

C4C interventions

Business cluster meetings facilitated by C4C regularly reveal a high demand for improved access to quality seeds among farmers. As result of those meetings, 16 unions included improvement of seed supply as a service they provide to their members in their action plans. Starting point was the development of a seed map, outlining the seed need of members. Based on the seed demand, unions with C4C support started to create access to the required seed through research institutes or seed enterprises.

C4C in collaboration with other value chain actors supported unions, cooperatives, and farmers to produce improved quality seeds and combine this access with training and extension activities to ensure effective use of new seed. C4C's seed supply activities included:

- Hiring union agronomists to ensure that unions qualify for the seed multiplication license requirements and are able to give agronomy trainings to the selected farmers
- Providing technical support to unions to certify/license their seed multiplication services
- Providing agronomy training for development agents, agronomists and farmers engaged in seed multiplications
- Preparing manuals in local languages on seed dressing
- Promoting relationships between unions, research institutes and seed enterprises to access certified improved seed varieties
- Providing on-the-job technical support and followup for seed multiplication processes and techniques
- Organizing farmer-field-days to promote and disseminate new varieties of seed and best practices
- Supporting unions to conduct seed mapping: assessing the seed demand by farmer members and identifying sources of available seed

Results

C4C's seed supply activities helped unions launch seed multiplication or distribution services for their cooperatives. Some of the results include:

- Melka Awash Farmer Cooperative Union (FCU) planted 50 hectare with improved chickpea seed variety for distribution among 700 farmers.
- Becho Woliso and Limu Enara FCUs became reliable seed producers of the ACOS Dube chickpea variety and key distributors, particularly among smallholder farmer.
- Merkeb FCU promoted wheat seed multiplication with 105 member farmers.
- Raya Wakena FCU improved their members' access to wheat seed. Using a full package of inputs and technical advice increased the wheat yield from 1.5-2 to 3.5-6 metric tons per hectare.
- Seed mapping has significantly improved the supply of seed to the unions and farmers by bridging the gap between seed supply and demand. In 2015 alone a total amount of 1,850 metric tons (mt) of seed (C4C crops) was distributed to 18,500 farmers via unions and primary cooperatives.

Way forward

Agricultural productivity will not improve without quality seed and Ethiopia's unions and cooperatives are in the ideal position to provide farmers with seed access and the knowledge and skills to use it effectively. C4C's seed supply initiatives generated new seed multiplication activities at cooperative and union levels.

C4C recommends that future efforts to scale up seed supply initiatives:

- Prioritize supporting strengthening cooperatives that specialize in seed multiplication and distribution to farmers.
- Complement union seed multiplication and distribution efforts with strong extension service to the producers.

A new seed enterprise for wheat

Farmers of the Edget Behibret cooperative specialised in seed multiplication of an improved wheat variety 'pickaflor', known locally as 'Kekeba'. Kekeba was developed by the Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research and has good performance in plant height, panicle weight and resistance to diseases, especially to the yellow rust fungus – factors that contribute to higher yields.

C4C helped the cooperative market their seed through Merkeb FCU. Merkeb certified the seed, a necessary condition to sell it as seed at competitive prices, and also marketed the seed to their member cooperatives. As a result, Edget Behibret's seed multiplication enterprise was profitable and Merkeb's farmers got yields using Kekeba seed that were 33% higher than their typical yields using the local wheat variety.

Service Provision



The role of cooperatives in the seed supply chain

Cooperatives for Change (C4C): Value Chain Approach for Cooperative Development in Ethiopia is a four-year project (2012-2016) implemented by SNV in partnership with Agriterra. C4C enhanced the business performance of 16 Farmer Cooperative Unions, reaching out to 160 primary cooperatives, and benefitting 44,000 smallholder farmers raising their productivity and incomes. C4C strengthened unions to adopt innovative business practices for improved service delivery and output marketing. The project is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Agriterra also invests in the project with own funds.

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for the producing of self-pollinated crop seed was too low to continue incentivizing seed production among participating farmers. As a result, farmers abandoned their multiplication efforts and instead sold the wheat seed as grain during the off-season when grain is in short supply and prices are high.

Background

“Good agriculture starts with good seed.”

Among the services that cooperatives can offer to their members, the timely supply of high-quality seeds that produce high yields and are demanded by the market is probably the most important one. C4C focused on strengthening the seed supply management of unions to deliver services to their members. C4C interventions improved the seed supply of major crops such as legumes, cereals and oilseeds by linking unions with research centers and seed suppliers based on member demand.

Problem

One of the major constraints in Ethiopia's smallholder agriculture sector is that farmers rely on local seed stored from previous harvests. These seeds are often poorly handled when stored and have low yield potential, but are readily available. Farmer access to better seed is limited because of a lack of information on the availability of improved seed, a lack of trust on the performance of new varieties, the high price of better seed, commodity-specific factors such as the high seed rate for wheat and chickpea, as well as a general shortage of seed in the market.

Improving seed supply is only one factor in improving crop yields: farmers also need training and extension on Good Agricultural Practices as well as the support of a network of agricultural stakeholders to make the introduction of new seeds effective. However, farmers also experience challenges accessing this support. Extension workers and development agents of the Bureau of Agriculture have limited resources, skills and knowledge to efficiently guide farmers. The weak linkages between research centers, seed enterprises and cooperatives limit farmer knowledge and access to seed supply.

The following presents an example of challenges in seed supply management for unions. Some unions already were addressing the shortage of quality seed by launching seed multiplication initiatives with individual farmers on a contract basis. While these initiatives generated production of high-quality seed, the overall experience was discouraging: a portion of the seeds did not pass the quarantine examination and the unions fell short of producing their desired volume of seed. Furthermore, in wheat, the 15% fixed profit margin set by the regional government