

ENSP Newsletter

Ethiopia-Netherlands
SEEDPARTNERSHIP



Issue 05, October 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 July and October 2023.

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Variety Testing for Registration Pilot Moving Forward

The Ethiopian Agricultural Authority (EAA) is taking a significant step towards transforming the seed sector in Ethiopia. In collaboration with the Ethiopia Netherlands Seed Partnership (ENSP) and the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), the EAA is making strides in improving national variety performance testing and registration.

To begin this initiative, a pilot project was implemented for wheat. It was conducted in selected research centres across the country and coordinated by the Kulumsa Agricultural Research Centre, which played a pivotal role as a collaborating centre for the implementation.

To provide a comprehensive evaluation of the new variety

registration and release system, ENSP organized a field visit to DUS (Distinctiveness, Uniformity, and Stability) and NPT (National Performance Trials) testing sites representing lowland, mid altitude, and highland areas under the DebreZeit and Kulumsa agricultural research centres.

The aim was to give participants a first-hand experience of the pilot project's management and showcase the progress achieved so far. The field visit was conducted for two days, from October 11th to 12th, 2023, and covered NPT and DUS being implemented at Debrezeit research centre, Kulumsa research centre, and Bekoji and Dhera sub-stations.

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The visit provided a unique opportunity for participants to observe first-hand the wheat variety performance testing being conducted and to engage with breeders and other key stakeholders in the seed sector. This allowed for a productive exchange of ideas and perspectives on how to further improve the variety registration and release system. National crop research coordinators and representatives for wheat, barley, chickpea, potato, sorghum, lowland and highland pulse breeding attended the field tour. At the end of the field visit, participants reflected that the pilot project is a big step forward. The breeders noted their anticipation that EAA's independent role in variety testing and validation sets the stage for intense competition among breeders and public breeding institutions. However, they underlined that this competition will ultimately enable superior and best-performing varieties to be registered and released. This

situation will encourage public research institutes to think of international markets for their varieties.

Participants also emphasized the importance of documenting the challenges and lessons learned from implementing the pilot. They stressed that EAA should identify key stakeholders and partners, raise awareness at all levels, including policy makers, and establish consensus. They suggested that the upcoming agricultural research review forums which will be organized by EIAR would be the best platform to introduce researchers to the new variety registration system by EAA. With over 1,500 crop varieties registered in the country, ensuring their availability to end-users is crucial. However, Mr. Fisha Teshome, the Plant Variety and Seed Regulatory Lead Executive at EAA, points out that many of these varieties

have not reached end-users, and their status remains uncertain. The majority of these registered varieties have not undergone the Distinctiveness, Uniformity, and Stability (DUS) test. This test plays a pivotal role in determining whether a variety is distinct from others, consistent in its characteristics, and stable over time. Without the DUS test, evaluating the quality of a variety, assessing its suitability for diverse growing conditions, and considering its export potential to foreign markets becomes challenging.

Mr. Fiseha further explains, given that Ethiopia has signed the regional variety registration harmonization agreement of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), breeders should take into account the potential market in neighbouring countries for their varieties. Mr. Fiseha stressed that



ENSP Mid-Term Evaluation: lessons to shape future focus areas

Partnerships are essential in the agricultural industry for promoting innovation and sustainable development. The ENSP project is a prime example of such a partnership, dedicated to guiding seed sector transformation in Ethiopia. A mid-term evaluation was conducted to assess its progress and impact, providing valuable lessons for future focus areas.

Mid Term review of ENSP project was done considering its relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the project. The team confirmed its relevance to agricultural development goals in Ethiopia. By targeting critical challenges in the sector, the ENSP project has the potential to significantly improve agricultural productivity and contribute to food security in Ethiopia. Efforts to improve the seed sector are commendable and can enhance agricultural productivity and food security. Support is focused on private sector capacity, skill development, and collaboration with universities. ENSP's support to the Ethiopian Agricultural Authority is also recognized by the review team.

The mid-term evaluation has also revealed promising endeavours in terms of the project's effectiveness. The support provided to the Ethiopian Seed Association (ESA), including capacity building initiatives with a

gradual decline in support, has enabled the association to commence functioning. Several international companies have expanded their market presence by utilizing interns. The facilitation and linkage between companies and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) have been instrumental in granting companies access to forage germplasm, thereby minimizing their dependence on public varieties. Furthermore, this linkage has facilitated a connection to dairy farmers, contributing to sustainable business practices. Certain companies are striving to acquire varieties from sources beyond solely relying on public varieties. Similarly, coordination among different seed projects has helped avoid overlapping activities and enhanced implementation effectiveness as various projects work together towards a common goal.

The review team indicated that ENSP collaborates with government entities such as the Ministry of Agriculture

(MoA), EAA, and universities, as well as private sector stakeholders such as seed and seedling producers and seed associations. Capacity-building efforts and support remain focused on these partners. Private companies exhibit heightened enthusiasm for engaging in seed business activities, and with improvements in regulatory systems and access to finance, they are eager to strengthen their businesses, thereby ensuring the sustainability of ENSP's efforts. Similarly, efforts to enhance technical capacity building among professionals and interns are ongoing within the system.

In the process of implementation, there were also lessons that ENSP learned. Although there was an intention to include women-owned businesses, few were able to meet the selection criteria. As a result, a different approach involving business incubation

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this approach will not only be advantageous for the breeders themselves but will also contribute to the overall advancement of agriculture in the region.

Moving forward, it is crucial for all stakeholders involved in this initiative to continue working together, sharing knowledge and expertise, and addressing any

challenges that may arise. By doing so, Ethiopia can establish a robust variety registration system that empowers farmers and contributes to sustainable agricultural development in the country.

In conclusion, the pilot project on national variety performance testing for registration for bread wheat, supported by ENSP, is making significant

progress. Through field visits and stakeholder engagement, this initiative aims to raise awareness about the importance of variety registration by an independent legal authority. By ensuring farmers have access to high-quality crop varieties, Ethiopia's seed sector can thrive, contributing to food security and sustainable development.

Contextualizing Seed Science and Technology curriculum that aligns with the needs of the seed sector in Ethiopia

Ansha Nure is a skill and career development expert at Ethiopia Netherlands Seed Partnership project. As part of her responsibilities, she facilitated the process of revising the SST curriculum of Bahirdar and Haramaya Universities. In this article, we delve into her reflections on the review process, the key elements that were scrutinized, and the significant improvements that were implemented.

Can you describe the process of reviewing the MSc in Seed Science and Technology curriculum?

The process of the curriculum review is a response to the dynamic nature of the seed sector and the demand of the labour market. The ENSP project, in collaboration with Haramaya and Bahir Dar Universities, has initiated the curriculum review of Seed Science and Technology (SST) to enhance the quality and relevance of the existing curriculum. The consultation meeting with relevant stakeholders and professionals of the seed sector provided valuable feedback to assess the gaps and propose strategies to review the curriculum. The teams from Bahir Dar and Haramaya universities prepared a draft curriculum individually, incorporating feedback from the consultation workshop.

Tracer and need assessment studies were conducted to assess the perception of former graduates and employers. The draft curriculum was presented for the university communities during the internal curriculum review workshop, and a national curriculum review workshop was organized to get feedback from the wider community. The final curriculum is expected to be effective in the coming academic year (2023-24) after endorsement by the senates of the universities.

What were the major elements of the curriculum that were reviewed?

During the review process, the team thoroughly assessed the seed science and technology curriculum to ensure that it met the latest industry standards and best practices. The review focused on the major elements of the curriculum, including seed biology, genetics, seed business, and regulatory frameworks related to seed. The review team also attempted to address the demands of the labor market in the seed sector by focusing on practical skills and balancing different aspects of seed science and technology such as policy, governance, marketing, and quality. The curriculum was designed to equip students with practical skills that will enable them to thrive in the seed industry.

How was the feedback from stakeholders, alumni, and faculty incorporated into the curriculum review?

The universities have received detailed advice and feedback from alumni, stakeholders, and faculty members regarding the Seed Science and Technology curriculum. In addition, the curriculum reviewers, who possess extensive academic and professional experience, have provided significant input and guidance to enrich the curriculum further. The

universities have taken into account the inputs from various sources and have endeavored to prepare a refined SST curriculum. The incorporation of these inputs is expected to enhance the quality of education in the field of SST and equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their careers.

What improvements were made to the curriculum as a result of the review?

A visible and significant improvement has been made to the current curriculum of Seed Science and Technology, as a result of the review. The revised curriculum has addressed the gaps in the old curriculum and is now market-responsive, catering to the demands of the industry. The curriculum now includes contemporary ideas, themes, and perceptions, which will widen the knowledge and skills of the graduates. The overall improvement in the curriculum will strengthen the seed system and focus more on practical skills. As part of the training, an internship will be integrated to provide students with hands-on experience. These changes will ensure that graduates are well-equipped to meet the demands of the industry and contribute to its growth. The revised curriculum is a step towards creating a more skilled workforce that can drive innovation and progress in the field of SST.

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Stakeholders consulted on proposed regulatory service fees

The Ethiopian Agricultural Authority (EAA) has taken a significant step towards enhancing its services, to this end the authority revised its regulatory service fees. The authority has revised its regulatory service fees, a move that is expected to have a positive impact on the quality and effectiveness of agricultural regulatory services in the country. To ensure transparency and inclusivity, the EAA organized a validation workshop to discuss the proposed regulatory service fees with stakeholders. Before proposing the revision of the service fees, the authority conducted an assessment and consulted with key players in the industry. The assessment aimed to take into account the current market rate, as the existing service fees were set thirty years ago.

During the opening speech,

Mr. Wondale Habtamu, the EAA Deputy DG, highlighted that the current service fees are significantly lower than the market price. He emphasized that for the authority to offer effective and satisfactory services to its customers, it needs to capacitate itself. This can be achieved by collecting fair income for the services provided. Mr. Wondale added that with the revised fees the authority will work hard to provide more streamlined and efficient service to its customers and other stakeholders in the sector.

The study team presented their findings regarding the proposed new rates for the services provided by the EAA. As per proclamation number 509/2014, the authority is authorized to collect income for the services it renders. In order to revise the service fees, the team looked into experiences

from other countries. The team's efforts were aimed at ensuring that the new rates are fair, reasonable, and in line with industry standards.

The team explained that the proposed service fees were done with careful consideration of various factors. The team took into account transportation costs, laboratory test and input costs, office supplies and printing costs, as well as supervision costs. These factors were thoroughly analyzed to ensure that the fees are reasonable and fair for both the authority and its customers. The team also evaluated other relevant expenses to ensure that the fees are reflective of the actual costs incurred in providing the service.

For instance, for variety registration (NPT/DUS test at six locations), the cost elements include land rent, farm input, labor cost, daily subsistence allowance for EAA staffs traveling for supervision, fuel, and other costs. Summing up all these costs, the team has proposed 266,000 ETB for variety registration. However, participants argued that some of the proposed costs are not clear, and need specific descriptions. All in all participants acknowledged that the current service fees are very low and most of the proposed service fees seem fair.

It is commendable that the Ethiopian Agricultural Authority is taking proactive measures to enhance its services. The



Mr. Wondale Habtamu, EAA DDG, making opening speech

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Contextualizing Seed Science and Technology...

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How has the updated curriculum better prepared students for careers in seed science and technology?

The curriculum enhancement aims to improve the education system and equip graduates with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their competencies in various aspects of the seed industry. The revised curriculum is designed to broaden the trainees' expertise and skills, with a particular focus on Seed business management, seed policy, regulation, ethics, and internship.

Students undergoing the revised curriculum will gain access to the most relevant and up-to-date information about the seed business. The revised curriculum will provide graduates with opportunities to utilize the competencies acquired from the SST's revised curriculum to boost their future careers.

The curriculum enhancement is a significant step towards strengthening the education system and ensuring that graduates are adequately equipped to face the challenges of the seed industry. The emphasis on the diverse aspects of seed will help graduates become successful professionals in the seed industry.

Were there any challenges faced during the curriculum review process? If so, how were they addressed?

During the curriculum review process, ENSP and the curriculum review committee faced several challenges



Ansha Nure, skill and career development expert

that impeded progress. These challenges include the unavailability of committee members due to their busy schedules, political instability in some parts of the country, financial issues faced by universities, the replacement of committee members and coordinators, difficulties in transferring financial resources, and varying levels of progress between the two universities.

To overcome these challenges, ENSP and curriculum review committee took several measures. They provided regular follow-ups and encouragement to the committee members to keep them engaged in the review process. The timetable was revised to accommodate any delays caused by unforeseen circumstances. Different schedules were arranged for the two universities to ensure that there was uniformity in the progress made. New ideas and suggestions were welcomed from committee members to ensure that the review process was comprehensive and inclusive.

In some cases, university presidents were engaged to resolve financial transfer issues that were hindering progress. Additional funding was provided when necessary to ensure that the review process was not interrupted due to financial constraints. By taking these measures, ENSP and curriculum review committee demonstrated their commitment to ensuring that the curriculum review process advance in the right direction.

Can you discuss any new courses or areas of focus that were added to the curriculum after the review?

To revise the curriculum, several courses were modified, merged, or deleted, and new courses were added. The new courses introduced

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include seed production technology, seed health management, seed system and marketing, seed health and post-harvest handling, scientific writing and seminar presentation, resilient agriculture, ethics, seed business management, and seminars on specific thematic areas. It also includes new courses: Internship and Seed, Gender and Nutrition Security, Seed System Handling (as an elective course). However, to make room for these new courses, Advanced Soil Fertility Management was omitted from the list of old curricula. The addition of new courses and the removal of outdated ones ensure that students receive a

comprehensive education that is relevant to current industry needs.

What plans are in place to continue evaluating and improving the curriculum in the future?

The reviewed curriculum may not be able to fully meet the demands of the seed sector, due to the limited number of courses and credit hours allotted for each course. In order to address these demands, short-term training will be designed and delivered to fill the professional gaps in SST. The short-term trainings will be designed to complement the existing curriculum and provide

students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their careers. ENSP promised to support the design and delivery of the short courses.

We anticipate that the revised curriculum will receive approval from both university senates, allowing the commencement of course delivery in the near future. It is important to note that curriculum review is a continuous effort that requires periodic evaluation and amendment. Therefore, the implementation and effectiveness of the reviewed curriculum will be periodically assessed to ensure that it keeps pace with the latest advancements in the sector.

ENSP Mid-Term Evaluation...

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was employed to incorporate women-owned businesses. Similarly, the initial open call for applications for postgraduate study and research sponsorship failed to attract sufficient female applicants. In the subsequent rounds affirmative actions were taken to include more female students. For certain value chains, such as leafy vegetables, identifying a large aggregator proved challenging, necessitating adaptations to align with existing circumstances. The capacity of EAA was initially overestimated in terms of assuming responsibility for variety testing and registration, leading to the adoption of a pilot outsourcing approach.

The review team has provided suggestions for the ENSP team to consider. These suggestions include:

- Exploring different ways to involve women in seed business activities.
- Increasing efforts to reach the goal of assisting 15 thousand farmers.
- Establishing a seed coordination system.
- Promoting collaboration among projects.
- Improving seed production practices.
- Offering internship programs for graduate students to enhance their knowledge and skills.
- Prioritizing the ratification of seed-related policies.

Overall, based on the review findings, it is evident that progress is being made in the right direction. However, this

does not imply that everything is flawless, as there are still limitations encountered during project implementation that deviate from initial expectations. Initiating a project is often accompanied by unforeseen challenges that require time to align new partners with shared objectives. Additionally, limitations in capacity and internal motivation among certain stakeholders impede implementation speed. Lastly, security challenges within the country have had some impact on project implementation. Despite these obstacles, the review team's conclusion regarding project implementation remains positive. This encouragement serves as motivation for the team to achieve even more during the remaining project period.



Stakeholders consulted on proposed regulatory ...

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revision of service fees is a crucial step towards achieving this goal. It will not only enable the authority to improve its capacity but also ensure that local and international seed companies, agro-input importers, public seed enterprises, and other industry players receive value for their money.

The revision of service fees is a step in the right direction towards enhancing the quality of services provided by the Ethiopian Agricultural Authority. ENSP supported the initiative anticipating that this will lead to increased efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery, ultimately benefiting the agricultural sector and the country as a whole.

The workshop was conducted on July 31, 2023 at Bishouftu. It was attended by various stakeholders including

seed and agr-input importers and distributors, public seed enterprises, Ethiopia Seed Association, Agriculture Transformation Institute (ATI), Ministry of Finance, EAA, ENSP, and other industry players. The participants engaged in fruitful

discussions and expressed their opinions on the proposed service fee revisions. The study team and EAA officials took note of all the feedback and assured the stakeholders that their concerns would be considered in the final decision-making process.



The workshop participants

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