

Supporting Market-oriented Agriculture in Ethiopia

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is engaged in a project in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to increase farmers' income by encouraging them to pay attention to the conditions of the market.

Farmers (seated left) conducting a baseline survey with support from extension officers

SAWAJI OSAMU

ARICULTURE in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Africa is a major industry accounting for about 40% of the country's GDP. Agriculture workers make up around 80% of the population. Many of them are small-scale farmers with an average of less than one hectare of farmable land, and these farmers make their living

by producing staple crops that include grains such as teff, sorghumⁱ, corn, and wheat, as well as potatoes, onions, tomatoes, cabbages, and other vegetables. However, as many of these farmers are not sufficiently managing crop cultivation based on the needs and timing of the high demand of the market, they struggle to raise income.

To respond to this problem, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) started a project in 2017 in cooperation with the Ethiopian government to improve the income of small-scale farmers in two regions by introducing the SHEP (Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment & Promotion) approach. SHEP is one of the market-oriented agricultural extension approaches originally developed through a technical cooperation project by JICA and the Kenyan government that started in 2006. Through JICA's support, the SHEP approach has been introduced in around 30 countries in Africa to date and has spread to around 60 countries worldwide.

"A major objective of the SHEP approach is to change farmers' mindset, from 'Grow and Sell (growing crops for food and searching for buyers later)' to 'Grow to Sell (growing for the market);'" says Saso Fumiaki, chief advisor for JICA's SHEP Project in Ethiopia from 2017 until January of this year (2023).



Farmer representatives conduct a market survey

ⁱ Teff and sorghum are cereal grasses widely cultivated in Ethiopia. They are usually used to make the crepe-like *injera*, a staple of the country.

Farmers selecting crops and creating planting calendars with the technical support of extension officers (left)

"With the SHEP approach, farmers carry out a series of activities and come to think by themselves about how to make a living through agriculture."

The key activities are baseline surveys and market surveys. With baseline surveys, farmers from the groups gather, and extension officers support them in understanding the current situation of their farms' management with regard to the crops being grown, cropping land size, yield, production costs, and net profit. As many farmers do not know exactly how much profit they make through producing and selling their crops, this survey is a chance for the farmers to learn firsthand about the current situation. After that, with market surveys, extension officers and farmer representatives visit the market and collect information from crop vendors such as which vegetables sell at high prices, what the purchase prices are, and what type and quality of crops vendors would like to purchase.



Farmer group representatives and farming material suppliers (right) exchange information at a market linkage forum

"Through market surveys, farmers can learn about the varieties and sizes of crops that sell at high prices in the market, as well as the timing of selling crops and buyers' needs. On the basis of the results of the market survey, the entire group of farmers discuss and decide on the crops to produce to sell at the market in the coming season," says Saso. "It is extremely important for farmers to go through these steps of raising awareness, making decisions, and acting on their own, so as to increase their motivation."

The crops farmers typically choose to cultivate include garlic, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, cabbages, and red peppers. Farmers proceed with planting these crops while receiving technical guidance on the timing of planting and cultivation methods from extension officers.

After that, farmer representatives participate in market linkage forums along with agricultural material suppliers (of quality seeds, pesticides, etc.), vendors, crop processing companies, microfinance institutions, cooperative unions, and other related parties. These forums are opportunities for farmers to exchange information and build networks with other stakeholders in the agricultural business. Accordingly, the forums lead to the purchasing of high-quality seed, diversification of customers, and other results.

The project also focuses on improving the capacities of offi-

cers in charge of local governments and extension officers who support farmers through a series of training programs. Participants in these programs learn about practical agricultural techniques, such as basic cultivation methods for target crops and making compost, how to control pests and diseases, and record-keeping of their income and expenditure to promote better farm management.

These project initiatives have led to an increase in income for many farmers. Comparing the before and after of the net income from the horticultural production of around 1,000 farmers that are a part of this project, it was found that the average income of target farmers from horticulture had more than doubled. This new income contributed to improvements in farmers' livelihood, being used for educational fees for children, for building new homes, and for the purchase of land, motorbikes as transportation, and agricultural machinery such as irrigation pumps.

"I was surprised when a few years after the introduction of SHEP in Ethiopia, a project target farmer spoke to me about the importance of crop diversification and market surveys just like a businessperson would. I realized that farmers' mindsets had changed more than anticipated," says Saso. "Officers in charge of local governments and extension officers, who had been uncertain about the effectiveness of the SHEP approach, came to deeply understand the effects of the SHEP approach after seeing tangible changes in the farmers with their own eyes, and they are now committed to expanding the SHEP approach as a part of their regular extension duties."

JICA will work to support the spread of the SHEP approach from the current two regions to a wider area in Ethiopia. The SHEP approach will surely make a great contribution to the lives of many small-scale farmers in Ethiopia. ■



A cabbage farmer who was part of the SHEP project and whose revenue was greatly improved as a result