



BENEFIT-REALISE National Conference

BENEFIT-REALISE programme held a one-day national conference to share its achievements over the last three years and discuss key institutionalization issues that need attention before the closure of the programme in June 2021. The conference was organized following three regional institutionalization workshops, organized to ensure sustained continuity of the programme approaches and results. Over 35 participants representing government organizations, universities, research institutions, NGOs, the World Bank and the programme staff attended the conference held on March 26 at Swiss Inn Nexus Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Participants from WCDI, WENR, ISRIC, the World Bank and Mekelle University joined the meeting virtually via zoom.

Welcoming speech

Following the introduction of participants, Dr. Dawit Alemu, BENEFIT Manager, formally welcomed the participants and appreciated the presence of many highlevel officials who were key players in the overall success of the programme. He noted that the programme has identified concrete innovations and great recommendations to mainstream into existing systems.. He added, BENEFIT is currently working on a new proposal and hopes to integrate some of the issues that emerged during the implementation process. The new proposal will also aim to capitalize on our relation with WUR as a knowledge institution to maximize transfer of skills and knowledge to build the capacity of research institutions.



Welcoming speech - Dr. Dawit Alemu, BENEFIT Manger

Keynote Address



Keynote speech – Dr. Mandefro Nigusse, CEO, ATA

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Mandefro Nigusse, CEO of Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) on 'Contributions of bilateral programs to national development agendas: The case of REALISE programme'.

In his presentation, Dr. Mandefro talked about the different components of BENEFIT-REALISE that were instrumental in bringing positive, better and sustainable changes. He talked about the clear targets and innovation pathways used; the programme's unique institutional arrangement; and the strong partnership & coordination that was instrumental in smooth implementation of the programme. In addition, he appreciated the programme effort in addressing both hardware and software issues (technology and institutional dimensions) and leveraging and focusing on complementary interventions that align with government and other efforts.

Dr. Mandefro also noted that the evidences generated reveal that the approach and initiatives of REALISE not only increased productivity and income but improved systems, processes, perceptions, partnership and leadership. He highlighted the relevance of establishing a platform to share learnings from programmes like this; engaging the brain powerhouse to lead the transformation of agriculture and food systems of Ethiopia; and the need to focus on science, technology and innovation based development.

BENEFIT-REALISE: Programme Approaches, Key Achievements institutionalization process and lesson learnt



Dr. Tewodros Tefera, BENEFIT-REALISE Manager

The next session was led by Dr. Tewodros Tefera, BENEFIT-REALISE Manager who gave a presentation on BENEFIT-REALISE programme approaches, key achievements and the way forward. At the beginning of his presentation he thanked the programme advisory board, implementing partners and others who contributed to the overall success of the programme. His presentations covered how the programme was initiated, the programme pathways, cross cutting and collaborative engagements and major achievements accomplished over the last two years. He gave a summary of best practices developed (122 BFPs), farmers adoption rate, use of quality seed, linkages established between input and service providers, productivity increase, woreda plan supported, training of researchers and Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) trained; pilot experiments and in-depth studies conducted. He also highlighted that gender and nutrition have been an integral part of the design and implementation of programme activities.

Dr. Tewodros highlighted that the programme was able to prove that the land holding of PSNP farmers is sufficient to secure sufficient food production. A table that shows how much land a family of five needs to meet their daily need of 2100Kcal per year, per crop was shared. The table also showed land sizes required to grow different crops for market, to buy a year round supply of maize to fulfil the daily calories of five family members.

Discussion highlights

Dr. Abadi Girmay, Head, Tigray Bureau of Agriculture: Expressed his excitement to see the level of achievements registered by the programme within such a short period of time. He appreciated the programme's effort that linked PSNP households improvement with sustainable natural resource; the realistic synergy that respects institutions individual goals and purposes; the use of research and in-depth studies to generate evidences that fit the community and geographic context; and empowering local people by including farmers as lead researchers.



Dr. Abadi Girmay, Head, Tigray Bureau of Agriculture

He highlighted the lessons learned are crucial, and need to continue through institutionalization based on the preference and economic capacity of the farmers. One thing we should look into and advocate the government investment is provision of weather information to enable farmers to make optimal investment decisions.

Dr. Mandefro Nigusse, CEO ATA: One of the most appreciated components of BENEFIT-REALISE programme was its multi-stakeholders approach that brought relevant institutions together. And most of the successes achieved can be sustained by these institutions depending on their expertise, priorities and interest. What do we do with those recommendations that do not align with a specific institution and will require further coordination and policy decision?

Dr. Tewodros and Dr. Dawit: Some BFPs, such as the 'one *timad*' package require coordination between national and regional level and need special dialogue with policy makers. The programme has been organizing and facilitating these discussions through different platforms and will continue to do so. We are also working to include some of the issues that need further attention into the design of our new proposal.

Dr. Tesfaye Shiferaw, Vice President, Bahir Dar University: I feel the programme is being terminated pre-maturely, and I am concerned about the continuity of some of the BFPs, especially considering the issue of staff and official turnovers. We have seen significant changes within two seasons, but we need more time to gather additional information and promote the work to ensure sustainability of the successes achieved.

Dr. Dawit: The intent of all BENEFIT programmes is to come up with innovations that can be mainstreamed into existing systems. We realize there are still critical issues that need further attention and we hope to address most of them in the upcoming programme we hope to start in July 2021.

Yenenesh Egu, Director of Extension Directorate, MoA: Given the Ministry's experience working on many projects, BENEFIT-REALISE impact is exceptional. I especially appreciate the programme's success in creating effective linkage between research and extension, since that has always been an issue with other programmes. But what is the programme doing to continue its work to take it to a different level? What is being done to convince the Embassy and other donors to build on what has been achieved?

Remko: These days, donors are more interested and encourage projects that promote co-investment. Ethiopian partners should identify their priorities and start thinking how to co-invest to bring in more donors and investors in to the country.

Dr. Chimdo Anchala, ATA Director, Production and Productivity Vertical (*facilitator of the session*): I am amazed by the successes of this project and it is one of the very few projects I know that have achieved beyond its goals and objectives. The design process that was based on lessons from relevant programmes, baseline data and scoping visits were critical to identify issues most relevant to the farmers. The active engagement at all levels, the linkage with relevant stakeholders, its leadership, regular communications, inclusion of cross cutting issues (climate, nutrition, youth, and women) and its focus on institutionalization process are key lessons all programmes should learn from.

At the end, Dr. Chimdo challenged the participants to think the difference between best practices and good practices. He thanked the donor and the programme team who contributed to the achievement of this exemplary project.



Dr. Chimdo Anchala, Director, Production and Productivity Vertical, ATA

The next session started with the following three presentations.

Institutional innovation in the making for 'one timad' package: The MoA joint experience with REALISE programme - Mrs. Yenenesh Egu



Yenenesh Egu, Director, Extension Directorate, MoA

In her presentation, Yenenesh talked about Ethiopia's extension system and its short comings; the new structure, guiding principles and market-oriented extension strategy; and the new directions towards pluralistic extension system. Yenenesh said that BENEFIT-REALISE is one of the very few programmes that is closely working with the extension directorate to address the needs of PSNP farmers while most development actors work in potential areas to promote new technologies. Among others, she expressed her appreciation for the programme's approach that link research-extension-university and the pilot on customized extension that encourages extension to think beyond the provision of tailor-made extension to reach PSNP farmers.

On the way forward, Yenenesh affirmed the Ministry's commitment to institutionalize 'one *timad*' package in the extension system and start working on promoting and building better understanding of the concept, and promote building policy framework on micro-packaging.

Towards Realising Sustainable Agricultural Livelihood in PSNP areas: snapshots of innovations from BENEFIT-REALISE, Dr. Ermias Abate, DDG, Amhara Regional Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI)



Dr. Ermias Abate, DDG, ARARI

The second presentation by Dr. Ermias focused on the major agriculture challenges and pressing demands that hamper the realization of sustainable agricultural livelihood in PSNP areas; structure, component and participants of PSNP; and key innovations and characteristics of BENEFIT-REALISE that resulted in improving the livelihoods of PSNP households. In his last remark he noted that the problem is not about resource but institutional - no research and universities component in PSNP programme. The minimum we need to do is enriching the PSNP-5 implementation manual under preparation with at least some of the elements of system innovation learnt from the programme.

Institutionalization of innovative approaches in the making: The case of IRM and soil mapping joint activities with REALISE programme - Ephram Mesfin from MoA



Ephram Mesfin from MoA

Ephram explained Innovation Recommendation Mapping is a geospatial, evidence-based decision support tool that is site and context specific. It uses land evaluation to determine which type of land use (crop) is suitable for a particular location and helps to assess specific innovations & recommendations and identify the major limiting factors. His presentation included IRM outputs, , intended use of IRM outputs and the development of digital soil type map at 1: 50,000 scale.

General discussion

Q: Even though the **ratio of extension workers to farmers** in Ethiopia is high and the country has one of the densest agricultural extension systems, the **quality of service** provided is low. Some farmers testify they get visited by DAs once a year. Is there any mechanism where we can improve and monitor their performance?

A. There are many reasons for low performance of DAs. They work in a challenging environment characterized by no transport, no electricity, no telecom and no necessary facilities required to do their work well. Their salary has been revised to make it comparable with woreda SMSs and senior experts, but we need to build their capacity and create a conducive environment to provide better services to farmers.

Q. What is the view of the Ministry towards **privatization of the extension system?**

A. Right now, the government strategy is not privatization but towards creating a multi-actor, pluralistic extension system, where all relevant actors (the government, agro-input dealers, universities, research, NGOs / INGOs, the private sector, etc.) are working together in an integrated way. In the current situation where the government is giving 95% of the advisory service, privatization is not feasible. We need the public extension to reach the disadvantaged groups and inaccessible location. Going private requires a legal framework on selection of services, setting standards, payment modality (direct, cost sharing), etc.

The government is currently against any payment and encourages free extension service to reach the poor farmers who could not afford to pay. Even though BENEFIT-SBN experience showed that farmers are willing to pay for services like SMS weather information.

Q. Is micro-packaging a policy issue or resource and implementation issue?

A. It is a policy issues since rural development policies tend to focus more on commercialization, clusterization, and export substitution. The input system is dominated by the government with no interest in micro-packaging. This requires to convince senior officers on its value and develop a policy framework that covers all agricultural inputs including seed, fertilizers and chemicals. We need a legal framework that holds distributors and suppliers accountable for what they deliver to the farmers. It is beyond simply repackaging inputs and implementation issue.

Q. What is the implication of using data from other source rather than local data (from Ethiopia) when using the IRM tool?

A. Finding Bio physical data was the hardest part. Of course if we can use local data the recommendations would have been more precise, but the Ethiopian metrological data is kept in spreadsheet, a format not suitable for the tool we used to do our analysis.



General Discussion

The afternoon session was devoted to deliberations on the following key issues. The session was facilitated by Dr. Mohammed Hassena, BENEFIT Senior Expert and Yenenesh Egu, Director, Extension Directorate, MoA.

- I. **One *Timad* package** – who should take the lead to take it forward?
- II. **Micro-packaging** – what should be the next step?
- III. What is **the difference between best practices and good practices**
- IV. **Access and use of agricultural information** – what is the best source of knowledge and information for farmers



Dr. Mohammed Hassena, BENEFIT Senior Expert and Yenenesh Egu, Director, Extension Directorate, MoA

'One *Timad*' package

BENEFIT-REALISE's agenda to pilot 'one *Timad*' package was to gather evidence to showcase the relevance of customized extension to address the need of different segments of the farming population. For example, in East Harerge zone due to shortage of land, the package is for 'one *qindi*', prepared for 1/8 of a hectare, instead of 'one *timad*' -1/4 of a hectare. Recognizing farmers are not homogeneous, the 'one *timad*' and 'one *qundi*' packages are designed as an entry point towards promoting customized extension packages. In addition, 'one *timad*' is not only for PSNP people but studies has shown it also improves adoption rate and it is ideal to promote urban agriculture. Given the evidence generated, if it has passed the scaling stage we should take it to the next level. Since the concept is a national issue MoA Extension Directorate should take a lead to include it in the National Extension package training. Some of the regions have already agreed to make it a directive.

Micro-packaging

The concept of micro-packaging is noble, but it requires a high level discussion towards liberalizing the country's agricultural input system. Currently, there is no legal institution that regulates downsizing and protect the farmers from malpractices by suppliers and service providers. Policy and legal framework and setting the rules of the game is important before engaging the private sector. But it is possible to work with cooperatives since their objective is to serve the farmers but the involvement of the private sector will require policy reform on input supply system. We need economic policies that call on the private sectors with the backing of the government to ensure accountability and sustainable business relationship.

Micro-packaging also goes hand in hand with the pluralistic system. There might be some reservations from agro dealers, especially in the case of 'one *timad*' package where fertilizer use is cut in half and supplemented by use of organic fertilizer (compost). But micro-packing of fertilizer can also mean reaching more marginalize farmers, which means higher use of fertilizer.

A business case is relevant to convince decision makers and suppliers. The next step should be ensuring micro-packaging is put on the agenda of high officials. There is already a legal framework and four regulatory authorities for seed but more work is needed to properly enforce the regulations and build similar systems for other inputs.

The name micro-packaging might have negative notation, and we need to have a better name that reflects that diversity in holding means reaching more farmers with diverse needs.

Best practice vs good practice

Best practice is any practice that brings a profound economic, social, technical difference compared to the status quo. It brings system level change in comparison. 'Best practice' is sometimes used interchangeably

with 'good practice'. BENEFIT-REALISE practices are Best Fit Practices (BFP) since they are designed to match appropriately to a specific context.

Access and use of Agricultural Information

In Ethiopia, Farmers Training Centres (FTCs) are designed to provide agricultural information and services to farmers – provide knowledge based trainings, solve agricultural related issues, provide advisory services, etc. Currently there are 14,065 FTCs and PTCs at different functional levels - pre-basic, basic, intermediate & advanced functionality. But advanced FTCs are very small in number, limiting the service FTCs provide to farmers.

Model farmers tend to work closely with research centres and easily access information from researchers. The extension directorate also gives advisory service through radio programmes, especially to address specific emerging issues of farmers. The farmers participate by sending SMS messages.

The participants agreed it is relevant to capacitate and link FTCs with research centres as source of information for farmers. Just like the health service, there should be a formal referral system that leads farmers to the right place to get the information they need.

Closing Remark

Dr. Tesfye Tilahun from the World Bank: I was involved in this project from the beginning and as PSNP implementer it is exciting to see the programme's impact and the benefit it brought to PSNP farmers. I fully agree that we need to exploit different opportunities to maximize the programme achievements and institutionalize the BFPs. Our future project need to capitalize what we have already learned. I also feel micro-packaging of inputs, matching the capability of PSNP is pivotal to make sustainable changes in the livelihood of PSNP farmers.

Yenenesh: I am committed to work on 'one *timad*' package and have already started the communication process. I also agree we need to capacitate our DAs and link our FTCs with research centres to provide better service to our farmers.

WCDI (Irene and Remko): Both thanked all participants for their contribution and the broad team that made the project such a success. It was encouraging and touching to hear how much the project is appreciated by many.

BENEFIT (Dr. Mohammed and Dr. Tewodros): The extension direction towards pluralistic extension is a good opportunity to mainstream the experiences and results from BENEFIT-REALISE programmes. We can also link with other efforts within the universities who are working closely with FTCs. The institutionalization process is not straight forward, and requires resources and capacity at different levels. There are some agreements with the universities to mainstream some of the programme achievements through their community outreach programmes. And there are discussions at regional level (BoA) on how to mainstream the BFPs at zonal, woreda and Kebele level. In addition to presenting the practice to MoA extension directorate, the programme technical achievement were presented to the World Bank, an institute instrumental in designing PSNP V. All the issues discussed are well noted and the discussion points are great inputs for the design of upcoming programme.

Dr. Dawit closed the meeting by thanking all for their proactive engagement and valuable reflection on how to move forward. He especially thanked the REALISE team who have been working hard at the ground level to transform the lives of PSNP farmers. He added that BENEFIT plans to organize another national event in the presence of high level policy makers to take things one step further and wished all a safe trip back home.