

Applied Research Partnerships with Developing and Transition Countries

Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities of Teacher Education

Project title

Understanding and enhancing the transfer of knowledge about sustainable agricultural production to Ethiopian smallholder farmers

Thematic focus

Sustainable agriculture, smallholder farmers, Africa

Year

2010

Project location

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa

Swiss Institution

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Partner Institution

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Description

Ethiopian farmers, most of whom are smallholders, face the challenge of supplying a population growing by 2.7% a year from fragile land and water resources threatened by soil erosion and other degradation. Knowledge and technology for a sustainable intensification exist. Through improved soil fertility management, water conservation, pest control, plant breeding, animal feeding and disease management, farms could become more productive and resilient. We hypothesise that two bottlenecks that impede improvements are the difficulty of translating the principles of sustainable agriculture to the farm level, and lack of access of farmers to practically relevant knowledge on sustainable production practices.

What fosters, what impedes the transfer of knowledge on sustainable agriculture to Ethiopian farmers? What criteria should be used to assess the practical viability of new production practices? What are motivation and scope of Ethiopian farmers to sustainably intensify production? Our study aims at answering these and other questions through literature and field research. Tools for sustainability assessment and communication at farm level will be provided. In this project, long-term practical experience of the Ethiopian partner in farmer training and of the Swiss partner in farm sustainability assessment are joined.

Development relevance

In Ethiopia, 84% of the population live in rural areas, 80% of the labour force are employed in agriculture. Agricultural development in Ethiopia serves, above all, the Millennium Development Goal 1, "Reduce poverty and hunger" (www.un.org/millenniumgoals). Growth in the agricultural sector is critical for hunger and poverty reduction, as was recognized in the World Bank's 2008 World Development Report.

Economic growth generated by agriculture is cited there to be at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth generated by other sectors. Our project will serve Ethiopia by elucidating how knowledge on sustainable agriculture is best made available to smallholders, and by providing a farmer-oriented tool that directly supports the targeted adoption of improved production practices by farmers.



Land degradation in the Worken region, Ethiopia. Photo by Mathias Pineau.



Extension officer and farmer inspecting a silage pit during a farm sustainability assessment, Kenya. Photo by Christian Thalmann.

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