



Building effective university research and community service programmes in Ethiopia

BENEFIT-ISSD Ethiopia (Integrated Seed Sector Development) programme organized a one-day symposium to discuss the role of universities in agricultural innovation in Ethiopia. Realizing the key roles universities play in facilitating innovation and system changes, the symposium was organized to improve institutional arrangements of outreach programmes and change paradigms to have greater impact in the agriculture sector. The symposium that was held on July 8, 2018 in Debre Zeit was a great opportunity to identify systematic measure universities need to apply to build effective research and community service programmes.

Over 60 participants, including the State Minister, Ministry of Agriculture Presidents and Livestock Resources (MoALR), Director of Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), Presidents and Vice Presidents of 15 major universities, representative from Ethiopian Agricultural Research Council Secretariat (EARCS) and BENEFIT staffs attended the symposium. The meeting was facilitated by Dr. Dawit Alemu, BENEFIT Manager and Dr. Maja Thijssen, Senior Advisor, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI).

The symposium started with a welcoming speech by Dr. Dawit Alemu, who gave a short briefing on BENEFIT partnership, and the relevance of working in collaboration to generate evidences to bring systematic changes to the agriculture sector. He noted that this is a great opportunity to deliberate on how universities can support the country's agenda by improving the effectiveness of their outreach programmes. He then invited H.E Dr. Eyasu Abrah, State Minister, MoALR to give the opening remark.

Dr. Eyasu, in his opening remark talked about the new agricultural strategy that focuses more on structural change and collaboration to enhance production and productivity in the agriculture sector. He said "I am here because I believe universities play an important role in improving food security and in facilitating changes to support the government reach its agricultural growth target".

He talked about the recent challenge the country is facing in relation to export rejects due to poor quality products, which is having a negative impact in the agriculture sector and the country's economy. He urged the universities to focus on quality research and education where students learn practically to become

capable citizens who can contribute to the development of the country. At the end, he thanked all for taking time from their busy this relevant symposium on agriculture and BENEFIT for organizing the event.

His speech was followed by an introduction of the symposium objectives by Dr. Amsalu Ayana, ISSD Manager, Programme Management Unit (PMU). In his presentation he emphasized that today, universities are required to be agents of change and are expected to facilitate/brokering innovation and change process.

The objective of symposium were to

- Improve the effectiveness of research and community service of universities;
- Identify and discuss the value of different services that can be offered; and
- Explore business models to embed within the universities structure to deliver these services.

Four universities (Hawassa, Bahir Dar, Mekelle and Haramaya) presented current services offered by their respective universities' outreach programmes. Each university presented background information on when and how their community service programme started, its structure, administration and staff, thematic areas covered, types of interventions included, partners and stakeholder involved, and challenges and lessons learned over the years.

The followings are key challenges and lessons highlighted in their presentations.

Approach

- *Challenges:* no long term and focused plan; implementation is activity based and piecemeal; low level of M&E framework; conflict between researches/community vs government priorities; community service considered as voluntary work
- *Lessons:* the value of scaling up approaches (from plot to thousands through testing, validating, pre-scaling etc...); using demand driven approach; provision of complete technology packages including training of extension staff and selected farmers; using step by step institutionalization approach; using decentralized decision making and inclusiveness; adoption of best practices from collaborative projects

Administration, structure and staff

- *Challenge:* low budget allocation; low to medium level of research mentorship (25% on research and 75% on education); difficult and restrictive purchasing and financial procedures; multiple staff responsibility; poor incentive mechanism for staff; high turnover; unable to engage untapped potential of the student population; low interest / engagement of youth in agriculture
- *Lessons:* value of employing technology transfer officers and establishing task force composed of relevant decision makers and stakeholders

Collaboration and partnership

- *Challenges:* Low level of mutual engagement among stakeholders; low level of external support (technical and financial)
- *Lessons:* value of strong mutual and collaborative engagements based on trust, defining clear roles and responsibilities; continuous dialogue with key stakeholders

Next, BENEFIT-CASCAPE and BENEFIT-ISSD Ethiopia presented their experiences in brokering innovative technologies. CASCAPE presentation focused on the challenges associated with conventional way of conducting researches and technology dissemination in higher learning institutes. Some of issues highlighted included focus on only technical publications, not well aligned to the country's policies and priorities, random and low impact, not geographically focus, not time bound, fragmented with poor coordination with stakeholders, lack of dynamism, weak learning and institutionalization etc.

CASCAPE's innovative pathway was given as a good example that is already being picked up by some of the universities. Key elements in the pathway include using participatory approach, clear technology validation procedure, using result oriented parameters (yield increase, market oriented ...), strong partnership in

innovative development, must be time bound, evidence based, address both hardware and software (linkage, access, contribution to policy). Therefore, universities should consider

- Re-engineering the process by starting with the end in mind
- Promote visible big ideas and mega projects (avoid subsistence thinking)
- Graduate programs should be linked with real problems of farmers
- Build strong relationship between higher learning institutes, research and extension (need to be institutionalized – joint research, share staff, teaching documented etc.)
- Strengthen documentation and work on changing data into information and information into wisdom
- Universities should play a lead role in system building and be a model in using new technologies to contribute to agricultural innovation development.

The ISSD team presentation focused on the programme experience in bringing systemic challenges to address seed related issues - availability, distribution, quality, coordination and access to credit. It was highlighted that universities have a big role in bringing systemic changes by using a multi-level perspective (influencing policy, introducing innovative technology,). ISSD experience in Direct Seem Marketing (DSM) was given as an example. What is needed?

- Deep understanding of the challenges
- Avoid the recommendation mental setup
- Win the commitment of key stakeholders
- Facilitate process of change (challenges are shared, solutions are owned). Since universities are knowledge hubs working in diverse disciplines and have freedom to look beyond the frame, they are in a position to lead the process.

The followings are extracts from the discussion on current status of different services where participants were given an opportunity to reflect on three statements.

Currently universities do not make optimal use of their resources in outreach.

Agree – 70%

- They are not using it efficiently, since community service is based on willingness and very few staff members and students are engaged.
- The rigid financial and procurement makes it hard to work efficiently.
- Proper attention is not given to monitoring progress.
- University professors are obliged to focus on learning and researches (publications) and not enough incentives is provided to engage in community service programmes.
- We can increase efficiency if we collaborate more with strong partners.

Disagree – 30%

- Universities are using the limited resources provided to them optimally and efficiently. Of course, with more resources they could do more.

The current institutional arrangements of outreach in the universities limit their responsiveness to societal issues.

Agree – 50%

- The institutional arrangement (financial and procurement) is constricting and not flexible enough to respond to community needs.
- Staff members are evaluated by research and teaching and not by engagement in community service.
- Due to lack of monitoring and proper follow up there are issues related to commitment and accountability.

Disagree – 50%

- In most cases, there is a responsible body with special directorate for community service.
- Community service is a mandate of most universities – structure is already there, and the question should be, is it being used efficiently.

Universities have the task to challenge the status-quo of current systems and change paradigms.

Agree - 90%

- Universities should think big changes in terms of influencing policies, facilitating and scaling.
- Instead of targeting reach universities should demonstrate evidences targeting system change needed.
- Quality education is needed to contribute to system changes; therefore universities should pay more attention to quality.

Disagree - 10%

- The current contribution of universities should not be undermined, so it is not about challenging the status-quo but working more efficiently and effectively by providing evidences.
- System change is not only the responsibility of universities. Universities can focus on validating and generating evidences while our partners can take it into the policy arena. It is a process that requires collaboration.



In the afternoon, Dr. Marja Thijssen presented WUR-WCDI business model outreach. In her presentation, she covered the five WCDI value propositions, customer segments, channels used to reach clients, keeping customer relationships, resources, activities, partners, revenue streams, cost structure etc.

She ended her presentation by encouraging the participants to ask how to strengthen the role of universities in agriculture innovation in Ethiopia? How to evaluate outreach model using business model canvas to identify areas of improvement? Are there opportunities to establish separate business units where BENEFIT can offer support in the process?

The last session of the day focused on the future of universities outreach programmes. The participants were divided in four groups to answer two questions on improving responsiveness to society issues and *change paradigms for greater impact?*

How can institutional arrangements of outreach in the universities be improved to increase their responsiveness to society issues - how to be more effective?

- There is knowledge gap in understanding the community outreach programme and more work is needed to clarify and popularize what it means to all stakeholders and communities including the top management of the universities. Harmonize the perspectives regarding community service/ engagement /technology transfer/ outreach programs etc.
- Work on the outreach operational model/clear pathways for each university- with clear definition, clear pathways, focusing on collaboration. The naming and structure of community engagement should be uniform in all universities.
- Put strong emphasis on the outreach programmes. The senate legislation favors only teaching and learning. The current 75% teaching and 25% outreach doesn't work, instead we should start working towards - research 25%, outreach 25, and teaching 50%- starting with Assistant Prof.
- To improve the low weight given to outreach (only 5% in staff promotion), incentivize personal commitment and revise promotion guideline. Voluntary based service makes people look for shortcuts and perform with poor efficiency.
- Hire two categories of staff: teaching focused and research focused.
- Adopt the best practices/ approaches of collaborative projects such as CASCAPE, ISSD etc.
- Allocate more budgets for outreach – enough to support the structure.
- Work on big ideas and at scale initiating mega projects. The usual trend is to focus based on the community request. We need focused and specialized interventions.
- Work with Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation (MoFEC) on how to minimize bureaucracy of the financial system.
- Improve linkage among research, universities and the extension system.
- Revise structure and rearrange existing systems (shape it like Haramaya).
- Encourage collaborative effort and linkage with internal and external stakeholders.
- Give appropriate credit/value for the outreach activities.
- Research activities should fulfill both academic and outreach needs.
- Have clear regular review, monitoring, follow up and evaluation and put supporting structure to enhance accountability (hard + soft rules of the game).
- Finance the community service activities.
- Work with the government to set priority areas (agriculture, health, education).
- Devise policy legal framework with clear guideline on how outreach programmes should function.
- Include community engagement on universities' calendars.

How can universities better challenge the status quo of current system and change paradigms - how to have greater impact?

- Link research with outreach. (e.g. variety development and promoting varieties /royalty fee to be effected)
- Balance budget: construction vs outreach.
- Utilize available knowledge.
- Form think tank groups and national/ regional dialogue and stakeholders forums.
- Develop policy briefs, legitimize/ lobby in the policy arena to influence policy makers.
- Develop Implementation Property Rights (IPR) implementation framework.
- Increase piloting of scientific evidence based practices and approaches.
- Build mutual engagements and networks with diverse stakeholders (inclusiveness).
- Persistence and perseverance.
- Conduct diagnosis of systemic bottlenecks and design improvement modalities.
- Strengthen practical training in participatory planning and implementation of outreach programs.
- Include outreach program in curriculums.
- Share results (data, documentation, impact assessment, quality standards, evidences etc).
- Focus on mega research and applied research that involve qualified professionals.
- Encourage senior staff to give more time for research and outreach programs.
- Focus on specific areas of excellence.
- Work at all levels.

At the end of the symposium the participants agreed for ISSD to prepare a draft synthesis report on the outcome of these discussions, to be presented at the next higher learning institutes, research and extension services linkage meeting planned for July 27, 2018.

The closing remark was given by Prof Fikre Lamesa, President of Jimma University who stressing the relevance of restructuring the way we work to be more efficient and effective to influence policy and decision makers. He added "It is critical we make this a priority and work hard to build consensus and harmonize our common understanding about our outreach programmes, harmonize our efforts to become more effective, and learn from each other to increase the impact of our work. These important discussions are important to guide us in the right direction, to meet the high expectation and support needed from knowledge institutions."