

The difference

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Ninety to ninety five percent of the farmers in Ethiopia are estimated to use informal seed systems. Up to the past few years, the governments (both federal and regional governments) have been responsible for the distribution of quality seeds produced in the formal system; though, the distribution means are believed to be inefficient and improper. With the emergence of new seed actors at the regional level, like PSEs, SPCs and other indigenous innovations of seed dissemination were required.

The aforementioned statement is true for Tigray Regional State as well, which is found far north of the country, has had the same seed based agricultural practices. Understanding this basic fact; MU took the initiative to conduct a scientific assessment in order to come up with prompt seed marketing innovation based solutions. Therefore, this preparation is designed to show the real success of Mekelle University Integrated Seed Sector Development (MU-ISSD) supported seed program on the ground and possibly the opinion of the partners.

The Local Seed Business (LSB) which has been designed to back up local seed production system by the farmers themselves brought visible behavioral change in the farmer's lives. Here below are two stories from Atsbi Wenberta and

Haleka Halefom Abreha lives with his 10 family members at Habes village, Atsbi-Wenberta wereda Eastern zone of Tigray regional state. Akin to other farmers in the village, Haleka Halefom was depended on the seeds obtained from the informal seed supply system which is not certified or labeled. Cognizant of this backward ways of seed practice, MU-ISSD project has introduced pilot quality seed assessment targeting to create demonstration

sites in order to improve the life of the people by providing seed of improved varieties.

The 48 years old farmer, Haleka Halefom, has joined LSB since 2009, immediately to its commencement. He said that *“50 farmers formed as a cooperative to be acquainted with the best seed quality for our village. In its first stage, MU*



provided us fifty kilo-gram barley seed to sow in our plots of land. According to the training details which had 12 criteria, we were watchful to investigate the differences in every stage during the pre and post harvest seasons. Recording all criteria we, the farmers, chose three feasible seed varieties; Fetina, Hirty and Felamit. Finally, emphasis was given to Fetina and Hirty. These improved seed varieties were selected for their quality; locally fit, disease resistance, and can mature within 90-120 days. We, the cooperative of 30 members (since 20 of the LSB members already dropped out in the process), become familiar with Fetina and Hirty; and able to distribute to the community. By now, on average we can collect at least 70 quintals of quality seed from barley, wheat and bean per hectare.

Haleka Halefom himself witnessed that the LSB cooperative, named itself as *“Hiwot seed producer cooperative”* has benefited more from the ISSD Tigray project. Regarding this fact he quoted that *“we have constructed three rooms (for office), and a store with a cost of 250,000 birr in 2012. Moreover, there is also one modern warehouse under construction with the support of MU-ATA. This left us with an entrepreneurship confidence.”*

Another member of Seed Producer Cooperatives (SPC), Priest Abreha Lema, one of the founding members of *Hiwot seed production cooperative* and now chair person, also us about told the prime outcome of ISSD. *“If we use the loca*

seeds that are the most common means of seed production, our maximum harvest is only 6 quintals per hectare (1.5 quintals per quartet of a hectare) even in the good harvest season. But now, thanks to the MU-ISSD project things have been changing. Our income from the quality seed exceeded 28 quintal per hectare. Out of the 10 seed varieties which have been provided by the scientific coordinator for 50 farmers, we found that only three (Fetina, Hurity and Felamit) of them were suitable. Especially both Fetina and Hurity are drought resistant and grow with small amount of rain. We have been tested it for Enjera (flat local bread, Kollo (roasted snack), bread, Tihlo (locally preferred food) and Siwa (local drink). Two of them are yet our optimal choice” said Priest Abreha.



Eventually, Priest Abreha the father of five told that the change is now cascaded to the community beyond every member of the seed producer cooperatives. As he mentioned,

the member's property and technology advancement is as follows;

Two potato storages of Shewit cooperative, Atsbi-Wenberta wereda

- *All of them have solar energy/system,*
- *26 out of 30 bought mobile phones (to communicate current market situations)*
- *20 of them have modern beds and well furnished house*

➤ *Four out of the total members have television (with satellite dish)*

In deeds not in words

The seed cooperatives established by MU-ISSD project together with stakeholders have registered good performance in the area of LSB and beyond that tried to improve the local seed banks of the region. However, the cooperatives still remained with critical problem of seed warehouses. To address their problem, the MU-ISSD project in partnership with Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) has been facilitating the construction of six modern cereal storages and two potato storages in five seed potential weredas of Tigray Regional State with the total cost of 12 million birr. The storages which use to store both cereals and tubers will hand over to the seed producer cooperatives right after completion. According to the supervisors' team observation, the storages will deliver to the cooperatives within this month and as a result their problem regarding to seed store will be solve.



The supervisors' team led by the ISSD scientific coordinator (Birhan Ayba, wereda Emba-Alaje)

The seed producer cooperative members are in hurrying to have modern seed storages and then store the amount of seed they want to collect. Hiriti Mekan seed producer cooperative which has 60 founding members is one of the cooperatives maximizes its capital from time to time. Its initial capital was 4,500 birr and now increased to 460,000 birr. In addition it has also 460 stored quintals of pure variety of wheat collected from each member. The members were always worrying about where to store their seed production. But now, their storage problem will solve, since the stores remained only with finishing corrections.

Ato Menasebo Zelelew, 54, and chairperson of Hiriti Mekan seed producer cooperative said that *"In 2010 the MU-ISSD project assisted us in order to produce, distribute and supply seeds. Our cooperative has specialized with wheat seed production. Though there are hard times to collect the seeds from individuals,*



as seed cooperative we are in a positive progress. To participate in a complete way, the MU-ISSD project in collaboration with other partners provided our cooperative with seed cleaner and packaging machines, tractor and modern storage which has the capacity to store 3,500 quintals in a time."

Ato Menasebo added that *"last year we have got encouraging dividends in proportion to our rate of share. I for instance got 5,600 birr net dividend form our cooperative. The actual price of seed wheat is 1,000 birr per a quintal, but in order to attract individual suppliers we paid them 1,100birr per quintal. Understanding the demand and supply of seed we have planned to buy some 2,000 quintals which worth over 2 million birr. To fulfill our currency problem, we have applied to the regional cooperative agency."*

The cooperative's future plans

As a legal cooperative with expertise on seed multiplication, distribution and similar trainings; they planned to expand the LSB sector to neighboring districts. As part and parcel of their plan, they will also provide seed loans for many farmers in their Tabias. The Hiriti Mekan seed producer cooperative for instance has a plan to participate in agricultural investment around Raya-Alamata development corridor.

✓ The cooperative demands for;



A sample of quality seed from the seed store of Hiriti Mekan, wereda Endamokoni

- ✓ Access loan for seed production to increase the number of clients
- ✓ New training about business and seed production systems
- ✓ Vehicles to transport
- ✓ Row planter, tractors and pre and post harvest machineries