RAISE-FS one pager

Seed as an essential ingredient for food system transformation

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RAISE-FS enhances seed availability, boosts productivity, improves land use, optimizes fertilizer use (organic and synthetic), and integrates pest management, promoting sustainable, inclusive agriculture in Ethiopia.

Importance of seed in the Ethiopian agriculture and food system

Seed is the fundamental agricultural input, without which crop production is impossible. Seed, in addition, determines and affects the resilience and quality of all agricultural production practices. Millions of farmers in Ethiopia access seed of different crops for their livelihood through different seed systems, which complement each other. The Ethiopian formal seed system is yet at infant stage as the process of transforming from its initial objective of supplying seed to state owned farms in the state-driven command economy towards a market-based seed business took long time. As a result, seeds from the formal seed system currently cover less than 20% of the cropped land in the country and predominantly focus on a couple of dominant cereals, and the majority of the crop land is covered from the informal seed system affecting agricultural productivity.

Seed as a means to build resilience

Well-functioning seed systems, understood as the entire complex web of actors and processes to supply seed to farmers, are not only important to supply quality seed and increase agricultural productivity, they also affect how the agricultural sector withstands shocks. Seed is also essential to build back production aftershocks and stressors induced by conflict and natural disasters. The Ethiopian seed sector is not strong enough to supply quality seed to the farming community as well as adequately respond to the different shocks including climate change effects and frequently changing policies and strategies. On the other hand, Ethiopia possesses significant potential to enhance its agricultural productivity by using high-quality seeds of locally adapted improved varieties of diverse crops adaptive to both tropical and temperate climatic conditions. As indicated above, these require vibrant seed systems that adequately address the demand at local and regional levels.

Food system transformation needs a reliable supply of quality seed

SWR Ethiopia has over 15 years of experiences in R4D in the Ethiopian seed sector development and has played a key role in the process of improving the performance of Ethiopian seed sector through a range of initiatives and projects, most recently the Ethiopia Seed Partnership (ESP) and the Resilient Agriculture for Inclusive & Sustainable Ethiopian Food System (RAISE-FS).

Bottom-up food system assessment and planning process in RAISE-FS have illustrated that poor access to quality and diverse seed has been and continues to be a major bottleneck for farming households in different regions, which has resulted in low productivity, and economic losses for farming households. Various assessments, vegetable seed in Amhara, the seed supply system in Tigray, have identified the bottlenecks that need addressing to be able to scale up tested innovation bundles. RAISE-FS demonstrated approaches that enhanced local availability of quality seed for crops not supported in the formal seed system such as for potato, faba bean, carrot and onion. The project also promoted diversified production of home garden vegetables to enhance diversified consumption. The lesson is that small quantities of seed are also required for allowing households to continue with home gardens, however, small seed packages are currently not available in the market.

Key publications

- Potato seed system in Ethiopia: challenges, opportunities, and leverage points
- The Seed System in Amhara Region: Assessing the Current Status and Charting Strategic Future
- Unravelling Challenges in Vegetable Seed System in Amhara Region
- Current Status of Seed System and Actions for Its Revitalization and Transformation in Tigray