RAISE-FS two pager

Extension Services for Food System Transformation

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

February, 2026

RAISE-FS has played a significant role in enhancing Ethiopia's agricultural extension system. By improving service quality and effectiveness, it helps farmers access knowledge and adopt innovative practices and technologies. This briefs highlights RAISE-FS's efforts in supporting agricultural advisory services in Ethiopia.

Introduction

Agricultural extension plays a crucial role in agricultural development and the transformation of food systems. This service is essential for promoting the adoption of improved farm technologies and practices, which can significantly enhance productivity and contribute to food and nutrition security. Ethiopia has one of the densest agricultural extension systems in the world, featuring approximately 72,000 development agents and 14,000 farmer/pastoral training centres. This extensive system plays a vital role in delivering agricultural knowledge and information directly to farmers. Nevertheless, despite having a strong extension system, there are significant gaps in service delivery. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the **major challenges facing the Ethiopian extension system** include: top-down planning, one-size-fits-all approaches, inadequate customized extension content, limited demand-driven services, poor linkage among value chain actors, insufficient evidence-based practices, lack of innovation bundle practices, limited innovation capacity, public-dominant extension services, limited market-oriented extension services and limited delivery modes. Addressing these challenges is essential for **enhancing the effectiveness of agricultural extension services** and **ensuring they better meet the needs** of farming households.

RAISE-FS' experience in the extension system

RAISE-FS has significantly contributed to improving the agricultural extension system in Ethiopia. Through various approaches, initiatives and activities, RAISE-FS has focused on enhancing the effectiveness and quality of extension services, ultimately aiming to support farmers in getting access to new knowledge and adopting innovative agricultural practices and technologies.

RAISE-FS has showcased a number of relevant innovations related to the national agricultural extension services, amongst others (i) the identification of leverage points for agricultural development using evidence-based integrated development planning, (ii) testing and validation of a food system approach in agricultural extension messaging, (iii) demonstration of evidence in agricultural marketing extension, (iv) demonstration of evidence of innovations in the area of improved practices through innovation bundles, and (v) demonstration of evidence of innovations as input to strengthen the enabling environment relevant for enhanced agricultural extension services.

1. Addressing the complex challenges of the extension system requires evidence-based agricultural development planning, locally defined priorities, and interventions. Accordingly, RAISE-FS has **tested** and **validated a bottom-up planning** and **participatory action research approach** that e**ngages farming households** and **other stakeholders** in **identifying** and **prioritizing key challenges** and **leverage points** within specific areas. This approach engages farming households to reflect on constraints and opportunities for agricultural development and identify potential innovations to test and promote at farm-level. This has facilitated the generation of endogenous and grassroots innovations and community-driven solutions that can be scaled up to benefit a broader farming population.

2. RAISE-FS **integrated** and **operationalized** a **food system-oriented approach** within the extension system. This innovative approach takes a systems perspective on agriculture and rural development through embedding the food systems perspective into the extension messages that extend beyond the production domain by including elements such as value addition and postharvest, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), marketing, seed systems, gender equality and social inclusion, healthy diets for nutrition and food safety. By comprehensively bundling socially relevant and technologically suitable innovations RAISE-FS designed innovations and respective extension

messages that address systemic issues and ensure that agricultural practices are sustainable and inclusive, addressing not only the economic aspects of farming but also the social and nutritional needs of the community.

3. RAISE-FS has played an instrumental role in promoting **market-oriented extension** and **advisory services**, **tailored for smallholder farming households**. Market-oriented extension builds on the idea that, while increasing farm productivity is essential, it does not automatically lead to improved incomes for farming households unless it is integrated into an inclusive value chain that is sustainably connected to markets. To address this, RAISE-FS focused on creating and strengthening market linkages between producers and consumers or processors for specific commodities, such as sesame, soya, lentils, and potatoes. By fostering these connections, farmers are better positioned to access lucrative markets, thereby enhancing their income potential. Furthermore, the development of value chain-based multi stakeholder platforms that focus on specific commodities was supported. For example, dedicated platforms for potatoes and sesame have been established. These platforms facilitate collaboration among stakeholders, including farmers, processors, and market representatives, enabling them to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.

4. RAISE-FS has been supporting the agricultural extension system by providing **evidence-based information** and **manuals** to support the implementation of **commodity-specific innovation bundles**. This information is designed to offer development agents and farming households practical, science-backed insights for improving crop productivity and sustainability. Through these initiatives, RAISE-FS not only supports agricultural productivity but also empowers extension experts by equipping them with the knowledge necessary for sustainable farming practices.

5. Host-follower farmer and scaling readiness approaches have been used to demonstrate and scale agricultural innovations together with diverse local stakeholders. These approaches have helped coordinate efforts to reach a large number of farmers and facilitate knowledge and skill transfer. Organizing training sessions, field days, and experience-sharing events for farming households has been instrumental for inclusive dissemination of knowledge and skills.

6. RAISE-FS has been involved in assessments to **generate policy evidence** to support the extension system, including in depth studies focusing on agricultural messaging, fertilizer alerts, seed alerts, pesticide use lifecycle and one-health approach. The study on agricultural messaging, for instance, identified major challenges in agricultural communication, including a lack of dedicated media, limited stakeholder participation, and inadequate alignment between messages and farmers' realities. These insights highlight the importance of establishing agricultural-focused media outlets and creating a collaborative platform for stakeholders, alongside training programs for agricultural journalism.

7. RAISE-FS has been actively supporting the Ministry of Agriculture by **providing tested** and **validated evidence**, **technical assistance** and **capacity-building** in the development and implementation of extension policies and policy instruments, i.e. Pluralistic extension proclamation, Agricultural and rural development policy, National Livestock and Fisheries Extension Strategy and Roadmap, Postharvest strategy, Food Systems Transformation Training Manual, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework and Indicators for the Ethiopian Food Systems Transformation Pathway. In addition, RAISE-FS has played a crucial role in **fostering linkages** among research institutions, universities, and extension systems. By bridging these entities, SWR Ethiopia enhances the **flow of knowledge** and **information**, facilitating the development and dissemination of **innovative agricultural practices**. This collaboration allows for the integration of research findings into practical applications that benefit farmers directly.

Key publications

Woreda food system profiles
Woreda food system profiles (Amhara, Oromia, South, Tigray)

Using a food systems approach in practice: The case of lentil innovation in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia.
Lentil experience paper

Analyzing Agricultural Messaging in Ethiopian Media: Strategies for Improvement.

For more information, please contact:

Dr. Dawit Alemu
Stichting Wageningen Research - Ethiopia
dawit.alemu@wur.nl

Dr. Irene Koomen
Wageningen Social and Economic Research
irene.koomen@wur.nl