desho grass, elephant grass-pigeon pea intercropping to visiting farmers.*



*Model farmer Mr Daniel Dasa from Sidama region Uudo Wotate farmers association talking to the media about his inspirations from the field visit.*



*Model farmer Mr Ermias Bongie from Shamana Godo kebele of Bilate Zuria district of Sidama region sharing his observation to the media .*



*Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw (CIMMYT Scientist) was pitching to the media about the collaborative efforts to maintain soil health.*



*Dr. Zerihun Yemataw, Director of SIRARI, acknowledging CIMMYT's commitment for the implementation of SCASI impactful technologies and practices during the field visit.*



*Participants were reflecting their observations after the field visit*



*The research team was observing the outcomes of SCASI.*



*Maize land races in Ajora kebele, Wolaita.*



*Pumpkin and maize at the Adanech farm, Wolaita.*



*Local dishes prepared by host farmers to visitors, Ajora kebele, Boloso Bombe woreda, Wolaita.*



*Ajora twin waterfalls visited by UU and SCASI project teams.*