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Taking a Systems Approach to Agricultural Education, Research and Extension: Analysis of the extension role and Practical Attachment Program of Mekelle University, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The capacity to benefit from knowledge depends on the ability to acquire and apply existing knowledge, and the ability to produce new knowledge. Agricultural education is central to the building of this capacity for the production, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge. In Ethiopia, higher education is undergoing a major expansion and re-form in light of its contribution to capacity building and development. The paper discusses the development role of higher education in Ethiopia with reference to Mekelle University using a systems approach to agricultural knowledge as an analytical concept. The main focus of the paper is the Practical Attachment Program (PAP) that links education, research and extension within the university as well as between the university and its stakeholders. The PAP provides social continuity for the university, putting it in touch with rural communities and stakeholders. The development effect of the university can be enhanced when its education, re-search and extension functions are integrated and developing organically. However, extension is not a well articulated function of the university. While significant attention has been given to research, provisions for fully integrating extension within the research process have been inadequate. This paper examines efforts at Mekelle University in putting knowledge into use, and identifies critical gaps in knowledge transformation and dissemination and managing its knowledge resources. The paper finally offers conclusions and recommendations to strengthen the extension role of the university. The paper observes that improving the knowledge environment within the university requires the adoption of an effective academic reward structure of research and extension, and developing staff research-orientation and knowledge sharing culture.

Keywords: Teaching, research extension, practical attachment program, Tigray, Ethiopia