



Ministry of Agriculture Introduces its New Strategic Development Plan (2024-2028)

The Ministry of Agriculture carried out extensive meetings in five regions of the country in a bid to evaluate the first-quarter progress, and to elaborate the new Strategic Development Plan (SDP) that spans from 2024-2028.

The Public Relations Division has conducted a detailed interview with Mr. Tesfai Tsegai, Sector Planning Unit head at the Ministry, and member of the SDP drafting committee.

Q: What are the needs assessment that led to the new SDP?

A: (Mr. Tesfai): Well. This strategic development plan is part of the ongoing efforts of the ministry to strengthen the productivity of the agricultural sector but with crucial revisions to address the contemporary challenges facing Eritrean agriculture. Thus, it builds upon the successes and lessons learned from the previous plans. To do so, we have employed a participatory approach where representatives from all departments and division of the ministry as well as planners from all regions of the country have drafted their Development Plan for the next five years.

Q: Compared to the previous two five-year SDPs of the MoA, what's new about this SDP?

A: The agricultural sector is constantly evolving, and facing new challenges



Mr. Tesfai Tsegai

and opportunities. The new plan addresses challenges that have emerged since the implementation of the previous plans. For example, it emphasises climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive programs and leverages on the accumulated strengths of the sector to implement these programs.

The Ministry has made remarkable progress in increasing yields of some crops, particularly wheat, maize, and potatoes. Moreover, the efforts to integrate sweet potato, which is highly nutritious, and climate-smart crop, into dietary habits are promising. Exploiting the yield potentials of these crops is top on the agenda of the plan. Moreover, this new SDP stresses promoting organic farming practices by motivating farmers to use organic fertilizers, bio-pesticides and integrated pest management practices.

Q: What are the major components of the new SDP?

A: This SDP has got five development programs, namely; agricultural land and natural resources management program; crop development program; livestock development program; integrated livelihood and agribusiness support program; human and institutional capacity development program. Each of these programs constitutes several outputs from each department, division and regional branch. These outputs are expected to result in five distinct but complementary outcomes that contribute to ending hunger and promoting sustainable food systems. Implementation of these programs is being kicked off under the theme "Safe and nutritious food for everyone, everywhere".

Q: Let's go deeper into each of these programs; and start with the Agricultural Land and Natural Resources Management program.

A: The Agricultural Land and Natural Resources Development Program as its name indicates, aims at enhancing sustainable utilization and conservation and enhancement of natural resources. Land and water are the basis of life and agriculture is a sector that largely depends on these resources. While this is a universal fact, our country's rugged topography, recurrent drought and mostly torrential rains induce additional challenges. That's why soil and water conservation programs



are always top on the national and sectoral agenda. This is an area where we have registered promising progress but we believe there is a lot to be done to sustainably tap the opportunities from the conserved waters, build more water reservoirs, and treat all watersheds. Expansion of renewable energy sources (mainly solar energy), promotion of organic farming, and conservation of plant and animal genetic resources are also among the main strategies in this program.

Q: Could you familiarize us with the second program on how it will contribute to producing adequate and healthy crops?

A: The second program aims at increasing the productivity of crops. We have ample cultivable land that is sufficient to feed our population and beyond. However, the overall agricultural output is not yet satisfying the local demand. Low productivity in the agricultural sector not only results in low outputs but also imposes heavy opportunity costs. Increased productivity is the only means we can release our labor and other resources to the other sectors of the economy. Therefore, increasing productivity in the agricultural sector is a prerequisite to all development programs for it has multiplier and far-reaching effects. Among the major strategies in this program include building on

the achievements of the previous years. Our researchers and farmers have proved that the potential yield of maize and wheat, if supplemented with irrigation and under good agronomic practices can reach an average of 50-60 quintals per hectare.

Besides, the productivity of potatoes has witnessed a satisfactory level with some farmers reaching 300 to 450 quintals per hectare. In light of these realities, we will focus on narrowing the yield gaps. Doing this is not easy, but we have already gained enough lessons from these success stories. What is needed is to multiply the number of exemplary farmers who adopt these tested good



agronomic practices, mainly through an extension work. In addition to this, we are working on introducing and expanding the cultivation of other adaptable, nutritious, and climate-smart crops. Date palm, sweet potato, and cassava are among the major crops being introduced to our farming systems. Date palm cultivation, for instance, has become an opportunity to change the arid and semi-arid lowlands into treasures for nutrition-sensitive and sustainable livelihoods. Here, it is important to mention that, we will continue to maintain production diversity according to the suitability of different agro-ecological zones.

In this area, we will invest in introducing small-scale handy technologies that can help farmers to reduce the cost of production. Another important issue that you raised is protecting the health of plants. For safety and sustainability concerns, we will encourage farmers to adopt integrated pest management practices. To accelerate this, we have introduced some locally produced effective biological methods. The use of chemical protection and treatment methods shall be used as a last resort and with standard safety protocols.

Q: Livestock Development has become among the MoA's top priorities. What do we expect from this program?

A: Yes. Livestock development is another important program of this SDP. As said, there are several problems in this sub-sector. The main objective of this program is to increase the availability and affordability of safe, and nutritious milk, meat, eggs, and honey.

Milk production has not fared well over the years. Among the major reasons for this trend has been the inadequate production of green feed and limited knowledge of herd management practices. To address these problems, initiatives will be taken to mobilize farmers to allocate land for green feed production. From this year on, horticulture farmers will be encouraged to allocate 10% of their land to animal feed (9%) and sweet potatoes (1%). Moreover, farmers will be trained on climate-smart forage-based dairy development practices which include the preparation of dairy-products-and-byproducts-based meals, and green feed preservation techniques.

To enhance the availability of quality meat, improved range land management practices will be

introduced for intensive and semi-intensive beef production systems.

Increasing the production of eggs is another area where we shall focus in the coming five years. On top of the modern egg production practices that we have been intensively working on, we will encourage traditional home-based chicken rearing methods as well. Henceforth, households should not be dependent on chicks distributed by the Ministry. This approach is expected to contribute to increased income and nutritional diversity in farm households which could potentially benefit women and children.

Honey production is another important part of the program. To augment honey production, farm households are expected to build at least one top-bar hive per year. The ministry will provide necessary training on techniques of making top-bar hives and multiplication of bee colonies.

Another cross-cutting issue in this program is promoting animal health and animal product safety. For this reason, the coverage and efficiency of vaccination and treatment services will be enhanced. Moreover, regulatory services will be strengthened through awareness-



raising training programs and inspection services.

Q: The fourth program goes to 'Integrated Livelihood and Agribusiness Support Program'. What are the major components of this program, and what are the strategies set to improve the livelihood of the people through this program?

A: This program puts special emphasis on integrated development models that are aimed at promoting farmers' livelihoods through climate-smart, gender-inclusive, and nutrition-sensitive livelihood patterns. For example, the Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package-MIHAP will be scaled up under this program. Moreover, home economics activities like nutrition education, expansion of improved stoves, and food safety are included in this program. Besides, the Small and Productive Farm Plot (SPFP) which will be practiced over 1000 m² is being introduced for the first time to improve access to safe and nutritious

food in the rain-fed and semi-arid areas of Eritrea, is part of this program. This agricultural initiative for water-stressed areas is a tailored climate and nutrition-sensitive initiative that could change the livelihood of many vulnerable communities for it will be implemented in all regions of the country to properly utilize two-three seasons to produce cereals, pulses and oil crops; as well as vegetables that include sweet potato. Its detailed implementation manual will be distributed very soon.

Q: The Human and Institutional Capacity Development Program is also one of the new SDP programs. What does this program constitute, and how does it add value to the rest of the programs?

A: This is a cross-cutting program that aims at enhancing the innovativeness, efficiency, and effectiveness of agricultural sector institutions. It includes two elements: human capacity building and institutional development. Human capacity development aims at upgrading the

qualifications and competencies of the MoA staff through different short- and long-term training. In this strategic period, these activities shall be implemented following the human resources development plan to fill the expertise gaps in the MoA. Another approach to enhance the competencies of our extension staff is promoting farmers' field schools (FFSs). The extension staff at village levels are expected to organize FFSs in villages or neighborhoods. These schools are expected to enhance the practical experience of both farmers and staff. By facilitating FFS sessions, extension agents can learn from the indigenous knowledge and identify tips for future development.

The second element is institutional development which can impact the the operational efficiency. This includes software and hardware parts, The hardware is the infrastructure development of laboratories, seed stores, vet clinics, etc. The other component is building the soft power which includes all the managerial and





support services in the MoA. These provide an enabling environment for the installation and development of pragmatic practices that can be sustained over the years. Developing agricultural policies, standards, and regulatory frameworks, planning, monitoring and evaluation systems, gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information, systems of human resources appraisal, etc are key elements that make up institutional development.

Q: Who are the major stakeholders behind this SDP?

A: Farmers are the main partners in implementing this plan. Our role is to clarify the vision and support the means to reach the ends. Other important stakeholders are relevant local government and non-government organizations and the development partners who always provide us with the needful support to overcome our challenges.

Q: How do you communicate to and engage with these stakeholders so that they can aggressively contribute to the success of this new SDP?

A: We do this in different ways. Primarily, we use our extension agents who are working at village and administrative area levels. We have also been conducting seminars at sectoral and regional levels. We are rigorously utilizing our media outlets through our public relations division. This interview, itself, is part of that. Above all, we have been working to make sure that every member of the ministry (directly or indirectly) contributes to the preparation of this plan. Therefore, the interest and passion in its implementation are promising. To this end, we are also strengthening the sectoral Monitoring and Evaluation system at all levels of the Ministry. All departments, divisions, and regions will now use standard monitoring templates which can also be easily tracked through the ongoing digitization process. Thus, leveraging the advancements in communication tools, we will soon be able to easily track the progress of implementation.

Q: Finally, I give you this opportunity to deliver some final words

A: Building on the wisdom of "failing to plan is planning to fail," we've taken a proactive step by developing this SDP. However, a well-crafted plan is only the first step. Now, we must ensure its successful implementation.

This requires effective monitoring and evaluation of all planned activities by their respective units as specified in the plan. To this end, we will continue to work closely with the planning and statistics units in all regions so as they develop the capacity to plan, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of the programs.

Finally, I want to express my sincere appreciation for selecting this important issue to be addressed through the monthly newsletter and your consistent efforts in communicating all other sectoral activities. This will help us achieve transparency and ensure everyone understands our path forward.

Thank you!
