



**Consultancy to evaluate the Regional Food Security Program in Ethiopia for the Regional Food Security Project: Improving food security and economic empowerment for smallholder farmers in Ethiopia, Malawi and Mozambique**

**Mid-Term Evaluation**

**(Draft Report)**

**Regional Food Security Program in Ethiopia for the Regional Food Security Project: Improving food security and economic empowerment for smallholder farmers in Ethiopia, Malawi and Mozambique**

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**December, 2017**

## **Executive Summary**

This report presents the findings, lessons learned, best practice, conclusions and recommendations of the midterm evaluation of the project ' *Improving food security, nutrition, income and livelihoods for smallholder farmers in Ethiopia* '.

The objective of the review was to assess if the project had achieved what it set out to achieve as well as provide recommendations to improve on areas that did not work well. The specific objectives were:

- To determine efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability, including progress towards project outcomes
- To assess Value for Money of the project (efficiency, effectiveness, economy, partnerships and equity)
- To provide information to further plan and improve the regional project, and
- Identify lessons learnt and best practice from the project which could be applied to improve the project as well as other similar projects in the region

A mixed method approach involving document reviews, household surveys, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, field observations, partnership health assessment, and case stories was employed. The Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework was used to assess the value for money for food security outcome of the project. A rapid assessment of potato value chains in the project area was also carried out. A total 636 household interviews were conducted. 8 FGDs, 35 KIIs and 12 case stories were also done.

## **Key findings**

- The project is appropriate and very relevant to the target communities and is in line with government priorities
- The project is highly effective. Its interventions have being carefully selected and implemented to deliver the desired change
- The project has a clear sustainability strategy that is in-built into its design to ensure outcomes outlive the project. From the outset it did not create a donor dependency syndrome among the community members. The project is partnering with Government departments in implementation of project activities to ensure sustainability after the lapse of the project. It also has a strong emphasis on skills transfer and capacity building which will ensure that the community will continue with activities even after the project ends. In addition, the project has also invested in strengthening of community assets e.g. DLSs, ware potato stores, and irrigation capacity of some farmers cooperatives. It also facilitated formation and strengthening of QDPM committees in collaboration with the local relevant government offices at woreda and kebele level to facilitate the inspection of seed potato production.
- The project deliberately targeted 30% of the project participants to be women. It did not specifically target either children or people living with disability to participate in the project as this was beyond the scope of the project. The project did not discriminate against any of these groups.
- Case stories show that the project has improved livelihoods of participants

- The overall Value for Money rating for the food security outcome was good, with a value of 5.6:1. The project has invested and appropriately used resources to ensure it has successfully used resources to deliver on the food security outcome.
- The two target sites are still operating below their potential yield levels and hence still have room for growth and further expansion. The value chain is under developed and uncoordinated.

### **Lessons Learned**

Our analysis highlights the following lessons:

- Choice of suitable land for seed production is key to successful seed production
- Bacterial wilt must be avoided at all costs, as its negative impact on sustainable potato production is huge
- Markets must be addressed otherwise farmers will have little incentive to continue producing the crop when production eventually expands
- Irrigation is necessary to ensure year round production
- The projects exit strategy should be clearly communicated to primary project beneficiaries at beginning of the project to avoid development of dependency syndrome
- Learning from the Chenchu experience informed the implementation of the project in Amhara and saved time and poor performance in the new area
- Food preparation is a critical issue to improve diversified dietary habits and was a useful entry point for the involvement of women in the project
- A quality declare system (QDS) is an important mechanism minimize spread of seed-borne diseases thereby contributing to improved production and productivity
- Development of a seed system requires multiple interventions and time, as well as collaboration among stakeholder owing to the complexities associated with seed systems
- Bringing together, science, development and business appears to pay good dividends in efforts to develop equitable potato value chains
- Training and technical support to farmers is critical to the sustainability of seed production
- Development of a value chain takes time
- The role of a zonal potato board in guiding potato producers in production and distribution of clean and quality seed is very important
- Working with local government structures is important for project sustainability

### **Best practices from the project include:**

- Assessing potential risks and mitigation factors during project design to facilitate project success and broad-based impact using of time bound subsidies/support to avoid creating dependency on project support
- Undertaking capacity building to enhance farmer's skills
- Improving access to quality seed using a partnership approach between NGOS, Research, government extension services and farmer's seed growing co-operatives
- Planting improved varieties for higher, more stable yields and increased income
- Using the 'negative selection' technique to improve quality of seed produced by seed multipliers

- Using dedicated extension officers to support farmers during introduction of new technologies to enhance adoption
- Using dark storage with good ventilation for safe and longer storage of ware potatoes in order to improve food security and enable farmers to obtain better prices as well as to ensure a steady supply of potatoes to the market
- Improving seed quality and access by promoting quality declared seed systems
- Using DLS as an option for small holder farmers and farmer co-operatives to store their seed
- Using mobile plant health clinics to help farmers easily access diagnostic and advisory services
- Collaborating with government officers at all stages of a project for sustainability
- Using farmer's cooperatives for seed production as this makes implementation of QDS easier
- Using community led approaches to development where the target community is fully involved in decision-making and implementation processes of a project, ensuring that all households in the target communities have equal opportunity to participate in consultation and planning processes, as well as having access to the services, technologies, resources and knowledge that are being delivered by projects
- Establishing linkages between early generation seed producers and seed multipliers for sustainability of the seed potato value chain
- Undertaking joint monitoring and evaluation by involving all project stakeholders including project beneficiaries
- Combining value chain development efforts with nutrition training aspects to promote intake of potato thus improving the health status of beneficiaries

## **Conclusions**

The key conclusion of the evaluation are:

- The project is highly relevant and addresses real needs of the smallholder farmers
- It is on track to delivering planned outputs and impacts
- The project has achieved good levels of awareness raising, and some important achievements in terms of capacity development and establishment of linkages along the potato value chain. The high level of stakeholder buy-in is visible in this project
- The dedication of project staff and the MoA, have assisted in maintaining the project's positive outcomes
- Women did not fully participate in seed potato production by co-operatives perhaps, due some of the criteria set to join a co-operative e.g. access to land. Most of the co-operatives had less than 10% as women. Limited awareness creation may also have contributed to this
- Disability – whilst there was limited participation of people with disability, there was some evidence of people with disability participating and benefiting from the project
- Seed cooperatives are not yet fully aware of the transition needed to become viable enterprises
- The project has an adequate monitoring, evaluation and learning system
- The project was good value for money having a SROI ratio of 5.6:1 for the food security outcome

## Recommendations

The project should consider adopting the following recommendation so as to fully realize its objectives:

- Put in place mechanisms to track where the seed is going so as to ascertain that it is benefitting smallholder farmers (Project)
- Improve management of bacterial wilt disease to prevent its entry in non-infected areas and control it in infected areas (Policy and Project)
- Promote irrigated production to minimize dependence on rain-fed potato production (Project)
- Improve access to early generation seed through decentralization (Project/policy)
- Improve access to quality seed (Project/Stakeholders)
- Traders should be encouraged to buy in Kgs instead of in sacks (Policy)
- Conduct a sensitization workshop on gender and disability mainstreaming for the project (Project/AOP)
- Scale up successful initiatives (Project)
- Expand mobile plant clinic e.g. Bahir Dar (Project and stakeholders)
- Field days and demo plots (Project)
- Pamphlets and publications (AOP/Project)
- Documentation and dissemination of best practices from the project (AOP/Project)
- Encourage exposure visits by farmers to enhance learning from each other (Project)
- Promote value addition (project)
- Expand diffuse light store (Project)

Others are

- Promote branding to improve markets (Project)
- Consider funding for longer periods not annually (AOP/Project)
- Government could consider providing incentives to interested private sector. Good example is that provided to flower farmers (Policy)
- Better organize farmers to improve their bargaining power (Project)
- Map the value chain to help understand of the dynamics in the potato sector (Project)
- Develop frameworks for respecting contracts (Project/Policy)
- Avail suitable varieties for different uses (Research)
- Improve skills of farmers in production processes (Project)
- Regulate illegal seed dealers as it undermines cooperatives, also risks of bacterial wilt (Policy)
- Support and strengthen the QDPM system (AOP/Project)
- Strengthen the Ethiopian Potato Coalition and linkages to other country Coalitions (Project/stakeholders)
- Management information and finance systems should be strengthened to enable the collation of relevant data – VFM is much easier to assess when performance data and the associated financial information are set out side by side (Project)
- Continue and expand funding the project to ensure intended outcomes are realized (AOP)
- Continue with the annual partnership health assessment exercise (project), involve all partners, and share the results with all partners

- Better branding of project activities (Project)