

Partnerships and Innovation in Integrated Seed Sector Development in Ethiopia



@ a glance



The programme on Integrated Seed Sector Development in Ethiopia facilitates collaboration in regional partnerships to solve key bottlenecks in the sector. Stakeholders jointly experiment with innovative approaches towards resolving such bottlenecks. The programme aims to strengthen seed sector coordination and governance by supporting partnerships and innovation.

The Ethiopian seed sector

The seed sector in Ethiopia is a complex sector, involving many different stakeholders, each with their own specific role in the seed value chain, such as variety development, early generation seed production, seed multiplication and seed distribution. Other stakeholders provide services such as seed quality assurance and seed extension. The sector is currently facing many challenges in ensuring that farmers get access to quality seed.

Partnerships for seed sector development

The ISSD Ethiopia programme aims to identify, prioritize and solve development challenges in the seed sector; and strengthen seed sector coordination and governance. The programme seeks to collaborate with those individuals, organizations and institutions that are trying to address these challenges. These challenges tend to be complex, systemic and consequently difficult for a single organization to solve on their own, thereby justifying the need for strong partnership, integration and alignment.

Common goals and mutual benefits

Key to overcoming these challenges is the inclusion of sufficient stakeholders in the seed sector for guiding innovation in the direction of demand and opportunity. Partnership interventions are designed to bring together *operators* in the value chain (seed producers, processors and marketers); *supporters* (non-governmental organizations and universities); and *enablers* (government agencies). Bringing these stakeholders together is crucial not only for the learning process, but also for identifying common goals, joint interests and mutual benefits.

Partnership platforms

As a working modality of the partnerships and innovation approach, regional partnership platforms have been established in Amhara; Oromia; the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR); and Tigray. Regional platforms involve as many stakeholders as are willing to participate in discussions on local and regional issues. In seed

platform meetings, challenges are prioritized and strategies are discussed for experimenting with possible innovations to address those challenges.

Core groups

A select core group, comprising eight to ten members representing the key stakeholder groups from public and private sectors, research organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), forms the decision-making body of the regional partnership platforms. The regional core groups are responsible for identifying and planning regional innovation projects, and following-up on their implementation.

Innovation projects

Innovation projects aim to initiate change through continuous adjustments in the seed sector that generate knowledge, facilitate learning and follow-up action, and feed into policy dialogue at various levels. The objective is to instigate systemic change, which can only be achieved through the participation and endorsement of a critical mass of those affected.

Innovation process

The innovation process in ISSD Ethiopia generally comprises the following three phases: problem identification; study and design; and institutionalization. The phases may be addressed through different modalities and innovation projects. Figure 1 shows the general consecutive order of the phases and steps, although specific steps may be skipped in some innovation processes, and the order of steps may be different. Real innovation implies a lasting and systemic change, meaning institutionalization. Innovation projects can be considered as having reached the institutionalization phase when they directly contribute to stakeholders taking up new responsibilities; the endorsement of new policies and working modalities; and/or the operationalization of new implementation structures. All innovation processes are designed with the vision of systemic change.

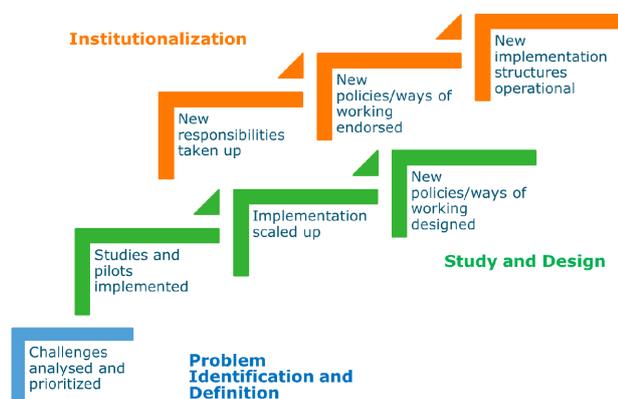


Figure 1: Three phases of the innovation process

Examples of partnerships for innovation in the Ethiopian seed sector

In each regional state, the dynamics of the process through which stakeholders participate in the platforms differ, thereby incorporating diversity into the full range of issues addressed, and also into the specific modalities through which similar issues are approached. Some issues of attention include: seed quality and seed quality control; the availability of early generation seed; access to finance for seed production and marketing; quality seed promotion and marketing; gender; seed-related education, training and extension; and seed entrepreneurship.

Diverse modalities of addressing seed quality

As mentioned above, each platform and core group initiates and embraces its own unique approach to addressing issues. Such diversity can be observed in the ways in which each regional state has been addressing seed quality, for example.

Comparative study on seed quality in Amhara

In Amhara, key stakeholders have been reluctant to recognize the potential contribution that farmers' organizations can make to quality seed production. The core group decided to conduct a comparative study on the quality of informally disseminated seed, and that of formally distributed seed produced by public as well as private enterprises.

Seed import regulations in Tigray

In Tigray, it was suspected that much of the seed coming into the region from other regions did not comply with national quality standards. The regional core group decided to test the quality of the seed before it is distributed to farmers, placing seed high up on the government agenda, as it is the government that assumes responsibility for quality.

Seed regulatory agency in Oromia

In Oromia, the core group concluded, based on an in-depth study of the performance of the formal seed system, that the regulatory wing of the Bureau of Agriculture is only able to provide limited enforcement of seed quality control. The

recommendation and subsequent action taken was to approve the establishment of a specialized regulatory agency for seed quality and other agricultural inputs in the region. This innovation has been scaled out to SNNPR, leading to the establishment of the Agricultural Inputs, Quality Control and Quarantine Authority. Similarly, in Amhara, the Inputs and Quarantine Regulatory Authority has been approved by the regional state council.

Awareness creation new seed proclamation in SNNPR

As a different approach to the issue in general, and in anticipation of the new seed proclamation, the core group from SNNPR decided to support an initiative for training public and private seed producers; regional, zonal and district-level agricultural input experts; seed quality laboratory technicians; university instructors; and researchers on seed multiplication, and quality control standards and procedures.

Exchange of experiences and learning

The above examples express the diversity that is captured in the ways partnership platforms, core groups and modalities operate. Such diversity is regarded as a valuable quality of the programme for experimenting with, and evaluating, processes and activities to identify those that work best in bringing about systemic change. The exchange of experiences and learning has really benefited the seed sector in Ethiopia; this can be seen most clearly in the piloting of direct seed marketing in *woredas* (districts) of Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR.

Direct seed marketing – an innovation facilitated by ISSD

Since its conception, as an idea discussed in the regional partnership platform in Oromia, in 2011, and its subsequent piloting that same year in the Amhara region, direct seed marketing has been widely regarded as a successful and a promising initiative for Ethiopia (see the ISSD Ethiopia documentary entitled *Partnerships in seed sector development in Ethiopia*, available at: www.youtube.com/user/ISSDethiopia).

The unique position of knowledge institutes

The ISSD programme is hosted by four public universities and a public seed enterprise. The programme regards universities as optimally positioned in the seed sector to act as both knowledge brokers and facilitators of innovation. They have the natural capabilities for taking on these roles and also the legitimacy for doing so; being mandated by the government to educate, generate knowledge, and reach out to the community in different humanitarian and development-oriented capacities. In addition, universities exercise academic freedom, which is important for establishing trust, enabling resourceful linkages to be created, and inspiring others to participate in the process.

Further information

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