

ATA NEWS



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The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) in partnership with Mercy Corps and the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) have developed and deployed a WhatsApp digital medium to communicate Business Desert Locust Hotline using Amharic, Affan Oromo, and Tigrigna languages. The hotline intends to provide some emergency services by supporting the Ethiopian government's ongoing data collection and surveillance activities regarding the current Locust swarm that is present in the country.

According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the East Africa Region is currently facing an unprecedented food security threat caused by the combined effects of recent severe floods, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the upsurge of desert locusts. Between 2019 to mid-2020, favorable weather and vegetation conditions have contributed to the worst desert locust upsurge in over 25 years, which has devastated crops and pastureland of many East African countries.

"Locust infestation has become a very serious matter in Ethiopia, and lack of information about the matter has strongly affected the smallholder farmers the most. That is why we have decided to team up with our partners to ensure important and up to date information is delivered to the smallholder farmers in a way they can easily access it." ATA CEO Khalid Bomba said.

H.E. State Minister Dr. Mandefro Nigussie, of the Ministry of Agriculture said "Desert Locusts are one of the most destructive migratory pests in the world and we have witnessed an unprecedented spread of these pests for nearly a year. We are deploying a wide range of tools and resources to combat and eliminate these highly mobile and invasive pests before they pose an even great threat".





Information about the occurrence on desert locusts, their natures and their movement are currently available on the WhatsApp hotline. This available information is also shared on the ATA run 8028 farmers hotline via voice and text to more than 5 million registered users across Ethiopia. Apart from conveying the message, the 8028 hotline is being used to conduct a survey involving 11,000 development agents and 600 agricultural experts four times a week via SMS on the occurrence and movement of desert locust in four regions of Ethiopia.

Mercy Corps' country Director in Ethiopia Melaku Yirga for his part said, "This initiative will support stakeholders' access to crucial data that helps to monitor and track desert locust movements and predict future movements and inform policies". He added that "The delivery of such information not only will help avert potential disasters it will also help connect people to the resources and opportunities they need to build strong, stable livelihoods that can withstand future challenges". The hotline has a prepopulated chatbot that provides basic information about desert locusts, latest observations, and information what to do and what not to do when encountering the pests. The data was collected from a wide range of automated and manual mechanisms during the Ethiopian Planting season. The collected data then uses expertise and environmental research infrastructures from within the cross-disciplinary spectrum of agronomy, biology, entomology, meteorology, computer science and telecommunications to analyze it and generate the needed data.

The Ethiopian Desert Locust WhatsApp hotline can be accessed by texting "Locust" 'Laqin' 'Ayaxa' 'Hawaannisa' 'አንባ' 'አንባ', to +251 95 287 8787 via the WhatsApp application. The system has been identified by partners as a key low-cost mechanism to reach rural communities' desert locust reporting and information needs at scale.

The deployment of the WhatsApp desert locust hotline will increase farmer and extensions staff awareness, enhance farmers and extension officers level reporting at scale via SMS and WhatsApp channels available to them, and further demonstrate how technology and digital tools play a crucial role during a global pandemic and lockdowns.

The new WhatsApp hotline is an addition to the already existing platforms which include an application developed by Plant Village/ FAO, ATA run 8028 Farmers Hotline and the Ministry of Agriculture and regional bureaus of agriculture's field observations. Moreover, public service announcements that aim to increase the awareness of the public on the matter will be forwarded to the public. Interested individuals can also access information regarding the swarm trajectory and predication, average growth projections, average flight dates, average reproduction dates and alike can be accessed by the public by using the following link:

[Click her for the maps](#)

According to the FAO, Locust swarms are currently present in eastern Ethiopia between Jigjiga, Harar, Dire Dawa, and the Djibouti border, and numerous swarms are in the Afar Region, due to several swarms migrating from Yemen. The good rains witnessed have caused large areas of green vegetation to develop that will allow breeding and a further increase in locust infestations during August and September. The launched WhatsApp for Business desert locust hotline, combined with other digital tools will support the Government of Ethiopia to effectively monitor, control, and combat the pest.

State Ministers visit regional ATA projects

Based on the request from the Ministry of Agriculture, the ATA organized a field visit on August 13, 2020 in East Shewa Oromia region (Sodere and Mojo areas). The visit was attended by State Ministers of Agriculture Dr. Mandefro Negussie and Aynalem Nigussie along with ATA CEO Khalid Bomba, other ATA senior Directors and stakeholders.

During the visit, the stakeholders were able to visit Avocado Nursery Sites in Sodere area which is being managed by the youth. There were also visits to selected avocado cluster farms in Lume Woreda at the outskirts of Mojo town. During the visit, the members were able to meet with the farmers of the clusters and see how the farmers lives have changed and listen to the challenges and promises of the farmers.

Furthermore, the officials were also able to visit Agricultural One Stop Shop (AOSS) in Modjo town. A project that the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) implements to provide quality agricultural inputs and services to smallholder farmers at the right time and with a competitive price in shops in close proximity to the farmers' homestead.

Following the visit, the state ministers applauded the commitment ATA is undertaking in removing the systemic bottlenecks that are hindering the Ethiopian agriculture from moving forward and expressed their commitment to help ATA and support in the facilitation of access to inputs to the smallholder farmers.





ATA Completes and presents a new Ten-Year Strategy

The ATA has successfully completed a series of consultation sessions regarding the ATA's 10-year strategy with the Minister and State Ministers of the MoA, as well as with other MoA reporting agencies like EIAR and FCA, and development partners. The new 10-year strategy is prepared in alignment with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) ten-year strategy and the Government of Ethiopia's 10-year growth strategy. Moreover, in the ten-year strategy the ATA will be moving from a portfolio-based to a program-based model, where projects contribute to strategic program objectives to ensure focus. Quite valuable inputs have been provided to further improve the strategy. The ATA will serve as 'centers of excellence', requiring less direct project implementation and operating as system integrator among actors and initiatives in the sector. It will also have the potential to implement 15 strategic programs and 120 system-oriented projects within these programs over the next 10 years.

Since its establishment 10 years, the ATA has conducted several studies, provided implementation supports to federal and regional implementing partners, and implemented many projects under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda, Agricultural Commercialization Clusters (ACC) Initiative, aiming to transform smallholder agriculture towards commercial farming and livelihoods. The implementation of these projects has improved farming approaches, facilitated access to inputs, services and markets, and thereby improved the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.



ATA Hands over Soil Fertility Atlases to Somali Region

The ATA officially handed over Soil Fertility Status and Fertilizer Recommendations Atlas to the Somali Regional Government. The Atlas (maps) show the soil fertility status at kebele and woreda levels with the corresponding fertilizer recommendations.

The Atlas was produced by the Ethiopian Soil Information Systems (EthioSIS) project, a joint effort of the ATA and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). This groundbreaking initiative was launched in 2012 to resolve the impediments to access updated information about soil fertility status and the fertilizer recommendations, hence increasing farmers' use of appropriate and customized fertilizers in the right amounts.

To date, the project had handed over Soil Fertility Status and Fertilizer Recommendations Atlases for Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, SNNP, Harari, Benishangul Gumuz regional governments, and Dire Dawa city administrations. In the next coming few months, Gambella and Afar will be receiving the atlas maps. The national soil map which will indicate the soil fertility status of the country and fertilizer recommendation for each soil will be completed in October.

EthioSIS project prepared this atlas to lay the foundation and help understand the soil fertility and soil resources potential to increase the regional state productivity.



CropIn: a new ATA pilot project

The CropIn pilot project aims at collecting, analyzing and visualizing detailed Farmer Production Cluster (FPC) information within the Agricultural commercialization Clusters (ACCs) program. This pilot project will enable agriculture extension workers to capture farmers profile, FPC clusters and plots, crop registration, geo-tag, and provided near-real time FPC clusters performance reports, which are accessed by key stakeholders. In addition, the system support to broadcast agronomy services (i.e. input recommendations), harvest projections, pest and disease reporting and village level weather advisory to agriculture extension workers and registered farmers using three local languages (Amharic, Afan Oromo and Tigrigna). The captured information will enable the regional ATA offices and federal FPC team to make near-real time and data-driven impactful decisions.

The project uses CropIn's Smart Farm platform, a cloud-based system, that has been developed with a number of the features and functionalities that have not been designed, tested, and developed into the Data Enhancement Pilot tool. The CropIn system has been utilized globally in 45 countries and has collected data from more than 2.1 million farmers, making it the largest farmer management platform of its kind. The ATA plans to utilize this platform to collection information at the Farmer Production Clusters (FPC) and Agricultural Commercialization Cluster (ACC) levels to get better visibility on this programs.

Achievements

In 2012 EFY, for example, 157 one-stop shops were launched out of which 114 are operational in the Agricultural Commercialization Cluster (ACC) woredas. The target is to reach 300 ACC woredas [as well as 11 woredas outside the ACC] across the four ATA program implementation regions – Amhara, Oromia, SNNP and Tigray – providing service to over 400,000 smallholder farmers in 2012. These centers have a total of ETB 500 million in private investment, created 599 jobs and generated sales of Birr 211 million during the year.

The ATA's role

The ATA's analytical studies revealed that the high startup and working capital required to open retail shops blocked potential owners from opening and operationalizing new outlets. To address this and make the availability of a one-stop center for all agricultural inputs and expert services a reality, the ATA worked directly with potential shop-owners, providing training and technical support as well as cost-sharing to cover AOSS staff salary and procurement of furniture and equipment for the service centers/shops.

The financial support was provided through the sub-grant model where the ATA provides start-up capital to potential shop-owning



AGRICULTURAL ONE STOP SHOP PROJECT

Background

The Agricultural One Stop Shop (AOSS) project that the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) implements aims to provide sufficient and good quality agricultural inputs and services to smallholder farmers at the right time and with a competitive price in shops in close proximity to the farmers' homestead.

The AOSS addresses lack of access to certified and traceable agricultural inputs that smallholder farmers continuously face, and cuts on time and money they spend in search of different inputs and services. Lack of access to quality inputs has been one of the challenges of the agriculture sector impeding farmers' production and productivity. In the past, a complex sourcing process with many middlemen had been chronically driving up the cost of inputs for retailers, and ultimately smallholders.

The ATA designed the AOSS project consolidating and enhancing existing retail models to create a consistent and quick path to network scale-up, enhance private investment in input retailing and create youth employment opportunities. The project strives to create consistency across all shops with a significant pace of network expansion.

entrepreneurs to furnish and cover up to one-year salary of professional staff working in the shops. The shop owners have to construct the building complying to a uniform pre-set standardized design and specifications within a given period, stock the shops with the required variety of inputs from producers, importers and wholesalers, and be ready and equipped to provide expert advice and service to smallholder farmers.

In addition, ATA has provided training on business skill development and project management to 269 AOSS owners and their staff.



Challenges and Mitigation Measures

Lack of local producers of many agricultural inputs has been one of the challenges affecting the agricultural sector. Many of the inputs have to be imported through a limited number of importers which often are constrained by shortages of foreign currency. Hence, AOSS owners often face shortage of supplies due to the inability and/or unwillingness of importers and wholesalers to supply the required type and quantity of inputs. Encouraging investors to focus on investing in local production is quite important to address this problem and make the inputs more affordable to farmers.

The Way Forward

The ATA is providing intensive capacity building support throughout the life of the AOSSs both to shop owners and the AOSS technical staffs to equip them with the necessary skills, competency, and capacity to own and implement the project. The project capacity building includes technical (Crop and Livestock) and business management training for the shop owners, and professional skills development and project management trainings for project staffs.

ATA will facilitate consultation workshop among MoA, AOSS owners, Trade Bureaus and other government institutions, and input importers to solve access of AOSS from importers and whole sellers to ensure sustainability of the AOSS business model.

Regular spot checks of the AOSS by regulatory bodies will streamline the quality of services. Moreover, project performance evaluation will help monitor the quality and ensure continuity and suitability of the inputs and services of the AOSS outlets. Regular performance monitoring and evaluation will be carried out to ensure that the project objectives are being fulfilled and that the targets and milestones specified at the project's inception are being met.

The problem of agricultural input supply, especially agrochemicals and veterinary drug need to also be resolved through strengthening the regulatory framework.

By the end of the project timeline, AOSSs will become a major agricultural input retailing network that will be replicated by entrepreneurs across the nation without the support of ATA, and the role of the regional governments will be limited to monitoring and ensuring that the regulatory framework creates an enabling environment for the smooth running of the AOSSs.