

Ethiopia Keeps Going

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Ethiopia is blessed with 60% arable land but like many African countries, it had been highly dependent on food aid. According to Food and Agriculture Organization, Horn African countries (includes Kenya, Uganda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Djibouti) continues to suffer from food insecurity.

Ten years ago, in Maputo, African heads of state agreed to allocate a minimum of 10% of their national budget to agriculture, but majority have not honored this. Unlike other African states, Ethiopia has done exemplary job by allocating even more than 10% of its GDP.

It is in our short distant memory that Ethiopia had been a country that was struggling to feed its population. Being unable to ensure its food security, it was frequently putting out its hands for food aid. Getting out of this longstanding predicament had required us to devise a public policy that envisions raising our productivity in the agricultural sector.

When EPRDF come to power, Ethiopia's agricultural sector was languishing under such an intractable problem that would even dampen the most indomitable spirit. However, EPRDF did not shrink or give up rather it has decided to overcome the daunting challenges and engaged itself in the task of rekindling the dying hope of the nation. Nevertheless, at that juncture, it was mainly engaged in taking measures that would protect the loss of life while at the same time devising a proactive approach in disaster risk management.

The decades-long prevalence of disasters and their attendant humanitarian crises bears witness to weaknesses of policy and strategy. Hence, from the word go, EPRDF has taken the formulation and adoption of policies and strategies that can support sustainable productivity enhancement in the agriculture as its core function.

Effective agriculture should yield enough surpluses to permit asset build-up and resilience, but in the prevailing situation of low-input/low-output farming, surpluses were scarce in Ethiopia. Therefore, even small recurrent floods and drought erode many rural Ethiopian households' assets to the point of destitution; a significant proportion of the population is chronically food insecure. Even in "good" years, drought and other disasters may affect many farming and pastoral households.

Response and Mitigation

The agriculture sector requires technical and policy support to achieve its potential, while humanitarian assistance is often required to respond to frequent emergencies such as drought, disease epidemics, plant pests, flooding, hailstorms etc. through preparedness, prevention, response and mitigation.

In the post-disaster or emergency situation it emphasizes on rehabilitation and recovery. It also supports the rural communities to support themselves in times of crisis and in doing so, preserves their livelihoods and dignity.

The predominant focus of the government in humanitarian interventions is preventing disaster-related emergencies and helping rebuild capacity for food production as soon as possible. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had conducted these emergency activities in close collaboration with organizations like FOA by coordinating and harmonizing relief efforts.

Ethiopia has built such an efficient humanitarian intervention system that has proved to be so effective in handling crises. While it provides agricultural inputs in response to droughts and floods, it works to strengthen the resilience of farmers and pastoralist communities through ensuring markets link that would sustain incomes. Sustainable land management and rehabilitation of water points in pastoralist areas were also implemented.

The New March

To begin a new march, Ethiopia should unswervingly invest all its energy on the sector by prioritizing agriculture as its top most agenda, while giving equal attention in managing the current population growth rate. Around 80 percent of Ethiopia's over 90 million people earn their living from agriculture, mostly on small land holdings and using low-input methods. Thus, low productivity combined with extreme population, puts enormous pressures on natural resources and the result is high levels of soil erosion and vegetation destruction that are often irreversible.

At present, Ethiopia's population is estimated to be over 90 million out of which 85% is assumed to be living in the rural area. Projections are that by 2025, the rural share is presaged to be declined to only about 60%, but the absolute number will be almost equal to the total national (urban + rural) population of today.

As the annual growth rate of Ethiopia's population is estimated to be around 2.7% per annum, its population could be doubled in less than 25 years and consequently Ethiopia would, in the coming few decades, face the daunting task of feeding a huge population. Hence, it is essential for Ethiopia to prepare itself for the future scenario and it is working in that direction.

Here, it serves little purpose to list the many challenges that Ethiopian agriculture is facing. Rather, it is better to stress the determination that Ethiopia has shown in raising its agricultural production and its output has been steadily growing in the last ten years.

However, we must underscore here that much of the success is attributed to the good luck of adequate and timely rains, and thus the need to eliminate the addiction of our agriculture on the erratic rainfall that could even be worse, given the climate change that is incarcerating the global community.

Farmers continue to use outdated technologies and have very limited access to yield-enhancing inputs, including quality seeds/breeds and fertilizers. Thus, the challenge for Ethiopia is to make food production and productivity predictable and thereby assured year in and year out. Achieving this goal would be particularly essential, noting the fact that droughts have been revisiting Ethiopia every four to five years. This combined with the low levels of technology

employed in crop and livestock production and the resulting low productivity could engender havoc in the agricultural sector.

As recently witnessed by the acknowledgement given by the FAO, Ethiopia has made successful effort in halving hunger. Moreover, Ethiopia has managed to ensure food security on a national level, while it has yet to cover some more miles to guarantee on a household level.

Attending the 39th FAO conference in Rome, PM Hailemariam Dessalegn has received the certificate that recognizes the country's achievement in halving hunger. He said the recognition Ethiopia has gotten from the FAO would encourage the country and energize its performance. Prime Minister Hailemariam affirmed that the success is the result of the development registered in the agricultural sector.

According to Hailemariam increase in the production and productivity of agriculture has enabled the nation to meet the MDG target set to halving the number of people suffering from hunger. Noting that Ethiopia has suffered devastating recurrent famine and drought that has left behind a lingering label, the Premier said, "this situation has now changed for good."

The effectiveness of the policy that has enlightened the rural-based development activities carried out by the collaboration of the government and the people has helped Ethiopia realize the MGD target prior to the deadline, the Prime Minister said.

Ethiopia, along with other 12 countries, had managed to meet the target in 2014, while this year additional 15 countries have joined the group to raise the number of nations that have realized the MDG hunger target to seventy-two.

However, Hailemariam was apt to acknowledge that his nation is still facing formidable challenges that demand due attention, while reaffirming his government's commitment to work hard. The recognition from FAO would encourage Ethiopia to address fully the food insecurity problem.

The government of Ethiopia has been implementing a wide range of programs and projects to improve the food security and nutrition of its population as well as to respond to emergencies in food and agriculture.

Ethiopia is a country that was endeavoring just to break the cyclical drought that had been plaguing its people. The programs and projects implemented so far have enabled the country to become self-sufficient in food production. However, there is no room for complacency as it still has millions of people who continue to live under a deplorable condition.

With a view to change this saddening reality urgently, Ethiopia is devotedly seeking durable ways to make hunger history. It is working with versatile partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to transform the agricultural sector. As a specialized United Nations agency with capacities in the entire value chain of the agricultural production, processing, and consumption, FAO is a long-term partner of Ethiopia. FAO is encouraging Ethiopia's efforts to make sure that its people have regular access to enough high quality food to lead active and healthy lives.

Sustainable increase in food availability requires policy actions that improve food production along the food chain. Growth in agriculture production will be primarily driven by increases in agriculture productivity, increases in value addition and reduction in food losses.

As most of the country's food is produced by smallholder farmers, increasing the productivity of especially smallholders is crucial to enhancing food production, decreasing rural poverty and improving food security overall.

Key elements of a comprehensive approach to increasing agricultural productivity in Ethiopia include: i) public- private partnerships in extension services and up-scaled farmer field schools; ii) strengthening farmers' associations and cooperatives and putting the farmer at the centre of

the agriculture productivity enhancement program; iii) ensuring that expenditures in R&D (Research and development) are sustained over time; and iv) promoting regional collaboration to spur investments, reduce unit costs, and accelerate dissemination and adoption of new and existing technologies.

Transformative effort

The Ethiopian government is promoting the sustained effort and increased commitment of the farmers and pastoralists via the various projects and programs being implemented. It is increasingly investing more resources in the agriculture sector, while adopting approaches that could make the commitment of its farmers and pastoralists sustainable and effective.

We have wedged war against the abject poverty that has been incarcerating Ethiopia for centuries. We vowed not to surrender or retreat. To win this fight, Ethiopia's agriculture should fully realize its potential for the rest of the economy is not prosperous enough to allow the country to purchase farm products from elsewhere.

Nevertheless, we cannot come out of this war victorious, if the farmers continue to use outdated technologies. Ethiopian farmers really need supporting public policies that could build their skills and promote institutional capacities. This policy should offer direct assistance to the producers, and thus reduce the risks they may face and create incentives that could encourage private investment.

To bring about transformative changes in the agricultural sector and make Ethiopia's farmers sustainably productive, Ethiopian government is working round the clock with an ever-renewing commitment. The government has identified various areas of public support and is providing various technology packages through the agricultural extension program.

As in all other human endeavor, effort made in developing the agricultural sector requires a kind of knowledge and skill that could enhance the productivity the work force in the sector. Hence, the government has devised different packages of agricultural technologies that are relevant to the farmers or pastoralists concerned.

Soon we have begun to witness the fruits of that intervention, as we see model farmers who have successfully implemented the technology packages catered by the Ministry of Agriculture, and to that extent managed to install decisive attitudinal change in the mind of their fellow farmers who began to show keen interest in emulating them.

Supporting the agricultural production with effective vigor and resources is much more viable than extending alms and feeding people or otherwise supporting consumption. Ethiopia's policy aims to balance an instinctive preference to feed the hungry with effective agricultural investments in high potential areas. It believes the future of Ethiopia's agriculture sector is reliant on innovative policy and increased technical capacity. Improvements in these regards will enable the country to not only attain food security, but also allow it to realize its competitive potential at regional and global levels. Surely, investment made in supporting agriculture and soil conservation will soon pay-off.

Currently, there is an undergoing effort aimed at identifying and mapping out the chemical contents and types of soil existing in each locality or *kebele*. This would drastically transform the current trend of the usage of fertilizers, which would in turn increase the agricultural output.

As has been the case in the past, fertilizers were applied far below the international averages and were simply administered on "one-fits-all" bases, without considering the chemical content of the particular soil in question, which could consequently reduce the output of the farmer.

Through price support (an investment in away), the government is making the gesture of helping farmers to afford fertilizers and good quality seeds. Contrary to the past tradition of feeding the people freely, this investment pays back at the end of the season, while free food is gone forever without a return.

Moreover, as applying fertilizers on poor seeds is a wasted investment, the government is working in the provision of good quality seeds. The policy measures taken by the government has made seed production a profitable venture. This would help the "seed industry" to grow fast. Until the recent past, the seeds planted in Ethiopia were not improved seeds. Back in

2003, I have learnt that only about 3% (certainly below 5%) are improved varieties that can give high yields.

The government has also realized that leaving the markets completely free and unregulated will rob both the earnings and the motivation the farmers. Thus, it has helped the farmers to organize. Organization will make it easier for the government to extend help and may even make it unnecessary. Being organized the farmers can even help themselves.

The government has put in place a policy that aims to create off-farm employment opportunities in rural areas to reduce the pressure on the land. In some areas, rapid population increase has reduced not only the fertility of the soil, but also diminished the farm size well below the feasible levels. This would render a situation where the government is required to create jobs off the field so that the farmers can have larger land plots that could support their family and turn the venture feasible.

It should also encourage self-reliance in the community by creating off-farm jobs, where they can earn money with which they feed themselves rather than being fed. Under this circumstance, it is incumbent on the government to foster among the rural people a mentality that abhor and despise dependence. The government does not provide free lunch; rather it strives to build the capacity to earn a living and work hard to promote the culture of environmental responsibility, while striving for the maximum yield. In fact, its interventions are not oblivious of the need to protect the soil, the natural vegetations and the wildlife as well.

The government is ready to back up the smallholder farmer's efforts to address the problem of hunger and the effects of the prevailing drought in the country. The government has made great effort to help the farmers and pastoralist in mobilizing the resources of the country toward this objective. To bring about long-term food security and agricultural development in drought and famine ravaged areas of the country. The government had focused on tackling the root causes of drought to ensure food security.

It is tackling the problem through various agricultural schemes on a national level, making water management to play a significant role in curbing the problem. The government had

mapped out "viable strategies" that will be instrumental in dealing with the impacts of the recurrent drought in Ethiopia in a sustainable manner.

To this end, it had given priority to such activities as afforestation, soil conservation, environmental rehabilitation, and irrigation in drought-affected parts of Ethiopia. **The Ethiopian government, working together with its regional and international partners, remains committed to curb this problem.** Therefore, the overall picture has changed over the last two decades, as the war and political instability that had been perforating the country has come to an end and the country got an unprecedented chance to commit itself fully to the task of development.

The chronic hunger situation that has been continually deteriorating came to a halt and the country has managed to register rapid and consecutive growth in the agriculture sector and thus substantially decreased the prevalence hunger. Although the number of hungry people and high level of poverty have considerably decreased, still we have higher prevalence of undernourishment.

Ethiopia has reached the MDG hunger target, yet it has a long way to go to reduce both the prevalence of undernourishment and the number of undernourished people to meet other MDG hunger targets.

Challenges and Partnership

Looking ahead to eradicating hunger, Ethiopia faces unique set of intertwined and complex challenges to achieve food and nutrition security. Over and above the traditional challenges of resource scarcity and rapid population growth, the country is confronted with unique nutrition challenges that take a huge toll on the nation's overall food security.

There are no easy solutions to these challenges, but there is a growing recognition that the effective ways to mitigate the adverse impacts of poverty exist in implementing the policies devised by the EPRDF and that the time has come for the leadership to redouble its effort to bring sustainable solutions.

Ethiopia has identified the right tactics and strategies that, taken together, could help it significantly improve its food security and nutrition situations. These include: i) relieving the demographic pressure; ii) improving water use efficiency in agriculture; iii) improving smallholder productivity; iv) harnessing its comparative advantage in some high value crops; v) unlocking the full potential of the livestock economy; vi) reforming social protection systems to better serve the poor and the vulnerable population, ideally within the context of a comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy; vii) putting nutrition at the centre of the its food security agenda; viii) reducing the exposure to international market volatility; and ix) promoting a effective response towards building resilience to crises and shocks.

These options need to be implemented in a differentiated manner, taking into account the specificities that prevail in each ecological region. It also needs to be part of a broader regional commitment and undertaking that would help to eradicate hunger and malnutrition throughout the country.

While developments in the last decade have engendered a more positive economic and political outlook for Ethiopia, conflicts and violence in its immediate neighborhood has remained to be worrying.

In view of boosting production and productivity, the government has established partnership with various bodies. Among this we have Chinese agriculture experts and technicians who would provide technical support to the farmers that would eventually boost Ethiopia's Agriculture production and productivity through South-South Cooperation Program (SSCP). These experts and technicians came to Ethiopia following the tripartite agreement signed by Ethiopia, China and FAO.

The Chinese agriculture experts and technicians have qualifications and experiences in small-scale irrigation, agricultural extension, crop production and protection, horticulture development, livestock production, post-harvest and agro-processing technologies and farm mechanization and have been working with the farming communities for the last two years.

The Project has an overall objective of providing technical assistance to enhance agricultural production and productivity through the improvement of small-scale irrigation schemes, strengthening post-harvest technologies and household agro-processing technologies. It also aimed at increasing household's income and attains food security using the Farmer Training Centers as strategic entry point for effective and efficient agricultural extension system.

Besides these, the program will enable reduce rural poverty and ensure food security of the targeted population by reducing rural malnutrition rate, increasing cereal and vegetable production, increasing the net incomes of farmers, increasing the knowledge and skill of small-scale irrigation utilization and by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of agriculture extension services.

By concrete actions in the field, Ethiopian farmers are expected to learn how to improve their agricultural productivity and production in sustainable way to alleviate poverty, malnutrition and food insecurity.

It is easy to imagine how important this mission is for Ethiopian farmers and government, as it would bring more technologies and knowledge so that farmers will be able to produce enough food for themselves, for their families and for the market. In fact, the South-South Cooperation Program (SSC) is improving agricultural production and food security in Ethiopia.

The results obtained from the programs are exemplary. Among others, the Chinese co-operant have assisted farmers in various farming tools, technologies which included trial of a variety of crops, cash crops, horticulture, and other vegetables.

As Mr. Regassa Bayesa, Director of Finance and Property Administration Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture had once said, "the program is improving agricultural productivity and production through skill transfer."

On the other hand, we have a 15 billion dollar project steered by Africa Development bank to be implemented in the horn of Africa to boost food security. The success of these plus the technical assistance that agencies like food and Agriculture organization are willing to add on , in contingent upon the implementation by member states.

The international food body has also launched a new metric for measuring food insecurity and hunger. The current methodology that is being used only monitors food availability at national level, whereas the new indicator will measure food access on individual scale and it will be piloted in Angola, Ethiopia, Niger and Malawi.

Discussion of food insecurity in horn of Africa is no longer a new issue with several countries already attempting to avert the situation. However, with the persistence of the challenge perhaps the member states urgently need to go back to the drawing board and adopt a more practical solution to secure sustainable food production.

According to FAO's regional panorama report, fifteen countries out of the nineteen have met the MDG hunger target. The food security and nutrition picture emerging from this Regional Panorama is a mixed one. While it asserts that fifteen countries (out of the nineteen) in the NENA region (Near East and North Africa region) have met the MDG hunger target, the region as a whole has however witnessed a significant setback in the fight against hunger due to conflicts and protracted crises.

The vast majority of the people affected by food insecurity live in conflict-ridden areas. Conflicts and protracted crises are the two main drivers of food insecurity in the region, but several countries in the region have also made substantial progress in their fight against hunger and malnutrition.

According to FAO, the region is becoming increasingly dependent on food imports, because of demographic pressure, rapid urbanization, water scarcity and climate change. The agenda of promoting sustainable water management and agricultural productivity, improving nutrition, strengthening safety nets, reducing food losses and waste are the top agendas of food security and nutrition.

Establishing regional collaboration is critical to address the multiple threats and risks that are countering the effort made to ensure food security and nutrition in the Horn and thereby build resilience.