Takeaways from ISSD Amhara regional workshop 2016

The annual regional seed sector workshop is a forum for all seed sector actors and stakeholders to share achievements and discuss challenges of the sector. The fact that all seed sector stakeholders are represented in the workshop means the issues and voices of all stakeholders will be raised. Hence, the summit tries to address roughly all seed related issues in the region. Every year, ISSD Amhara organizes such forums where achievements are shared, challenges are identified and prioritized for intervention by relevant stakeholders and way forwards are planned.

On 25 of November, the annual workshop of 2016 has been held at Bahir Dar. The workshop was a success because the workshop objectives of sharing achievements, identifying and prioritizing challenges and getting inputs for the 2017 planning from all sides are successfully met at the end of the day. We think the following are some of the key lessons of the workshop both as strengths and weakness to be taken with.

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Amhara region seed core group approves four SVC projects

Amhara region Seed Core Group (SCG) approved four Seed Value Chain (SVC) projects that aimed at increasing quality and availability of seed potato and hybrid maize seed in the region. The approved projects are the direct result of the two SVC studies on potato and hybrid maize conducted by ISSD Amhara as prioritized by the SCG in its previous meeting.

The seed potato SVC study indicated that potato is one of the most productive and important food security crop in Ethiopia. However, shortage of high quality seed potato is a major bottleneck due to lack of such variety and/or the susceptibility to diseases and pests of released varieties. Farmer to farmer seed transfer is a dominant seed potato distribution system. The study further listed a score more constraints surrounding the value chain.

Likewise, hybrid maize is the most important cereal crop in the region growing in more than 2 million hectares of land and is used for food, feed and fuel. Unlike potato, however, maize seed is produced by the formal, intermediary and informal seed systems. Better attention is also given to it in seed production and marketing by the government and other stakeholders across the value chain. However, it is also surrounded by constraints from limited germ plasm supply to variety release and registration to basic supply and marketing of quality seed to farmers. Released varieties are obsolete these days showing inconstant and poor performances.

The two SVC studies also suggested a list of recommendations or strategic interventions that aimed at addressing the identified bottlenecks in each SVC.

The SCG evaluated the results and further qualified the findings by contextualizing to regional practices. So as to tackle the challenges strategically, the SCG discussed and prioritized the most pressing issues for immediate action by relevant stakeholders.

Accordingly, four top challenges were selected and projects were approved for action. With the available finance and time, the regional seed Quality Regulatory Authority (QRA) and research institute (ARARI) have taken the full responsibilities for the implementation of the four projects.

The QRA will work on strengthening of seed potato quality regulation and promotion of the implementation of QDS for potato and strengthening the capacity of seed quality regulation particularly at distribution levels for hybrid maize.

ARARI on its own will work on enhancing the supply of tissue culture to supply disease free source seed potato for SPCS and work on EGS production on private farms in partnership with a private seed producer to increase the supply of basic seed of maize.

ISSD Amhara facilitates the smooth implementation of these projects by assigned partner organizations. ISSD Amhara also supports the finance needed for the projects.

The meeting was held on 20 Oct. 2016 at Bahir Dar.

ISSD Amhara is a biannual knowledge sharing publication of ISSD Amhara programme at Bahir Dar University. It is published and distributed in print and online. For access to the online version, please go to www.issdbdu.wordpress.com/resources

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Seed core group members with ISSD Amhara team discussing innovation projects (20/10/2016- Bahir Dar- Photo by Aderaw Genetu)
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ISSD Amhara has provided seed production and cooperative organization capacity strengthening training workshop for seed producer farmers from five directly supported SPCs and supporting Woreda experts on selected crops for three days.

The training aimed at equipping farmers well with the technical skills needed in seed production and marketing of potato, tef, wheat and sesame. Besides, to strengthen their organizational and management capacities of their cooperatives, cooperative management and entrepreneurship topics have been also given by experts.

Fifty farmers from five SPCs that ISSD Amhara is directly supporting and ten Woreda experts that support the SPCs in their day-to-day operations participated in the training workshop. The five SPCs are Mush (Basona Worana Woreda), Genete Tsehay (Jabi Tehnan Woreda), Serten Endeg (Bure Zuria Woreda), Addis Alem (Farta Woreda) and Work Amba (Metema Woreda).

These SPCs are expected to be professional seed businesses being technically well equipped in seed production, market oriented, well organized and strategically linked to key stakeholders by 2019. This capacity development training provided for the first time for most of them is part of this general aim.

The SPCs are scattered across the region with different seed production potential and capabilities. While Addis Alem and Mush are more of seed potato producers, Serten Endeg and Genete Tsehay are of wheat and tef, respectively. Work Amba is to specialize in sesame seed production.

Farmers were active in the training sessions where they raise critical challenges they are facing and how they are solving them. The sessions were good learning events as the discussion helped them to share experiences and it was two-way that participants contributed to the plenary and discussions.

ISSD Amhara experts and an expert from ARARI provided the trainings. The trainings were clustered into two at Debre Tabor and Enjibara and were held on 23-25 December 2016.

INFORMAL SEED...

**Key observations so far**

Crop and varieties selection and prioritization are highly influenced by gender. Women and men have differences in prioritizing crops and varieties. Women more prefer varieties that fulfill expectation at household such as backing quality while men chose more of their market demand.

Though the system helped different crops and varieties to exist for many years, there are shifts due to agro ecological and climate influences in the past two decades. In Habru Woreda, specifically at Kule Kebele, for instance there is a complete shift in Sorghum from Degalit to red Jugurtie varieties because of susceptibility to stalk borer and long maturity nature of the former. Frost, drought, pests, and long maturity of some varieties are the major obstacles to their productivity.

The pressure from the introduction of improved hybrid maize varieties (e.g. in Dera Woreda) has diminished the area coverage of local maize variety known as the “red maize”. Similarly in Dejen, the nutritionally known variety- Davo/red tef/ is rarely grown by few farmers.

Since the dominant trend of the formal seed system is introducing varieties with higher yield, farmers have high demands for varieties with other characteristics. A good example is kuncho tef variety which is not much appreciated for its dry nature of the Injera though it is high yielding compare to local varities.

**What is next?**

For the full implementation of the piloting in 2017 onwards, stakeholders are to evaluate and validate the assessments. Then, they plan together what to do next based on their preferences. ISSD will be the leading facilitator in the planning, implementing and evaluation of the projects in each Woreda and kebele. Regional and local stakeholders work on the implementation together with the beneficiary farmers. In the process, those working with women and generally with farmers at regional and local levels are key stakeholders of the works.
Takeaways from ISSD Amhara ...

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1. ISSD is a source of inspiration

On the 2012 regional workshop, one participant from a highly relevant partner raised an unexpected question that if 'ISSD has a legal mandate' to facilitate such partnership and play a role towards the development of vibrant, pluralistic and market oriented seed sector. Noting that ISSD had been working for more than three years with that organization, it was truly unexpected. However, it was worth to understand the source of the frustration and think what could be in the minds of other stakeholders too. We had believed, this particular question stood from the frustration that the success that was seen as a blink because of ISSD’s intervention could take the organizations’ roles away and might put a question on their relevance or existence. But now, no one would dare to think that let alone to publicize such a frustration. Because, they know that ISSD is not only supporting them to be successful in their missions but also is a source of inspiration to think beyond the usual routines of the day.

2. Seed sector partnership is stronger than ever

The discussion mood of the workshop shows a sense of working towards the same goal. When achievements are discussed, there is a general acceptance that it is because of the concerted efforts of all relevant stakeholders, not just by a particular organization, that the achievement was a success. Moreover, when challenges are prioritized, it is mostly clear who would be responsible for addressing them and that body immediately takes into it and seeks support from partners, if necessary. This mood is a real change compared to the early days of such gatherings.

3. Ownership of the seed sector is astonishingly flying high

Unlike the situations some five-six years ago where partners and stakeholders may blame one another for problems that they are facing or services not delivered, this time there is a clear sign of understanding challenges as sectorial and an interest to working together. Whenever, an issue so to say a criticism on one partner comes, the partner sees it as an opportunity to improve the performance and takes it as a good input rather than a criticism. Partners now easily understand that the weakness-on-one-affects-all in the chain and hence they want to provide a supportive means to solve the challenges.

4. The seed sector is more complex than it appears to be

Every time a bottleneck is solved, another two or three appears. When achievements are mentioned they are not pure enough because in one side at least they have one burning issue exposed. When seed production was enhanced because of farmers’ participation, marketing became a challenge. When DSM solves marketing, shortage of EGS became the biggest issue. The success of one partner clearly and decisively depends on the other. When one fails it affects others achievements too. Highly interdependent, the sector needs consortium of efforts plus individual excellence. Innovations have clearly shown solving particular challenges for good but at the end they require other innovations on other related and connected challenges for the effect to last.

5. More work is ahead than it is done so far

From the complexity of the nature of the sector to the exponentially growing demand for a vibrant and all accommodating seed sector, the achievements so far cannot stand hugely enough to be proud. Rather they are good spring boards and source of inspirations to work more. More challenges and bottlenecks are visible now than they were some time before. Hence, stronger partnership and collaboration, efficient work, quick response for demands and decisive and innovative action for challenges are required more than ever to achieve the dreamed vibrant, pluralistic, and sustainable seed sector in Amhara region. That message is, we believe, what the workshop participants took when finally it concludes.
"ወ/ሮ አይናዲስም የገበያ ችግር ትምህርት በጣም ከፍተኛ ነዉ የሚለዉ አርሶአደር የኔሰዉ "ለዛሬዉ ዉጤታማነት ያ克斯ተት የነበረው አስተዋጹ ከፍተኛ ነበር" ይላል፡፡ ከወቅታዊ ጉዳዮች ጋር ተያይዞ የዘንድሮ የክረምት የሽንኩርት ዘር ገበያ እንደቀነሰባቸዉ የተናገሩት አርሶለ dboች ብጥራት ያለዉ ከምቤይ ሬድ የሚባል የሽንኩርት ዘር አምርተዉ በራሳቸዉ ስም በግማሽና አንድ ኪሎ መጠን አሽገዉ ገበያ እንዳቀረቡ ይገልጻሉ፡፡ በሽያጭ ግን ከግማሽ የሆነም እንዳልዘለሉ ይናገራሉ፡፡ የዘር ብዜት ስራ እጅግ ጥንቃቄ የሚጠይቅ ቢካም ያለበት ቢሆንም በዚያኑ ያክልም በቶሎ ገቢን በማሳደግ ህይወትን ይቀይራል፡፡ ሎሎች የውርስ ዋይት ያስታዉሳል፡፡በተለይ የበቆሎ ዘር በሚያመርቱበት ጊዜ ይጠቃሚነት የሽንኩርት ዘር እያመረቱ እንደሆነ የምትናገረዉ ወ/ሮ አይናዲስም የገበያ ችግር ትምህርት በጣም ከፍተኛ ነዉ የሚለዉ አርሶአደር የኔሰዉ "ለን ቢሆንም የሽንኩርት ዘር እያመረቱ እንደሆነ የምትናገረዉ ወ/ሮ አይናዲስም የገበያ ችግር ትምህርት በጣም ከፍተኛ ነዉ የሚለዉ አርሶአደር የኔሰዉ "ለዛሬዉ ዉጤታማነት ያ克斯ተት የነበረው አስተዋጹ ከፍተኛ ነበር" ይላል፡፡ ከወቅታዊ ጉዳዮች ጋር ተያይዞ የዘንድሮ የክረምት የሽንኩርት ዘር ገበያ እንደቀነሰባቸዉ የተናገሩት አርሶለ dboች ብጥራት ያለዉ ከምቤይ ሬድ የሚባል የሽንኩርት ዘር አምርተዉ በራሳቸዉ ስም በግማሽና አንድ ኪሎ መጠን አሽገዉ ገበያ እንዳቀረቡ ይገልጻሉ፡፡ በሽያጭ ግን ከግማሽ የሆነም እንዳልዘለሉ ይናገራሉ፡፡ የዘር ብዜት ስራ እጅግ ጥንቃቄ የሚጠይቅ ቢካም ያለበት ቢሆንም በዚያኑ ያክልም በቶሎ ገቢን በማሳደግ ህይወትን ይቀይራል፡፡
The informal seed system accounts about 90% of the seed farmers’ source. But it is the least supported seed system. It is characterized by farmer saved seed, farmer to farmer exchange and marketing at local markets. Regulated by its traditional set ups of cultural and religious norms and customs, it existed for ages as the dominant source of seed for small scale farmers. Earlier initiatives to improve seed systems chose to ignore it and tried to replace it with a new formal seed system that is research based and governed by government structures. This effort, however, could not satisfy farmers’ needs of improved seed of different varieties. Only about 10% of the seed could be supplied by the formal seed system. ISSD, however, aims to improve it within itself.

**ISSD approach**

As the name indicates, ISSD is an integrated approach. It recognizes the pluralistic nature of the seed sector. This means ISSD acknowledges the complementary roles of the informal, intermediary and formal seed systems. Our intervention on the intermediary seed system through the LSB approach promotes the introduction of improved seed and varieties at local level. Farmers exchange best varieties within their localities apart from selling the majority to regional and national markets through seed enterprises. More specifically in the new 2016-2019 program it is one of the focus areas of seed security investments/interventions of ISSD Ethiopia.

**What to improve**

The informal seed system is a new component in the BENEFIT ISSD Ethiopia 2016-2019 program. It strongly focuses on empowering women and other disadvantaged groups. Women are the primary beneficiaries in this component. It also works on the improvement of the productivity of traditional and neglected crops and varieties. Nutrition is the other focusing topic in this component. Overall, target groups will be supported to insure their access to appropriate varieties be farmer saved or improved.

**Target areas for piloting in Amhara region**

ISSD has selected 12 kebeles in six Woredas in Amhara region for piloting support. These Woredas are Dejen, Fagita Lokoma, North Achefer, Dera, Meket and Habru. 24 farmers groups, two farmers groups in each kebele, are selected or reorganized for the piloting. 12 of them have women members only. These are informal groups. Woreda and kebele stakeholders have participated in the process of selection and baseline data collections.

**Status of implementation**

Currently ISSD is conducting four baseline studies in the six selected Woredas. Among the four interrelated studies, one tries to understand how farmers exchange seed and how this informal seed exchange network functions. The other two profiles crops and varieties in selected pilot areas and assess the social capital of farmers. The last surveys the role of the informal seed market that farmers depended for years.

All together, these studies are expected to provide detail explanations about how this an age-old, highly organized, self-functioning and strongly entrenched to the farmers cultures seed exchange/marketing system functions and how it could be improved.

.... continued to page 4
4 Key Performance Indicators to win in seed business

Be a private seed producer or a public or cooperative, to succeed in seed production and marketing business, you need to show excellence in four areas. These desirable qualities are:

- Technically well equipped
- Market oriented
- Well organized
- Strategically linked

I. Technically well equipped

Technically well-equipped means having the necessary knowledge and skills for (1) quality seed production and (2) value addition techniques.

This is to mean that you have the necessary knowledge and skills in pre-harvest seed production techniques including demarcation with appropriate isolation distance, removal of off-types, detasselling, as well as basic seed production and variety selection, with eventual capacity for variety development and maintenance.

Moreover, you are skilled in post-harvest seed handling techniques that includes value addition through processing, storage and warehouse management.

II. Market orientation

Market orientation of the seed producer means you have the capacity to satisfy different customer needs more efficiently than your competitors do through supplying products in demand on the basis of prior market information and customer satisfaction surveys.

You have the capacity to evaluate potential markets and their needs, to identify what is in demand. Market orientation involves collecting and analyzing market information, assessing potential markets, collect customer feedback and manage customer relations. Moreover, you have a strategy to develop a unique and superior product, or diversify, responding to market needs; and promote the product(s) in the market.

III. Well organized

Generally, well organized seed business includes having a business attitude with strong determination for success (i.e. vision) as well as having strong managerial capacity for human, financial, and material resources and infrastructure development.

More specifically, you have a well-articulated plan for your organizational management addressing organizational management, including coordination, supervision, task division, training, staff development and risk management

You have also the required financial management and control system. You have the capacity to make detailed financial analysis.

You can access or have the required infrastructure for seed business operation, including land, farm road, office and equipment, storage, internal laboratories with equipment and supplies, farm machinery and tools, trucks and vehicles, seed processing machines, packaging materials, electricity and irrigation facilities

IV. Strategically linked

A strategically linked seed producer has a wide range of networks with national and international research systems, extension, credit and insurance service providers, seed regulatory body, NGOs and donors, and forms functional partnership with other public and private seed enterprises and benefits from business-to-business integration, policy advocacy and lobbying by being a member of the seed association.

Ideally, as a seed business, if you are technically well equipped, market oriented, well organized and strategically linked, then you are exceptionally successful in your business. Practically that is not an easy task. But these are key indicators of your performance and measure of your progress from time to time.

About ISSD: The Integrated Seed Sector Development in Ethiopia project goal is to improve female and male smallholder farmer access to and use of quality seed of new, improved and/or farmer preferred varieties to sustainably increase agricultural productivity.

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