Access of Rural Women to Agricultural Extension Services, Opportunities and Challenges in Ethiopia

Women and Youth Affairs Directorate of Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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1 MOA/WYAD = Ministry of Agriculture, Women and Youth Affairs Directorate
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3 MOA/AED = Ministry of Agriculture, _____________________________
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Highlights of Contributions of Rural Women to Agricultural Economy

It is a well known fact that agrarian economy in Ethiopia is operated not only by men, but also by women albeit this fact is still inadequately acknowledged by many of the development partners and even the community itself. In light of the existing cultural perceptions and beliefs, men are the ones considered as “farmers” assuming responsibility for every type of agricultural activities while women are supposed to be responsible solely for domestic (household) chores. Several gender based studies have documented that women contribute labor in the range of 45 – 75% for agricultural activities. This is even in addition to more than 95% of the household (reproductive) activities operated by women. When they operate both productive and household based activities, they spend about 16 hours a day (Agajie and Derese, 2011). Women’s contribution to agricultural development is diverse including crop production, livestock production and natural resource management. In spite of their enormous contributions, much has not been done than said in recognizing their interests and needs in development plans.

Even though the extent might vary from one culture to another across different parts of the country, the fact is that women’s contribution to the economy is of paramount importance. The disappointing reality, however, is that the interests and priorities of women and their immediate and strategic needs are not adequately addressed in the development strategies of institutions. Even though there are women based initiatives and plans in limited cases, it is poorly implemented on the ground still keeping away the interests and priorities of women.

Agricultural extension system of Ethiopia is striving to address complicated problems of farmers and ensure improvements in their livelihoods through adopting various approaches. It has also been transparently stated in the extension strategy that 30% of the extension beneficiaries shall be women. In spite of this target, the actual implementation has faced challenges of identifying the real problems of women and designing appropriate extension approaches that respond to
their real needs and priorities. In effect, most of the rural women are not yet able to benefit from the different services given by the extension system because of their diverse roles and needs. Even though there are limited attempts made, the extension system fails to tailor made its services to meet the various needs of female farmers. Some of these needs can include trainings, demonstrations, access to labor and time saving technologies, engagements in farmers groups, and access to other extension services credit, inputs, market and others.

On the other hand, previous studies have illustrated that recognizing the diverse roles of women and designing practical strategies tailored to their interests and priorities is anticipated to enhance economic growth by more than 30%. Given the crucial contributions of women for the agricultural economy, it has become evident that overlooking the development needs of women in the programs, strategies and plans will hardly lead to sustainable development of the country. However, there is no adequate information systematically documented on the existing extension service provision practices for men, women and youth, extension approaches being employed, opportunities available, and challenges of rural women in benefiting from agricultural extension services. In notice of this gap and the fundamental development needs of women, Women and Youth Affairs Directorate (WYAD) in the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) in collaboration with Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) has taken initiatives to assess the existing practices of extension services, identify gaps, opportunities and challenges, and propose recommendations to better mainstream gender in extension system and enhance women participation in extension services. The taskforce was established drawn from WYAD and respective regional offices to conduct an assessment study in four regions of the country: Tigray, Amhara, Oromiya and SNNPR.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

Overall Objective

The overall objective of the assessment study was to explore existing practices of extension service provision to women and men, and propose strategic inputs to the National Agricultural Extension System strategy from a gender perspective.
Specific objectives

The study specifically addressed the following objectives:

- Explore existing practices and access of extension services in particular focus to rural women
- Identify bottlenecks to gender mainstreaming, and participation of rural women in extension services
- Document best practices, challenges and lessons of success stories in gender equality and participation of women in development initiatives and extension services
- Figure out opportunities available that help develop strategies for enhancing benefits of rural women from extension services
- Propose entry points and recommendations that will help as inputs for designing the national agricultural extension system strategy

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

2.1 The Study Locations

To ensure national coverage and representativeness, the study embraced four major regions of Ethiopia: Oromiya, Amhara, Tigray and SNNPR. Two districts were selected from each of the regions and two kebeles from each of the districts. The districts and kebeles were selected to capture the status of extension service provision at grassroots levels.

2.2 Approaches Employed to Collect Information

Blends of approaches were engaged to collect information that address the objectives of the study. Participatory approaches were also adopted to help facilitate interactions and consultations with the identified target groups. The major approaches used have been briefly summarized as follows:
2.2.1 Desk Reviews

Desk review was employed in the first and subsequent stages of the study to explore the findings of earlier assessments made related to women participation in development initiatives. Published and unpublished articles, strategy documents, development plans, books and other relevant manuscripts were exhausted from both electronic and print media. This stage helped to capture the findings of earlier studies and substantiate the information collected through various approaches in this study. Documentations of Governmental and Non-governmental organizations, and international organizations were reviewed in the course of the study.

2.2.2 Participatory Consultations / Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus groups discussions (FGDs) were largely held with the team of target groups drawn from the community, and selected staffs of GOs and NGOs. Women only and mixed (women and men) groups were largely consulted through FGDs in all of the study regions. This helped to make in depth and free discussions with women only and mixed groups to explore their access to extension services, benefits generated from participation, appropriateness of extension approaches to women, barriers that restricted them from participation in extension services and much more. A mixture group of both men and women was also engaged with FGDs to learn the overall practices of extension service provision and responsiveness of the services to both men and women. The checklist was used as a tool to help capture essential points and lead the discussion process through logical sequences.

2.2.3 Key-Informant Interviews (KII)

Taskforce members held key informant interviews with representatives of Gender Offices structured from region to district levels. Heads/representatives of Women and Youth Affairs Bureau, Women and Youth Affairs Offices, Bureaus of Agriculture, Offices of Agriculture and other sectors were engaged in the KII. Community representatives, Chairpersons of Women Associations and similar structures were also consulted through KII. This approach (KII) helped explore specific issues of gender perspectives in much more details. Here also was used a checklist as a tool to figure out the issues.

2.2.4 Supplementary FGDs and KII with Selected Organizations and Prominent Individuals

In addition to FGDs and KII made by the taskforce, similar approaches were also engaged during organizing the report to fill the gaps and enrich the report with supplementary information. One of the target groups considered for gap filling included prominent individuals who experienced gender initiatives for decades in various research and development programs. These individuals have been largely exposed to sets of agricultural extension approaches in different cultures and agro-ecologies of the country. They shared lots of lessons and best practices that help involve women in agricultural extension systems. Selected institutions were also targeted during supplementary stages, such as the
National Agricultural Research System which also pursues outreach programs to demonstrate its agricultural technologies for its beneficiaries, women and men farmers. The Agricultural Research System is largely engaged in promoting its technologies to both men and women farmers through employing various options of participatory approaches. Field visit was also made to model sites of one of the research centers and held discussions with women only and mixed groups to take lessons and best practices in the course of their participation during pre-extension demonstrations and popularization of agricultural technologies before they are advanced to formal Agricultural Extension System. KIIIs were also held with promoters of these demonstration programs.

Selected NGOs engaged in pursuing development projects for rural households were also targeted at supplementary stage. These NGOs adopt ranges of participatory approaches when targeting either the household as a unit or women in particular in their development initiatives. FGD was held with representatives of NGOs to learn their lessons on how they are targeting households and women. Key informant discussions were also held with women focal persons of NGOs on best options of enhancing women participation in development and extension programs. In the course of these endeavors, there were lots of lessons learnt for further consideration. Individuals were also contacted from selected NGOs who have been engaged in promoting development initiatives to rural women.

Further supplementary FGDs were also held with professionals of selected GOs and NGOs working on women empowerment programs. These organizations had been experiencing women based initiatives as one of the components in their development projects.

2.2.5 Case Analysis of Best Practices

The study has also made efforts to track best practices recorded in enhancing women participation and improving their livelihoods in the study regions. After making investigations with organizations that are believed to have such best practices and exhausting documented reports, three best practices from Oromiya region, two from Amhara, and one each from SNNPR and Tigray regions have been figured out for consideration and presentation in this report. A total of seven cases were selected to illustrate best practices of women and youth participation in different development programs. Lots of lessons were learnt from the cases selected that would help as inputs in designing women-friendly and gender aware agricultural extension strategies.

2.3 Information Synthesis and Report writing

The information collected from four regions have been synthesized and presented in subsequent chapters. Accordingly, the report has been structured into eight chapters. The first and second chapters present the introduction and methodological approaches employed in the study. The third chapter was devoted to illustration of existing extension service provision in Ethiopia at length while the fourth chapter figures out the practical and strategic needs of rural women. The fifth chapter essentially explains the best practices, lessons and challenges of women participation in extension services while
the sixth chapter deals about opportunities available for enhancing women participation and gender mainstreaming. The seventh chapter is critically dedicated to presentation of strategic and operational recommendations and inputs for strengthening women participation in agricultural extension. Eighth chapter concludes the overall findings of the study while the ninth chapter illustrates pertinent literature reviewed in the course of the study.
3. Existing Practices of Extension Services for Women

3.1 Policy Framework for Gender Mainstreaming and Women Participation in Agricultural Extension

3.1.1 Policy Dimensions and Provisions in Mainstreaming Gender and Women Participation in Agricultural Extension Services

Equitable economic development cannot be achieved without due recognition of women’s contributions in development initiatives and ensuring equality of access to public services and resources. In view of this, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has endorsed lots of provisions for equality of men and women in all social, economic, legal and political sectors (FDRE, 1994). All other ministries, agencies, organizations and institutions are expected to design their gender aware sectoral policies and strategies in line with the provisions of the constitution. In response to this, Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has designed gender inclusive agricultural policies and established Women and Youth Affairs Directorate (WYAD) to facilitate gender mainstreaming process and women and youth empowerment in the agriculture sector. The directorate has in turn developed guidelines for facilitating gender mainstreaming process in the sector. The guideline was developed with the overall objective of serving as a practical tool for incorporating gender issues and prioritizes into the overall endeavors of the agricultural sector, which ultimately contributes to sustainable agricultural development of the country (WYAD, 2011). All departments under MOA are also supposed to take their own actions to pursue gender mainstreaming initiatives in their own operational programs. Among these is Agricultural Extension Department which is making efforts to mainstream gender in all its programs and involve women to benefit from agricultural extension services. In general, gender inclusive policy dimensions and provisions are already set in place and favorable for women to exploit the benefits from agricultural extension and beyond.

In spite of all the efforts and endeavors being made, much of it still remains to ensure women participation and utilize the services of agricultural extension. Implementation of policy provisions has not ensured anticipated economic benefits to most of the rural women in getting out of the hurdle of poverty. Moreover, the standard guidelines and regulations established at national levels to help promote participation of rural women in agricultural extension services has not been cascaded to lower structures, such as regional, zonal and district levels. The direction has only been given to implementers that 30% of the extension beneficiaries shall be women. In spite of this provision, the reality happened to be that the extension services are not accessible to most of the rural women. Women in male headed households (WiMHH), especially, have almost been neglected from the services except the limited attempts.
It has become evident in almost all of the regions that scores of women are not beneficiaries of the available agricultural technologies and various other extension services. Ranges of reasons can be attributed to low participation and inadequate services reaching to women farmers in different parts of the country. As a result of this, a strong need has been initiated to revise the existing Extension system strategy and make it more gender aware and accessible to rural women.

### 3.1.2 Organizational Structures of Gender Directorates, Departments and Units

In response to policy provisions, gender accountable structures have been laid down from higher to lower levels of government structures. In line with the Ministry of Women and Youth Affairs, similar structures have also been laid down from Regional to district Levels. At lower levels, however, these structures have been structured under Extension Core Process. At least one gender expert has also been allocated in the gender offices of the region, and each of the zones and districts. The existence of such a structure by itself can also be taken as a favorable opportunity even though the actual performance is inconsistent across regions.

At grassroots levels, there are also cases where female development agents (DAs) have been assigned with the responsibility of promoting agricultural extension services to all the farmers in the kebeles where they are assigned, including women. This can also be taken as a good opportunity to offer better services for women farmers, provided that female DAs are knowledgeable and skilful on techniques and mechanisms of identifying women’s demanding needs and addressing them accordingly.

### 3.2 Extension Service Provision Practices to Women

#### 3.2.1 The Practice of Designing Indicative Extension Plans

Mechanisms of preparing indicative plans for development needs of the community are almost similar across the regions. Indicative plans prepared at regional Bureau of Agriculture (BoA) are cascaded to district levels to customize it and prepare their own plans based on the potentials they are endowed with. Based on the district level extension plan, Development Agents (DAs) with the support of district level Subject matter specialists (SMS) prepare kebele level plans. While kebele level extension plan is being prepared, chair person of women association and leaders of women and men development groups get chances to participate and reflect on the plan. However, at this point in time, the scale of representation and participation of women has been perceived to be inadequate, even though the extent varies from district to district. It was supposed to be that the needs and priorities of women are being identified in the respective development groups and 1-to-5 networks where women also get the chance to participate in the planning processes and voice their needs. In some kebeles, DAs also take initiatives of identifying input demands of women and facilitate supplies accordingly.
At lower levels, household level plans are expected to be developed by the respective households through involvement of all members of the household. The extent of participation of women and the benefits accrued to extension services were reported to vary from district to district, and from kebele to kebele depending on the status of women, such as education, access to information and others. Even within a district, women may participate actively in one kebele than the other, or in one district than another. Even among women, FHH have more access to participate during discussions on the extension plans than WiMHH. This reveals lack of uniformity in the extents of women participation in extension planning. Moreover, in cases where plans are designed with the participation of men and women together, it is likely that women got dominated with men, and that the interests of women remains missing without being considered in the plans. Moreover, the processes of designing extension plans seem to be dominated by top-down approaches. Even though discussions are being made from top to bottom levels, it is largely the issue of customizing and adopting plans developed at higher levels with limited rooms for incorporation of ground realities. The real problems of women are little addressed in the plans, leaving them still desperate for meaningful changes of their livelihoods. It has even been reported that there is limited knowledge and skills of implementers on identifying the real gender problems and needs.

3.2.2 Approaches of Extension Services Being Employed

Even though at limited scales, participation of women in extension services is illustrating improvements as compared to earlier days. Establishment of new extension structures at village levels, such as development groups, 1-to-5 networks, FTCs and selection of female model farmers have contributed for participation of some women (mostly FHH) in extension services. These structures are new in their kind being established in close proximity and accessibility to farmers’ villages. These structures are supposed to facilitate linkages between extension service providers and beneficiaries.

The extension system employs several types of approaches that are believed to enhance the transfer of knowledge, skills and technologies for the farming community. The common types of extension services being in operation included trainings and consultations, practical demonstrations, experience sharing visits, field days and regular advisory services. The other extension approaches being used included electronic and print media. For instance, there are cases where regional radio programs, such as Amahra Radio program and Demtsi Woyane Tigray, promote best agricultural practices for public. The same is true for other radio programs aired in the country where they allocated part of the air time for agricultural programs. Radios and mobile phones are also becoming essential media of communicating agricultural information. Even though in limited scales, there are also cases where videos are being used in rural areas to illustrate specific issues in need. Among the print media, posters and manuals are also employed at limited extents even though not yet accessible to farther rural areas.

Irrespective of the diversity and options of approaches engaged in extension service provision, some of them have drawbacks. For instance, most of the farmers are fade-up of the prolonged and frequent
meetings on similar issues. Even the trainings given every time are almost on similar issues without value addition. Sometimes, there is also language barrier between the trainer and the community during training sessions. There are also cases where posters do not fit to the farmers’ circumstances. Radio and mobile are also not accessible to most of the farmers on account of economic problems.

The extension approaches being in use are adopted for all types of beneficiaries irrespective of gender, education and age. They are supposed to be equally important for both men and women. Youth farmers are even almost neglected from extension services. It has been reported that there is no specific type of extension service that is being tailored to the benefit of women farmers, both female household heads (FHH) and women in male headed households (WiMHH). The reality, however, has clearly revealed that all the extension approaches are not equally important for both men, women and youths. The real problems and development needs of women have not been properly identified by the extension practitioners and other development actors, or being neglected for some reason. What works best for men is not equally important for women. However, it was assumed that a particular extension approach is equally compatible to both men and women. This is believed to be one of the missing links in the existing extension system.

The extension services are being provided by ranges of development actors, even though at different scales. Ministry of Agriculture through all its cascaded structures is the fundamental provider of formal extension services to various beneficiaries at larger scales. At grassroots (kebele) levels, extension services are being facilitated by development agents (DAs), both male and female, even though female DAs account for only 26% in Amhara, 11% in SNNP, 13% in Oromiya and 17% in Tigray Regions.

There are also several organizations providing informal extension services to the farmers including National Agricultural Research Systems (Federal and Regional Agricultural Research Institutions, and Higher Learning Institutes), several NGOs, International Organizations, private enterprises, model farmers and others. These institutions incorporate promoting and demonstrating agricultural technologies to the farmers as one of the components in their programs and projects. With respect to preference, there are cases where the community preferred informal extension approaches despite they are usually run on pilot scales with limited numbers of participants. Women, especially, preferred informal extension approaches since this option organizes women-only extension group and introduces women friendly technologies. Moreover, women often get extension services from informal sources, such as their neighbors, peer groups, social networks (farmer based associations) and in limited scales from husbands. Even though development groups and 1-to-5 networks are favorable structures for promoting extension services, they are not even functional in most of the study regions. Since development groups and 1-to-5 networks are not strengthened and often reported to focus on non-technical issues, cases have been observed where farmers and DAs resort to the choice of informal extension services which produce tangible and observable outcomes and impacts. On the other hand, at higher levels, district and regional level experts claim “formal extension shall be better than informal”.


In spite of the well organized extension systems and several institutions being engaged in service provision, there are still challenges that restricted anticipated achievements. Among the extension approaches, some of them have been reported to have limitations. For instance, beneficiaries complained trainings that mostly deal on similar issues every time they are called for. Farmer Training Centers (FTCs), where trainings are supposed to be offered, are not well equipped and do not create conducive environment for learning. Cases have also been reported where there is language barrier during trainings. Trainings are often offered for both men and women in mixed groups, on similar matters. Sometimes, there are also cases where the messages on posters do not fit to the target groups under consideration.

### 3.2.3 Extension Services and Communication Channels Tailored to Women

Women farmers are not homogenous. There are female household heads (FHH) and women in male headed households (WiMHH) with different socio-economic status. The proportion of FHH in the population is also increasing from time to time. Extension services mostly target FHH as compared to WiMHH. Out of the total extension beneficiaries, FHHs account for 15% in Amhara, 35% in SNNP, 12% in Oromiya and 49% in Tigray regions. Formal extension system is making relentless efforts to engage these categories of women in extension services even though there are no specific extension approaches and communication channels tailored to women, as such. Available approaches are being channeled to both men and women farmers irrespective of their socio-economic and cultural status. In spite of this, there are limited initiatives being experienced in some locations mainly through informal extension approaches. In parts of the country, such as Amhara, Oromiya, SNNP and other regions, efforts were made to engage women in garden farming such as fruits and vegetable production, poultry farming, sheep/goat fattening and dairy production. In addition to this, there are also limited cases where women were empowered to engage in the production of field crops.

Some governmental organizations and selected NGOs have been striving to address the interests of women through informal extension approaches. Trainings, practical demonstrations, experience sharing visits, poster displays and others were made for women only groups. In some locations, such as in Wolmera district of Oromiya region where informal extension service was being offered to women only and men only groups, women were observed to apply new practices and technologies faster than their male counterparts. Women were asked why they opt to apply the new practices faster and they said “we are the ones who bear more burdens than men when arises food and economic crisis in our household. Therefore, we do not want to give further time to try new practices and technologies that are believed to solve household problems soon”. This does not mean that men do not adopt new practices, but that they want to take some more time until they prove that the new technology really works better than their conventional practice. In general, women were contented with the specific approaches compatible to their interests and most of these initiatives were reported to be efficient and effective. It was, therefore, learnt that women prefer approaches tailored to meet their specific developmental needs. The problem anticipated was sustainability and scalability unless these best practices and templates are streamlined into formal extension systems. The new templates and best
practices achieved shall be scaled-up to different parts of the country and to do so shall be embraced by formal extension systems. The formal extension system, in turn, requires women-compatible approaches to be included in the extension system strategy.

It was also clearly underlined that all women farmers are not of in the same socio-economic status. Female household heads (FHH) and women in male headed households (WiMHH) do not have similar status of resource availability, household level decision making, resource control, exposure and others. Participation in decision making is also either limited or inexistent for WiMHH which is often dominated by men (husbands). In female headed households, FHHs are the ones making decisions and controlling resources. In the case of WiMHH, resources are mainly controlled by their male counterparts. FHH are more exposed to outside world, such as extension, meetings, participation in management committee and others. On the other hand, these opportunities are almost inaccessible for WiMHH. At household levels, WiMHH are more over-burdened than FHH. Cultural influence is also more apparent on WiMHH than FHH. Because of this, there are cases where DAs provided extension services to WiMHH at Health Posts when they come for monthly vaccination of their infant children or for pre-birth health services. This indicates the existence of difficulties and inconveniences for WiMHH to get out of home for other services as agricultural extension. This can be an indication that WiMHH require designing of appropriate extension approaches for men and women, in general, and for WiMHH, in particular. These ground realities, therefore, prove that these two categories of women do not actually have similar problems. They may not also have similar needs and priorities to address their problems. Their development needs will also be different and so require different approaches to be addressed.

Further findings have also been illustrated on the access of FHH and WiMHH to extension services. It was reported that in almost all of the regions, extension services have been intending to address more of FHH than WiMHH. WiMHH stay behind at home due to the real circumstances described above and no initiative was taken to address their problems first and then involve them in extension services. In the existing extension strategy, that provision has been given that 30% of the extension beneficiaries shall be women. Even though it is not clearly indicated which category of women this proportion refers to, FHH seem to be more beneficiaries than WiMHH for reasons that WiMHH are assumed to be represented with or addressed through their husbands, which is not always true. The experience of husbands sharing lessons to their wives or family members is not a common practice. However, the reverse is true in that if a woman participates in extension services, she opts to share the lessons and knowledge to all of her family members. This has been confirmed in several women based initiatives pursued in different parts of the country during FGDs and KIIIs. In spite of the target of reaching to 30% of women in extension services, the plan is not yet achieved in most of the locations. For instance in one of the districts in Oromiya Region, such as Girar Jarso district, women extension beneficiaries have reached to 10% while this proportion is only 4.5% in Woliso district. In some districts, there are cases where a direction has been given to development agents (DAs) to give a priority for FHH during input distribution and other occasions. In spite of all these, a lot still remains to be done from women, especially for WiMHH.
3.2.4 Women’s Preferred Extension Approaches

**Demonstrations and experience sharing:** Out of the options of extension approaches, women have selected some of them that are compatible to their real circumstances and problems. In almost all the regions studied, women preferred an approach that is accompanied by practical demonstration of the practices under question. Demonstration preceded by a sort of on-the-job training for women only group has been appreciated by women. This should also be accompanied by experience sharing visits to model sites where they can further observe the best practices and take the lessons. They build more trust and confidence on the technologies and practices that are practically demonstrated to them and prove that it is working. Experience sharing is also equally important in that women get the chances of observing how the practices impacted on the productivities and economic benefits of early adopters.

**Women-friendly trainings:** Women also value trainings facilitated with local languages in their own groups. The trainings shall be women friendly in their own locality and in the time or season convenient to them. Since most of the women are illiterate, the trainings shall be illiterate-friendly accompanied with lots of illustrations and demonstrations, but not lecturing as such.

**Electronic media:** Those women who have access appreciated radio and mobile phone as good means of communicating best practices and new developments. Mobile phone, especially, is most preferred by youth female farmers to share agricultural information, demand and supply status, input supply and distribution and price updates. FHH preferred radio when agricultural information is aired with local languages and in the convenient time. There are cases where model women farmers’ experiences and best practices are promoted through radio, which inspires other women for change. There are also cases where posters have been selected when it fits the conditions of women and presented in a more self-explanatory way.

**House-to-house advisory services:** Delivering extension services through house-to-house advisory and supervision approaches is reported to be most preferred especially by WiMHH. This is because, WiMHH are busy at home and all their time is tightly occupied with various domestic issues. It becomes more of informal communication and inspires women to express their interests freely and genuinely. They also feel confidence, because, it is being done in their house. Therefore, house-to-house extension service is believed to be preferable followed by demonstrations in their garden. Female DAs are best preferred for house-to-house extension services for ease of communication and better understanding.

**Focus on women-friendly technologies and enterprises:** Women preferred demonstrations, trainings and experience sharing visits being made on enterprises that are women friendly, such as fruits and vegetables, poultry management, small ruminants fattening and dairy management. This is because, these are the enterprises most managed by women in the premises of their villages or garden. Women also appreciated supports being made through value chain platforms linked to markets.
**Women only development groups:** It has been reported that women appreciated development groups that are being established for their convenience: women-only groups. They figured out that they meet every week and focus on common matters that are of interest to them. This platform gave them exposure to new practices being adopted by other women and created an opportunity to share experiences. When women-only group is facilitated by female DAs, that is even much better.

**What women did not appreciate:** trainings being given along with men in the same group is little appreciated by women. Even though it may expose them to new environment, formal trainings in classrooms with slide presentations, sometimes with a different language than they can understand and more of theoretical is not so much appreciated by women. It also receives little interest when demonstrations focus on technologies that are largely men-friendly, such as demonstration of mold-board plows, chemical calibration and application, etc. They did not also appreciate daily meetings required by 1-to-5 networks. They do not have new issues to discuss on daily basis and it does not also fit their busy schedules at home.

Therefore, identification of women preferred extension approaches would help design appropriate extension strategies that are compatible to their real needs and priorities. This shall also be used as fundamental inputs for considerations during planning of extension services.

3.3 Gender Mainstreaming in Agricultural Extension Program

3.3.1 The Roles and performances of Gender Experts in Promoting Gender Initiatives

Gender positions have been well structured from regional to district levels, even though district level positions are not yet functional in most of the districts in SNNPR and even none in Tigray and Oromiya regions. On the other hand, district level gender positions are functional in Amhara region. In Oromiya Region, Home Economics Section is assumed to take responsibility of performing gender related activities. This reveals regional disparity in the commitment of establishing gender structures at district levels.

Where functional, gender experts are supposed to facilitate gender mainstreaming processes in the agricultural extension system through adopting various enabling approaches and techniques. However, it has not been practical to the level expected on account of various reasons including limited capacities of gender experts, lack of resources (budget) to facilitate gender mainstreaming, limited institutional supports, weak leadership commitments and others. The findings have figured out that in almost all of the study regions, most of the gender experts are perceived to lack awareness, knowledge and skills of gender perspectives and its application techniques. It was also explained that regional level gender experts are relatively gender aware even though they still lack the skills of mainstreaming gender and appropriate approaches of engaging WiMHH and FHH in the extension services. One of the reasons
could be that the individuals engaged in the gender expert positions are the ones who did not have gender backgrounds.

Gender mainstreaming initiative cannot be effective without allocation of adequate resources. However, this is not the case in almost all of the study regions. Formal extension system has not allocated budget for district level Gender Units for facilitating gender mainstreaming and involvement of women in development endeavors. Moreover, institutional support is meager in empowering gender units and motivating them render determined services.

In offices where gender unit is functional, gender experts are often assigned to do non-gender activities. This might also be an indication of lack of leadership commitments in gender mainstreaming and facilitating women participation in extension services. There also exists weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of gender to track progresses made and provide timely corrective measures. It has also been duly reported that DAs, who are supposed to spend full time on agricultural extension activities, are actually spending considerable proportion of their time being assigned to do non-agricultural matters.

On the other hand, most of the institutions who are pursuing informal extension practices have established Gender Units along with reasonable institutional supports. The gender units are also empowered to build their skills and knowledge along with experience sharing opportunities. When the gender experts are employed, most of them are the ones with gender backgrounds in their education. In addition to this, they enrich their knowledge and skills through short-term trainings. This can be one of the reasons why best practices and tangible outcomes/impacts have been reported on livelihood improvements of women.

3.3.2 Resources and Budget to Facilitate Gender Mainstreaming in Extension System

One of the factors that largely contribute for sustainability of extension services is resource allocation including human power and associated logistical issues. In almost all of the study regions, it has been firmly reported that the Gender Units are structures created with meager or no budget. This has appeared to be disappointing for gender practitioners and hinders the mainstreaming processes. Under such resource limitations, it is hardly possible to enhance women participation in various types of extension services. Currently, Gender Units have been structured under Agricultural Extension Process in the Offices of Agriculture. Coupled with unfavorable attitudes of the management against gender, the unit is not receiving its share of operational budget for reasons that priority is being given for other departments as Agronomy, Natural Resources Conservation, Livestock and others. To solve this problem, it has at least been proposed that the gender unit shall be re-structured to a process level and shall stand by its own. This is supposed to create opportunities of the unit to receive its own budget.

Apart from budget, gender expert is another resource worth to be considered in the mainstreaming process. It was reported that gender positions are not competitive in all the regions. Moreover,
individuals assigned as gender experts are mostly the ones without educational backgrounds on gender. Being female seems to be the only criteria to be selected as gender expert. These gender experts are not given the opportunity of short term trainings on gender, either. Under such circumstances, it is hardly possible to achieve tangible outcomes/impacts from gender mainstreaming initiatives.

3.3.3 Networking of Institutions involved in gender mainstreaming and extension service provision to women

The assessment study has identified several organizations, such as NGOs and International Organizations, with initiatives of promoting women participation in their respective development programs. For instance, organizations operating in both Amhara and Tigray regions included AGP, HAB, ENGIN and IFAD. Other NGOs operating in Tigray Region included GRAD, SG 2000, ILRI (African Rising), CASCAPE and Action Aid. Agri-Service Ethiopia, World Vision and several NGOs and International organizations are also operating in Oromiya Region. ORDA, operating in Amhara region, is also striving to engage women in development activities and improve their livelihoods. Send a Cow is also operating in SNNPR with women empowerment initiatives in its programs. In general, there are tens of such organizations in almost all the regions of the country with women empowerment components being incorporated in their programs and projects.

There are also several GOs striving to empower women and mainstream gender in their respective mandated responsibilities. For instance Agricultural Growth Program (AGP) offers credit services for common interest group farmers while HAB facilitates credit services for PSNP beneficiaries, including women. On the other hand, ENGIN is devoted to promotion of food and nutrition while different government organizations have been striving for scaling-up of the best practices and technologies. GRAD and SG-2000 also offer credit services for women. Even though the extent varies across the institutions, they are making efforts to involve women in their development programs. Even though their achievements have not been documented, World Vision and SG 2000 are also working on initiatives related to women.

Even though availability of several organizations dealing with gender perspectives and women empowerment components in their development plans can be taken as one of the favourable opportunities, there is no dependable linkages and networking among them. If there is a linkage, it is only when one organization invites others for workshops, seminars, panel discussions or conferences. There can also be occasions where institutions team-up together for a special ad hoc taskforce. These partnerships, however, are largely of informal and did not have any formal agreements to bind their linkages up. Only some cases have been reported to demonstrate relatively better linkages between NGOs and Bureaus of Agriculture, and other
governmental organizations. This is because, Bureau of Agriculture is signatory of most of the agriculture related development initiatives being proposed by NGOs.

In general, availability of tens of institutions engaged in gender and women empowerment initiatives can be taken as a good opportunity. Recognition of the weak linkages and networking will help design appropriate strategies on how to bring these institutions on-board, and design mechanisms of sharing experiences, best practices and lessons. The best practices recorded in every of the institutions shall be documented and shared among themselves for possible consideration during their own plans and incorporation in their strategic documents.

3.3.4 Practices and Extents of Women Participation in Community Based Organizations

Extension services are offered not only by GOs, NGOs and international organizations, but also by community based organizations, such as cooperatives and associations established for different purposes. These community based organizations are instrumental as centers of promoting informal extension services. They facilitate extension services and impacts through input supplies (improved seeds, seedlings, fertilizers, chemicals, etc), marketing of products, saving and credit services and others. Both men and women are recipients of these services even though the extent varies.

Multipurpose cooperatives (coops) are among community based organizations established in almost all of the kebeles in the country embracing thousands and millions of members. For instance, Amhara region accommodates 2.8 million members of cooperatives (coops), of which 20% account for women. These coops are run by a management committee where women are also members, and almost all of these women are FHH. There are also saving and credit associations (SaCCOs) established for the purpose of creating informal access to saving and credit services for the community. Women prefer to be members of this association since it addresses their pressing needs. For instance, in Amhara Region, there are 265,618 members of SaCCOs, of which women account for 35%. This association is also managed by a committee where women (FHH) are also included as members. There are also several kinds of cooperatives and associations all over the country established for various purposes. Even though women are members of the management committee of these associations, all of them are almost FHH except in limited cases where WiMHH are also members. In spite of membership, women are largely of passive participants in the management committees without being able to influence decisions in favor of their interests. Women absentees are also reported in most of the committee meetings for various reasons, such as work burden at home, inconveniences of meeting schedules, feeling that they do not bring any change whether they participate or not,
influences of husbands (for WiMHH) and other reasons. This indicates that they need to be empowered further to enable them become active participants and influence decisions towards the benefits of rural women.

There is also a platform known as ADPLAC (Agricultural Development Partners Linkage and Advisory Council) with the purpose of identifying various development problems and proposing solutions to them. Zonal level ADPLAC is being led by Zonal Head of Agriculture while Regional level is chaired by Head of Bureau of Agriculture. However, ADPLAC is not yet structured at district levels. This platform meets twice a year and a gender issue is supposed to be one of the agenda set forth for discussion and considerations. However, assessment findings revealed that ADPLAC is a forum that is not widely known to all and it doesn’t also seem to be active in most of the places. In situations where ADPLAC is active, gender issues are almost missing in the discussion except in limited cases. Identification of development needs is being generalized to all farmers without taking into consideration of women’s priorities and needs.

3.3.5 Barriers to Women Participation in Extension Services

i. Limited Capacities of Implementers: Women participation has been constrained by ranges of problems. Limited capacities of gender experts and implementers on the knowledge and skills of mainstreaming gender and facilitating women participation in agricultural extension is worth to be mentioned as one of the major reasons. The gender experts themselves only have scanty knowledge about gender, the skills of identifying gender issues and addressing gender related problems. Inability of implementers in identifying women’s real needs and mechanisms of involving them in extension initiatives has also been reported as one of the barriers to women participation in extension services.

ii. No or meager resource for gender promotion: Limited or unavailability of resources for gender promotion and supporting women is also another dimension that curbs women participation in extension services. Limited operational budget allocation to Gender Units through formal extension seems to be acute in that adequate budget has never been allocated to grassroots gender promoters in almost all of the study regions. This can further illustrate the limited focus given by policy makers in addressing gender issues in agricultural extension services.

iii. Attitudes and Cultural Setup: Attitudinal issue still remains high in hindering women participation in development initiatives. In male dominated society, women are often believed to be passive recipients of information and technologies. They are not encouraged to express their needs and priorities in public, or their voices are not often heard. Even though there are improvements over time, negative attitudes are still persistent at large not only at the levels of the community but also at different levels of implementers and officials. It was reported that men and even DAs often perceive “women do not know about agriculture”. When trainings are offered in mixed groups, women feel embarrassed to speak in
front of men. Men also spot those women as having petite manners who dare to speak in front of them. Women also lose confidence to speak in the presence of men with the perception “we can’t express ideas in organized ways as men do”. Then women demanded “we don’t want to join men’s group and there shall be a separate women’s group to express and figure out our needs freely”. All these unfavorable attitudes are effects of cultural influence and it was this substantial reality that has often been overlooked to influence change not only by extension practitioners but also at higher policy levels.

iv. Inappropriate and Lack of women-friendly technologies: The other barrier identified was that most of the agricultural technologies available are not appropriate and responsive to the conditions and needs of women. While women require labor and time saving technologies to relieve their burdens, most of the technologies, instead, are time and labor demanding. Inappropriateness of the technologies could result to resistance of women to adopt and utilize. In light of their busy schedules both in domestic and field level responsibilities, women require productive, but labor and time saving technologies. Because they are not benefiting out of it, this can discourage them from participation in extension services.

v. Limited understanding of real problems and needs of women: Given the tight schedules and overloads of women, cultural influence to gather along with men and different technology needs, it is required to select appropriate extension approaches that fit the conditions of women. However, this has not been done in most of the cases and formal extension system assumes as that every approach works equally well for both men and women. Since women do not often benefit from such holistic approaches, it discourages them from participation in extension services. They realized that women’s interests are being ignored and concealed, and feel that they are wasting time for something that is not of large importance to them. While all farmers cannot be placed in the same category due to their differences in socio-economic status, they require compatible extension approaches. To maximize benefits rendered through extension services, men, WiMHH, FHH and youths require approaches compatible to their circumstances, such as social status and cultural setup (socially dominant/subordinate), economic status (resourceful/poor), educational status (literate/illiterate), age (elderly, youths), previous experiences and exposure (exposed/not exposed) and others.

vi. Failure of identifying the right entry points: Unless women’s practical/immediate needs are addressed at priority levels, it has been reported that they will not be motivated to participate in extension services. Credit service is very crucial for women, especially for FHH, to get engaged in supplementary income generating activities. WiMHH will also be sensitized to get engaged and generate their own income if they can get easy access to credit services. However, it has been repeatedly reported that credit is not adequate for FHH and almost not accessible to WiMHH by their own. WiMHH seek permission of their husbands and signature on the credit application formats in order to get the services. The other problem reported in most of the study areas is less focus given to improved food nutrition aspects which used to be facilitated by Home-Economics Section in Office of Agriculture. Along with increased production and economic status, farmers require improvements in life styles that maintain their health. Since extension planning is largely of top-down approach, such
practical/immediate needs of women are often missed from consideration. Therefore, addressing some of the major immediate needs of women would have been used as entry points to motivate them to participate in extension services.

vii. Lack of committed drivers for change: Limited motivation of gender experts has also been an obstacle to sensitize women and enhance their participation in extension services. Gender expert positions are not competitive as that of other parallel positions, no operational budget is allocated for them to pursue their responsibilities, they are made to get engaged in non-gender, low focus given by the leaders and other factors have discouraged gender experts to strengthen their linkages with rural women. In general, limited commitment of leadership has discouraged gender experts to motivate women and enhance their participation in extension services. Lack of driver for change has, therefore, been spotted as one of the barriers to women participation in extension services.

viii. Top-down Extension Planning – missing the real needs of rural women: It has been reported in almost all of the study regions that extension plans are drafted at higher levels and then cascaded to lower levels for customization. Discussions are made on the plans at different levels to down far as household levels: at region, zone, district, development groups, 1-to-5 networks and household levels and this structure is excellent. Representatives of women’s groups are also participating in lower level platforms. The problem, however, is that discussions do not bring much of the changes on the plans even though pertinent issues are raised. It largely remains to be of customizing and letting to know what has been planned. Even though pertinent ground realities are raised by the community, the chance of getting incorporated in the plans is limited. The real development needs of women are even almost missing from the plans. When they realize that their needs and priorities are not adequately addressed in the extension plans, it doesn’t inspire them to participate in extension services.

ix. Illiteracy: Women repeatedly expressed that high rate of illiteracy is one of the major factors that kept them aside not only from extension services but also from other public platforms, such as committee and leadership positions. Most of the women perceive “since we are illiterate, we are not able to express our feelings in organized ways, we may not understand well what has been said during trainings, we will not be able to understand posters well, we will not be able to operate mobile and radio well, all due to illiteracy”. They also feel embarrassed to join a group and explain their development needs in front of men who are believed to be relatively literate and exposed.

x. Language barrier: Most of the rural women have indicated that there are cases where extension services are offered in a language they cannot understand. In such cases as posters, radios, trainings, experience sharing visits and others, language has become a barrier to rural women who often speak a single local language. There are also cases where DAs cannot understand the local language.

xi. Limited participation of women in management committee: Women are members of executive committee of various community based associations, such as cooperatives, saving and credit associations (SaCCOs) and others. Even though they are supposed to represent all the women members,
committee membership is largely of nominal without being able to influence decisions towards the interests of women. In most of the cases, women are given only one seat in the committee membership leaving a single woman voiceless to influence decisions. Occasions have also been observed where a man represented gender in the management committee of cooperatives. Women are mostly passive participants only to endorse what has been said and decided by men, who take upper hands and dominate decisions. This process discourages women and often do not want to appear in meetings. This practice has also been disappointing for other women members of cooperatives and associations when they realize that their interests and needs are not well entertained in the decisions of management committees. One of the causes for this flaw is attitudes of the community which perceives “women cannot lead”. Even women themselves acknowledge this attitude saying “we cannot lead as men do….or let men decide whatever they feel since they know everything”.

Barriers to women participation are, therefore, crucial factors that restricted mainstreaming of gender and women participation in the extension system. Identification of these barriers that restrict women from participation in the extension services is believed to be essential step for designing appropriate and workable extension strategies for women. It all implies that if these challenges and barriers are tackled effectively, then women will maximize the benefits of extension services and their livelihoods would be improved further. They will also be inspired for further participation and demand for more technologies once they realize that their poverty is being talked and that their pressing needs are being met.

3.4 Accountability and Tracking Mechanisms of Gender Mainstreaming in Extension Services

3.4.1 Leadership Commitment in Tracking Efficiency of Gender Mainstreaming

It was observed almost everywhere in the study regions that leadership commitment is very limited in supporting and tracking efficiencies of gender mainstreaming initiatives. This can be demonstrated in that there is no evaluation and accountability mechanism established, limited or no budget allocated, even no gender expert position created at district levels in some regions (such as Tigray and Oromiya), gender experts (where available) are made to get engaged in non-gender activities. Where available, the gender positions were not competitive as compared to other parallel positions. In these and several other factors presented in earlier sections, leadership commitment remained fragile, inconsistent and unsustainable. Leaders also were observed to have attitudinal problems against gender by equating it with “feminist movement”. Most of the leaders did not also have adequate awareness of the contribution of addressing gender perspectives to economic, social and cultural development. It all seems to depend on the personal outlooks and good wills of the leaders in that some of them strive to offer supports for Gender Units while most others not. Even though some of the leaders opt to organize gender related trainings for their staff, follow-up assessments and monitoring of applications is almost inexistent.
In institutions pursuing informal extension services, such as NGOs, International Organizations and selected Governmental Organizations (GOs), leadership commitment is relatively apparent. Most of the Heads and Country Directors at least motivate all their staff to consider gender in their respective development initiatives. Even though there is a Gender Unit with all its responsibilities of facilitating capacity building of the staff, the mainstreaming process remains to be the duty of all the staff in their respective programs, projects and activities. The leaders also encourage publications of success stories and promotions through electronic media to share lessons for other institutions and development partners.

3.4.2 Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) Systems, Accountability and Tracking Mechanisms of Women Participation

Different types of tracking mechanisms are being employed to measure the level of extension services in reaching to the farmers. The mechanisms adopted to track efficiency of extension services included SMS field visits, quarterly reports, DA’s plan Vs achievement evaluation, performance of DA’s as per the numbers of model farmers created, and agricultural production and productivity status. When the monitoring and evaluation team is drawn from different departments, it was reported that gender focal person is missing in the team in almost all of the study regions. Irrespective of the different approaches employed in the monitoring and evaluation of extension services, there were no indicators specified to evaluate the extent of women participation in extension services. It only generalizes “all the farmers” as uniform entities and did not disaggregate performances of extension services for men and women. In such cases, it is likely that the report narrates extension efforts tailored to the needs and interests of men.

Assessment results further revealed that evaluation and accountability mechanisms of gender mainstreaming initiatives is almost inexistent in all the study regions except in Tigray region where there is attempt of evaluating gender mainstreaming plans and accomplishments through steering committee. The issue of accountability mechanism and monitoring of gender specific indicators is observed to be inconsistent across regions. Moreover, it has been reported that there is no strong practice of evaluating the performances of women participation and empowerment at district levels. Even though DAs are supposed to be grassroots implementers of women empowerment initiatives, gender specific indicators have not been incorporated in their performance measurement or Balanced Score Cards (BSC). If it is not there at grassroots levels, it may not also be expected to exist at higher levels. Therefore, assessment results have clearly brought to light that accountability mechanism of gender mainstreaming and women participation is almost inexistent in the extension system.
3.5 Women Participation in FTC Based Extension Services

FTCs are believed to be structures that facilitate close linkages of DAs and farmers in the processes of extension service provision. They are supposed to facilitate linkages and experience sharing between farmer-to-DA, farmer-to-farmer, FTC-to-FTC and Farmer-to-Development partners. However, large proportions of FTCs are not yet functional in almost all the regions. For instance, 97.5% of FTCs in Amhara region and 40% in Tigray region were not yet functional until the time of this study. Even those who are believed to be functional did not have adequate facilities and resources.

In FTCs that are functional, similar extension services are being demonstrated to both men and women farmers with the assumption that the same approach is equally important to all the farmers. No efforts were made to address men and women groups separately as per their needs and priorities. In all the cases, most of the WiMHH are not still benefiting from the extension services in FTCs.

FTCs are being managed by farmers’ management committee including one woman as a member, who is often FHH and by default a leader of Women’s Association. Extension service plans which are framed at higher levels are also cascaded and being discussed at FTC levels along with DAs and the management committee. However, gender issues are not as such apparent in the agenda and the possibility of including women specific priorities and development needs in the plans is almost missing.

Budget allocation for FTCs is inconsistent across regions. In Amhara region, FTCs are allocated budgets of Birr 20,000.00 for their operational needs. In contrast, no budget is formally allocated in Tigray Region. Instead, FTCs in Tigray Region are encouraged to get engaged in their own income generation activities, such as production and sales of crops, vegetables and dairy products. In Oromiya and SNNP Regions, no formal budget is allocated for FTCs. Even though it is not clear how FTCs are going to be financed in Oromiya and SNNP regions, there is expectation that FTCs shall generate their own incomes from the plots allocated for demonstration and other purposes. All the decision seems to be at the hands of community level management committee and DAs.

In general, establishment of FTCs can be potentially taken as a favorable opportunity for the farmers. Establishment of FTCs in close proximity to villages is a favorable condition for women (especially for WiMHH) who are often overloaded and do not have adequate time to go away from their villages. However, most of the FTCs are non-functional in all the regions except in selected cases where they started functioning. Most of them did not also have their own plots of land which are supposed to be used for demonstration purposes of new technologies and improved practices. Even those which are supposed to be functioning did not have adequate facilities required. However, there are cases in parts of the country, such as Amhara region, where FTCs are built with the supports of NGOs and are well furnished. Therefore, the destiny of FTCs shall be clearly defined and they shall be strengthened to ensure envisaged benefits to both men and women.
4. Practical and Strategic Needs of Rural Women Identified from Assessment Study

4.1 Practical Needs of women farmers (FHH and WiMHH)

**Labor and time saving technologies:** In all the study regions, women required productive, but labor and time saving technologies to relieve their burdens. Even though every enterprise is essential for rural livelihoods, women prefer to focus and require supports on garden farming, such as fruits and vegetables, poultry, small ruminants fattening, dairy production and similar enterprises. These enterprises are often managed by women in the premises of their home or villages which is convenient to them still taking care of household duties and children. In line with this, they required women-friendly trainings complemented with practical demonstrations and experience sharing visits to model sites. Trainings shall be organized for women-only groups, in local languages and with lots of demonstrations. Experience sharing is also equally essential to take lessons and appreciate changes that can be impacted from the initiatives. Women also demanded facilitation of market linkages for their products. Since their goal is income generation, they required supports on market related subjects, such as demand creation, sorting and grading techniques, packaging and storing, transportation, price determination and others.

**Home Management and Nutrition:** Home management and nutrition are also other needs immediately demanded by women. As they are pursuing diversified farming practices, the issue of nutrition also comes into picture for women to improve healthy consumption practices. Home management and nutritional aspects also come into focus as incomes are increasing for rural households.

**Income Generating Activities:** In the study regions, women have revealed their interests to get engaged in their own income generating opportunities. Even though they have interests, they are not sure which business option is better and profitable. This means, they required supports and trainings on entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship training will take into account of the potentials and opportunities available in the premises of women’s villages, such as proximity to urban towns (markets), availability of infrastructure (roads), access to electric power, access to institutions around (colleges, offices, schools, industries, etc), access to water sources (irrigation, etc) and other potentials.

**Women Friendly Financial Sources:** Along with identification of options for income generation, women also demanded to have easy access to credit services. Since formal credit services are procedurally complicated, women required formalities that can be managed with their capacity. Not only trainings that women required, but also technical supports and backstopping, and monitoring and supervision of their income generating initiatives. They do not want to be left away as problems will arise in the course of operations requiring supports for timely corrective measures. Therefore, periodical monitoring and encouragement has been believed to ensure sustainability and empowerment of women.
4.2 Strategic Needs of Rural Women

**Adult Literacy Education:** During the assessment study, women have clearly revealed that illiteracy is the responsible factor for their ignorance to technologies, best practices, new knowledge, better options to life, their legal and development rights, and much more, even though they have their own indigenous knowledge. They underlined that cultural influence had been a barrier, especially in earlier days, for women not to enroll for schools. They appreciated the recent era which gave much focus to education of youths and school age children. However, they underscored that getting to basic literacy education would facilitate adoption and utilization of new practices and technologies on sustainable basis. Therefore, they demanded women-friendly literacy education which is linked to their lives in their villages and on convenient time and season.

**Women Friendly Saving and Credit Associations:** Among the community based associations, women appreciated saving and credit associations, such as SaCCOs. Women have started realizing the benefits of saving and also easy access to credit services for their immediate cash needs. From earlier experiences, they have confirmed that “the poor can save”. In addition to this, informal credit sources are observed to be women-friendly as compared to formal ones. Therefore, women demanded supports in establishing and strengthening women-friendly saving and credit based associations.

**Women Empowerment in Leadership:** Women believed that unless they are represented in any of the service giving platforms, it is hardly possible to expect their needs and priorities being incorporated in the development agenda. So far, women participation in leadership positions and committee membership is perceived to be largely of nominal without being able to influence decisions towards the interests of women. Therefore, they demanded that women selected for leadership and committee membership need to be encouraged and trained to help them get empowered and build confidence. Experience sharing is reported to be instrumental to learn how women empowerment appears to be influential.

**Devotion on Attitudes:** It has come to be a real fact that cultural influence has inflicted the community to develop unfavorable attitudes against women. It is a dominant expression to say “the place of a woman is kitchen while that of a man is public”. Even this perception has been acknowledged by women themselves expressing “we do not know as men do”. There are also lots of proverbs in every culture and everywhere in the country all with the ultimate meanings making men heroic and women subordinate. This attitudinal orientation among the whole society is serious, deep rooted and a barrier for change not only of women’s livelihoods but also of the entire society as a whole. There is a recent positive proverb which expresses “changing women is changing the whole society........or........educating women is educating the whole society”. Therefore any sorts of interventions are required that focus on changes of unfavorable attitudes against them. It is underscored that without changes of this attitude, their livelihoods will not be changed as well.
5. Best Practices and Lessons Drawn from Women Participation

5.1 Success Stories of Women Participation and Gender Equality

It is believed that there are lots of best practices and success stories across regions and cultures in the country that illustrate the ways women improved their economic status and livelihoods through participations in either formal or informal extension services, or development initiatives. Moreover, there is success story that illustrates excellent gender equality. In general, about seven case stories have been identified and documented in this study from each of the study regions. Three of them are from Oromiya region, two from Amhara and one each from SNNP and Tigray regions. The case stories describe about best practices of women and youth participation in extension and development initiatives.

The first case was selected from Oromiya region presenting the success stories recorded through organizing women-only groups and channeling all the extension supports through the groups. Even though the groups faced series of challenges at initial stages, improvements and timely corrective measures were taken in the course of its growth recording vibrant success stories across the way. Eventually, tremendous impacts were witnessed and lots of lessons were learnt from about eight years of endeavors. This development initiative was experienced in Wolmera district of West Shewa zone, Oromiya Region with facilitation of Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, Holeta Research Center along with its key partners, such as Office of Agriculture.

The second case analysis was identified from Wolayta Zone of SNNP region and it was facilitated by Send a Cow Ethiopia (SaCE) NGO. SaCE introduced a household approach with intention of first addressing gender inequality and ensuring changes to the whole household. It adopted Transformative Household Methodology (THM), an approach which started with detail analysis and understanding of the real household level gender relations and associated problems. The approach eventually creates an opportunity for the household itself to propose solutions on how to address their own problems. It worked well and lots of lessons can also be learnt from this initiative.

The third case analysis was devoted to the story of women beekeeping groups in Dendi district of Oromiya region. Women were given the opportunity of identifying intervention points which they believe would improve their economic status. Taking into consideration of the opportunities and forest resources available in their locality, they selected to get engaged in beekeeping enterprises. Once women are given free chances to select what they want, they do not miss to identify appropriate entry points that can inspire their participation in development initiatives.

The fourth case is peculiar in its kind and different in nature. It was selected from Amhara Region and the story is about the popular community called “Awramaba community”. The community is an excellent example for changing the negative attitudes of the society and ensuring gender equality. At the beginning, it is being achieved by a single dedicated individual and this demonstrates that it is all about “willingness” and “determination” to bring real changes to the community. What makes it peculiar is that the community was transformed not by NGO, GO, international organization or anyone else. It was just by a single individual who was not even trained,
educated or attended colleges. Lots of lessons can be learnt from this gender aware community which most of the development partners failed to achieve in spite of spending millions worth of resources.

The fifth case was still identified from Becho district of Oromiya region presenting a story of potato seed producer groups of women. They were given free chances of selecting an enterprise which they would like to start interventions with. They held consultations in their own groups, identified opportunities available around and decided to engage in the production of improved potato seeds. It worked well and the group is still alive. There are also lessons we can learn from this groups of women.

The sixth success story was devoted to youth groups engaged in apiculture farming in Fogera district of Amhara region. Here also, youth identified their own business enterprise which they believed would be feasible and profitable. Given the supports they received from Office of Agriculture and an NGO operating in the locality, they were able to establish shortly and advanced to diversification of more other enterprises. Youth have also shared lots of lessons on how they managed to establish their businesses and their vision.

The last (seventh) case analysis presents success stories of youth groups from Endamuhoni district of Tigray region engaged in dairy farming. Youths took notes of opportunities available and selected dairy enterprise which they believed would remain feasible and sustainable. They realized available feed resources and high demands for dairy products in the locality. Once they are given chances to make their own decisions, youth can also select the enterprise which will lead them to successes and further growth.

In general, each of the case stories has best practices to share and lessons to draw for future consideration in designing women and youth friendly development initiatives. Highlights of these case analysis and stories have been illustrated in the boxes below followed by best practices that can be picked up and lessons that can be learnt from the perspectives of women and youth participation, and gender equality.
Case Analysis 1. Success Stories of Women Participation in Integrated Farming in Oromiya Region

It was some nine years ago (in 2006) that Holeta Research Center (HRC) established women-only farmers research and extension group (FREG) with only 25 women (20 FHH and 5 WiMHH) as pioneer members. Initially, there was a resistance from the side of women to join the team thinking that it might just be waste of time. In later years, after noticing the progresses of the group, more and more women flooded to join the group until it has come to the point of inability to accommodate large numbers of members. Even men in later years turned out to request establishment of their own groups and pleaded supports as it is done for women.

Before joining FREG group, women were unable to produce enough for their family and they had severe problems of food insecurity. They used to face critical food shortages at least for four months in year and had to purchase food crops through selling of their valuable assets, such as livestock. Female headed households were even more fragile than male headed households. When HRC approached them to involve in extension initiatives, they did not have better options than accepting the opportunity voluntarily and with pleasure. Women were given freedom either to establish, drop or re-join whenever they like, and there was no any sort of enforcement. As entry point, women preferred to start with improved seed potato technologies which is highly demanded in the locality. Improved seeds of two improved potato varieties: Jalene and Gudene were then introduced on revolving seed scheme along with series of practical trainings on improved management practices. The group had its own management committee and started with problem and solution analysis. This created an opportunity for women members to complement the solution with their own indigenous knowledge and innovation. Just a year later, 72 more women requested membership and joined the group. Until 2013, the members rose from the initial 25 to 253. Almost the whole kebele women pleaded for membership and it almost became unmanageable to accommodate all. As new entrants joining the team continue to increase from year to year, the management process also became more and more complicated, but still well organized. Even though each of the groups have their own management committee, the need for establishment of Central Committee became evident embracing village level sub-committees established with excellent ability of maintaining communication and experience sharing among themselves, and with outsider development partners. The central committee even started challenging institutions through official letter requesting for introduction of new technologies to their villages. In later years, women diversified their focus from potato seed technology to other enterprise, such as barley, wheat, faba bean and field pea. Inspired by their successes, they further demanded dairy technology in 2014.

In the process of growth from 2006 – 2014, there had been lots of modifications, innovations, challenges and eventually successes. More and more of WiMHH started joining the team until 2014. In about 2010, women realized that men counterparts who support them through land preparation, planting and other farming operations shall also join them during trainings on improvement management practices. Therefore, WiMHH started participating trainings along with their husbands, which eventually worked well. Starting from the third years of participation, economic status and livelihoods of women started to improve. The productivity of potato which used to be 60 quintal (qt)/ha raised to 250 quintal/ha, and that of barley from 11 qt./ha to 32 qt/ha. Annual income of women increased from nothing to an average of Birr 11,000.00 per annum. Iron sheet roofed houses which used to be only 65 in the village before intervention increased to 264 by 2014. Households which used to face food shortages for more than 4 months in a year became not only food secured but also started supplying for markets by 2014. The farming system of the locality almost changed with adoption of new technologies. The group members shared their experiences to their neighbors through field days, demonstrations and informal communications. As a result of spillover effects, copy farmers have also been created in the vicinity of the city emulating the practices of group members. Above all, women developed tremendous confidence and demonstrated “they can do and they can change the system” disproving the attitude prevailing against them. It was amazing to receive reports from men counterparts saying “supporting women was the right approach and our livelihood changed since then”. They also underscored “no more violence against women now and respectfulness has prevailed at home, instead. We take household decisions with full consensus of women and men. Old times are gone now ”. This comment from men was so impressive and remarkable indications of changes in attitudes. In addition to agriculture, women further demanded associated trainings, such on leadership, record keeping, savings, rights issue, and associated matters.

Case Analysis 2: Success Stories of Transformative Household Methodology in SNNPR

Send a cow Ethiopia (SaCE), an NGO operating with a mission of giving communities and families the hope and the means to secure their own future from the land, adopted a methodology that is believed to ensure sustainable changes to the household as whole. After realizing the cultural and social construct of the community, SaCE introduced Transformative Household Methodology (THM) to the households of Wolayta Zone, SNNP region. It is a tool which aims at creating awareness of intra-household gender relations between women, men, girls and boys. The belief was that sustainable change of livelihoods cannot be ensured unless the household is targeted along with all its members. At the outset, THM identifies the different roles and responsibilities of household members, their access to and control over resources, the real needs and priorities of household members and other related issues. While other methodologies focus on groups drawn from different households, THM focuses on the household as a unit putting strong emphasis on gender relations. This tool was proven to be effective in rural contexts, because it is illiterate friendly and promotes a process that is simple and easily understood by all household members. The first exercise is applying the tool to understand the real construct of the household, their shares of roles, responsibilities and workloads of each household member in the working age ranges, the real needs and priorities of women, and other issues. Household members get stunned when they realize the skewed workloads among themselves, a lot of work being overloaded on women. With the help of a facilitator, they hold consultations on the spot and start setting up of plans right there to share responsibilities, decision making and resource control and relieve work burden imposed on women. Send a Cow Ethiopia also facilitated series of practical based trainings and experience sharing visits to the target households.

After a while, SaCE made assessments of targeted households for impacts of the household (THM) approach. The study selected 25 households with a total of 125 household members including women, men, boys and girls. The study compared improvements with the situation it was at the baseline. Remarkably, household members set-up fair shares of responsibilities which eventually led to decreases in workloads of women. This means that it will contribute for improvement of women’s health, create opportunities to participate in extension services, and improvements in quality of life for the household. On the other hand, men’s involvement in various household related activities increased, which used to be almost none before interventions. Of particular significant here is change of attitudes of household members, especially men, in sharing responsibilities of traditionally known as women-tasks. Shared decision making practice has also reigned in the household, which used to be a male-only task. Authentic change of attitudes and beliefs have started to prevail in the community. The beneficiaries transferred the knowledge, skills and practices they acquired to their fellow farmers and neighbors. Even though the intervention is made at pilot scales, the lesson that can be drawn is that focusing on household can bring changes to all members of the household, which in turn is instrumental for ensuring sustainability.

**Case Story of a man participant in the village**

He is Fasiko Wogosso a participant from Wolayta zone and he was a participant of THM pursued by SaCE. He said “the society used to have conservative culture that makes men dominant and women subordinate. After participating in THM, I was stunned to see how overloaded my wife was, and I never thought this will really happen. Before the training, I never washed my children, never fetched firewood, never washed clothes and much more thinking that it is women’s duty and I would have felt embarrassed to engage in these activities, either. Now, my way of thinking has been changed and I have started supporting my wife sharing many of the activities she used to do. Beyond my family, I have also trained seven other neighbor households and I am monitoring their changes overtime. I never thought this would change, but now I learnt that it is possible to change through learning and my old attitudes are gone now”.

**Case Story of a Woman participant**

She was Meselech, a mother of five and she described “During THM training, I was stunned to see all those loads of activities being shouldered on me, a single person, while we have members full of the house. I never even realized that I am burdened, because, I already have taken that as a norm and a fate for me. But thanks to SaCE, we took lessons and started sharing burdens. My family, including my husband, are now at my side supporting the loads to which I used to suffer. My husband has turned out to be supportive for me, which I never thought this will happen. I have been wondering whether it is possible for a man to carry the activities that are traditionally defined to be female-tasks. The experience sharing visit I made to Awramba community in Amahra Region has totally changed my attitude. I never thought that there would exist such a perfect equally between men and women. Since then, my husband and I consult each other make shared decisions on every matter. Out family bond has increased better than ever.”

*Source: Send a Cow Ethiopia (2014)*
Case Analysis 3: Success Stories of Women Beekeeping Group in Oromiya Region

The other best innovation group identified in Oromiya Region was women beekeeping group established with the support of AGP in Dendi District of West Shewa zone, Oromiya Region. Office of Agriculture and Cooperative Promotion Office approached women in the community and briefed about the development initiative AGP is going to support for improvement of their livelihoods. After receiving orientations, women held discussions of their own and 20 common interest women came up with a business idea for their own. They decided an extension approach to be women-only group and selected beekeeping as a worthwhile business venture to engage with. They were asked why they selected beekeeping and they justified “we have big natural forest known as Chilomo in our locality with rich diversity of honey flora species and springs around including source of Awash river. We thought the natural resource we have in our premises is a favorable opportunity for beekeeping”. They received trainings and supports of 14 beehives. The group was sensitized with the initiative and decided to make Birr 100.00 contributions of their own and added four more beehives. Each of them also contributed bee colony in kind. This group is different from others in that they are not fully dependent on external supports and shared costs of investments from their own earnings. The first year was devoted to establishments and investments. Since second year, they started making net profits of about Birr 6400.00. This income is likely to rise in subsequent years as they build skills, improve management and produce high yield of honey. The group is motivated and has started making additional investments of their own. They have big dreams and vision for the future to become prominent honey producer and supplier to markets. From first year on, they have started running the beekeeping enterprise by their own without external supports and likely to be sustainable.

The crucial lesson that can be drawn from this group is the ability of women to identify the opportunities and potentials available in their locality, and select feasible and plausible business idea. Different from other case stories, this group was further motivated to add investments by their own and expand the enterprise. They only received part of the supports and added the other part from their own incomes. This was basically the result of group inspiration and the opportunity they were given to decide the business idea by their own. Group approach is still the preferred extension service for women accompanied by practical oriented trainings.

Source: Abhinav and Kaleb (2014)
Awramba is a community living in Fogera district of South Gonder zone, Amhara region. It is located at a distance of about 650 kms north of Addis Ababa, 74 kms north east of the town of Bahir Dar and 14 kms east of Woreta town on the highway from Woreta to Woldiya town on kebele administration known as Woji Awramba. This community is exemplary not only for all cultures of Ethiopia but also beyond that for its perfect establishment of gender equality. This was brought not by extension service, not by NGOs or not by any institution or external body. It was just created by a single individual named as “Zumra Nuru”. Zumra was born from a rural farming family in Este District of South Gonder Zone. In his childhood, he grew up observing the extremely skewed gender relations at home, especially the one between his parents. He noticed his mother supporting his father in farming activities from dawn to dusk. Then he noticed his mothers duty still continuing at home doing all the cooking, washing, taking care of children, collecting firewood, grain milling and much more while his father rested at ease. And this continues almost every day and sadly he observed his mother being beaten by his father when she delays to abide to his “orders” for his comfort. Then Zumra started to question “why this should happen? Why is that women are given the fate of living in hell doing all those countless duties alone while her husband is doing less activities and then seated at home back from field, requesting his wife to comfort him washing his feet, fulfilling his orders now and then? Why doesn’t he would have washed his feet, at least, to relieve some minutes to her?” Zumra started questioning endlessly and hopelessly with no one giving answers. He further noticed, all the households are pursuing the same life and all women are the ones living in misery. While GOD created all human beings equally, why did that high disparity persist between men and women. Then Zumra said “NO...this should STOP!” No one advised him nor taught him. At age of 13, he travelled to different parts of the country and started promoting equality between men and women. But due to deep-rooted attitudes against women, he couldn’t get followers. In spite of the challenges, he didn’t want to give up and continued full of hope with the belief that there is no wrong with his idea. He eventually managed to convince his thoughts to the community from Woji Awramba kebele, located about 50 kms west of his home village after five years of wandering. He was overwhelmed when he realized that his dream has come true and he left his home village once and for all and started living there with his new community. It was in early 1970’s that he established the community with few members. Zumra’s thoughts are that there shall not be disparities between men and women. Division of labor shall be based on capacity and not on sex. What can be done by men can also be done by women, and vice versa except the biological differences. He believes sustainable development and livelihoods improvement can prevail only when equality between men and women is ensured, peace and love reign. In Awramba community, there is no defined men’s role or women’s role, and it is the capacity and skill that defines roles, but not sex. This is absolutely what gender principle outlines. Therefore, as far as gender equality and status of attitudes on men and women are concerned, Awramba is the perfect place to visit. So far, hundreds of NGOs, GOs and International Organizations have visited this community and almost all of them were stunned to see such a society who changed the deep-rooted social and cultural setup by its own without any external support, either technically or financially. Now, the community has come to the attention of not only the institutions and the public within the country, but also the world. It is being visited almost every day as model community as far as gender equality is concerned. In only 10 years (2002 – 2012), more than 50,000 visitors have visited Awramba community, of which 10% of them were foreigners.

Lots of lessons can be drawn from this story. The first is that it is possible to change the existing skewed gender relations and ensure gender equality through dedicated efforts. The other lesson is that even though challenges and barriers are ahead to block entry into new way of thinking, it is still possible with persistent efforts. What it requires is only willingness to do, dedication and initiating the correct thought. It is only a matter of designing appropriate approaches and identifying entry points to instill the thoughts. Therefore, it is also possible to enhance women participation in extension services, a task that can be much simpler than the above story. In now days, there are lots of such experiences and best practices, documented stories and literature from where ample lessons can be learnt, to simply customize and adopt it to our purposes. Government policies are also favorably supportive, and what is required is only identifying and designing the correct MEANS of arriving at the set goals.

Source: Awramba Community (2012)
Case Analysis 5: Success Stories of Potato Seed Producer Women Group in Oromiya

Since the last 3 – 4 years, Agricultural Growth Program (AGP) is supporting agriculture sector to ensure food security and economic growth of farmers including women. To utilize this opportunity, Office of Agriculture facilitated establishment of women-only common interest groups voluntarily with 19 members in Mend Tufisa kebele of Becho District, Oromiya Region. After being sensitized and participatory consultations, women were given options of selecting an extension approach and an enterprise to engage with. Accordingly, they preferred to establish their own groups, held consultative discussions and preferred to get engaged in potato seed production. This is because, there is high demand for seeds of improved potato in their locality. Then, they leased-in common land and received material supports valued to Birr 36,625 from AGP to purchase improved seeds of potato, fertilizer and Diffused Light Storage (DLS) facility. In addition to material inputs, they also received trainings on potato seed production. Everything went well and the first year was almost devoted for learning and establishing favorable grounds. In the second year, they produced 83 quintals of potato and secured a net profit of Birr 11,855. In addition to this, each of the women members acquired improved seeds of potato for their own farms and also got some amount for consumption. In addition to economic benefits, they also valued social benefits, such as working as a group which built social capital, their skills and motivated them for further change. They also developed dedication to take the skills learnt to their own farms and change their household. Moreover, they have become sources of clean seeds of improved potato for their neighbors and locality. AGP support was withdrawn in the third year and the group managed to continue operating by its own. As a result, it has been identified as one of the successful common interest groups.

The lesson taken from this success story is that women were given free options to choose the extension approach and also the enterprise they would like to engage in. They expressed “As women, it is impossible to start business individually whereas working together in a group has brought courage and finally success to every member of the group, merely because we are working in a group”. This means that tremendous change can be attained and women participation can be enhanced if demand driven extension service is tailored to the interests of women. At the outset, women need to be given options and let them discuss freely among themselves and pick the one that suits them, and then tailor supports in line with their interests. The other lesson that can be drawn from here is that women need not be told or guided to do something that has not been preferred and selected by them. Rather, they need to be consulted and given options to choose what they prefer.

Source: Abhinav and Kaleb (2014)
The other success story was extension supports rendered to youths in Fogera districts of South Gonder Zone, Amhara Region. An NGO named as Ethio-wetlands and Natural Resources Association pursued development intervention in collaboration with Office of Agriculture, District Administration and Kebele Administration. After being sensitized to engage in development projects, 10 youths (2 female and 8 male) conceived a business idea of establishing beekeeping. Soon after looking at the good progresses, 16 more youths (1 female and 15 male) joined the pioneer group. Then the group size became 26 members of youths (23 male and 3 female) and about 50% of them attended grades 7 and above. Kebele Administration along with District Administration gave 1.0 ha of land in the premises of forest land to manage and take care of the forests and utilize it in environmentally friendly ways. Based on their business idea, Office of Agriculture constructed a shade while Ethio-wetlands offered financial supports to purchase beehives. In addition to this, youths received skill based trainings and close monitoring from the NGO and Office of Agriculture experts. At initial stages, they started with 48 beehives and generated an income of Birr 7000.00 with a vision of adding several more from their own investments. In subsequent years, the group is expected to generate a minimum of Birr 60,000.00. Being motivated with apiculture business, they youths even set up plans of establishing fishing ponds. They have started value addition to their honey products, made semi-processing and packaged pure honey for the market. They already realized what the market requires and they have established different approaches to expand their marketing networks. They have already started preparing infrastructure for aquaculture. Using the irrigation water in their accessibility, they are also planning to engage in the production of fruits and vegetables.

The lesson that can be drawn from this success story is that youths can have innovative business idea if they are supported through appropriate extension approaches. They have the ability of identifying an enterprise of their own interest taking into consideration of opportunities and potentials available. The other lesson from youth group is that they have the ability to expand and diversify the business very fast. They can assess the potentials available in their locality and conceive a business idea that makes use of those potentials. Youths also have the ability to watch out what the market requires and tailor their products accordingly through further value addition and semi-processing. They are dynamic in expanding the business concepts and establishing linkages with markets. What they required is administrative, technological and financial supports.

Source: Agajie and Derese (2014)
Case Analysis 7: Success Stories of Youth Dairy Group in Tigray Region

Another youth group from Endamuhoni District of Tigray Region has emerged with innovations engaged in dairy production. Being sensitized by Office of Agriculture and Cooperative Promotion Experts in three days long consultations, youths decided to establish a group of their own and selected dairy production among the many business options. Office of Agriculture and Cooperative Promotion experts gave options of business ideas for youths to choose one from. Youths, then, held discussions of their own and came up with a business idea of dairy farming taking into consideration of the potential of their locality, such as feed availability and high demand for milk and milk products in the district towns. The group embraced 13 members drawn from Fire Menaesey kebele administration. They are all unemployed, landless and completed high school education. Being impressed with their approaches and determination for change, kebele administration gave 2.5 ha of land for running the dairy farm and production of forage feeds. Youths approached Dedebit Micro-Finance Institute (MFI) and granted a loan which they managed to purchase 13 crossbred dairy cows. In addition to the loan from the MFI, group members raised more money through their own contributions for two consecutive years. They also received trainings being financed by AGP. In the second year, the group made a gross revenue of Birr 170,600.00, of which Birr 76,625.00 is a net profit. The group has already started repaying the loan from this income and they are left with only 15%. This reveals the commitment and economic ability of youths and their business orientation in being able to repay the loan on time.

The lesson that can be drawn from this youth group is their dedication to take loans and start the capital intensive business. They were also able to identify feasible and worthy business taking into consideration of the potentials available in their locality. Apart from generating initial capital from loans, the group has also demonstrated its commitment of raising additional capital for two consecutive years. More or less, it is a stand-alone group with only limited external supports. The group was convinced in the group approach of extension. Because, they noticed that the group approach pools together the knowledge and skills of different individuals and sets up a favorable opportunity for innovation and creativeness.

Source: Abhinav and Kaleb (2014)
5.2 Best Practices and Lessons Drawn from Case Stories

• Establishing women-only group approach has motivated women for innovation, enhanced experience sharing among themselves, and developed their confidence. Women expressed “we feel embarrassed to speak in front of men. Because, men think women know nothing. We may not also be able to express idea in organized ways as men do. The facilitators often give more chance for men to speak than for women counterparts. Instead, we feel free when we are in our own boundary. It is not knowledge we lack as such, but it was culture which oriented us to be reserved from everything”. Therefore, until the time comes that both men and women are equally empowered, it would be valid to employ women-friendly approaches, such as targeting and facilitating women-only groups. This approach is believed to be scalable to other development initiatives including formal extension systems. Group members shall be in the range of 25 – 40 for ease of group management.

• Identifying entry point that is easily manageable by women was a turn out to trigger women participation. The entry point can be selected by women themselves and once they prove that the technology works well and they can bring change, no one can stop them from further exploration. Therefore, identification of appropriate entry point can be taken as the best practice. In that case, it can include garden farming such as vegetables, poultry, fattening of small ruminants and others.

• Introducing appropriate and women-friendly technologies enhances uptake by women and improvements in livelihoods. Women themselves start demanding the type of technology they believe would solve their problems and that of their family. They prefer to start experiencing with simpler enterprises which they know well and then progress to higher levels step by step. If they start with complicated practices, they would rather frustrate and refrain thinking that the technology doesn’t work to them.

• Practical demonstration and experience sharing were preferred approaches of training women. Classroom training with slide presentations is not as such appreciated by women. They want to see the new practice demonstrated and working on the ground, so that it makes easy for them to experience it by their own.

• Once women are convinced that the new practice or technology works well, they opt to experience it faster than men. Surprisingly, women remain committed to manage their farms as per the recommendations given. This has been confirmed by many of the development partners who pursued women specific initiatives. What women want to see is the new
practice or technology impacting on their lives benefiting their family in creating more food and income. Since women are the ones who are shouldering the effects of poverty more often than any other member of the family, they don’t want to waste further time to try the new technology. On the other hand, men often hesitate the new practice or technology saying “it may not be better than what we already know. Any way let’s wait and see how it works in others farms”.

- Once women are given a free opportunity to consult among themselves, they can come up with an innovative business idea taking into consideration of the potentials and opportunities available in their locality. They can also choose the best extension approach suitable to them.

- Addressing youth group through extension approaches can lead to tremendous progresses. Youth can identify plausible and profitable business ideas taking into consideration of opportunities available. They can also establish market linkages fast and diversify their enterprises with lots of options. Youths also require extension approaches that are suitable to them, such as print and electronic media, including production manuals, pamphlets, demonstrations, experience sharing visits, radio, TV, mobile phones and others. Moreover, they are interested in businesses that are profit oriented, such as apiculture, fruits and vegetable production, dairy and fattening, value addition and processing and others.

- Women groups promote and share experiences, knowledge and skills faster than men do. Since they never had much of the exposure so far, they feel enthusiastic to share what they learnt to their family members, their peers and neighbors. It was amazing to observe that women share the new practice to the whole of their family members, which is a rare practice to be done by men. The whole family, including their husbands, gets motivated to participate and share responsibilities when they see that change is coming home through women. Women convey messages to their children and family not forcefully as men do, but charmingly and lovely, and this motivates them for change and determination. Even during trainings, women opt to help each other on the spot in an easily understandable expression.

- Shared decision making prevails at home when women are empowered and build knowledge of improved farming. Since they share to their family, all household members can have similar understanding of the subject under consideration. Therefore, women start influencing decisions to the interest of the whole family, the practice which was inexistent so far. In effect, women are then respected by the family including their men counterparts.

- Since women are responsible for most of the field based activities, fields were observed to be well managed. Weeding, cultivation, field cleaning and similar activities were managed very well as per the recommendations suggested during trainings. Even though men receive
several trainings repeatedly, there are several cases where they do not manage their fields well as women do.

- Participation of WiMHH along with their husbands in trainings was observed to be the best approach for them to have common understanding of the technical issues. Since farming is practiced by both men and women, there are cases where bringing both of them (husband and wife) for trainings and demonstrations was the best option. In this case, it is possible to establish separate groups during trainings as “men-only group” and “women-only group” to avoid dominance and create favorable environment for women.

- It was also learnt that once inspired with entry points in new agricultural practices, women were able to identify what next is required to them and started demanding supports on leadership, team management, conflict resolution, record keeping, savings, rights issue, and associated subjects.

- Sustainable livelihood changes can be achieved in targeting the household as a unit including women, men and youths. Shared household responsibilities can relieve the burden of women. Therefore, a big lesson has been learnt that development initiatives shall focus the household as a unit and treat women, men and youths according to their circumstances.

- Design extension services and development initiatives not only for women and men, but also for youths. Especially, FHH depend on their youth children for the farming activities, such as plowing, sowing, planting, harvesting and others. Therefore, unless youths are embraced in the extension programs, participation of FHH per se will not bring expected productivity enhancements and income increments.

- Women are capital accumulators. Therefore, it was learnt that saving practices should be introduced along with development initiatives. Women can also access credit from their own savings through establishing village level saving and credit groups. Supports can also be facilitated to women on off-farm income generating activities (IGAs) to help them diversify on-farm incomes.

- Determination for change is instrumental for success. It requires dedication to change skewed attitudes of the community against women and ensure gender equality. Once gender equality is surfaced in the household, there is peace, love, belongingness and overall livelihood improvements.
5.3 Lessons Drawn from Assessment Study

- Extension planning was observed to be largely of top-down approach even though discussions are made on these plans until lower level extension structures. In spite of the discussions, there is little chance of incorporating pertinent issues raised at lower levels. It was, therefore, learnt that plans should be able to accommodate priority issues that can also be raised at grassroots levels.

- It was learnt that unless the gender implementers, experts and leaders are well aware of and skilled in techniques of mainstreaming gender in the extension systems, programs and projects of institutes, favorable gender policies per se would have remained futile. Adequate resources, such as budget, shall also be allocated along with skilled and knowledgeable implementers, and accountability for the dreams of gender equality come true. Therefore, capacity building and empowerment of implementers shall be set as one of the priority agenda in facilitating gender mainstreaming and women empowerment initiatives.

- Extension service provision was observed to focus mainly on supply of inputs (fertilizer, seeds, etc). It was, however, learnt that supply side per se does not lead to sustainable development of agriculture economy. The extension system shall be linked to social and economic perspectives of the community, such as culture, language, educational level, economic status, available resources and opportunities and other dimensions. Value addition, saving and credits, and linkages with markets shall also be an integral component. Extension services shall, therefore, be designed taking into consideration of not only agriculture, but also other interrelated services required for sustainable growth of household economy.

- A lesson was also taken that once extension services are rendered, or a new technology is introduced, monitoring and supervision, and a learning mechanism was not strong enough and not adequately participatory. Practitioners or implementers do not make regular monitoring of the technologies introduced and take timely corrective measures for the problems arising in the course of implementation. Lessons shall be taken and corrective measures shall be effected in the interest of further improvements. The learning process shall also be iterative and continuous to arrive at set goals.

- Newly established extension structures, such as development groups and 1-to-5 networks are very crucial to facilitate extension services. It was, however, learnt that these structures shall give focus to technical issues, such as disseminating extension information, sharing best practices and lessons, taking lessons and making corrective measures and others that are helpful to strengthen agriculture sector. Even though FTCs are excellent structures for promoting extension services, most of them are not functional. Even those which are functional lack the required facilities, plots of their own, budget and other logistical issues. It was, therefore, learnt that unless new structures are accompanied with adequate supports and logistical requirements, it only remains in vain.
• It was also learnt that the practice of learning lessons and best practices from others is very limited. Since extension service provision takes care of complicated farming systems across agro-ecologies and cultures, taking lessons from success stories of any other organization facilitates change and makes sustainable. There are success stories, best practices and colorful achievements either through formal or informal extension practices, by GOs or NGOs, in every part of the country. These model practices can be packaged and transferred to others for immediate change.

• In light of high level of illiteracy which is believed to be responsible for ignorance to new technologies and many of essentials for their life, it was learnt that adult literacy program can be initiated not only for women but also for men. Action oriented literacy program is believed to raise interests of women and men for adopting new technologies and bring sustainable livelihood changes. It can be designed in their villages at convenient time as per their preference.

• It was also learnt that facilitators or implementers or DAs themselves need to be trained on how to train, how to design women-friendly or men-friendly training programs, how to approach the community and various related issues. Even though they know technical issues, implementers largely lack skills on “how to train” perspectives or training skills. Trainers shall prepare training programs that suit the conditions, knowledge, exposure, literacy, age and other perspectives of men, women and youths. There should also be a training manual and a sort of farmer-friendly curriculum to maintain consistency and avoid repetition every time trainings are organized.

• Lesson was also taken that the issue of language shall be seriously considered when organizing trainings for women. The trainer shall be the one who can be conversant with the local language spoken by the community. Therefore, there should not be language barrier, so that participants can express their views freely with their own languages.

6. Challenges and Opportunities Available for Enhancing Women Participation and Gender Mainstreaming

6.1 Challenges of Gender Mainstreaming and Women Participation

Gender mainstreaming initiatives and women participation programs were not executed without challenges. The major ones have been summarized in subsequent paragraphs for possible consideration in taking corrective measures.
• The first and foremost challenge is unfavorable attitude of the society against women. This challenge stands high when many of the development initiatives are implemented to change livelihoods of women. There is no option other than striving to change attitudes over time towards the benefit of women, in particular, and the society, in general.

• The other major challenge repeatedly mentioned in almost all the study regions was limited knowledge and practical skills of implementers and gender promoters from higher to lower level hierarchies. Even though they have general awareness, they often lack practical skills of how to mainstream gender in extension programs and also identification of women’s real problems and priorities. Moreover, they have limited skills on how to involve women in extension services through employing workable and practicable approaches. It seems to be apparent that all other problems related to poor gender mainstreaming and limited women participation in extension services are largely caused by the limited knowledge and skills of implementers themselves.

• Limited participation of WiMHH in extension services has also been a challenge as compared to FHH. WiMHH have been influenced by attitudes and their involvement in household decision making is restricted. WiMHH who account for the largest proportion of rural women population are devoid of extension services due to attitudinal problems and effects of male dominated culture. It is not possible to say that women are benefiting from extension services without making WiMHH part of that.

• Limited availability and accessibility of women-friendly technologies, such as labor and time saving technologies, was also observed to be a challenge to satisfy the interests of women. Women are overburdened and they do not have adequate time to spend in trainings. They could not even complete their routine duties by working for more than 15 hours a day. On the other hand, technologies often being promoted rather require more time of women involvement which further exacerbates their troubles.

• Even though there is gender based structure from higher to lower levels responsible for mainstreaming gender into extension systems, it was without being allocated adequate budget. It has been reported from almost all the study regions that Gender Directorates and Units are left with sparse or no budgets. This is one of the major challenges restricting gender mainstreaming and women participation in extension services.

• FTCs, development groups and 1-to-5 networks are not strengthened in many of the regions. It has become a challenge to pursue extension services through these structures without being empowered. Almost all of these structures operate below expectation in all the regions, except some who are believed to be functional.

• Low literacy level of women is also a challenge to employ different means of extension approaches, such as posters, mobile phones and other electronic and print media.
• Even though community based institutions, such as cooperatives, SaCCOs and others are directly established for a certain purpose, they could have also been used as platforms of promoting extension services. However, their limited capacities in technical, managerial and financial perspectives have still been a challenge to utilize these platforms for channeling extension services.

6.2 Opportunities Available for Facilitating Gender Mainstreaming and Women Participation

The following favorable opportunities have been identified to help facilitate the processes of women participation and gender mainstreaming:

• All provisions for women have been included in the constitution of the country and policies of respective ministries, including Ministry of Agriculture. Every institution is expected to design its own implementation strategies to ensure gender equality and women benefits in every development initiative. Therefore, supportive gender policy in place is a favorable condition to design workable strategies.

• Establishment of Gender promoting structures, such as Directorate of Women and Youth Affairs at national and regional levels, and Gender Units at district levels of GOs is also a good opportunity to enhance gender mainstreaming and sharing of experiences and best practices. Gender Units are also established in several public institutions and NGOs.

• Extension structures laid down from top to bottom levels, such as FTCs, development groups and 1-to-5 networks being established at grassroots levels can be taken as good opportunities to use as platforms of promoting extension services. Development groups were further established as men-only and women-only groups separately.

• Establishment of community based institutions, such as cooperatives, saving and credit associations is also a favorable opportunity since they can be used as platforms to enhance extension service provision. ADPLAC is also another opportunity where gender issues are supposed to be discussed as one of the agenda. This platform is established with the purpose of identifying development needs of the community and finding solutions to these needs through different mechanisms, such as establishing linkages with different members of ADPLAC including Research Centers, NGOs, Seed Multiplication Agencies, Soil Laboratories and other development partners. Therefore, this platform offers a potential opportunity to promote extension services including means of enhancing women participation.

• Availability of best practices and success stories on women empowerment in several GOs and NGOs can also be taken as a favorable opportunity. These best practices would need to be packaged and documented to be used during designing of similar initiatives and also for scaling-up and dissemination to more other parts of the country.
There are tens of organizations either GOs, NGOs or international organizations striving to mainstream gender in their programs and projects and enhance women participation in their respective development initiatives. It is favorable opportunity to network with these organizations for technical and financial supports, and experience sharing. Some organizations are committed to support gender and women empowerment initiatives, both technically and financially.

Resource materials, literatures and documented reports available on electronic and print media that deal with mechanisms of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment can also be taken as a favorable opportunity. These resources can be reviewed and best practices can be identified for possible consideration during designing of women centered development programs and gender mainstreaming strategies.

7. Proposed Interventions and Inputs for Enhancing Gender Mainstreaming and Strengthening Women Participation in Agricultural Extension System

7.1 Proposed Strategic Interventions

1. Identify, prioritize and document the real problems and development needs of Women

As a matter of principle, any intervention shall be preceded by identification of the real problems, priorities and development needs of the target group under question. In the Ethiopian context, where there is diverse social set-up, the problems, priorities and interests of women vary across cultures, customs and traditions. For instance, the needs and priorities of women in Afar and Gambella regions will not be the same as with those in the regional states of Amhara, Oromiya or Tigray. There is divergence of priorities and needs as we move from corner of the country to another. All women farmers are not also homogenous. WiMHH and FHH do not often share similar problems, priorities and development needs, even though there are some commonalities.

Among the realities as confirmed by several earlier investigations, women in many of the country spend several hours a day, more than 15 hours a day, operating ranges of household and field level activities. This means that they are already overloaded with almost no time left to allocate for participations in trainings, demonstrations and other extension services. Relatively, this problem is more pronounced in WiMHH than FHH. It was so far learnt that coupled with social and cultural influences, busy schedules of women have restricted them from participations in extension services. This means that scheduling of extension services both in time and space shall be in accordance to these real problems of women. The realities, therefore, suggest that relieving their burden and releasing part of their time shall be one of
the entry points needed to be made at the outset to level the ground and create favorable opportunities for women to participate in extension services. This is believed to relieve women to participate in extension and development initiatives. In the short-run, it is better to set schedules of extension services for women separately at the time and place convenient to them. Along with this, focus on the whole household and strive towards changing attitudes of household members to share responsibilities fairly among themselves and support each other. This can better be done including house-to-house extension approaches along with other approaches. This process eventually relieves women and releases part of their time to participate in extension services.

Therefore, women’s realities need to be identified, prioritized and documented at the outset across the different cultures and societal constructs. Subsequent to this fundamental step follows identification of intervention options and opportunities available to address the needs of women. There is also a need to hold consultation of these options of solutions with the community itself, especially with women, and key stakeholders in the locality. Based on the feedback reflected from women and taking into consideration of the existing ground realities, then design appropriate strategies and extension services that are believed to address women’s priority needs.

For the extension services to stay sustainable, there is no better option than designing demand driven extension services to both men and women (FHH and WiMHH). First understand the real problems of men, FHH and WiMHH followed by designing of demand driven services in order that it can respond to the needs and priorities.

2. Introduce and promote women-friendly technologies and associated packages

Women required friendly technologies that address their needs and priorities. Due to the fact that women spend several hours in a day operating different domestic and field level activities, they would like the technologies to have the key merits of saving their time and labor still enhancing productivity. On the other hand, most of the technologies currently available and being promoted rather demand more time and labor of women. Women also demand not only time and labor saving technologies, but also associated needs, such as informal savings and credit services, market linkages, value addition and processing, entrepreneurship opportunities, options of supplementary income generating activities (IGAs). These shall be offered as packages rather than as separate entity. Some of these packages might be of interest to FHH while some others to WiMHH. Therefore, it might mislead to assume always that packages of technologies are equally important for FHH and WiMHH.

3. Identify and Promote Extension Approaches Preferred by Women

Diversities of women’s problems and needs necessitate designing of appropriate extension approaches compatible to their real circumstances. Even though ranges of options are available for extension approaches, all of them are not equally important for women. What works well for men might not be as good for women. Even similar approaches might not be equally important for FHH and WiMHH.
Therefore, it is essential to make informed decision in the identification of appropriate approaches that suit the circumstances of women. For instance, women selected demonstration and experience sharing as the best extension approaches. Women-friendly trainings complemented with lots of practical demonstrations and brainstorming interactions with local language is also a preferred approach by women. House-to-house extension approach especially by female DAs has also been preferred by women since they feel relaxed to express their true feelings and development needs. If possible, video projection on best practices with narrations in local languages can also help them get impression of how the new practice works. Above all, women feel free, comfortable and participate actively in “women-only” groups. It will, therefore, be misleading to assume that a particular extension approach is equally important for men and women.

4. Complement Action Oriented Adult Literacy Program

Especially women believed that it is illiteracy a responsible factor for all their poverty and limited access to new practices and technologies. They recognized that cultural influence in earlier days in their school age has restricted their chances of attending formal schools. Women were meant to be for marriage in their early ages and that was how the society was oriented and has been exercising. As a result, women have realized the consequences of illiteracy on their livelihoods. When they notice the natures of technologies and extension services being rendered to them, they demanded adult literacy program to be offered to them to get basic literacy education even though at later ages. Men have also demanded the same provision. Women demanded literacy program to be established in their villages at the time convenient to them. Therefore, complementing adult literacy program along with extension service provision is believed to enhance exposure of women and men to new practices and technologies, and improve their livelihoods.

5. Focus on the household when targeting extension services for sustainable change

Extension services mostly focus on individual in a household, mainly the household head. However, all working age household members including men, women and youths are participating in different agricultural activities even though the extent varies. Even though household heads are supposed to share the new knowledge and experiences they acquired to all other household members, it was not as to expectation. Especially, the practice of men sharing their new knowledge and skills to household members is limited. Therefore, focusing all the working age household members (men, women and youth) is believed to bring anticipated changes. Therefore, it is a preferable approach to focus on the household members, men, women and youths to ensure sustainable changes in economic status and livelihoods. For instance, it worked well when WiMHH participates along with her husband on certain extension services. This helped them narrow down disparities in understanding of technical issues related to improved practices and technologies. Moreover, both of them apply the knowledge and skills acquired on their own farms.
In female headed households, male youths are the ones who often participate in major agricultural operations, such as plowing, planting and other operations. Unless youths are made to participate in extension services along with FHH, household farms will not be managed very well compromising productivity and quality. Once awareness is created for the household members on the unfair workloads in the family, often on women, they would resort to sharing tasks to relieve the burden from women and release time for participation in extension and other public services. There are also possibilities of adjusting existing female biased gender division of labor in the household. Household approach will also be instrumental for addressing the perpetuated attitudinal problems of the society. Once household members start exercising gender equality in sharing responsibilities, making shared decisions and joint resource control, it would lead to building positive and constructive attitudes in the household strengthening family bond and determination for change.

6. Launch focused and participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (M and E) system at grassroots levels

In addition to being exercised by higher level officials and experts, participatory M and E system shall also be established at grassroots levels where community members including women, take active part. There should be a mechanism where women themselves are given the opportunity to monitor and evaluate women-designed extension services and development initiatives being tailored to improve their livelihoods. Their observations, obstacles and feedback shall, therefore, be communicated to respective technical experts, administrative personnel, higher officials or policy markets for possible amendments and timely corrective measures. If this system is effectively set in place, the chance of designing demand driven extension services to the interests of women and enhancing their participation would be escalated. Moreover, gender mainstreaming would reveal tangible improvements. Women focused initiatives will also be owned by themselves and remain sustainable. This approach will also build accountability and ensure delivery of expected outputs.

Well designed monitoring and evaluation mechanism shall be taken as an iterative process to track progresses of gender mainstreaming initiatives, identify problems early and take corrective measures timely. Practitioners should also be accountable for their efforts made and achievements on involving women in different initiatives of extension services. Such a monitoring and tracking mechanism shall be structured in bottom-up approach in that the community by itself and especially women shall actively participate in evaluating the efforts made to involve them in extension services. Adequacy of initiatives, approaches of extension and communication mechanisms employed, appropriateness of technologies to women and other issues shall be evaluated by groups of WiMHH and FHH separately and the feedback along with proposed solutions shall either be tailored to higher levels for possible consideration or got solved at grassroots levels. The gender expert shall also form part of the team in monitoring and evaluation, and performance tracking of gender based initiatives and other associated group works.
7. **Allocate budget dedicated to supporting women**

One of the serious impediments for gender mainstreaming and women participation in extension services is allocation of either negligible or no budget at all. This has further discouraged implementers from planning and executing women supportive development initiatives. Therefore, it is strongly suggested to allocate a separate budget that is dedicated to women empowerment, participations in extension services and other development programs.

8. **Capacity Building of Implementers, Leaders and Gender Experts at all levels**

Since capacity limitation has been reported at almost all levels of gender structures, it shall be set up as a priority agenda to unlock this barrier and enrich the capacities. While organizing capacity building programs, focus shall be given not only on organizing the training, but also on the quality of the training. The trainers to be engaged should have practical knowledge, experiences and skills of illustrating how to mainstream gender and workable approaches that help involve WiMHH and FHH in different extension services. The trainings shall also be accompanied by practical demonstrations, exercises and lots of brainstorming sessions.

9. **Establish Common Interest Groups and Promote Women Centered Extension Services**

It has become evident that targeting mixed groups of men and women have not worked well except in limited occasions. In such cases, the chance is high that men dominate the session and women remain passive participants without being able to influence decisions to their interests and needs. As a result, women themselves preferred to establish common interest groups with shared vision and goals accompanied by women-friendly trainings and skill development. Common interest groups are groups based on specific commodity or enterprise, such as apiculture group, vegetable group and others. FHH and WiMHH can establish common interest groups depending on the subject under consideration. This will help all women members express their feelings and development needs freely. As a group, they can also access credit services through co-guarantee mechanism. They can also purchase bulk inputs at lower costs and sale bulk producers with better bargaining powers. It also creates ample opportunities to motivate women innovations and creativeness in solving their own problems on sustainable basis. Even though there might be cases where men and women can come together during certain extension approaches, such as field days and household based trainings, they prefer to be separate in other approaches. Such kinds of women-centered extension services have been proven to be successful in various countries. For instance, women-centered extension in the Gambia along with skill development has achieved a dramatic increase of women participants from 5% to over 60% in just under five years. Similar approach has also worked well in Kenya where common interest groups have been established to run commercial businesses (Cathy and Marceline, 2010). The group extension approach has also worked well in Cameroon. It was reported that working with a group compared with working with individuals is cost-effective and group dynamics increases diffusion effect of the technology (Walker, 1990).
10. *Embrace youths in extension services*

Youths are the potential drivers of economic, social, cultural and other dimensions of development. It was reported during assessment study that there is no as such a special extension service that is being tailored to youths except limited experiences in parts of the country. Therefore, the extension systems shall also address the interests and development needs of youths. They may either have limited farmlands which they acquired from their family or none at all. On the other hand, most of the youths have gone through schooling to the high school levels, and even as high as colleges, which can be taken as a favorable opportunity. They may require a different extension approach than the one adopted for men and women farmers. For instance, classroom trainings with slide presentations, print and electronic media can suit for youths. Production manuals, pamphlets, radio, video, mobile phones, demonstrations and experience sharing visits can also be easily employed for youths. They also need selected enterprises that are believed to be feasible and profitable, such as apiculture, fruits and vegetable production, dairy and fattening, IGAs, processing and value addition and others depending on their interests. Not only Office of Agriculture that should stand at the sides of youths, but also others, such as Kebele and District Administration, the community itself, technology sources (research institutes, mechanization) and others. They require special purpose trainings such as entrepreneurship, price determination and demand creation, sorting and grading techniques of products, value addition and processing, packaging and transportation, record keeping, team management and conflict resolution, handing, management and operation of new technologies, and others as per their demands. Since most of them are landless, they need to acquire land from their respective Kebele Administrations with supports from District Administration. Moreover, they require credit services to start the business and need to be supported through different sources of financial institutions, such as Micro-Enterprises and others.

11. *Identify entry points to induce women participation*

Identification of entry points that can be easily managed by women will inspire them to enhance participation in extension services and development initiatives. Women would be comforted if they receive extension services on garden farming, such as technological packages of fruits and vegetables, root crops, enset, post-harvest handling, processing and value addition, poultry, beekeeping, small ruminants fattening, dairy production and other similar enterprises depending on the potentials available in their locality. These are almost women’s enterprises which can be managed in the premises of their home without getting far-away from villages. Along with supply of these technologies, women require practical oriented trainings, demonstrations and experience sharing visits. Packages of interventions suggested in the preceding section can also be included along with entry points to substantiate benefits of women. Once women got inspired with successes of entry points, then they would demand more technologies step by step to secure livelihood improvements of their families.
12. Establish and Promote Farmer Field Schools (FFS)

Farmer field school (FFS) is also another extension approach that triggers the processes of economic, social and personal change, particularly among women. FFS approach works well as case study to explore specific subject matter in more detail and enhance learning among each other. The approach can embrace women members ranging from 25 – 30. The group will have its own managing committee and it will be facilitated by development agents (DAs). The learning process takes season long time from planting to harvesting stages of the technology under consideration. Practical on the job learning process takes place at each stage of farm operation and it progresses with creation of practical impressions and knowledge for women. The timing of discussions can be arranged as per the interests and conveniences of women themselves. FFS approach has its own curriculum revealing all the steps and processes from beginning to end, and this makes facilitation easy. It works well not for every subject, but to demonstrate technologies that require skillful knowledge and experiences. Such kinds of approaches have also worked well in Ethiopia on potato FFS at Dendi district facilitated by Holeta Research Center along with Office of Agriculture. Similar approach has also been successful in Mozambique where it was confirmed that participation of women in FFS was higher than men (Ambra and Catarina, 2010).

13. Establishing and Strengthening of networking with potential development partners

In the extension service provision, there is no substitute for establishing and strengthening of networks with potential development partners that are believed to be of importance to men, women and youth farmers. In addition to Office of Agriculture, it is essential to establish and strengthen linkages with other development partners as Agricultural Research Institutes for sourcing technologies, Financial Institutions to secure credit services, NGOs for financial and technical supports, District and Kebele Administrations for land and administrative supports, traders and processors for product marketing, Agro-Mechanization and Nutrition Research Centers for processing and value addition technologies and several others. Office of Agriculture may be at the center of these institutions and potential partners to facilitate establishment of linkages and common platform.

7.2 Proposed Operational Interventions

1. Cascade Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines to Lower level gender structures

In all the study regions, it was figured out that the gender mainstreaming guideline developed at national levels has not been cascaded to lower gender structures, such as regional, zonal and district level Gender Units. To facilitate the processes of gender mainstreaming and women participation in extension system, the standard guideline shall be adopted at all levels. The guideline shall reveal the procedures and technical steps of mainstreaming gender in all the activities of all the core processes.
This will help to facilitate gender mainstreaming process in all the core processes, programs and projects of agriculture sector.

2. Establish and strengthen rewarding mechanism for best performances

Recognition of best performance is believed to be an instrumental incentive for change. Leaders, implementers, women’s groups and elite women need to be recognized and rewarded for best performances in the course of ensuring women participation and empowerment. The government has enormously set up reward system for those individuals and groups who recorded outstanding achievements in various economic sectors, such as agriculture, industry, science and technology, investments, research and others. In similar trend, reward system shall also consider best performances in gender mainstreaming and strengthening women participation in agricultural extension services, in particular, and agriculture sector, in general.

3. Empower and bring women to leadership positions

It is believed that women leaders can be more inspired than men counterparts to amplify women’s voice and influence for incorporation in the extension and development plans from top to bottom levels. Even though attempts have been made to place women in limited leadership positions, they have not yet been influential due to capacity limitations. Therefore, empowering leadership qualities of women is believed to be crucial stage to enhance their ability influential ability and create favorable grounds for motivating women to participate in extension services and other related programs. This can be achieved through offering women-friendly leadership trainings and exposing them to experience sharing visits.

4. Make recruitment and employment of gender experts on merit basis

When employing experts on gender positions, selection process shall be on merit basis. In most of the cases, being female seems to be a mere criterion to nominate gender expert. Since there are gender departments at university levels, the applicant shall at least be educated in gender fields or should have received short term trainings on gender. Once selection is being made on merit basis, the gender expert position shall be made competitive as that of other parallel positions. Their knowledge and skills can be enhanced further through trainings and experience sharing visits.

5. Strengthen Development Groups

Development groups are extension structures organized at kebele levels and there are also cases where women-only groups have been organized. They are especially of better convenience to women for being organized at close to village levels. Even though development groups have been organized to the levels of almost all kebeles in the study regions, they are not as such strengthened. Therefore, it has been suggested by women that development groups need to be strengthened with a focus on development issues. They should be oriented to demands and development needs of the community, in general, and
of women, in particular. Women especially preferred women-only development groups for they address women’s interests and also have weekly schedules of consultative meetings. On the other hand, women found inconvenient the daily meetings required by 1-to-5 networks.

6. Documentation of Best Practices in Gender Mainstreaming and, Women and Youth Participation

There are best practices and innovations in different parts of the country that recorded colorful achievements in gender mainstreaming and participation of women and youths in development initiatives. There are also success stories and best practices in women and youth participation that can be shared across other institutions. In every corner of the country, there are achievements of GOs, NGOs or international organizations, but most of them remained invisible, inaccessible and untraceable for they are not known or no documentation made on these best practices. There are similar experiences in such a documentation, such as a book entitled “Millions Feed: Proven Successes in Agricultural Development” published in 2010 (IFPRI, 2010). International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) took initiative of packaging best practices and success stories globally in agricultural development. The book examines how policies, programs and investments in pro-poor agricultural development have helped to substantially reduce hunger across Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is an award winning book for packaging best practices that worked well in developing world can be scaled-up at large for drawing lessons. Therefore, Women and Youth Affairs Directorate of Ministry of Agriculture can take the lead along with ATA or other organizations to initiate the case and facilitate documentation and publication of best practices on gender mainstreaming, women empowerment and youth participation.

7. Ensure Committed and Sustained Leadership Supports

Leadership commitment is required in such supports as allocating adequate budget for women empowerment and participation, employing qualified and competent gender experts, launching gender aware M & E system, organizing capacity building programs for gender awareness, motivating implementers and much more. Without dependable leadership supports and determination, all the above recommendations will remain futile. Therefore, officials at all levels of structures shall reveal their dedication to change the livelihoods of rural women for there is no real development of the country without addressing their misery. Establishment of a common platform where higher officials take part and organizing programs as presentation of best practices that impacted on lives of women and youths, initiating panel discussions, preparation and distribution of policy briefs, facilitating visits to model sites and other approaches can be employed to create impression of policy makers and leaders. This would further illustrate that women-friendly development initiatives can really contribute to changes in their livelihoods and growth of the country. Members of Parliament (MPs) shall also be targeted in addition to higher officials of institutions and ministries at different hierarchies.
8. Conclusion

The findings of assessment from four of the regions have clearly revealed that rural women are not beneficiaries of extension services to the level anticipated. It has also been figured out that the extension service has largely missed WiMHH as compare to FHH. Extension approaches being employed were also assumed to be equally important for both men and women, which is not the case in reality. Capacity limitation of implementers, gender experts and leaders was also reported to be one of the causes for limited participation of women in extension services and development initiatives. Unfavorable attitude against women that perpetuated in the society has also been a fundamental barrier to women’s participation in extension and development programs. In general, the study has figured out several issues as presented in all the preceding sections and sub-sections. Problems and barriers that hindered women participation in extension and development programs have been identified. Available opportunities and favorable conditions that help facilitate to address women’s real needs and priorities have also been identified and documented. Attempts have also been made to illustrate limited best practices of successful stories in enhancing gender equality and women and youth participation in extension and development initiatives. Above all, options of interventions believed to be relevant to the context of the country and the purpose of the study have also been proposed for possible consideration in designing either gender-aware extension strategy or any other development program intending to address the development needs of women.

9. References


