Teshale Amde: The Changing Face of Ethiopia's Agricultural Extension System

Teshale (left), in the process of creating a video

Teshale Amde is a development agent (DA) in Arsi Negelle district of Ethiopia. He is a government extension service provider responsible for promoting relevant modern agricultural practices in rural areas. Teshale provides crop extension services, engaging with 411 households of the Gubeta Arjo peasant association, Teshale's key responsibilities include providing classroom and field-based training in the Farmer Training Center and supporting farming households to develop their annual plans and assist with their implementation, while following up with the farmers to assess their agricultural performance.

For about a year now, Teshale has been using videos to disseminate information, part of a pilot implemented by Digital Green in partnership with Oxfam America and Sasakawa Africa Association in association with the Ministry of Agriculture, to test the efficacy of Digital Green's approach in the Ethiopian context. Discussing his experience during the pilot phase, Teshale says, "Using the Digital Green approach has helped me to be successful in my job. The videos help farmers to quickly understand and accept new technologies and practices. This saves me time because now I do not need to travel from house to house to explain the new methods or technologies. Since we began using the video dissemination method, my focus has shifted to providing follow-up services after video disseminations and offering assistance to farmers who adopt the new practices or technologies."

The pilot project was initiated in late 2012, reaching out to approximately 1,000 farmer households in three districts of Ethiopia: Arsi Negele and D. Libanos in Oromia region, and Gumer in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS)

region. The pilot was designed to help amplify the effectiveness of existing government extension systems for agriculture by building the capacity of DAs. This was done by training DAs in Digital Green's video production and dissemination techniques, and by providing technical operational support of low-cost mediated, instructional video as a method of extension services.

Teshale finds the video-enabled dissemination approach suitable and beneficial for Ethiopian communities, as, "The process helps us teach farmers the ever-changing agricultural technologies in a very visual and practical manner. The discussion between farmers also helps to increase trust amongst the community, and to create a spirit of healthy competition in implementing practices"

Elaborating on how the Digital Green method has helped his work, Teshale says, "Traditionally, we did not have either the means or the capacity to demonstrate best farming practices or irrigation technologies practically. Convincing farmers about a new practice or technology verbally through theoretical lessons was very difficult. Farmers are far more willing to adopt practices or technologies after observing the benefits firsthand."

Jero Gelgelu, a farmer from Arsi Negelle district, agrees, "[the video-based approach] helps the DAs to explain new technologies and practices in a more detailed manner along with scientific evidence that substantiates their claims." Emphasizing the community-learning benefits of the approach, he adds, "Before the end of the dissemination session, there is an active and open discussion among group members. Farmers are able to ask as many questions as they like, no matter the question's content. This discussion helps to minimize doubt farmers may have in regards to the new technology or farming practices. Through the video dissemination process, farmers learn new practices from three different sources: the video, the development agent, and the farmers themselves."

The statistics complement Teshale and Jero's enthusiasm about this innovative ICT-enabled, community-sourced approach to share information on best practices. During the pilot phase of the intervention, within the Arsi Nagele district in Oromia region, about 88% of the engaged farmers adopted a practice featured in the videos.

Buoyed by the success of the pilot, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), a technical support agency established by the Government of Ethiopia, have invited Digital Green to scale up its approach to amplify extension efforts and reach 150,000 households across four regions of Ethiopia: Oromia, SNNPRS, Amhara and Tigray.