

Farmer training centres and the IPMS programme in Ethiopia



Marketing farm produce in Ethiopia
Photo: IPMS, Ethiopia

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When Getachew Seifu faces a problem on his farm, he knows where to go: he heads for the farmer training centre in Hidi, his home village. There he can get all kinds of advice – about what crops and varieties to plant, where to buy seed and chemicals, how to get high yields, and how much various crops are fetching in the market. The centre offers training on a wide range of farming topics. For example, Getachew attended a demonstration about a new variety of tomato, called Kochoro, which has a long shelf life. That means that he does not have to sell immediately at harvest, so can negotiate a better price. And he has doubled his tomato yield to 30 t/ha by using improved techniques.



Figure 35 The farmer training centres provide information on new farming techniques, improved seed and training on business management

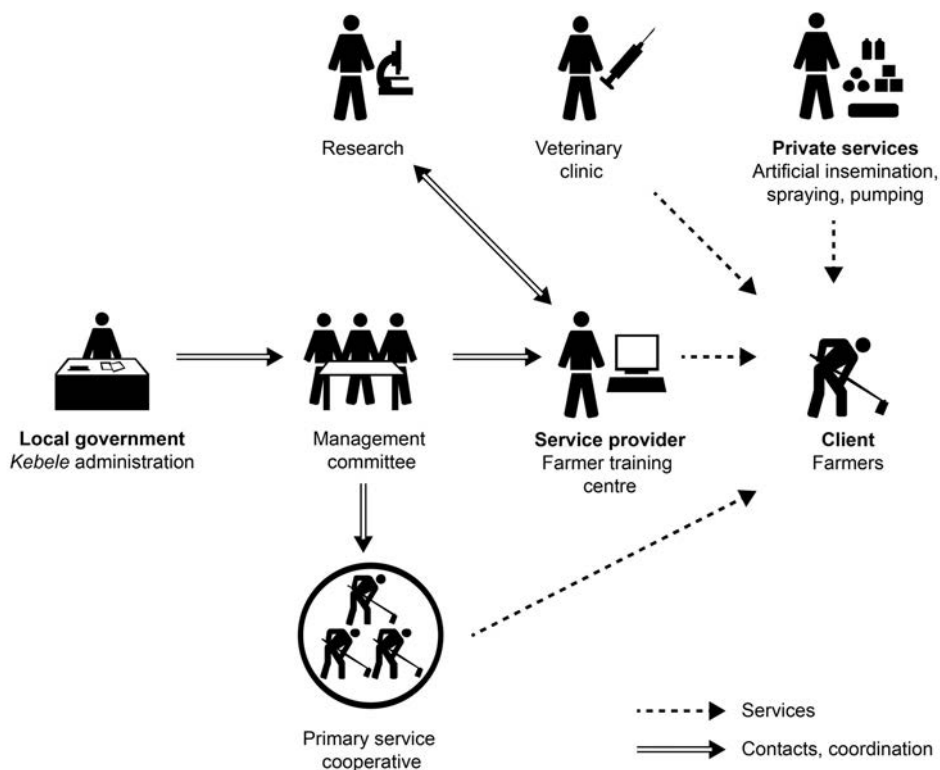


Figure 36 Actors involved in service delivery in villages

Farmer training centres like the one in Hidi are the cornerstone of Ethiopia’s strategy to support small-scale farming as a business. The centres were set up in 2002 in each rural *kebele*, the lowest unit of administration in the country (each *kebele* has around 5,000 people). Each farmer training centre is staffed by three extension agents. There are nearly 8,500 such centres throughout the country – though perhaps understandably for such a new and massive initiative, only about 2,500 are fully functional. The government plans to establish about 15,000 centres in all.

The centres are governed by a management committee of between 7 and 10 extension agents and farmers. The committee is chaired by the *kebele* head, who is also a farmer. At its monthly meetings, this committee plans, manages and evaluates the training and demonstration programme. It also organizes farmers to help in setting up and maintaining the demonstration fields.

The centres provide a wide range services: farmer training and extension services on improved farming techniques (through training courses, exhibits, demonstration farms, field days and farmer-to-farmer extension); market-oriented information and advisory services; meeting and communication facilities; and seed and seedlings of new crops,

vegetables, fruit and forage varieties. The Ministry of Agriculture has developed some 20 training modules for use in the centres.

The centres are part of a system of agricultural services in each *kebele* (Figure 36). The primary service cooperative supplies inputs. A public animal-health clinic offers veterinary services. Private providers do artificial insemination, treat livestock, spray crops, and rent out water pumps. Innovative farmers organize their own field days. The training centres are also linked to research centres in each Zone in Ethiopia.

Many of these services complement what the training centres do. Relations with them tend to be informal, though the training centres' management committees are increasingly coordinating their work. The use of farmer-to-farmer services is increasing, also with coordination by the committees.

Overcoming limitations: The IPMS project

Unfortunately the government budget is tight, so after paying for staff salaries, there is very little money left for regular activities. That limits the types of work that the training centres can undertake. So in practice, many of the functions listed above depend on projects funded by the government, donors or NGOs, that use the centre facilities and take advantage of their staff for training, management and facilitation.

A 5-year (2004–10) project known as **Improving Productivity and Market Success of Ethiopian Farmers** (IPMS for short) aimed to overcome some of these problems. This project was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and implemented by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) on behalf of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture.

IPMS focused on 40 pilot farmer training centres. It invested small amounts (around 10%) of the costs of investment and running the centres to leverage their contributions and facilitate market-led, knowledge-based transformation. It provided on-the-job training to extension staff, linked the centres with research institutions, provided market information, and put farmers in touch with input suppliers and produce markets. It provided motorbikes and paid for fuel so the extension agents could reach farmers. It offered short courses for farmers, organized field days, and encouraged both extension agents and farmers by giving prizes for performance.

It also established knowledge centres at the *woreda* level (the next level of local administration above the *kebele*), with printed materials and electronic access to a wide range of information and training materials on markets, production technologies, input suppliers, as well as the latest updates, news and unbiased opinion. It set up similar but smaller information units in each *kebele* centre.

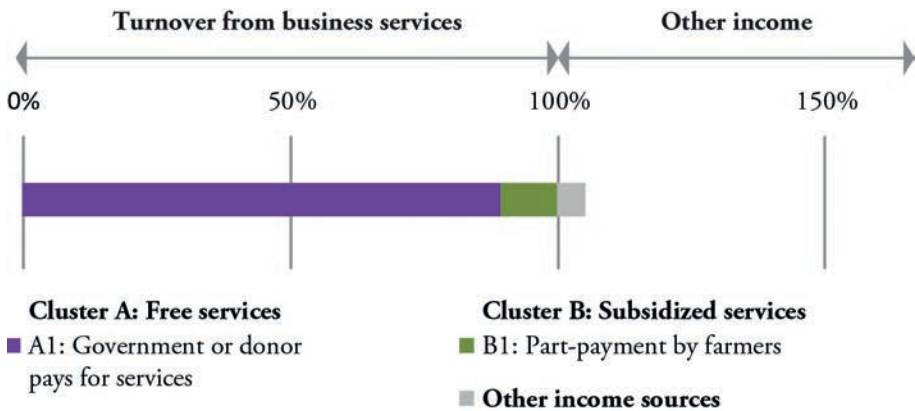


Figure 37 Share of business models in the farmer training centres' revenue

Business models

The farmer training centres are financially supported by the government, and by projects such as IPMS. Farmers also cover some of the costs.

Business model B1: Part-payment by farmers

Farmers contribute significantly to the centres in two ways. First, they have helped build them by providing labour and some of the construction materials. This is equivalent to nearly 40% of the total investment costs of a centre (the rest was paid by the government and the IPMS project), and about 10% of a centre's business-service turnover. The second way that farmers contribute is by volunteers working on the centres' demonstration fields.

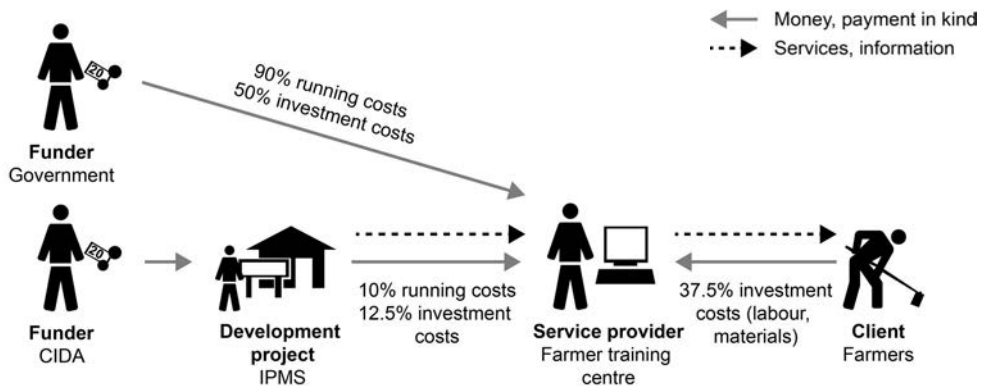



Figure 38 The farmer training centres' business model B1

Business model A1: Government or donor pays for services to farmers

The most common business model is still the provision of free services to farmers. This represents about  of the centre's turnover.

Other sources of income

The centres sell the produce from the demonstration fields, generating further income.

Results

Demand for the centres' services is high. Farmers have adopted a number of other new production techniques, such as new cereal and potato varieties, legume varieties, and vegetable production, as well as bio-fertilizers for pulse growing, and urea-molasses as cattle feed. They have started selling their grain and vegetables on the basis of weight rather than by the number of bags or boxes. They have been able to decide where and when to sell their produce on the basis of price information they received through the centres.

Extension workers (called "development agents" in Ethiopia) provide marketing information on the centres' billboards, and update this every week. The marketing committee, an ad-hoc committee of farmers, visits markets in other areas (or contacts them by phone) to check on commodity prices and availability. The market information system is not yet perfect. The information provided by the training centres is general, and does not focus on particular crops that they are promoting. And some information is not yet available: the price of hot peppers (an important local commodity), for example, is determined in Addis Ababa, and is not provided to the farmers.

Accountability

The centre's management committee is key to ensuring the centre is accountable to its clients. It bases its plans and activities on the perceived priorities of local farmers. Issues such as gender and HIV/AIDS are also taken into account. The committee reports to the district office of agriculture about the training centre's work and any serious issues that may arise. Such issues can also be raised in meetings of the village general assembly.

While it was operating, IPMS monitored how satisfied the farmers were with the extension service and the training centres. In addition, district extension staff assess farmers' demands and report these to the district office of agriculture for consideration in planning the next phase of the project.

During field days and training centre meetings, farmers are invited to reflect on what they have learned and any improvements needed. The farmers are not directly involved in assessing the performance of the extension agents, but do so indirectly through the management committee and the field days.

Sustainability

The farmer training centres provide many of their services for free. They get their funding from four sources: the government, donor-funded projects, the sale of products, and the local community.

The bulk of the funding for the centres comes from the regional governmental Bureau of Agriculture (part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). This covers investment costs, staff salaries, fuel and allowances. But there is no budget to run the centres' extension activities. Donor-funded projects such as IPMS support the centres in various ways: they contribute information materials and equipment, training, facilitation and some running costs. The centres earn some money by selling produce from demonstration plots, as well as honey, coffee, and seed and seedlings. This revenue is supposed to pay for running costs: things like electricity, internet subscriptions and security. Local people provide materials such as stones, sand and timber, as well as labour to construct the centre buildings. They also help plough, plant weed and harvest the demonstration-farm plots.

The government hopes that the centres will be able to cover more of their costs from the sale of products (Box 8). For some training centres, sales from the demonstration farm are the main income, but this is not the case for Hidi *kebele*, which got top-up funding from the IPMS programme.

Inclusiveness

All the farmers in the *kebele* have the same opportunity to take part in training centre's activities and organized events such as demonstrations, technology exhibitions, field days

Box 8 Atsibi *woreda*, Tigray: A sustainable farmer training centre

In the farmer training centre in Atsibi *woreda*, Tigray, the extension agent runs the demonstration farm like a business. It sells improved breeds of sheep, beehives and chicks to farmers, and fruit, vegetables, and milk to the local markets. It uses the revenues to pay for its extension and training activities. It has managed to develop its training facilities. Local farmers donated labour, stones and building materials to construct the facilities and run the demonstration farm.

The highly entrepreneurial extensionist started off by buying a low-cost drip-irrigation system for 950 birr. He planted tomatoes, repaid the loan, took a bigger loan to buy a cow, and began diversifying into new horticultural crops. He reinvested the profits in the training centre; that led to more demonstrations and a sophisticated water-harvesting system, as well as purchase of equipment

The Atsibi farmer training centre has become the model in Tigray for demonstrating and training other development agents on how to finance the training centres.

Source: Adapted from IFPRI 2010

and meetings. They can also contribute to the centres by helping build facilities and maintain the field demonstrations.

The information on the billboards is broadcast over the village loudspeaker so illiterate people can also get the information. Classroom training, however, is open only to literate villagers.

Women are encouraged to participate in the activities. The centres aim for women to be half of the participants in all their activities, but this goal is seldom achieved. The centres occasionally hold special field days for women on subjects like vegetable production.

Challenges

Budget constraints. Various efforts, funded by the government, donors and NGOs, aim to improve both the training centres' programmes and their ability to generate their own income. Their ability to do so depends heavily on the abilities of the management committee and the extension agents.

Delivery of services. Illiteracy among farmers, and limited funding and staff skills constrain the centres' ability to deliver training and other services. The centres try to complement their training courses with practice-oriented activities such as demonstration sites, field days and exhibitions.

Staff turnover. The rapid turnover of extension agents hampers the development of strong relations between the centres and the community. Many development agents are rapidly transferred or promoted, while others leave the service to work with NGOs or private companies.

Administrative interference. *Woreda* administrations often interfere in training-centre matters, for example, by ordering the staff to call farmers for meetings. Tired of such events, the farmers often decline invitations to other types of meetings too. Such duties also cut the time that staff have to support the farmers. The local administration should use other channels to reach its constituents.

Relations with other service providers. Links between the training centres and other service providers (notably cooperatives, private enterprises and research agencies, larger-scale farmers) and actors such as commercial farms, still require improvement. The management committees can also coordinate better with the innovative farmers who are involved in farmer-to-farmer extension.

Market orientation. The new Agricultural Growth Programme, funded by donors and the government, aims to further develop the centres, notably in agribusiness development and market information. This programme foresees the construction of a market warehouse in the village, as well as market-oriented training. The village loudspeaker could be used to broadcast market information.

Lessons

The farmer training centres are the most accessible and affordable source of business development services in the *kebele*. This is because the extension agents are stationed in the villages, and they know the people. There is no need to deploy expensive consultants or pay their transport costs. Because the activities are held in the village, they are convenient for farmers to attend, and they do not incur travel expenses. Investing in the training centres is an important and effective contribution to building the capacities and skills of farmers and increasing their food and income security.

The sustainability of the training centres and their services requires adequate financial support from the government and development agencies. The centres will also have to generate their own income, persuade local people to support them with voluntary work, and encourage innovative farmers to continue the farmer-to-farmer extension programmes. That is a complex balancing act.

More information

IFPRI. 2010. In-depth assessment of the public agricultural extension system of Ethiopia and recommendations for improvement. IFPRI discussion paper 01041, December 2010, eastern and southern Africa regional office. International Food Policy Research Institute.

www.ipms-ethiopia.org

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