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In many parts of the developing world, agriculture can contribute substantially to both Economic development and poverty reduction. How can growth in this sector be achieved and what can be done to influence agricultural policy.

Future Agricultures is a research consortium aiming to answer these questions by stimulating debate and creating policy options for pro-poor agricultural growth. Starting in Africa, the consortium is doing this by encouraging dialogue through reviewing existing knowledge, learning lessons from policies that support agriculture and sharing insights across the continent and beyond.

Agriculture, growth and social protection:
Can agriculture generate, poverty-reducing

economic growth? Are there trade-offs between growth and social protection objectives?

Institutional Change and Innovation: *How can productivity be raised in farming and supply chains through institutional innovation in marketing, input supply and rural finance?*

Technology Options: *How can agriculture technology be made to work for the poor? What role should the public and private sector have as part of innovation systems?*

Politics of policy process: What political, organisational budgetary processes affect the priority given to the agriculture sector? What should a Ministry of Agriculture look like in the twenty-first century?

Bottom Up Policy Process: An agenda for Future Agricultures in Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

A number of observers have described the policy making process in Ethiopia as strongly influenced by a long history of centralised, hierarchical systems of control under Imperial rule and nearly two decades of military rule by the Derg. The present government has made efforts to reverse this legacy however,

“in spite of significant political, administrative and financial decentralisation, the centralised and controlling legacy remains an important factor”².

According to this observation, it is not easy to overcome a legacy in a short period of time. Future Agricultures, a learning consortium of local and international academics and researchers, has developed and tested an all inclusive policy consultation process that, if scaled up, could change the top down legacy. In the process of testing the model, indicative ideas for agricultural policy making have been generated. This article reports on this innovative process.

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² Michael Halderman, FAO, PPLPI Working Paper, No. 19, 24 March 2004.

2. What is Future Agricultures?

Future Agricultures is a learning consortium of academic and research institutions based in the UK namely, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Imperial College London, coordinated by DFID. Ethiopia, Kenya and Malawi are the focal countries.

Agriculture is the mainstay/backbone of the economy of Ethiopia and still regarded as the key pathway out of poverty. However, over the last 3-4 decades, the sector has been unable to realise its potential leading to increased number of people becoming food insecure. The consortium aims to revitalise the debate around this paradox and draw lessons across the continent. To this end, a series of regional consultations were planned and implemented.

3. The consultation process and coverage

A 4-step policy dialogue process was developed and tested. These steps are:

Step 1: Community consultation

Step 2: Validate/enrich findings at regional workshop with researchers, the academia and practitioners

Step 3: Inform policy makers and the general public

Step 4: Engage/influence the policy process

These steps are neither mutually exclusive nor linear. They are used in a dynamic and interactive manner.

Using these steps, six regional consultations and one consolidated national conference have been completed. Focus group discussion (FGD) is the principal method of community consultations (see Table 1). Other tools such as key informant interviews and observations were also used. A cross section of community members was consulted on the future of agriculture. These included elders, adult small farmers, rural traders and commercial farmers, youth and children.

The regional coverage represented the national profile. Tigray, Oromia, Amhara and SNNPR are pre-dominantly agricultural; Afar is pre-dominantly pastoral and Benshangul-Gumuz is an emerging region. The selection of communities was purposive based on criteria designed in collaboration with regional offices. The communities were selected to generate *indicative* ideas.

Following completion of community consultations, a 2-day regional workshop was conducted in each of the regional capitals to validate/enrich (**Step 2**) the *indicative ideas* generated from the community consultations. Regional researchers, academics, practitioners in agriculture and other sectors, community representatives were present at these workshops (see Table 2 and 3).

The national conference held in June 2007 is the beginning of a process of informing policy makers and the general public (**Step 3**) on the *indicative ideas* generated during the regional consultations. It was organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD). About 100 participants attended the conference representing, the various departments of the MoARD, regional bureaus of agriculture, research organisations, agricultural TVETs, other sector ministries, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Standing Committee on Pastoral Affairs, donors, NGOs, professional associations and the private sector (investors in agriculture).

The fourth step will be a process of engaging and influencing the policy process based on the indicative ideas. Some of these ideas will require further investigation.

At the end of each regional workshop, a Future Agriculture Regional Group was established with a view to continuing the dialogue. Similarly, at the end of the national conference a National Future Agriculture Working Group made up of volunteers from different organisations and the private sector was formed with a view to taking forward the recommendations and sustaining the dialogue.

Table 1: Community consultation coverage

Region	No. of Woredas	No. of FGDs	No. of participants
Tigray	3	11	87
Oromia	4	15	124
Amhara	5	24	216
Beshangul-Gumuz	3	8	78
Afar	3	7	55
SNNP	4	12	118
Total	22	77	678

Table 2: Regional workshop participants

Region	BoARD	Research	Academia	Donor/ NGO	Office of the President	Other sectors	Farmers/ pastoralists	Total
Tigray	16	4	2	3	1	2	3	31
Oromia	7	3	0	5	0	7	3	25
Amhara	9	7	4	7	1	6	2	36
Benshangul Gumuz	10	3	2	3	1	7	2	28
Afar	7	0	0	2	0	5	2	16
SNNPR	8	2	5	3	1	1	2	22
Total	57	19	13	23	4	28	14	158
%	36.1	12.0	8.2	14.6	2.5	17.7	8.9	100.0

Table 3: Regional workshop participants by sex

Region	Men	Women	Total
Tigray	29	2	31
Oromia	20	5	25
Amhara	35	1	36
Benshangul Gumuz	26	2	28
Afar	14	2	16
SNNPR	19	3	22
Total	143	15	158
%	90.5	9.5	100

4. Indicative ideas generated during the consultations

Indicatives ideas for future agricultures were generated with respect to four principal pathways for agriculture, namely intensification, commercialisations, diversification and depopulation.

Intensification – this is a pathway adopted under conditions of continued land fragmentation. It entails the use of modern inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds and irrigation to get the maximum yield possible from a small plot of land.

In the case of Ethiopia, the average farm size in the highlands has been falling for many years and at the moment is no more than 0.5 ha. In recognition of this fact, the country has followed the intensification path since the 1960s with introduction of area projects such as CADU, WADU and the minimum package programmes and more recently PADETES. Nonetheless, the rate of intensification has been very low across the country. It has not been possible to achieve the desired productivity on a sustainable basis. During the consultations, farmers indicated that fertilizers and improved seeds are (i) too expensive, (ii) untimely and (iii) the delivery mechanism is not flexible.

The experts generally agreed with these points and added that as a result of these constraints on average Ethiopia applies the least fertilizer per ha by Sub-Saharan African standards. The government's drive to introduce water harvesting schemes has gone along way to raise farmers' awareness but the use of irrigation is still at its infancy.

What are the prospects for intensification? The consultations generated possible ideas for addressing these constraints. To begin with, there was a consensus that the government should take intensification seriously. It needs to improve access to fertiliser and seeds by, for example, (i) liberalising input marketing; (ii) reintroducing subsidies at least in a targeted manner (iii) setting adoption targets based on ground realities (iv) diversifying into high-value crops to make adoption economically viable for farmers. Intensification has negative environmental consequences. Attention should therefore be given to environmental impact assessment.

Diversification – this pathway has two dimensions, namely diversifying within and outside agriculture. Historically there has been limited policy attention to diversification but during the regional consultations it was observed that this is changing. The research team found several examples of diversification (within agriculture) in Amhara, Tigray and Oromiya. SNNPR is the most diversified region but not as market oriented as one would like. Constraints to diversification include the problems of access to input stated above and land fragmentation.

The prospect for diversification is good both in policy circles (re: PASDEP) and in practice on the ground. Nonetheless, the rate of diversification needs to be speeded up by addressing the constraints and paying more attention to off-farm sources of income (e.g. trade and marketing, rural non-farm employment).

Commercialisations – this pathway goes back a long way in Ethiopia. There was a policy push in the 1960s, and more recently in the 2000s. During the regional consultations it was learned that there is an “eternal commercialisation dilemma”: the choice between large vs small farm commercialisation. Presently, the government is convinced it can promote both. However, small farmers face numerous constraints to commercialise. Researchers argue that commercialising smallholders is expensive; there are no economies of scale. Commercialisation may make land consolidation inevitable as more successful farmers push the less successful ones out of agriculture. Co-operatives offer an important route for smallholders to commercialise. Presently, the focus of cooperatives is on the traditional cash crops such as coffee. They need to expand into other marketable crops such as fruits and vegetables.

Depopulation – this pathway captures three related modes of population movement namely urbanisation, resettlement and migration. It is a process of easing pressure on agricultural land and historically it goes back to the 1980s. In all the regional consultations depopulation in one form or another was considered inevitable. There is a general consensus that the present figure of 85% agricultural population should not continue.

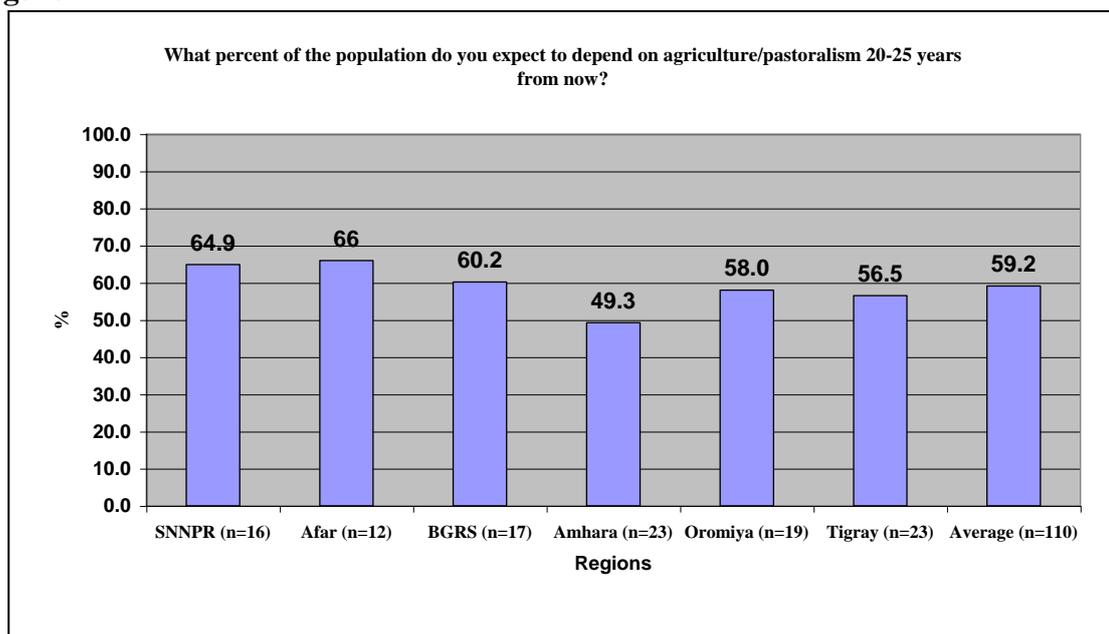
The government’s concern that depopulation might lead to millions of rural population flocking to urban areas and putting considerable pressure on urban resources and creating social problems is appreciated. However, depopulation should not necessarily mean flocking to urban centres. Expanding basic services to rural areas will create rural based employment for the landless and school drop outs, which serve dual purpose – reduce pressure on agricultural land and reduce farmers’ transaction costs. As one female farmer from a village in Amhara commented:

“You always talk about us going to urban centres. Why not you bring the urban centres to us?”

Depopulation was considered inevitable but also variable. Not all regions can depopulate at the same rate. In some regions (e.g. Tigray, Oromia and Amhara) there are good beginnings. Small towns are mushrooming and providing employment opportunities. In others where there is an overwhelming rural population and low rate of urbanisation, it will take time to depopulate. There are also indications of reverse migration in SNNP where people have gone back to rural areas and using their skills acquired in urban areas to diversify the rural economy.

By way of generating an indicative trend, regional workshop participants were asked what proportion of the population will depend on agriculture 25 years later. Figure 1 summarises the response. The figures may not be as important as the discussion they generated in each region. The overall conclusion was that the 59% average rural population 25 years later is by no means outrageous. Countries like China, Morocco and Chile have reduced population dependent on agriculture over a similar period.

Figure 1



In addition to the main pathways, cross cutting issues were also examined during the consultations. These included (i) education and agriculture, (ii) gender and agriculture (iii) environment and agriculture and (iv) attitudes and agriculture.

Education and agriculture – the relationship between these two was found to be complex. Both the rural communities and the experts concluded that lack of education is an inhibitor of technology adoption. Farmers indicated that if they had some education they would probably not remain in agriculture or do agriculture better than they way it has been done so far.

The most revealing finding was the fact that the educated population, which came out of rural areas, never went back to agriculture to combine their knowledge with land and labour.

“We were told education is a way out of rural areas and poverty; so we escaped!”

Agriculture was brain drained. This trend is likely to continue because rural youth and children consulted did not show interest to remain in agriculture suggesting that the brain drain from agriculture will continue. Today’s children lack successful educated farmers that they can aspire to.

Having said that, there are school drop outs that have gone back to agriculture. But their innovativeness was not uniform across regions and within regions. In food insecure areas of Amhara, they were found to diversify their income from various sources and well linked to the market, with or without support from the extension system. In relatively food secure areas of Oromia, they were found to be satisfied with existing situation and took little or not step to improve the situation. This indicated that the extension system is not designed to make effective use of educated farmers.

What are the policy implications? The government has expressed its desire to replace the current illiterate farmers with literate farmers through formal education. If today’s children and youth do not wish to stay in agriculture, then this policy may not succeed. Therefore, the government should introduce flexible forms of education (formal and non-formal) for today’s farmers and design the extension system that makes use of educated farmers. It should also investigate the reasons why the educated do not wish to go back to agriculture and encourage them to go back and contribute to the rural economy not only in financial and material terms but also transferring knowledge and skills. Some form of incentive schemes may have to be considered.

Gender and agriculture – the consultation has found that all the pathways for agriculture increase women’s burden. In farms that have sufficiently been intensified, women have to take part in land preparation, cultivation and weeding. On-farm diversification also divides existing labour among the various activities adding to women’s burden. The importance of girl education is indisputable but concerns were expressed from mothers and girls alike that this has increased women’s burdens.

The policy implication is that contradictions between development objectives should be analysed and articulated in policy documents. Practical labour saving measures should be taken to ease women’s burden.

Environment and agriculture – there are progresses made in watershed management approach to environmental protection and land reclamation particularly in the food insecure areas where there is history of food aid. However, there is a general

consensus that enough has not been done to protect the environment in the relatively food secure high potential areas. If this trend continues, the so-called food secure areas will degenerate into food insecurity and the situation may not be easily reversed. Some regions proposed that environment should be a pathway by its own.

Attitudes and agriculture: Ethiopia has rich cultural and religious heritage which are important to maintain the integrity of the nation. If marketed well, these cultures and traditions could generate income for millions in all the regions where consultations were held. However, there was also strong feeling (based on several other studies) that some aspects of these cultures and traditions have become bottleneck for agriculture and are leading to resource and labour wastage. The existing efforts to tackle harmful traditional practices should be intensified. Researchers and policy makers should work very closely with religious organisations/leaders, clan leaders and elders to devise strategies.

When one speaks of attitude, rural communities often come to mind first. However, researchers and academics also need to re-examine their approach to investigating problems facing rural communities. In addition to the formal research that is based on hard data, they need to adopt techniques that allow listening to rural communities. The 4-step process described in this article is an ideal way to go about it.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The bottom up policy process developed and tested as part of Future Agriculture work in Ethiopia has generated useful indicative policy ideas. Some of these ideas will require further investigation. In addition to the specific recommendations that have been highlighted within the text, two broader lessons can be drawn from the policy process exercise.

First, top down policy process is not God given to Ethiopia. Genuine bottom up process is possible. Therefore, the government should make genuine community consultation a culture of policy-making. It should move away from “conference style” consultations processes.

Second, the regional consultations have revealed that there is a tendency for certain development objectives to contradict. If they go unchecked, they could become barriers to each other and stop or reverse progress being made. Therefore, in addition to the usual potentials and constraints analysis, the contradictions and conflicting objectives should be identified and articulated in Ethiopian policy circles. Strategies should be devised to resolve these contradictions.