

Market-oriented agriculture to boost productivity

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Since early this decade, the government of Ethiopia has complemented its agricultural development plan of action with a market-oriented smallholder agricultural development strategy. It has adopted a policy response specific to Ethiopia's food security and agricultural productivity challenge, including the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy. In fact, the ADLI strategy is the Government's overarching policy response to the country's food security and poverty reduction.

Thus, the agricultural productivity of the country is expected to provide the ability to meet food security and economic development objectives in the face of rapid population growth. Hence, improving agricultural productivity would be essential to attain the sustainable development goal of reducing poverty. In this regard, fostering the establishment of agricultural systems and sustainable resource management practices that contribute to the mitigation of climate change, promote ecological balance, reduce poverty and hunger, thereby facilitating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals would be mandatory.

In pursuit of the Government development strategy, the role of agricultural research community and other actors is very crucial to promote technology transfer and assist public exposure to relevant information in agriculture sector. In supplementary to the due attention by the Government in improving livelihoods of smallholder farmers and pastoral community, the role being played by development partners is commendable. Improving Productivity and Marketing Success (IPMS) of Ethiopian Farmers Project, consortium pertinent government bodies and development partners worth mentioning in this respect. The Project has conceptualized and designed to assist the Government's endeavours few years ago.

In an interview with *The Ethiopian Herald*, Dr. Azage Tegegne, a Scientist at IMPS-Ethiopian Farmers Project, explained as to what necessitated to set up IMPS-Ethiopian Farmers Project. It is primarily established to further provide agricultural technologies and market access alternatives to the rural population. The 2002 E.C. technology exhibition and workshop collaboratively organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural

Development (MoARD) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) was the main initiative for the establishment of the Project. It was then concluded that technologies which have been developed by the international, national and sub-regional research centres were not benefiting the rural population to the desired level.

Based on that, ILRI in collaboration with other research organizations was requested to design a project which would lead to increased uptake and impact of technologies for smallholder farmers and pastoralists in Ethiopia. And then, IMPS project come to existence. Thereafter, IMPS which is a five year project, mandated to focus on market-oriented agricultural development in accordance with the country's development strategy. This project is designed as a research for development project to be implemented in four states namely: Amhara, Oromia, SNNP and Tigray using pilot learning woredas.

According to Dr. Azage, the project is particularly targeted at assisting the MoARD to develop a more efficient system to give a fillip to market oriented agricultural development through learning by doing and documenting the lessons learned. IMPS-Ethiopian Farmers Project is founded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and implemented by International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) on behalf of the Ethiopia Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD).

The implementation activities of the project is also commenced in the selected 10 pilot learning woredas of the country in April 2005. All the pilot learning woredas are selected in a transparent and participatory manner. These woredas are owning a diversified agricultural resources that can be easily market oriented so as to strengthen the effectiveness of the Government's effort to transform agricultural productivity and production, and rural development in Ethiopia.

For instance, Goma and Dalle woredas of Oromia and SNNP states respectively are well known for their coffee production. While in other selected woredas in which the activities of the project is taking place targeted at animal fattening, dairy production, bee keeping, goat and sheep development, development of fish product and poultry. The project is also participating in cereal crops, vegetables and fruits production development activities in some woredas. It has also have a designed development programme for those irrigation and rain-fed crops production activities on

the other hand.

As it was indicated by Dr. Azage, the major objective of IMPS-Ethiopian Farmers Project is to contribute to improved agricultural productivity and production through market-oriented agricultural development, as a means for achieving improved and sustainable livelihoods for the rural population. Hence, to achieve this goal, IMPS focuses on four major project pillars. Development of agricultural knowledge management system to highlighting innovations and appropriate technologies is the first pillar on which the project has focused to bring about the desired improvement.

Unquestionably, without developing ones knowledge and capacity to improve the availability, access, sharing, and use of relevant knowledge and information on the country agriculture, it would be unrealistic to register the desired development in the sector. Hence, the project is working on how to strengthening the modern knowledge management system flow at woreda and federal levels. To achieve this particular pillar objective, the project is providing trainings to all agricultural development role players of various levels such as agricultural development agents, farmers (who are the target implementer of the activity), business persons, agricultural products exporters and others key role players of the sector so as to equip them with knowledge.

Similarly, the capacity to innovate by the value chain actors was identified by the project as key factor for a participatory smallholder market-oriented agricultural development. The project therefore, has focused on strengthening the innovation capacity of farmers, pastoralists, and public and private sector agricultural organizations to respond to development challenges and opportunities as its another major pillar. It is implementing this objective through technical and entrepreneurial skills development and facilitating linkages between relevant actors.

The project is enabling agricultural sector employees to benefit from formal and informal education opportunities. For example, facilitation of Msc/BSc trainings fellowship programmes (to enhance skills of the staff of MoARD at various woreda levels and Ethiopian Agricultural Research Institute) is among the project's human power development interventions. Organizing short-term trainings and study tours are some of the various approaches and methods implemented by the project to attain desired improved level in the selected



Dr. Azage Tegegne, a research scientist in IMPS-Ethiopian Farmers Project

focuses on the selected tools, approaches, and methods relevant and practical.

The Project has developed the Ethiopian Agriculture Portal web-based gateway from which any body can access agricultural information resources relevant to Ethiopian agriculture in partnership with the MoARD. It is a typical manoeuvre in improving agricultural productivity through employing market-oriented production strategy. The portal (www.eap.gov.et) is intended to make available timely and relevant information to assist experts of the field, researchers, policymakers, students, NGOs, and other stakeholders in the sector. On top of that, the Project has established agricultural knowledge centres in each of the pilot learning woredas, zones, regional agricultural research institutes.

Then, currently it has established 28 such centres each of which are having five computers, a printer, a TV set, DVD player, books, manuals, training materials and selected demonstration materials (in some locations). These centres provide the woreda extension personnel easier access to agricultural information so as to encourage them to discharge their duties effectively. The Project strives to ensure that the interventions being tested are gender balanced and environmental friendly while implementing its activities in each of the four major focus areas. It also aims at mitigating the potential risk of HIV/AIDS due to market-oriented agricultural development activities.

Now, the Project is conceiving of scale-up the best practices being registered in these ten pilot learning woredas step by step and reach the entire farmers of the country, and thereby improve agricultural production and productivity of the nation.

With increasing land scarcity, efforts to increase agricultural production must not concentrate only on agricultural intensification. Smallholders can find a way out of poverty by increasing the competitiveness of their produce and strengthening public-private sector partnerships through market-oriented agricultural development. With no doubt, improvement in market access increases agricultural productivity by facilitating specialisation and exchange transactions in rural areas and by enhancing intensification of input use.

pilot learning woredas. In general, more than 250 people have already benefited from the fellowship programmes opportunities facilitated by the project so far.

As Dr. Azage indicated that the project has focused on various short and medium term training to encourage market-oriented development activities. Market networking, market information and how to predict market demand are among the topics of the trainings being provided by the Project. Similarly, target farmers in the pilot woredas are also benefiting from the theoretical and practical trainings provided to them by the project.

The third major focus area of the Project is commodity development. The market-oriented commodity development approach was introduced in ten pilot learning woredas to improve technology intake. In the course of implementing commodity development programme of the Project, certain sensible measures were employed. First, potential marketable crop and livestock commodities were identified. Then, the bottlenecks and opportunities in the value chain of exploiting the resources in each district were also identified. Hence, interventions to address the identified constraints or to take advantages of the identified opportunities were introduced. Such interventions include technological, organizational or institutional usually take place in few locations and peasant associations.

Thereafter, successful interventions are scaled out through farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing and capacity development. Women farmers

are involved in these commodity development activities through their participation in knowledge management, capacity development and targeted credit provision. In general, this focus area of the project is dealing with how the targeted farmers can win the market through producing better products. It is all about promotion and adoption of appropriate technologies, innovative input supply and output marketing services and financial services in order to improve agricultural productivity and market success in the pilot learning woredas.

In line with implementing this particular objective, IPMS has been working closely with woredas development agent and other stakeholders so as to enhance the productivity of the community with all agricultural sectors. The activity of enhancing the productivity of the community is also being implemented by the assigned experts at the grass root level and thereby to equip farmers with the innovative technology.

Similarly, since access to relevant knowledge is one of the key factors that determine agricultural production and productivity improvement, developing knowledge management system has been chosen by IPMS as its other major focus area. It is believed that this focus area can help address some constraints of the sector related with access to relevant knowledge. Although there are many methods, processes, and tools available to assist knowledge needs and availability assessment, the project