

# ENSP Newsletter

Ethiopia-Netherlands  
**SEEDPARTNERSHIP**



Issue 03, March 2023

## About this newsletter

The purpose of the ENSP newsletter is to provide relevant information on the latest developments and current issues in the Ethiopian seed sector and the partnership support activities.

In this issue we highlight the major activities that have taken place between January and March 2023.

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## Counterfeit Seed: A growing challenge that is threatening the sector in Ethiopia

The problem of fake, counterfeit, or substandard seed in Ethiopia has received little attention. Yet there are substantial indications of the problem as an emerging challenge facing the seed sector. Cognizant of this fact, ENSP has organized stakeholder

workshops at Adama and Bahir Dar to provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss the status of fake seed in Ethiopia. Dr. Mohammed Hassena, ENSP project manager, in his welcoming speech indicated that the problem of counterfeit

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*Mr. Ahmed, Head of Oromia regulatory, making opening speech*

## Dysfunctional plant variety protection in Ethiopia: Professionals' perspective

Plant Variety Protection (PVP) is one of the areas of debate among professionals in the sector. Beyond protecting the right of the breeder, it is also linked to international trade and different countries follow different systems of protection.

Although proclamation 481/2006 was enacted as early as 2006 and it was revised in 2017, so far Plant Breeders' Right (PBR) has not been implemented in Ethiopia.

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## Dysfunctional Plant Variety Protection..

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Many reasons can be listed for the delay of operationalization of PBR. There are also varied perceptions among professionals in the area of PVP implementation in Ethiopia.

While approval of the regulation and capacity of

implementing institutions are priority issues, understanding and exploring the diverse perceptions of professionals is critical to pave the way for implementing PVP. Thus, open discussion will help the government look into the prevailing understanding regarding PVP among professionals and collect feedback for implementing PVP in Ethiopia.

Accordingly, Ethiopia-Netherlands Seed Partnership (ENSP) has organized a workshop for professionals



*Mr. Wondale Habtamu, EAA Deputy Director General, making opening speech*

on December 23rd, 2022 in Bishoftu town. The workshop aimed to set a stage for open professional discussion so as to understand professionals' views and perceptions on PVP and explore possible options to harness the benefits of its implementation. This will break the silence about PVP implementation in Ethiopia and facilitate its operationalization.

Dr. Mohammed Hassena, ENSP project manager, welcomed participants and highlighted the purpose of the workshop. In his opening statement, HE Mr. Wondale Habtamu, DDG of Ethiopian Agricultural Authority (EAA), stated that despite the fact that Ethiopia was one of the first countries to begin agriculture, the sector remains backward. If we want to boost agricultural productivity and production, we must integrate with the global system to support the introduction of new agricultural technologies. For that Mr. Wondale said "A functioning PVP system is required to stimulate breeders and attract investment from competitive commercial seed companies.". Following that, presentations were delivered on the current Ethiopian PVP law and historical perspectives on the development of PVP, respectively by Medemdemyaw Naknike and

Dr. Amsalu Ayana. Following the presentations, participants reflected on the two presentations. The participants were then divided into four groups for discussions based on their background

and affiliation with PVP. The discussion themes emphasized on identifying the advantages and disadvantages of implementing PVP in terms of biodiversity, agricultural production, seed sector development, local/public breeding, local company development, and food/seed sovereignty from the perspective of participants. In addition, participants expressed their feeling regarding the reason why PVP implementation is delayed, and suggested PVP should be framed in terms of farmers' right.

Participants' perception varied with regards to the effect of implementing PVP on the above listed issues. For instance, while some believe implementing PVP may reduce genetic resource pool, others argue that it in fact increases as it creates access for breeders to use protected varieties. Similarly, while some consider implementing PVP increases agricultural production and thus ensures food security, others link it to monopoly and threats to seed/food sovereignty. Thus, there is no consensus as such on the advantages and disadvantages of protecting plant breeders' right.

Despite some variation in perception among

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## Dysfunctional Plant Variety Protection..

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the professionals on the negative and positive impacts of PVP, they all recommended the authority to start implementation. They remarked that during implementation the authority needs to put in place a strong regulatory system.

Ethiopia's accession to the UPOV 91 convention, which restricts farmers' rights and requires a country to protect all genera, is the subject of contentious debate. The main justification offered by those who favor the UPOV 91 convention is that, if varieties are not adequately protected, foreign companies will not be interested in entering the seed market, making the implementation of PVP less relevant. Others contend that farmers should have the right to save, use, and sell seeds of any kind for crops used as staple foods because of the dominance of the informal seed system. Although consensus was not reached, the discussion leaned towards not acceding to the UPOV 91 convention and instead evaluating the effect of implementing a sui generis law on PVP.

Along with the capacity issue, participants discussed why the government has not yet adopted PVP since 2006. They listed several key

reasons for not implementing PVP, including the policy environment, limited commitment of the government and stakeholders, a lack of common understanding among stakeholders, and frustration with its enforcement.

Finally, participants suggested that in order to fully implement PVP, EAA should raise awareness among all pertinent stakeholders, staff itself with qualified technical personnel, create unique incentive strategies for attracting professionals, begin implementation with bilateral agreements/cooperation with actors (such as variety testing using an outsourcing mechanism, purchase/accept DUS test reports...), and strengthen itself with improved infrastructure facilities (lab, testing sites, logistics).

More than 25 representatives from research institutes, Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute, ICARDA, Bioversity International, GIZ, ATI, Ethiopian Agricultural Authority (EAA), private seed companies, senior professionals in the seed sector, ENSP, and consultants participated in the workshop.



Workshop participants attending the meeting



## Exploring the Potential of using HTPS for variety registration in Ethiopia: Consultative workshop

Hybrid True Potato Seed (HTPS) is a new technology that has the potential to revolutionize potato production in Ethiopia. It is not possible to use TPS for potato multiplication mainly because of segregation and the use of tubers has slowed down multiplication and marketing of potato seed. HTPS is believed to solve such problem. As a result, it is critical to explore possible ways of introducing and registering hybrid potato varieties that can be propagated through HTPS in Ethiopia.

In terms of variety release protocol, Ethiopia currently has a protocol for tubers and no practice of registering HTPS. To this end, ENSP organized and facilitated a consultative workshop on January 31st, 2023 at Bishoftu. The objective of the workshop was to present the concept of HTPS, build a shared understanding of its significance among stakeholders, and investigate the feasibility of utilizing HTPS as seed source for variety registration in Ethiopia. The session was attended by more than 19 individuals representing EIAR and RARIs, Solynta seed company, Solagro plc, development partners representatives, and ENSP project staff.

In his introductory remarks, Dr. Mohammed Hassena, ENSP project manager, highlighted the purpose of the consultation session. According to Dr. Mohammed, ENSP is cooperating with local and international private seed companies to enhance Ethiopia's seed sector. One of the international seed firms collaborating with ENSP is Solynta. Solynta is a Dutch potato breeding company that

has developed hybrid potato varieties, has experience of using HTPS as seed source, and has invested in promoting the technology. This company is enthusiastic about introducing and registering its hybrid varieties in Ethiopia through HTPS. Dr. Mohammed added that ENSP organized this consultation meeting with key stakeholders to look into the possibilities of employing HTPS as seed source for variety registration in Ethiopia.

Charles Miller, the commercial director of Solynta made a presentation on the general concept of developing hybrid varieties and its advantage. In his presentation Charles pointed out that the use of HTPS is a new technology that has the potential to revolutionize potato production in Ethiopia. It is a more efficient seed production technique, helps to produce clean and disease-free true seed, and lowers logistic and seeding costs (25-100g TPS vs 2,500kg tubers for 1 ha). Currently, Solynta

has registered 2 varieties in different countries and is planning to register these varieties in Ethiopia. The varieties are meant for table consumption. "The testing will help stakeholders jointly learn how HTPS works" said Charles. Then, participants raised both technical and variety registration related questions, which were thoroughly discussed.

Mr. Fiseha Teshome, Variety release, registration & seed quality control Director of EAA made presentation on the Ethiopian experience in variety registration. His presentation entitled "Variety registration procedure in Ethiopia: Existing and future plan" discussed key pillars of the registration process. Focusing on potato variety registration, Fiseha said that there are 39 potato varieties that have been registered so far. From these varieties only six are registered by private seed companies. He stressed that in the registration mechanism there is no

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*Charles Miller, the commercial director of Solynta*



## Ethio-Netherlands Seed Committee reinitiated

The Ethio-Netherlands Seed Committee (ENS-committee) held its first meeting on February 23, 2023, at the Radisson Blu hotel in Addis Ababa, with the goal of facilitating trade and investment in the seed sector by creating a conducive business environment for international companies.

The Netherlands and Ethiopian governments' cooperation in fostering an environment that is favourable to trade and investment is valued by ENSP. As a result, ENSP set up a forum where the business actors, in particular the international companies and their associations, have opportunity to meet with Ethiopian government officials and discuss barriers to doing business with and in Ethiopia and offer solutions to these hurdles. Roughly the last meeting of this committee was

four years ago. This year, ENSP reinitiated the meeting because of the importance of the committee.

The purpose of the Committee is to create conducive business environment for international companies to contribute to Ethiopian seed sector development. Specifically, it includes identifying hurdles to doing business in Ethiopia, suggesting ways to make it easier to do business, designing and commissioning studies and piloting, strategizing how to scale and institutionalize, and monitoring and evaluating of related projects.

The committee approved the TOR, elected Wondale Habtamu from Ethiopian Agricultural Authority as chairperson and Meeuwes Brouwer from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the

Netherlands as co-chair for the committee. A brief highlight of the ENSP project and EKN Addis activities related to the project were also presented and briefly discussed. In this round of the meeting, the committee focused and openly discussed issues related to forex, variety testing, phytosanitary service among others.

The committee members are not only responsible to attend the quarterly meeting, but also review minutes and documents, provide suggestion as to how the challenges of doing business is solved to advance the committee's objectives. Furthermore, members support dialogue, debate and encourage fellow members to voice their opinions, acknowledge conflicts of interest, respect agreements of confidentiality, establish subcommittees or take up assignments individually whenever needed. The first meeting was concluded by giving assignment to Ethiopian Seed Association to assess and present the forex demand for vegetable seed import. The committee will convene its meeting every quarter and ENSP will continue serving as the secretary to the committee.

The ENS-committee comprises 13 representatives from the Ethiopian Agricultural Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture - Horticulture Development Department, the Agricultural Councillor of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Ethiopian Seed Association, the Ethiopian Horticultural Producers and Exporters Association, international seed companies, HortLIFE, and ENSP.



*Ethio-Netherlands Seed Committee members attending the meeting*



## Counterfeit Seed: a growing challenge...

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seed is increasing. He said the problem was mainly limited to maize in the past, but now it is expanding to the other crops. Further, he expressed that the workshops aimed to facilitate discussion among stakeholders to identify the main types and source of fake seed, explore the extent of expansion, and pave the way for joint action to reduce the problem.

The workshop that was held in Adama was started with an official opening speech made by Mr. Ahmed, Head of Oromia region regulatory. Similarly, the workshop in Bahir Dar was officially opened by Mr. Belete, Deputy head of Amhara region regulatory. In his opening speech Mr. Ahmed mentioned the significant contribution of the ISSD project in the past. He appreciated ENSP as a continuation of ISSD, for its support to strengthen the seed sector. He added that seed counterfeiting is a serious problem and the workshop is a good opportunity to discuss the problem and put a way forward. Similarly, Mr. Belete appreciated the targeted approach of the project in supporting the regional seed regulatory body. He confirmed the prevalence of counterfeit seed in the region, and appreciated the workshop as a good opportunity to discuss the challenge. The main sources of fake seed were then discussed by the participants. They emphasized that all parties throughout the seed value chain contribute to the production and- dissemination of substandard seed in some way. It includes agro-dealers, out growers, producers, brokers, cooperatives, unions, grain traders, politicians, and some unethical government staff. The most common types of seed counterfeiting are repacking rejected seed, stealing seed on farm, adulteration and dressing grain with coloring agents. Reusing certified seed bags for fake seed was mentioned by participants as a common problem; counterfeiters sell low-quality seeds disguised as popular seed varieties in these re-used bags.

Participants also discussed the major factors driving seed counterfeiting in these regions. Participants highlighted a number of systemic challenges in the seed sector that promote the expansion of counterfeiting, including: weak and inadequate regulatory frameworks, insufficient production and supply of certified seeds, regulatory authority capacity limitations, no follow

up mechanism in place, and limited attention and enforcement. A push factor for counterfeit seed was also identified as a lack of awareness among seed producers about the potential harmful consequences of fake seed.

While participants' reactions to the challenge of fake seeds varied, the major challenges raised by participants to combat seed counterfeiting were: limited capacity of regulatory bodies to effectively manage the problem, political leaders' intervention, weak linkage among stakeholders' and actors, and changing behaviour of seed brokers. According to participants, increasing the production and supply of certified seed can help to alleviate the problem of fake seed. Genuine seeds, which are supplied and managed by responsible seed producers and licensed distributors, help to ensure crop quality. To fight the threat, regulatory authorities' capacity should be strengthened and collaboration with other sectors should be strengthened. Coffee marketing regulation was raised as an example, where there is a reward system for combatting illegal coffee marketing. Participants indicated that if the strategy is adopted, meaningful transformation can be made in the seed sector.

Finally, the workshops participants stressed counterfeit seed has negative impact on the seed sector in many ways. The fake seeds in branded packaging cause a loss of trust. It compromises the effectiveness of efforts to enhance the adoption of improved varieties since farmers will have no way of knowing whether the seed they buy is genuine. So, governments must ensure that legislation deters illegal seed practices effectively and consistently. Without legal mechanisms in place, counterfeit seeds might risk the livelihood of many farmers and the seed sector.

The workshops were held on February 6th and 9th, 2023 in Adama and Bahirdar, respectively. More than 44 individuals from Oromia, South, Amhara, Sidama, Benishanguel Gumuz regions and federal institutes took part.





## A state-of-the-art seed producing companies in Ethiopia visited

Staff from the ENSP project and a Plantum representative visited two cutting-edge seed producing companies: Nunhems, which is situated in the Amhara region close to Arerti town, and Solagrow PLC, a potato seed producer company situated around Bishoftu city.

Ben Depraetere, Managing Director of Nunhems Ethiopia PLC and Country Head of BASF's vegetable seed business in Ethiopia, welcomed the guests and provided a brief overview of the facility, which is BASF's first high-tech greenhouse complex in Africa and provides an ideal year-round production condition for sweet pepper, tomato, cucumber, and watermelon. He continues by explaining that the company is producing some vegetables seed in the greenhouse and on farmers' fields as out-growers. The company expanded its operations to other parts of the country, including Bahir Dar, Modjo, SNNPR, and Tigray regions. In expanding the operation, it transfers knowledge and skills to out-growers in the respective areas by demonstrating drip irrigation methods, mulch application, and seed production using net cages. Furthermore, through demonstrations and trainings, the company is introducing new vegetable varieties, integrated pest management practices, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The company created 70 permanent and more than 100 seasonal employment opportunities.

The delegates visited various areas of the facility, including



the fully automated climate control system, which includes humidity, heating, and irrigation. They also visited the seed and pollen extraction rooms, seed storage, waste disposal, and other facilities.

Following the visit, the delegates discussed the challenges of the company, the collaboration with ENSP project, the role of Ethiopian Seed Association (ESA) in supporting its members in particular and the sector in general, the ambition of the company in the coming ten years, among others. Ben mentioned scarcity of water, shortage of hard currency, and the political instability are the main challenges facing the company.

The delegation then visited Solagrow PLC, where Jan van de Haar, country agent for HZPC, briefed them on the company's operations. He stated that, despite facing various challenges, the PLC has made a

significant contribution to the country's potato seed tuber production system since its inception in 2006. Solagrow PLC is currently a sustainable source of potato seed tubers of various varieties for potato producing farmers by multiplying mini-tubers with stem-cuttings. The company also intends to demonstrate various potato-related technologies at eight demonstration sites during this irrigation season. Jan stated that, in addition to seed, Solagrow transfers skills and knowledge to surrounding producers. It also offered 34 young people with employment opportunities.

The two seed producing companies are among the seven international seed companies selected to partner with ENSP. The ENSP delegates appreciated the two companies for hosting the visit, and reaffirmed their commitment to work together.



## ENSP advisory board meeting

Are we doing the right things and are we doing things right? These are fundamental learning questions for any impact driven organization and ENSP is no exception. On Wednesday February 22nd, ENSP convened its first Advisory Board meeting, bringing representatives of the public and private sectors from Ethiopia and the Netherlands together to help answer these questions. "We value the strategic advice of these policy makers and practitioners for the success of the programme and its alignment with key interests. Identifying opportunities for synergy and benefiting from an enabling environment that these stakeholders can contribute to is part of this" reports Gareth Borman, coordinator of ENSP from Wageningen Cen-

tre for Development Innovation. Project manager, Mohammed Hassena, complements, "the tone of our discussions was encouragingly positive; we expect to have a constructive collaboration with these knowledgeable individuals over the coming years." Comprising the ENSP Advisory Board are representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopian Agricultural Authority, Ethiopian Seed Association, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ethiopia, Plantum, and of course management of ENSP. SeedNL – a partnership in the Netherlands between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, Plantum (the seed association), and NAO (potato association) – is the seventh and final member. They will help hold ENSP to account in

achieving its goals.

Whilst getting to know each other and ENSP's objectives was an important purpose for their first meeting, Advisory Board members also discussed their role in the strategic guidance of the project, evaluated current progress and plans for the coming year, and identified structural constraints to achieving ENSP's outcomes. It was agreed that not all issues are within their scope of influence and control, and therefore members will use their access to strategic networks to raise such concerns with those willing and able to contribute to change. On that hopeful note, the meeting was concluded.

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## Exploring the Potential of using HTTPS...

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protocol on how to register potato varieties using HTTPS. Amended proclamation provides three different alternatives for variety registration which will alleviate some of the problems.

In the conclusion of the workshop, Charles Miller appreciated participants for the positive and open-minded discussion. In his concluding remark, Fiseha appreciated ENSP for organizing and facilitating the workshop. He also said that the authority is ready to work with Solynta to bring and register better hybrid varieties which will transform the potato production at country level. He also said seed companies can apply for registration online through the authority's platform.

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ENSP is a project hosted by

Stichting Wageningen Research (SWR) Ethiopia



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