MPs Commended the Works of the ATA

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Members of Agriculture, Pastoralist and Environmental Protection Standing Committee of the House of People’s Representatives commended the works of ATA and urged to strengthen its supports in transforming the Ethiopian agriculture. Members of the committee conducted a consultative meeting with the Senior Management Team (SMT) of the ATA and visited the Tef Research Laboratory in Bishoftu and Agricultural Commercial Cluster (ACC) avocado farms in Lume woreda of Oromia region, 6-7 April 2019.

On the occasion, ATA briefed members of the standing committee about its mandate areas, projects undertaken and its current performances. Ato Khalid Bomba, CEO of ATA, presented the general overview of the agency. Senior Directors of different verticals briefed members of the committee on the works of Production & Productivity, Agribusiness & Markets, and ACC. Following the presentations, ATA Senior Directors as well as the CEO responded to questions raised from the members of the standing committee.

"Such sessions will help the committee gain firsthand knowledge, and help us understand what the Agency is working on,” The Chairperson of the Standing Committee H.E. W/ro Almaz Messele expressed her appreciation to the works of the ATA. She further emphasized the importance of the consultation meeting and the visit to helping the members understand better the works of ATA. “The visit and the discussion have helped us understand the situation on the ground, and shape our focus areas regarding ATA,” she added.

Likewise, Hon. Ato Akililu Getachew, members of the committee, called upon ATA to further strengthen its efforts in transforming the Ethiopian agriculture. While expressing his appreciation to the works of ATA in changing the landscape of the Ethiopian agriculture he said: “what we saw here today is beyond my expectation and it has opened my eyes to help me understand what ATA is doing and the impacts it is bringing on the lives of smallholder farmers”.

Members of the Standing Committee also visited the largest Tef laboratory in the world where Tef related researches will be conducted once the center is operational in the coming two months. Also, they visited selected avocado cluster farms in Lume woreda at the outskirts of Mojo town and spoke with the farmers. The Avocado farms are part of the ATA efforts to expand cluster farming in which smallholder farmers cultivate selected high value crops in a cluster farming approach.
Women selling tomatoes they produce through small-scale irrigation, SNNPR
The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) developed and handed over Soil Fertility Status and Fertilizer Type Recommendation maps to the Oromia Regional State. The maps are the soil fertility status of 285 woredas and rural towns in Oromia along with their corresponding fertilizer type recommendations. The Handing over ceremony was held on 24 February 2019, in Adama with the presence of senior government officials.

Ato Kahlid Bomba CEO of ATA on his opening remark of the occasion noted one of the ATA works to transform the Ethiopian agriculture is through making studies and providing recommendations to solve the major bottlenecks of the sector. “As knowing the soil is one of the bases for agricultural development, these soil fertility status and fertilizer recommendation maps will solve the challenges related to fertilizer application,” said Ato Kahlid.

Dr. Girma Amente, Oromia Regional State Rural Development Sector Coordinator with the rank of Vice President, noted the importance of the maps. “The maps will transform our agriculture by helping experts and farmers understand how to nurture the soil to increase crop yields and raise smallholder farmers’ incomes,” Dr. Girma said. “This will definitely contribute to poverty eradication and ensuring food security.”

Ato Daba Debele, Head of the Oromia Regional State Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources on his part said the maps are practical tools for agricultural experts to help farmers apply soil-test based recommendations to increase production and productivity. “As our farmers need to produce more than subsistence and supply to the export market, these maps will lay the ground.” Ato Daba also called on ATA and other partners to provide the necessary support including training and capacity building so as agricultural experts and Agricultural Agents (OAs) use the soil fertility status and fertilizer recommendation maps properly.

The Ethiopian Soil Information systems (EthioSIS) project is mapping the soil fertility status and fertilizer recommendations of all 748 agricultural woredas in Ethiopia. The project has analyzed more than 97% of the country’s agricultural soils using extensive soil sampling and remote sensing satellite imagery. The project has handed over soil fertility status and fertilizer recommendation maps to Amhara, SNNP, Tigray, and Harari regions and Dire Dawa administration. The soil maps for Benishangul Gumuz and Gambella are expected to follow shortly while soil fertility analysis and mapping are underway for Somali and Afar regions.
ATA developed and handed over Shallow Groundwater Atlas maps to Amhara and Tigray Regions on 21 February 2019 in Bahir Dar and on 19 February 2019 in Mekelle respectively. It has also provided Navigational Tools on which hydrogeological information on potential areas for groundwater irrigation is installed.

The maps for the Amhara region were handed over to the regions Bureau of Agriculture. It included 44 woredas which are enclosed in the Tana-Beles and Maychew - Tarmaber Shallow GroundWater Mapping (SGWM) study areas.

The occasion took place at the backdrop of a workshop that deliberated on Integrated Shallow GroundWater Irrigation Development (ISGWID) project and a summary of shallow groundwater mapping status in Amhara region. The workshop revealed that more than 4,300 million meters cubic water is available at a depth of less than 30 meters in the region. “This can irrigate 136,352 hectares of land benefiting 272,705 smallholder households,” said Kassahun Teka, Irrigation and Drainage project Team Leader at the ATA. Senior officials including Deputy Head of Amhara Region Bureau of Agriculture Ato Markus Wende, ATA Amhara region Senior Director Dr. Teshome Wale, Directors and Senior Technical Staffs of different sectors attended the handover event.

Similarly, the ATA has handed over 23 published Atlas maps and two navigational tools to Raya Alamata and Raya Azebo woredas of the Tigray region. Raya Alamata and Raya Azebo woredas are under Maychew - Tarmaber shallow GroundWater Mapping (SGWM). In Addition to this, nine navigational tools for potential shallow groundwater woredas were provided to the Tigray Region Water Resource Bureau. Senior officials including Head of Tigray Region Bureau of Water Resource Ato Tedros Gebregziabher, and ATA Tigray region staff attended the handover event.

On the occasion, Integrated Shallow GroundWater Irrigation Development (ISGWID) project and a summary of shallow groundwater mapping status in Tigray region were presented. The presentation noted that the Tigray region has nearly 113.12 million meters cubic water available at a depth of less than 30 meters that can irrigate 3587 hectares of land benefiting 7,174 smallholder households.

SGWM for small-scale irrigation is one of the important components ATA is undertaking in Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, and Tigray regions. With this project, ATA does a number of capacity building initiatives such as providing shallow groundwater Atlas maps and Navigational Tools installed with the hydrogeological map. ATA has also been giving training on SGW investigation methods, data handling system using navigational tools and some application software in order to speed up the implementation capacity of regional experts to develop shallow groundwater for household irrigation.
ATA hosted mid-year performance evaluation meeting for development partners on 4 January 2019, in Addis Ababa. Primary donors drawn from UNDP, EU, AGRA, BMGF, USAID, and OCP have attained the meeting. The briefing explained the performance made in four mandated areas namely, project execution, implementation support, analytical studies, and linkage and coordination to partners.

Mr. Khalid Bomba, ATA CEO, made a high-level presentation on each mandated area key achievements from project inception up to the closure, with the inclusion of each project track record status. The ATA plans to extend such facility to its provincial offices also.

ATA promotes gender equality in the workplace. To facilitate the working women, the gender working committee has introduced Women Mentorship Program in ATA HQ in a bid to drive gender parity. The ATA plans to extend such facility to its provincial offices also.

ATA Staff and leadership marked the International Women’s Day under the theme “Better for Balance” on 8 March 2019 with remarks, panel discussion, and a question and answer session, not to mention fundraising. The ATA CEO, Khalid Bomba, made a remark representing the entire ATA team. In his remarks, Khalid said “everyone has a part to play, all the time – everywhere” stressing the importance of an inclusive approach to tackling gender issues. “In ATA gender mainstreaming is something we don’t compromise. This occasion, therefore, is just a refrain to remind us to keep the momentum,” he underscored.

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The occasion involved invited speaker as well as a question and answer session that served as edutainment.

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ATA Briefs Progress to Development Partners

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Promoting Ethiopia with a brand consistency across our different sectors – whether we are promoting agricultural commodities, investment in our industrial parks, enhancement of foreign diplomacy or visits to our historical sites and national parks – we send a unified message that our country offers a colorful and eclectic menu of things to see and do.”

Promoting the export of agricultural commodities has the power to positively reinforce the Ethiopia brand. “By commercializing our agriculture and linking our smallholder farmers to local and global supply chains, we send a message to the world that Ethiopia’s growth and transformation is as much about improving the livelihoods of our people as it is about repairing the image of our country,” Ato Khalid underscored.

It was noted that the MoTI and ATA have tested the brand in international trade shows. Promotional materials have been widely disseminated via print and a dedicated website (www.tasteoforigins.info).
The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) and Save the Children in Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to use 8028 Farmers’ Hotline. The MoU was signed by Mr. Khalid Bomba, CEO of ATA and Mr. Ekin Ogutogullari, Country Director of Save the Children in Ethiopia on 31 January 2019 at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa with the presence of local media and senior staffs from both organizations.

“The information smallholder farmers getting through the 8028 Farmer’ Hotline platform is helping them to improve production and productivity,” said Ato. Khalid Bomba CEO of ATA speaking at the ceremony. “The integration of nutrition-sensitive agriculture messages will, therefore, enhance their health and nutritional status” he underscored. Mr. Ekin Ogutogullari, Country Director of Save the Children in Ethiopia, on his part, said: “8028 is a smart and timely information dissemination tool and our partnership with ATA to use this platform will be useful to deliver nutrition-sensitive agriculture messages at scale through mobile Nutrition (m-Nutrition) approach.” Mr. Ogutogullari concludes “This will contribute to the dietary consumption behavior improvement of farmers.”

After the signing of the MoU, Elias Nure, Project team leader, ICT for Agricultural Services at ATA said that the use of ICT to expand information is a huge opportunity to support smallholder farmers. “I hope we will do our best to convey the necessary information to the target audience.” He concluded.

Daniel Abbot Chief of Party of Growth Through Nutrition at Save the Children acknowledged the importance of nutrition and Development Agents (DAs) play an important role in delivering the information. “We also hope our experience in previous projects will help us to excel in this partnership”.

The hotline will be of use to deliver nutrition-sensitive agricultural messages in addition to its existing agricultural information dissemination.

The 8028 Farmers’ Hotline is an Interactive Voice Response/Short Message Service (IVR/ SMS) system. It is a mobile platform ATA uses to provide smallholder farmers with information on a wide range of agricultural issues. This agreement, therefore, is to provide access to Save the Children to the 8028 platforms. Hereafter, Save the Children will use the platform to provide Development Agents (DAs) with targeted information and advice on nutrition-sensitive agriculture. This development is expected to arm DAs with updated information that they can timely deliver to farmers. Furthermore, the DAs will be able to have access to a variety of resources to equip themselves with.
The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) signed a subgrant agreement with the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), which will enable seasoned agricultural researchers to share knowledge to young researchers. The agreement signed on 6 March 2019 at ATA head office in Addis Ababa, will help to inject up to 50 senior agricultural scientists into Ethiopia agricultural research system on short-term contracts.

The agreement is the second phase of the project “Enhancing the Capacity of the Next Generation of Agricultural Research Workforce of Ethiopia by Engaging Seasoned Researchers”. The project aims at building the leadership capacities of EIAR’s youth researchers so that they will be able to deliver agricultural technologies, information, and knowledge that are relevant, effective and sustainable in the context of Ethiopia’s agricultural growth and development agenda. Ato Khalid Bomba, CEO ATA and Dr. Mandefro Nigussie, Director General of EIAR signed the agreement in the presence of Senior Directors of ATA and officials of EIAR.

On the occasion, Ato Khalid noted that the ATA is creating an institutional relationship with EIAR to help bring change and make a difference in the agriculture sector. “This agreement will be the beginning of good things to come,” Khalid. “We have a working relationship with EIAR and this strong relationship will overcome any limitations by open dialogue and communications,” he added.

Dr. Mandefro Nigussie on his part said: “This partnership is a perfect opportunity to use the support of ATA to achieve success in the sector.” This partnership agreement will enable to transfer immense knowledge from seasoned agricultural scientists to youth researchers,” Dr. Mandefro. Researchers who will be injected in the sector through this partnership will be important for Ethiopian Agriculture and the only way to ensure the success is through continued support from both parties.

The project will focus on consolidating the achievements of the first phase of the project and further refinement and scaling of the results. It will work to achieve the long-term objective of building technical and leadership capacity of EIAR’s youth human resources, which represents a majority of the workforce engaged in agricultural research.
ATA Spearheads the Transformation of the Seed Sector

Since its establishment in 2011 the ATA has been working with all stakeholder to develop a system in which smallholder farmers access high quality inputs such as improved seed, fertilizers and agro-chemicals at a convenient place and right time, through multiple channels as well as with competitive prices. The production and distribution of improved seeds in particular has been at the forefront of ATAs input initiatives.

To this end the agency catalyzes the development of new seed law, regulation strategy and different directives that will enable the sector to spearhead the seed sector transformation. The country’s compressive seed policy is endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and now sent to the Council of Ministers for review and to be acted by the Parliament. Recently, a Seed Marketing Guideline and the Certificate of Competence for the One Stop Shop Directives were approved by the MoA.

“The ATA has played the leading role to facilitate stakeholder consultations and align on the major challenges, bottlenecks and appropriate intervention in the seed sector,” says Dr. Yitbarek Semeane, Input Director at the ATA. “Some of the interventions are policy, operation, capacity, harmonization that is critical for seed system to effectively act as a catalyst of agricultural transformation.”

According to the prioritized transformation agenda, the efforts in the seed sector aim to develop a vibrant and competitive seed sector by creating enabling environment and incentivizing investments across the entire seed supply chain. They also strengthen federal and regional regulatory capacity, undertaking structural reforms and legal frameworks to meet international standards and address climate change adaptation.

To catalyze the process, the ATA has launched projects such as the Cooperative Based Seed Production (CBSP), Direct Seed Marketing (DSM) and Agricultural One Stop Shopping (AOSS) services among others. While the CBSP build capacity of Farmers’ Cooperatives and Unions as well as member smallholder farmers to enable them to be engaged in seed production and marketing; the DSM and AOSS projects create market access for seed and all type of inputs to smallholder farmers, respectively.

The DSM aims to create an efficient seed supply system that ensures access of smallholder farmers to improved seeds through multiple channels (public and private) and thereby enhance their production and productivity, and ultimately their income. The project targets about 250 woredas across four regions (Oromia, Amhara, SNNPR and Tigray) and reaching an estimated 1.5 million farmers, out of which 450,000 will be female. By the end of 2018 DSM has reached 228 woredas. The learning from the project has also contributed to draft and endorse a seed marketing guideline for the country.

The DSM has dramatically improved smallholders’ access to quality input such as improved seed with competitive price, at the right time through multiple channels, which in turn will highly contribute to increase production and productivity,” says Dr. Yitbarek. Moreover, the system contributed to reduce seed carry over significantly as low as 2% compared to 30-40% carry over by the conventional system as well as government budget by billions of ETB and staff time. In 2018, DSM covers 63% of seed supply in the four major agricultural regions (45% in Amhara and SNNPR, 56% in Tigray and 74% in Oromia).

On the other hand the AOSS, aims to scale up the farm service centers in four regions by establishing nearly 200 one-stop input centers and close to 500 retail shops, and thereby enhance access of smallholder farmers to agricultural inputs and advisory services. The one-stop input centers and the retail shops aim to deliver high quality agricultural inputs and advisory services to over 300,000 smallholder farmers, to train over 100,000 smallholder farmers on improved agricultural technologies, and create nearly 500 new jobs.

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“Before the project started a diagnostic study was conducted to understand the bottlenecks, operating model, opportunities and key interventions,” says Mersha Tesfa, Project Team leader of CBSP at the ATA. “The CBSP works by building capacity of Unions so as they can provide their member farmers the necessary support, follow up as well as monitoring and controlling of the quality of seed production process.”

The ATA through the CBSP project has provide capacity building and trainings for more than 13,000 smallholder farmers and 500 agricultural experts at different tiers of the government administration. Seed production through the CBSP project now covers 44 woredas and involving 14 unions, 196 cooperatives and 16,640 member smallholder farmers.

All in all, the ATAs efforts in improving the seed system in the country has registered an encouraging result so far. Interventions on seed production and marketing systems have improved smallholder farmers’ access to quality seed with competitive price at convenient places. They have also eased government’s financial burden of more than a billion birr that would have been otherwise used as guarantee for the seed distribution.
ATA and EIAR Conduct Lowland Wheat National Field Day

ATA in collaboration with the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) conducted a Lowland Wheat National Field Day in Amibara and Fentale woredas of Afar and Oromia regions from February 8-10, 2019. The objective of the field day was to evaluate the lowland wheat performance and scaling up the experience to other potential areas.

Officials and stakeholders from the two regions, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), research centers, Members of Parliament, policymakers, investors, NGOs, and local farmers participated in the field day.

Participants of the field day visited three-demonstration lowland wheat grown on 3,502 hectares of land. The demonstrations were on pre-basic and basic seed production and certified seed production on a research center, smallholders’ farms as well as commercial farms.

On the occasion, participants discussed with the farmers and the stakeholders. Ato Sani Redi, State Minister for MoA, suggested to harvest the wheat with combine harvesters, link the produced wheat to market and develop next year plan to intensify and scale up the lowland wheat production to other potential lowland areas in the country.

MoA developed a one-year implementation plan to increase wheat production by organizing the national lowland wheat team from ATA, EIAR, and Ethiopian Agricultural Research Council Secretariat (EARCS). The plan aims to introduce and scale up lowland wheat in Awash, Wabishebele, and Omo basins through irrigation.

Ethiopia is the third largest wheat producer in Africa with a total annual production of 4.8 million tons on 1.8 million hectares of land in the highlands of Ethiopia. The annual wheat consumption in Ethiopia is around 6.85 million tons per annum. The government imports wheat annually with 600 million USD expense to fill the gap in the demand.