



Forage seed systems in Ethiopia

Fodder Round Table meeting

A workshop was held at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) on March 12, 2009 to discuss the state of forage seed systems in Ethiopia.

This Fodder Roundtable meeting brought together actors from the NARS, the NGOs, government offices, the private sector and international research centres in order to assess the present constraints to ready availability of forage seeds to smallholder farmers and discuss ways to enhance a sustainable forage seed supply system in Ethiopia.

Background

There are an estimated 555 million poor livestock keepers, mostly residing in rural areas in the developing world. Their inability to feed their livestock adequately throughout the year remains the most widespread technical constraint to increased livestock productivity. As grazing land area declines and cropping expands to marginal areas, access to traditional feed resources is further constrained.

Use of improved forages would reduce the pressure on natural pastures, improve soil fertility and erosion on marginal lands, improve carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change, support system sustainability, and enhance natural assets and system resilience.

Despite these theoretical benefits of improved forages, uptake among smallholders has been slow in Ethiopia. One reason for this may be the lack of a ready supply of good quality planting material at affordable prices. Stimulating forage seed supply could therefore be one way of addressing the oft-cited feed scarcity problem in Ethiopia.

Issues

During the workshop on forage seed systems in Ethiopia, presentations showed that:

- There is huge demand among smallholders for feed but ready availability of affordable seed is a constraint to fodder production.
 - Therefore, forage seeds systems have to be stimulated for mitigating feed constraints for poor livestock keepers linked to systems intensification. And forage seed supply can also be promoted through influencing policymakers, NGOs, and extension agents.
- Fodder has a low adoption rate in Ethiopia, despite efforts, because national capacity was never strongly built and the real demand for fodder seed from farmers is still not well quantified. Therefore market conditions do not seem stable for those considering entry to the market (contrary to other crops with an established market demand).

- In its recommendations, the meeting strongly suggested thorough assessment of market demand for fodder and fodder planting materials.
- Risks associated with the long seed–fodder–livestock commodity chain are significant for potential seed producers who cannot predict future demand.
 - Participants agreed that the development of fodder seed enterprises needs close linkage to profitable livestock enterprises.
- The lack of knowledge to specify and articulate demand for forage seeds, limited technical know-how about seed, poor information about seed quality, and lack of rigorous certification have led to very variable and/or low demand for seed among smallholders.
 - All actors in the seed system recognize the need to invest in knowledge management among smallholders. Extension materials, flyers, posters etc. can be used to promote the production and utilization of forage.
 - But information should also be available to help identify suitable species and varieties, and agribusiness skills should definitely be developed to deal with the problems linked to certification and quality of seeds.
- Comparative economics of forages with other crops is very important since farmers seem reluctant to grow forage because of competition for land from other crops.
 - Studies on the economics of forage seed production under farmers' conditions have to be rigorous and addressed to smallholders. Cost of seeds need to be affordable or else fodder will not be a viable option for farmers.
- In order to help design future strategies, several observations can be drawn from past experiences
 - Lessons from past experiences should be documented alongside the need for policy advocacy initiatives founded on field-based experiences.

Specific actions

Following presentations and discussions, the workshop participants concluded the meeting by suggesting next steps targeted at enhancing sustainable forage seed supply system in Ethiopia:

- Supply/demand issues
 - An *ex-ante* sustainable demand assessment for forages is required.
 - Future efforts should target seed production in niches within value chain e.g. intensive dairy and fattening, peri-urban livestock production
 - The multiple/functional roles of forage (SWC, feed, food, ecosystem services, risk management) need to be considered in efforts to stimulate forage seed supply
- Learn lessons
 - Develop position paper? Learn from past experiences. Pilot to provide proof of concept

- Capacity building and knowledge
 - Capacity building: diversifying choices for farmers, agribusiness skills, decision support.
 - Facilitate access to knowledge sources (especially agribusiness skills)
- Advocacy
 - Consult policymakers and industry associations about their needs
 - Convene larger forum with Government, NGOs, MoARD (policy advocacy)
 - Foster development of public private partnerships.

List of organizations represented

National institutions

Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (Debre Zeit Agricultural Research Centre)
Oromiya Agricultural Research Institute (Adami Tulu Agricultural Research Center)

Private sector

Eden Field Seed Enterprise

International research organizations

International Livestock Research Institute
International Food Policy Research Institute
CGIAR Systemwide Livestock Programme
Improving Productivity and Market Success of Ethiopian farmers (IPMS) project

NGOs sector

Mercy Corps
Save the Children USA

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