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Corn called 'Lutheran'

Erffa is a kebele located 37 km southwest of Lalibela town, in Lasta Woreda, North Wollo Zone, Amhara Regional State. LWF first operated in this kebele as a response to the El Niño-induced drought in 2016. The response had various components including natural resource conservation activities through cash-for-work, direct cash payments for the elderly, pregnant and lactating women as well as seed distribution including corn, lentils and *teff*.

Three years later when the Phase I Food Security Project ended in neighbouring Medague, Nakutele-ab and Shumshaha kebeles implemented from 2015 to 2018, LWF made sure that Phase II will target these kebeles that were severally affected by the El Niño drought and only supported through a short-term emergency project, in an effort to link relief activities to long term development, building farmers' resilience.

Now in 2019, farmers are growing and benefitting from the seeds that were distributed in 2016. As LWF introduced the new and improved lentil and corn varieties that proved very popular in these parts, the corn is popularly known as *Lutheran* and has become a staple in this region where *teff* is king. The other variety previously cultivated in Erffa is 'Raya'.



Amare Mulaw is a model farmer successfully growing 'Lutheran'. 'Lutheran changed my life' he says. 'For the first time, I was able to earn almost ETB 9,000 from the sale of *Lutheran* grown on 0.12 and a half hectare of land.' He used to cultivate the 'Raya' variety and the maximum he could earn was ETB 3,000. He has now tripled his income from just one crop. Asked about the enabling properties of *Lutheran*, Amare enthusiastically counts the ways *Lutheran* differs from the *Raya* variety. 'To start with', Amare explains 'is the superior taste. Secondly the corn stalk holds three large cobs whereas the *Raya* only holds one or two small ones. Maximum. Furthermore, due to the leafiness and thickness of the cob cover, it does not get attacked by birds and pests. I now get 6 ETB for one cob whereas before I used to get half that', he continues excitedly. 'Finally, even if *Raya* takes only 3 to 4 months to grow, the extra two months that *Lutheran* takes to grow is worth the wait due to the size, yield, taste, overall quality and potential for commercialization.'

Amare Mulaw showing his prized 'Lutheran' corn, ©Yitbarek Frew/LWF, 2019

Amare says that demand for *Lutheran* is very high but that he and other farmers only have enough production to satisfy demand in Erffa and in the nearby Gagn Amba village. His ambition is to supply corn all the way up to Lalibela where *Lutheran's* reputation already precedes it. His next plan -- with the support of LWF -- is the multiplication of *Lutheran* so that this is replicated and reaches more farmers at little or no cost. Part of LWF's plan is to conserve such seeds and especially landraces through seed multiplication in this region known for its plant genetic resources but increasingly under threat due to Government policy focused on high yielding varieties, use of chemical fertilizers over sustainable agricultural practices.



Amarre Mulaw and his family, Erffa, Lasta, North Wollo, Amara Regional State, ©Yitbarek Frew/LWF, 2019

Amare grows *Lutheran* through rainfed agriculture and is excited with the potential of irrigated farming would bring once the rehabilitation of the Erffa small scale irrigation scheme is completed, opening up additional opportunities for increased production and income.

Amare says his life is changed and that he now plans to buy a *bajaj*, Amharic for tuk-tuk, ubiquitous and affordable mode of transportation in these parts. He had already made improvements on his house and is sending his children to school.