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Knowledge Management for Sustainable Agricultural Development. A Multi-Level Analysis of Obstacles and Potentials in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study investigates knowledge management obstacles and potentials within the institutional and social system for agricultural and natural resource management in Ethiopia. The objectives are 1) determining the institutional framework and collaboration, 2) analysing the capacity of the extension system and training activities for knowledge generation and transfer, 3) investigating local thresholds for information access and knowledge exchange.

The explorative study was carried out from 2013 to 2015. A single case study design was applied with Ethiopia incorporating the national and local level as embedded units. Data was collected by reviewing official documents, conducting 80 interviews with state and civic organisational representatives and a survey with 112 community members in Amhara and Oromia Region. Stakeholder and communication analysis was applied.

Findings show that Ethiopia's national strategies on economic growth and climate change adaptation are elaborated by the government with minor involvement of non-government stakeholders and lower administrative levels. The national institutions for environment and climate change are not reflected at the regional level which results in a gap of information flow and unclear responsibilities. The top-down and sector-focused structure of the government system impedes multi-stakeholder collaboration and information transfer fitting to local contexts. Trainings on agricultural and environmental rehabilitation activities are offered to local stakeholders and community but the content and methods are partly not matching with the demand. Information structures of the extension system are primarily one-way. Very basic local living and working conditions induce a brain drain of qualified local staff and community members leading to a loss of knowledge and manpower. Half of the community members face challenges in accessing information and communication due to remoteness and lack of communication means. Women have a limited social network and access to information due to traditional gender patterns.

Narrowing the gap between governance and action requires a mutual understanding by the relevant actors. Platforms for multi-level stakeholder dialogue can facilitate access to information, knowledge exchange and the production of new knowledge. Prerequisites are vertical and horizontal institutional linkages, and the sharing of decision-making power and responsibilities.

Keywords: Communication analysis, Ethiopia, extension, governance, multi-stakeholder collaboration