

# **Forging Partnerships to Enhance the Relevance of Graduate Research in Agriculture**

## **Report on Stakeholder Workshop**

**23-24 October, 2008, Hawassa University, Ethiopia**

### **Background and Rational**

Tertiary level education in agriculture and allied disciplines, research and extension constitute the core components of agricultural knowledge triangle in Ethiopia. The first has a profound influence on the latter two in, at least, two ways. First, indirectly through imparting knowledge, developing skills and shaping attitudes of research and extension professionals and managers. Secondly, directly as a key research actor in its own right. Research conducted by postgraduate students is an integral part of research activities of tertiary level education in agriculture, and probably represent the larger share of time-bound research undertakings of the institutions.

Ethiopia has registered over half a century of experience in tertiary level agricultural education. Graduate programmes in various fields of agricultural sciences commenced at MSc level in 1979 at the then Alemaya College of Agriculture (now Haramaya University) and has been expanding ever since. Today, the number of Universities is expanding at an unprecedented rate, and most have commenced graduate programmes. One of the strongest aspects of these graduate programmes is exposure of students to research undertakings, write-up of theses and open defence of their major findings.

Currently R&D organizations are under immense pressure to improve their relevance, accountability and impact; and are facing new and increasingly complex challenges of supporting the process of agricultural commercialization, fighting poverty and food and nutritional insecurity in ecologically sustainable manner. In this regard, research carried out by graduate students can make its own contribution if properly planned and implemented with the stakeholders. Nonetheless, although the graduate programmes in agriculture have been successful in producing high calibre professionals in their respective fields of study, the relevance of their theses research in addressing the real needs of Ethiopian farmers and supporting policy and development practice has been questionable. One of the reasons for the mismatch between research activities of graduate students and the other two major components of the agricultural knowledge triangle has been the absence of proper coordination of efforts among the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD), National Agricultural Research System (NARS) and Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) right from research problem identification and implementation to synthesising, packaging and popularization of relevant research results. This has led to difficulty in leveraging funds for graduate research projects, created artificial shortage of manpower to undertake research and opened up the door for duplication of research activities.

The current global trend in agricultural research reveals a major shift away from the conventional linear and often isolated process, to the pursuit of impact as a driving force for research with innovation systems perspective as a framework. A new way of doing science with focus on impact-driven engagement in research for development is emerging. Given our stage of development, we therefore need to position ourselves to these changing circumstances and ensure that our resources and efforts are spent in a more meaningful and intelligent way through partnering and collaboration to create synergy.

Given the particular attention provided to the agricultural sector by the Government of Ethiopia, the urgency of the need to enhance agricultural productivity and market-orientation of the production system and the encouraging trend in expansion of higher learning institutions, it is felt to be an opportune time to harmonize efforts to create synergy among the major actors and stakeholders. As a result, the Improving Productivity and Market Success (IPMS) of Ethiopian Farmers project, in collaboration with the Hawassa University, has organized a two day workshop from October 23 to 24, 2008 to thoroughly examine the current situation of graduate research in various national universities, come up with sustainable remedy to the problem and enhance the relevance of graduate research to science and agricultural development in the country.

**Purpose of the Workshop:**

The purpose of the workshop was to stimulate and facilitate the development of improved partnerships for enhancing the relevance of graduate research in advancing agricultural sciences and development in Ethiopia.

**Objectives:**

1. To deliberate and achieve a common understanding on how to improve the relevance of agricultural graduate research to the country's agricultural policies and strategies
2. To re-position graduate research undertakings to focus more on demand-driven engagement in research for development in pursuit of impact
3. To develop mechanisms for enhanced partnerships among key actors and stakeholders in engagement in problem identification, research implementation and application of research results
4. To come up with a common understanding on coordination of funding and resource mobilization for sustainable support of graduate research
5. To develop appropriate recommendations for proper documentation and dissemination of research results
6. To agree on modalities and mechanisms for coordination of efforts to enhance the relevance of graduate research

**Expected Outputs:**

1. The potential contribution of graduate research in addressing the country's agricultural problems appreciated and understood
2. The need to re-position graduate research to be more demand-driven and impact-oriented agreed
3. Mechanisms for enhanced partnerships in engagement in graduate research undertakings and application of research results agreed and developed
4. The importance, need and mechanisms of coordination of funding and resource mobilization to ensure sustainable support for graduate research appreciated and agreed
5. Recommendations for proper documentation and dissemination of research results developed
6. Modalities and mechanisms for coordination of efforts to enhance the relevance of graduate research developed and agreed

***Participants:***

The workshop brought together all the relevant stakeholders (Annex-1) from:

- the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- the Rural Capacity Building Project, MoARD
- the Federal Ministry of Education
- the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)
- Regional Agricultural Research Institutes (RARIs)
- the Addis Ababa, Haramaya, Hawassa and Mekele universities
- the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
- the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
- the Improving Productivity and Market Success (IPMS) Ethiopian Farmers Project, ILRI

### **Activities and Processes:**

The two- day stakeholders' workshop was carried out through both plenary sessions (presentations and discussion) and a breakout session (small group tasks followed by plenary presentations on group findings and discussion). During the workshop the stakeholders deliberated on four themes relating to graduate research in agriculture and allied disciplines: the relevance of graduate research, finance and staff for supporting graduate research, documentation of outputs of graduate research and its effective communication to potential users, and the need for partnership for enhancing the relevance and impact of graduate research.

The workshop began with a welcome speech by Dr. Sheleme Beyene, the Vice President of the hosting University. His Excellency Dr. Adhane Haile, State Minister, Ministry of Education, made a keynote address outlining the GoE strategies and directions for advancing graduate programmes in agriculture.

#### ***Plenary sessions***

The whole of the first day and part of the second day were used for plenary presentations and discussions (Annex-2).

Five invited papers were presented to set the scene for the workshop. These papers addressed different issues relevant to the theme of the workshop such as: the implications for agricultural higher education of the emerging issues and challenges in AR4D (Dr. P. Anandajayaskarem & Berhanu G/Medhin, ILRI); agricultural higher education linkages with the core components of agricultural knowledge triangle in Ethiopia (Dr. Tena Alamirew in lieu of Professor Belay Kassa); the need for harmonizing EIAR research and research in agricultural higher education (Dr. Solomon Assefa, EIAR); and examples of success stories in strengthening the contribution of agricultural education to research and development in sub-Saharan Africa (Dr. David Spielman, IFPRI).

Following the invited papers presentation session, the deans of schools of graduate studies (AAU- Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Haramaya University, Hawassa University and Mekele University) presented papers on the experiences of respective institutions with graduate research entitled '*Critical analysis of graduate research in agriculture: types of research, quality, relevance, partnerships, coordination and resource mobilization*'. During this session IPMS presented a paper on its experience with graduate research in agriculture and allied discipline.

The papers presented during the final plenary presentation session primarily dealt with strategies and opportunities for capacity building to strengthen graduate research in agriculture and allied disciplines.

- ILRI strategies and opportunities for capacity building through graduate research (Dr. P. Anandajayaskarem)
- IPMS experience with capacity development through graduate studies (Dr. Azage et al)
- Rural Capacity Building Project – support for graduate research (Dr. Mandefro Negusie)
- Addis Ababa University: higher education staff capacity building (Dr. Brook Lemma)

### ***Breakout session followed by plenary presentation***

During the breakout session, the participants were divided into four groups and critically reflected on key issues relating to enhancing the relevance, quality and practical usefulness of graduate research in agriculture. Different groups addressed specific issues in graduate research such as relevance, quality and accountability, partnership, research funding and staff, and documentation and communication of research outputs. The breakout session was followed by a plenary presentation whereby each group representative presented observations of the groups. Discussion was then conducted on the findings of the groups.

### **Wrap-up Session**

Finally, Mr. Hoekstra, the IPMS project manager, presented the summary of the key issues and deliberations during the two day stakeholder workshop. The workshop came to its end with the words of thanks from Mr. Hoekstra to the organizers and the participants of the workshop.

### **Workshop Key Findings and Recommendations on the Way Forward**

The summary of current status of graduate research and key concerns of the workshop participants are presented here.

#### ***I. Research Relevance***

- Questionable quality of research
- Graduate research topic selection is generally driven by individual interest
- The research by graduate students is often haphazard, isolated, supply driven, technology focus
- There is a mismatch in graduate research with the duration the research demand and available student time
- Lack of national agricultural research plan

#### ***II. Funding and staff***

- Near exclusive reliance on limited government funding
- Disparity in allocation of funds – uncoordinated
- Unavailability of adequate staff for teaching and guiding graduate research
- Difficulties with the retention of staff qualified and experienced staff
- Flexibility of staff to adapt and respond to changing stakeholders demands and expectations

### ***III. Documentation and dissemination of research***

- Poor documentation of graduate research outputs
- The dissemination of research outputs is limited mostly in the peer community
- Inadequate use of ICT for proper documentation and communication
- Poor writing and communication skills of students, which seriously influences the quality of graduate research output

### ***II. Partnership***

- Weak linkage/collaboration
  - Intra-institutions
  - Inter-institutions
  - Research – extension – education
- Other relevant actors (private sector, farmers, civil societies, etc)

Options and entry points identified during the workshop to enhance relevance and impact-orientation in graduate research in agriculture are summarized here.

### ***I. Enhancing the relevance of graduate research***

- National research & development plan – how do we develop it
- Assist in transformation from subsistence agriculture to market oriented agriculture
- Value chain – innovation system perspective
- Impact oriented
- Thematic approach - most Universities do not yet follow the thematic approach, but there are emerging cases. How can we learn from each other? Are plans the same as deeds.
- Aligning organizational and individual interest – creativity

### ***II. Improving funding and staff situations***

- Industry/commercial clients
- Donors/projects/NGOs as sources of funding
- Post graduate grant scheme
- Short-term in-service training on new concepts
- Staff and student incentive schemes
- Linkages with foreign universities
- Creative staffing arrangements (joint appointments, university/research/industry collaborations)

### ***III. Improving documentation and dissemination of research outputs***

- Database development for thesis research
- Ethiopian Agricultural Portal
- Fora for stakeholders
- Repackaging research outputs
- Development training materials
- Involvement of students in applying research outputs

### ***III. Partnership for enhanced relevance of graduate research***

- Some encouraging beginnings along partnerships with foreign universities
- Theme based partnerships
- National graduate council
- REAC – who is involved? Is it enough?

- Organizational structure research and higher learning institutions – separate/integrated

### **Next step:**

The importance of having some kind of coordination structure and platforms was considered critical to translate the intentions to concrete actions. Thus, it was decided to establish a ***“Forum for Graduate Research in Agriculture”, FGRA*** for short. The forum is consisting of deans of schools of graduate studies of relevant higher institutes as well as EIAR representative. Actors like Improving Productive and Market Success (IPMS) of Ethiopian farmers’ project and the Rural Capacity Building Project (RCBP) of MoARD were identified as collaborators with important facilitation roles.

It was agreed that Hawassa University would convene the next FRGA meeting and play a coordination role during the transitional period. The University was recommended to take this transitory role because it had previously considered to launch similar initiative and was making effort to secure financial support from the CIDA.

The FRGA would be expected to:

- workout partnership and communication strategy, modalities, and to suggest coordination mechanisms; and
- organize the next platform for deliberation on the proposal and action plan to move forward.

**Annex-1: The list of participants**

	Participant	Institutions
1	H.E. Dr. Adhane Haile, State Minister, Ministry of Education	MoE
2	Dr. Mandefro Negussie	Manager, RCBP, MoARD
	Ato Tesfaye Cherinet	Special Assistant to the State Ministry, MoARD
3	Dr. Alemayehu Assefa	DG, ARARI
4	Dr. Admassu Shibru	EIAR
5	Mr. Dirk Hoekstra	Manager, IPMS, ILRI
6	Dr. Kiros Meles, DG	DG, TARI
7	Dr. Dr. Assefa Ta'a	DG, ORARI
8	Dr. Amsalu Ayana	Director of crop research, ORARI
9	Dr. Tenna Alamerew	Academic and Research Vice President, Haramaya University
10	Dr. Sheleme Beyene	Academic and Research Vice President, Hawassa University
11	Dr. Tesfaye Yazew	Academic and Research Vice President, Jima University
12	Dr. Brook Lemma –	Director of Research, AAU
13	Prof. Chemedha Fininsa	Dean, SGS, Haramaya University
14	Dr. Enquebaber Kassaye	Research Director, Mekele University
15	Dr. Fikre Lobago	FVM, Addis Ababa University
16	Prof. Chali Jira, Dean - SGS	Dean, SGS, Jima University
17	Dr. Eyasu Yazew, Dean, SGS	Dean, SGS, Mekele University
18	Dr. Tesfaye Abebe	Dean, SGS, Hawassa University
19	Dr. Kelay Belihu	Assoc. Dean, Graduate Studies & Research, FVM/AAU
20	Ato Dhuguma Adugna	Dean, CoA, Jima University
21	Dr. Girmay Tesfay	Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, Mekele University
22	Dr. Yewulsew Abebe	Dean, CoA, Hawassa University
23	Dr. P. Anandajayaskeram	Manager, Capacity Strengthening Unit, ILRI
24	Dr. Yibrah Beyene	Hawassa University
25	Dr. Dereje Assefa	Mekele University
26	Dr. Ababaw Gashaw	Jima University
27	Ato Ejigu Tegegne	MoARD
28	Dr. David Spielman	IFPRI, ISNAR Division
29	Ato Alemayehu Mengistu	Addis Ababa University
30	Dr. Azage Tegegne	IPMS, ILRI
31	Dr. Berhanu G/Medhin	IPMS, ILRI
32	Dr. Ermias Sehai	IPMS, ILRI
33	Ato Kahsay Berhe	IPMS, ILRI
34	Dr. Tesfaye Lemma	IPMS, ILRI
35	Dr. Gebremedhin Waldewaid	IPMS, ILRI
36	Dr. G/Yohannes Berhane	IPMS, ILRI
37	Dr. Yigzaw Dessalegn	IPMS, ILRI
38	Ato Abebe Shiferaw	IPMS, ILRI
39	Ato Ketema Yilma	IPMS, ILRI
40	Ato Zewdu Ayele	IPMS, ILRI
41	Ato Worku Teka	IPMS, ILRI

## Annex-2: Workshop Program

Date	Time	Papers	
		<b>Theme I: The Current Scenario</b>	
		<b>Chair: Dr. Sheleme Beyene; Rapporteurs: Drs. Tesfaye Abebe/Berhanu GM</b>	
<b>Day 1</b>	8:30-9:00	Registration	Orga
	9:00-9:15	Welcome Speech	Dr. S Vice
	9:15-9:30	Keynote address: GoE strategies and directions for advancing graduate programmes in agriculture	H.E. Min
	9:30-10:00	Discussion	
	10:00-10:30	Setting the Scene: Emerging issues and challenges in agricultural development and the relevance of graduate research	Dr. A
	10:30-11:00	Coffee/Tea Break	Orga
	11:00-11:30	The missing links in agricultural higher education and agricultural research, extension and development in Ethiopia	Dr. T Kassa
		<b>Theme II: The Experience</b>	
		<b>Chair: Prof. Belay Kassa; Rapporteurs: Dr. Manderfo Negusie/ Ermias Sehai</b>	
	11:30-12:00	Critical analysis of graduate research in agriculture: Experiences of Haramaya University – types of research, quality, relevance, partnerships, coordination and resource mobilization	Drs.
	12:00-1:00	<b>Discussion</b>	
	1:00-2:00	<b>Lunch</b>	
	2:00-2:15	Critical analysis of graduate research in agriculture: Experiences of Hawassa University – types of research, quality, relevance, partnerships, coordination and resource mobilization	Drs.
	2:15-2:30	Critical analysis of graduate research in agriculture: Experiences of Mekelle University – types of research, quality, relevance, partnerships, coordination and resource mobilization	Drs.
	2:30-2:45	Critical analysis of graduate research in animal health and production: Experiences of FVM, AAU – types of research, quality, relevance, partnerships, coordination and resource mobilization	Dr. I
	2:45-3:00	New perspectives of research and graduate programs at Addis Ababa University	Dr. I
	3:00-3:15	<b>Discussion</b>	
	3:15-3:45	<b>Coffee/Tea Break</b>	
		<b>Theme III: The Opportunities</b>	
		<b>Chair: Dr. Admassu Tsegaye; Rapporteurs: Drs. Chemedu/Tesfaye Lema</b>	
	3:45- 4:15	An innovation systems perspective on strengthening agricultural education and training in sub-Saharan Africa	Dr. I
	4:15-4:30	Capacity development through graduate studies: IPMS experiences	Drs.
	4:30-4:45	Strategies & opportunities for capacity building through graduate research	Dr. A
	4:46-5:00	Opportunities for graduate research support under the RCBP of the MoARD: Making it more relevant	Dr. I

	5:00-5:15	Harmonizing EARS research and graduate research at agricultural AHLIs	Dr. S
	5:15-5:30	<b>Discussion</b>	
	7:00 PM	<b>Official Workshop Dinner</b>	Org
<b>Day 2</b>		<b>Theme IV: The Challenges</b> <b>Chair: Dr. Mitiku Haile; Rapporteurs: Drs. Kelay/Azage</b>	
	8:30- 9:00	From problem identification to popularization of results – Synthesis of key issues, challenges & opportunities	Prof Mem
	9:00- 9:30	<b>Discussion</b>	
		<b>Coffee/Tea Served in Syndicate Rooms</b>	Org
	9:30-1:00	<b>Breakout Sessions</b>	
		• Group I. Relevance, quality and accountability of graduate research	
		• Group II. Funding, support and supervision	
		• Group III. Documentation, database, dissemination, popularization and application of research results	
		• Group IV. Partnerships – Mechanisms and modalities for coordination	
	1:00-2:00	<b>Lunch</b>	Org
		<b>Theme V: The Possible Solutions</b> <b>Drs. Sheleme Beyene/Tesfaye Abebe</b>	
	2:00-3:00	Group Presentations – by respective group chairs or secretaries • Group I • Group II • Group III • Group IV	
	3:00-3:30	<b>Coffee/Tea Break</b>	Org
	3:30-5:30	<b>Synthesis of Key findings and way forward</b>	Mr.
	5:30	Closing Remark	Mr.