

# **Implementation of Technical and Vocational Training Strategy in Agricultural Sector in Ethiopia: Practices, Challenges and the Way Forward**

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## **Abstract**

*Ethiopia introduced a wide range of socioeconomic development strategies, programs and practices since 1991. One of these is Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) strategy that aims at producing extension agents (usually referred to as development agents /DAs/) who are capable to contribute to sustainable agricultural development in Ethiopia. The objective of this study was, therefore, to assess the contribution of ATVET graduates in improving agricultural productivity and the farmers' livelihoods. A blend of descriptive and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques were employed in this research. The study findings indicate that the role of ATVET in technology transfer, productivity enhancement, agricultural commercialization, rural economic growth and environmental protection is vital. However, its realization has been constrained by several adverse factors such as graduates' lack of practical skills and the stamina to work in rural areas, farmers' attitude towards rural development agents (DAs), weak industry-ATVET college linkage, and poor administrative support to DAs. The study concludes that there is a need for tailored ATVET curriculum development and strong college-industry linkages to realize the immense role of ATVET program in Ethiopia.*

**Keywords:** technical and vocational education, development agent, agriculture, Angolela, Kuyu, Ethiopia

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## **Introduction**

Agriculture continues to play an important role in developing economies, where it represents the economic mainstay of over 85% of the rural populations, of which more than half are smallholders (World Bank, 2008; Mumtaz and Gopal, 2014). As it is vital for the livelihoods of the rural population as well as for national economic growth, developing countries, including Ethiopia, have placed emphasis on the development of this sector. In Ethiopia, agriculture contributes 38.8% to the national GDP (EIC, 2016) and employs about 74% of the country's total labor force (NPC, 2015). This sector contributes to 3.6% of the export revenue as share of GDP and about 75% of the total value of Ethiopia's export value (NPC, 2015).

As a result, the Government of Ethiopia has demonstrated a strong commitment to the development of the agricultural sector through various mechanisms of which integration of the agricultural sector to technical and vocational trainings is a vital aspect. Ethiopia has a National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Strategy developed in 2008. This is the guiding document for all TVET programs in the country, including Agricultural TVET (ATVET) (MoE, 2008; NEPAD, 2013). The TVET strategy of Ethiopia attests that TVET programs seek to create competent and self-reliant citizens to contribute to the overall socioeconomic development of the country, thus improving the livelihoods of all Ethiopians and sustainably reducing poverty (MoE, 2008).

The National TVET Qualification Framework (NTQF) also emphasizes the TVET program to be wage-and-self-employment-oriented, demand-driven and outcome based, and thus appropriate to address the sustainable development needs of the Ethiopian economy (MoE, 2010). The TVET program is targeting a paradigm change putting quality and relevance as its first priority. This is because, as indicated in NTQF (2010), an outcome-based TVET system creates ways for the fair recognition of the wide range of formal, non-formal and informal trainings and learning, hence opening access to qualifications for previously neglected target groups, such as smallholder farmers. TVET envisaged increasing chances of an occupational career, boosting productivity and creating options for further training and employment opportunity.

As a vital component of the general TVET program, Ethiopian Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) strategy targets to immensely contribute to the national mission of 'Creating a modern and highly productive agricultural system that uses a more advanced technology which enables the society to get rid of poverty.' The ATVET system is geared towards improving the competitiveness and sustainable development of the agricultural

sector through integrated demand-driven and competence based ATVET systems and producing qualified, competent and responsible workforce. The training program aims at producing rural-targeting personnel in animal science, plant science, animal health, natural resource management and cooperative promotion. This is because, as noted by Tiedao, *et al.* (2001), dissemination of new technologies to rural areas through vocational education and training has the potential to transform economic activities and economic performance levels of the rural populations, thereby contributing to improving their quality of life and level of community development. Karmel (2007) also indicates that vocational and technical trainings broaden the choices available to young persons and clearly for some it provides a livelihoods pathway.

Ethiopia, with the intention of addressing its targets, has been running agriculture-related vocational and technical trainings and implementing the strategic plans aiming at enhancing smallholder agricultural productivity in rural areas. Fields of training include agricultural cooperatives, animal health, animal production, crop production, natural resources development/management and agricultural mechanization. According to the data obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MoANR), annually about 50,000 trainees have been attending trainings at five federal and over 15 regional ATVET colleges in Ethiopia. These colleges provide a 3-year training program to produce middle level work force by admitting youth who completed general education (grade 10) in the Ethiopian education system.

On the other hand, the implementation of the ATVET strategy in Ethiopia has been challenged by lots of problems as noted by NEPAD (2013). The challenges include, but not limited to, limited funding to provide quality training; high staff turnover (approximately 10-15% per annum) of the extension workers (commonly known as development agents /DAs/); low quality of training as some DAs lack practical skills and experiences; trainers work overload; shortage of training resources at Farmers Training Centers (FTCs) due to limited budget; DAs lack of stamina to work in rural areas; limited participation of the private sector; weak industry-TVET college as well as stakeholders linkage; unwillingness of some farmers to engage in training; lack of considerations to indigenous knowledge in some occupational standards for some fields; lack of startup capital to start own agribusinesses after graduation from TVET; and poor infrastructure in rural areas.

These challenges, no doubt, blurred the high political commitment of the government to improve agricultural production and productivity. Hence, all the prevailing facts and the challenges to the ATVET program in Ethiopia call for a well-thought-out and well-advised implementation strategy so as to renovate the country's economic base from the existing resource-poor and rain-fed traditional

smallholder agriculture to more productive agriculture in order to remedy the existing rural development challenges. In addition, the roles of concerned bodies that include the Government, civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners working on ATVET and rural development in Ethiopia need to be assessed to enhance their roles in the enhancement of ATVET program in the country.

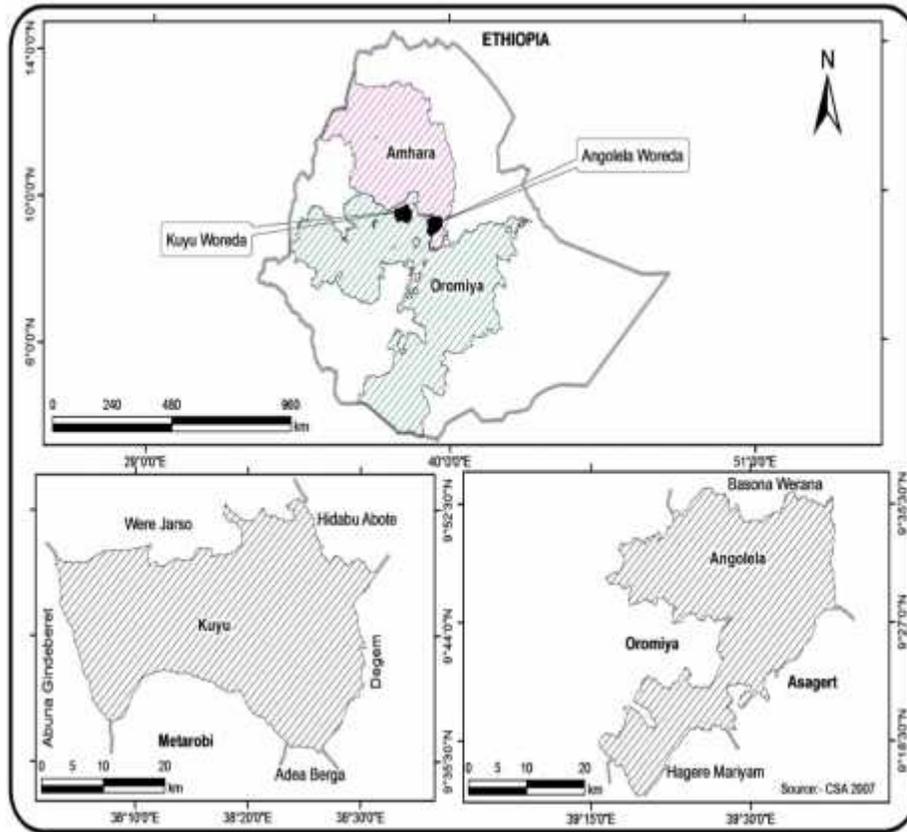
The overriding aim of this research was, therefore, to carry out an assessment on the contribution and practices of ATVET graduates in the advancement of agricultural production systems and productivity thereby recommending solutions and directions on the possible roles and gaps of the national ATVET program in Ethiopia. More specifically, the research aspires to assess lessons learned from the past experiences of ATVET program in imparting theoretical knowledge and practical skills in agricultural development practices and reveal the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the program to promote agricultural productivity in rural Ethiopia.

### **Methods and Materials**

Cross-sectional design was employed in this study. This is because it is best suited to studies aiming at finding out the prevalence of phenomena or problems by taking a cross-section of the population at the time of the study. Fieldworks were carried out in Kuyu Woreda of North Shewa, Oromia National Regional State, and Angolela Woreda of North Shewa, Amhara National Regional State (See Figure 1). This study employed a hybrid of descriptive and qualitative mixed approaches. The results of the qualitative approach were used in the development of a survey instrument with the view to explore the phenomena in-depth and to identify important variables. Open-ended questions were used in case of qualitative data collection while survey questions were administered to collect quantitative data.

The study employed a hybrid sampling techniques based on the mixed approach designed for the study. The sampling of the geographical area units of analysis (*woredas*) was purposive, the major purpose being the geographical proximity of the two areas assuming that other issues related to extension services in Ethiopia are almost the same across most parts of Ethiopia. Likewise, selection of respondents for in-depth interview that is of qualitative nature was also purposive thinking that more knowledgeable informants could be addressed through purposive sampling technique. On the other hand, the study made use of simple random sampling technique to select survey respondents (farmers and TVET graduates) from both study areas.

Key individuals having special information about the issues under survey were also contacted. This focused on organizing formal interview with the aim to facilitate open interaction between the key informants and the researchers through inviting key figures having adequate knowledge of the issue under investigation. The key informants were experts in *woreda* administration, agricultural bureaus, *woreda* investment bureaus, *woreda* education bureaus, TVET graduates, and rural development agents and the farmers. The interview was carried out face-to-face with the respondents based on predesigned probing questions. In addition to the primary data, researchers reviewed and compiled reports/documents related to socioeconomic and policy state of affairs in Ethiopia.



**Figure 1.** Study *woredas* in their national and regional settings (Source: Constructed based on data from CSA, 2007)

The data analysis has taken the form of interpretive and descriptive methods. This involved describing key findings and state of affairs uncovered from the data while interpretive analysis focused on providing meanings, explanations, perceptions or causal relationship from the findings. The quasi-quantitative data analysis involved statistical techniques in the form of descriptive analysis focusing on numbers, frequencies, averages, proportions and ratios.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Perception of the Farmers towards ATVET Graduates**

In this study, attempt was made to look into the perception of rural farming households towards their children who attended formal education and/or graduated with a degree/diploma, perhaps in agriculture, and decide to get back to farming business. As a result, questions were asked for the farmers to investigate what they do feel when their graduate child comes back to farming livelihoods and attempt to modernize/improve the farming systems. Most farmers responded that it is a waste of time to train a person who ends up in farming. Most of them agree that farming does not need training. They do not want to see their educated children to go back to farming. They rather want them to go to urban areas and engage in other urban-based activities such as office works and commerce. One key respondent, for example, exclaimed 'I want my child to be a judge or a medical doctor, not farm worker; knuckling down in the soil should end at me'.

Conversely, the agricultural and education policy of the country gives emphasis in bringing structural transformation of the economy by modernizing agriculture. However, this research revealed that the policy is not deeply entrenched in the farming communities thereby calling for intensive advocacy work.

In Kuyu Woreda, ten beneficiary farmers (all male-headed) were contacted to look into their views towards the role of TVET graduates in rural areas. All of them were mixed subsistence farmers in that they produce both crops and animals only to satisfy the immediate needs of their families. Though many youngsters have gone to TVET schools, almost all the respondent farmers in the area use traditional farming methods and tools. Oxen are the single most important traction power in the area. Most farmers produce cereals (like *teff*, sorghum, wheat, maize and barley). They also raise livestock (cattle, sheep and goat) and beast of burden (such as donkey, mule and horse). In fact, a few of the farmers in the area (those who don't have oxen) practice hoeing to prepare their farmland.

All the contacted farmers in Kuyu Woreda lived in the area for more than 15 years, and they have access to DA service in their farming livelihoods. Similar to

the case in some developing countries, such as Pakistan (Mumtaz and Gopal, 2014) and contrary to the experiences of developed countries, such as Ireland (O'Donoghue and Heanue, 2016), where such agricultural practices have brought about positive returns in terms of farm level innovation and yield improvement, the farmers both in Kuyu and Angolela are a bit unhappy towards the effectiveness of rural development agents (DAs). The overwhelming majority of farmers were dissatisfied that DAs are not adequately supporting them. DAs do not want to come to their farms frequently. They rather prefer to stay in the town and try to access the farmers on market-days only to order them to buy fertilizers, collect land taxes, etc. In most cases the DAs are working more as political cadres, rather than agricultural development agents according to the respondents, though, as argued by Mumtaz and Gopal (2014:1037), 'the effectiveness of any agricultural extension depends firstly on how accessible it is to farmers'.

A case in point is the words of one of the key informant farmers in Kuyu Woreda:

*'The DAs '...do not want to take off their shoes and engage in demonstrating practical farming activities. They even do not want to come to our farm fields during rainy seasons when the ground becomes muddy, the time that we badly need their support. They really lack the determination to do so. They are always gabbling in the town with their friends in other profession, such as teachers, rather than staying with farmers toiling in rural areas. At the end of the day they produce fake reports to woreda sector offices. ...'*

The aforementioned words of the key informant are in agreement with the report of NEPAD (2013) that disclosed the existence of high DA staff turnover in Ethiopia (about 10-15% per annum) owing to dissatisfactions with their jobs and other predicaments.

According to the respondents, most DAs have no stamina to bring about changes in agricultural activities. They lack passion in farming. Some of them are grown up in urban areas and have no interest in rural issues. They are no better than the local farmers in practical knowledge. Some of them even try to force the farmers to implement inharmonious and out of place farming activities as a result of which conflicts arise between DAs and the local farmers. Minor disagreements occur on issues related to ways and time of sowing, field draining, quantity of seeds and fertilizers per unit of farmland, etc. Generally, the farmers argue that DAs lack local knowledge in farming. The farmers strongly comment that potential DAs should be selected from the local community, the training must integrate

local/ indigenous and scientific knowledge, and DAs must be well aware of the fact that local knowledge is also vital to enhance agricultural productivity in the area.

According to the respondents, it is of little use to train DAs. Some kind of change in policy and practice must be in place in order to enhance the role of DAs in agricultural activities. 'Currently, DAs are not significantly contributing to agricultural productivity. Rather they are wasting our times nagging us about politics (issue like terrorism, religious tolerance, developmental state, etc.). They do this repeatedly, day-to-day... These things, no doubt, have little to do with farming...' says a key informant farmer from Angolela Woreda'.

Most of the farmers in both *woredas* argue that the traditional farming that they have at hand does not need any training. The farmers argue that they know it more than anybody can do. What they want is how to modernize their farming systems and increase productivity, not theoretically but practically being in their farm field. What the DAs are doing now is more of theoretical and even nagging.

Generally, the rural families in both *woredas* do not want to see their educated children to be engaged in farming. They rather encourage their children to move to urban areas and engage in non-agricultural pursuits. One key respondent, for example, exclaimed 'I want my child to be a judge or doctor, not farm worker. I don't want him to toil with the earth; nor to share the miniscule land plots that I have. This miserable rural life has to stop with me.'

All the respondents in both *woredas* assent that the role of TVET is vital for their agricultural activities, if it has been implemented as it was talked/planned. A case in point is an argument of a key informant interview at Kuyu Woreda indicating that the farmers need an agro-technologist who can improve their ploughshares, sickles, axes, and other farm tools. They need a clued-up person who can provide them with drought resistant and fast-maturing species (both crops and animals). Generally, they need someone who can unburden them from their backbreaking, but nonpaying, farming activities; not someone who spends their time nagging trivially.

#### **Views of the Woreda Level Experts and Administrators towards TVET Graduates**

Five experts and/or administrators were interviewed in Kuyu Woreda. Most of them were selected from agricultural bureaus. These were productive safety net program (PSNP) public officer; agricultural extension works process owner, natural resource management process owner, human resource development process owner and food security process owner. In case of Angolela, four concerned government

offices were contacted for interview to look into the contribution of TVET graduates for advancement of agricultural productivity in Angolela Woreda. Hence, experts and heads of bureaus of micro and small enterprises, Chacha Town Administration, Education Bureau, and Bureau of Agricultural were interviewed.

All the experts and heads of bureaus are of the same mind in that TVET graduates can play vital roles in economic transformation in our country in general and in the selected *woredas* in particular. According to these informants, TVET graduates can contribute greatly to the overall sustainable economic development of the *woredas* and to agricultural enhancement in particular. But they are not contributing as per the expectation of the government owing to several factors such as lack of production materials, startup capital, and diminishing size of farmland. There is also no adequate support to the graduates from the government side. No one is tracking the performances of the graduates. Some graduates also lack stamina to bring about changes to the livelihoods of the farming community. They do not want to start from the bottom. Rather they want to join the bureaucratic system of the government observing that the livelihoods of their classmates who joined the bureaucracy is changing swiftly may be because of the existing high level bureaucratic corruption at present.

Sometimes the graduates cannot get job as soon as they graduate as a result of which they may put out of their mind what they have learnt in TVET Colleges. The difference in machineries they used in training centers and in the market may also cause challenges to the graduates. According to these respondents, sector offices in the *woredas* try to support the graduates to stay in their family's business particularly in rural areas. But graduates from agricultural TVETs have no interest in this regard. They rather want to abandon rural areas and search jobs in towns; be it professional or not. Contrary to this, *woreda* sector offices want them to add something constructive to the existing agricultural practices. 'We want them to improve the traditional farm utensils like ploughshare, sickle, knife, axe, butcher knife, and machete. But a few of them are interested in doing so....' says a key informant from one of the sector offices in Angolela Woreda.

The data obtained from Kuyu Woreda Agricultural Office indicates that there are about 71 DAs in the *woreda* at present. This means about 4 DAs are there in each *kebele*, as the *woreda* has 23 rural *kebeles*. However, the respondents point out that there is no TVET graduate who attempted to establish/create his/her business in rural areas related to his/her trainings. No one wants to go back to its family's farming business. They believe that farming for an educated fellow is a humiliating job. So the contribution of TVET graduates in this regard is very negligible. The causes may be graduates' lack of interest, scarcity of land, lack of

basic facilities in rural areas, and the undesirable socio-psychological setup of the graduates towards rural life.

The interviewed officials and experts in each *woreda*, however, are of the opinion that TVET has the potential to improve the agricultural practices and productivity of the farmers. It can play a lot in technology transfer related to farmland preparation, sowing/seeding, draining, harvesting, and post-harvest management. The problem is when it comes to practice. For one thing, the government should work intensively on attitude of the potential DA trainees. They should be aware that rural areas are sources of economic development and rural business is lucrative. If rural areas are developed, no doubt, productivity will boost, and food insecurity will be history. Secondly, farmers must be well aware of the importance of modern farming practices in sustainable agricultural productivity enhancement, and this can be done if and only if they are supported by well-trained experts and DAs, so that they can integrate their indigenous knowledge with the improved technology to bring about better changes in their agricultural practices.

All the interviewed experts are of the same mind in that the existing situation is not encouraging for TVET graduates to start their business related to what they have gained in TVET centers. Some of the challenges for the graduates are lack of startup capital, production sheds, market, raw materials and farmland. As a result, TVET graduates are not contributing as per the expectation of the government. There is also no adequate support to the graduates from the government side. No one is tracking the performances of the graduates. Similar to what the respondents said in Angolela, some graduates also lack stamina to bring about changes to their livelihoods in Kuyu Woreda. They want to join the bureaucratic system of the government with the 'get-rich-quick' mindset.

The FTCs (Farmers Training Centers) were found to be underequipped and inadequately staffed. Had it been, the graduates could have joined the sector soon before they forget what they have learnt in the TVET centers. The machineries they have been using during their trainings are virtually nonexistent to work with in both study areas: Kuyu and Angolela.

The respondent experts and officials in both *woredas* raise a critical question that some instructors in TVET colleges have no adequate practical knowledge as they do in theoretical aspects. This is reflected in the performances of the graduates in that their knowledge in practical aspect is trivial as compared to what the farmers do by their intelligence obtained through long-term experiences. This discourages the farmers to approach DAs and gain information and practical skills from the DAs. The graduates also develop fear to start their own business owing to fear of failures. They may not be competent in market if the training lacks quality. A key informant interviewee from Kuyu Woreda argues 'Graduates inform us that

some trainers in TVET College have no adequate practical knowledge; rather they tend towards theoretical aspects. As a result the trainees grasp inconsequential knowledge about the field of study they are specializing. Hence, graduates may have certificates; but no adequate practical knowledge.' This stands in sharp contrast to the TVET curriculum where graduates are supposed to have more practical skills than the theoretical knowledge component.

*Woreda* level experts and officials in both Angolela and Kuyu strongly recommend rural electrification, small town development and industrialization as a key input for rural economic transformation and sustainable development. Similarly, a key informant that the research team contacted at Kuyu *Woreda* also strongly recommended rural electrification as a vital input to enhance the role of TVET graduates in rural areas. He argues that rural areas should be adequately provided with electric power if the government needs to keep the TVET graduates in their family's business. The problem now is '*keferesu gariwu kedeme*' (a cart before the horse'). The respondents argue that, as it is clearly indicated in the TVET policy directive, the main target of TVET is to help the industrialization attempts of the country both in urban and rural areas. But now, there is no electric supply in rural areas. So how do graduates of metal fabrication, for example, improve their family's traditional ploughshare where there is no power supply to forge the metal? So how can the graduates operate in rural areas where there are no such facilities? Again manufacturing industries should be located in rural areas and in small towns, too, not in large urban areas alone. If industries are located in rural areas, it may have double roles. On the one hand it helps the TVET graduates stay in rural areas and support their family's business in close proximity. On the other hand the industrial technologies may trickle down to the rural traditional practices. This will in turn have a multiplier effect on the rural economy.

By and large, the interviewed experts and heads of bureaus at *woreda* level recommended improved trainings at TVET colleges so as to enhance the role of TVET graduates to the rural economy and of sustainable socioeconomic development. Accordingly, demand driven or need-based trainings, continuous follow up to graduates of TVET, provision of adequate startup capital, awareness creation endeavors to the graduates and to the farming community, need-based and contextualized training manuals in the TVET colleges and local based trainings are instrumental for the success of TVET programs and of the graduates in the future.

### **Joblessness among TVET Graduates**

Jobless graduates of TVET were interviewed in both study areas: eight in Angolela *Woreda* and ten in Kuyu. They are graduates of Basic Surveying, Electrical Electronics Level 3, General Metal Fabrication (GMF), Furniture Making,

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Building and Electrical Installation (BEI), Bar Bending and Concreting (BBC), Garment, Information Technology (IT), Woodwork, and Natural Resources Management.

Most jobless graduates of TVET agree that TVET as a program is very necessary for the sustainable development of Ethiopia. The problem lies in the proper implementation of the program. It has several problems from the very beginning of the recruitment of potential trainees to employment of the graduates. TVET by its very nature requires inborn quality. One has to be born to live in rural areas or appreciate arts, architecture, farming, herding and other technical pursuits. One has to have the dexterity and passion in bundling, designing, welding, and construction. So care should be taken in recruitment stage. Similarly, training needs care. At this stage, more attention should be given to practical sessions. Adequate practical attachment should be provided to trainees. Instructors must be passionate in technical aspects and need to have adequate and excellent knowledge in practical know-how.

In addition to these, the TVET jobless graduates argue that courses related to entrepreneurship, rural society, psychology and sociology could have been given adequately so as to enable the trainees understand rural life in depth. 'We graduated without adequate knowledge and target...' says one of the jobless interviewees. The researchers have tried to look into the course catalog of TVET College and confirmed that the argument of the jobless graduates is justifiable. One should be well aware of the psychosocial setups and political economy of the rural society in not less than the technicalities of planting crops or herding animals or running machines of any kind.

All the jobless key informants from Angolela grew-up in rural *kebeles* of the *woreda*. They responded that their aim was to live in urban areas, as life in rural areas is 'boring and uninteresting.' When they were at elementary and high schools they were always thinking of urban life. They were bored of the poor facilities (such as lack of electricity, television, cinema, potable water, hotels and cafeteria, road, etc.) in rural areas. A case in point is what one of the respondents said: 'Life in rural areas is boring and mind-numbing experience. It is better to be a shoeshiner in Addis Ababa, rather than becoming a rich farmer in rural areas'.

In addition to 'the unattractive living condition in rural areas', as stated by the overwhelming majority of the respondent DAs, the scarcity of basic resources (such as land, livestock and water for irrigation) has forced the TVET graduates not to think of going back to rural life. Related to this, the words of one of the key informants have been translated as follows:

*'My father has 6 children, a few cattle, and less than 1 hectare of farmland. Imagine what will happen if he tries to share out 1 hectare to six of us. In addition to scarcity, rural land in our area is extremely degraded. Even the nature of the rainfall is not reliable. So how can I think to go back to rural life amidst the scarcity of land there? Rather I am currently thinking of how I can move to any country better than Ethiopia, if there is any'*

Another key informant who was seeking job in the town of Garba Guracha argues:

*'I know that the government wants us to go back to our family and enhance and modernize the rural economic system. But I do not have land. My family is very poor. The bureaucracy in rural areas is not welcoming. The society is also expecting me to work in urban-based jobs like teaching.... Truly speaking it is also not of interest to live and work in rural areas. I think rural life and farming is waste of time...'*

Relevance and quality of education in TVETs is also not to the standard according to the jobless graduates. Trainers often teach foreign-based theoretical concepts rather than local-based practical applications. Sometimes even the trainers may not know in practice what they theoretically teach. Sometimes they themselves tend to be confused and complicate things. So the trainees may graduate without adequate knowledge in some practical applications.

A case in point is the argument of a jobless key informant from Angolela:

*'...most TVET trainings are meant for urban areas; not suitable for rural community. For example, look trainings like surveying, electricity, metal fabrication, furniture making, building, bar bending and concreting, garmenting and IT. What do the graduates of these trainings do in rural areas? So government must revise the curricula of TVET and introduce those trainings that best fit to the current rural needs. I had the interest to live and work in rural areas. I graduated in bar bending and concreting. So what do I do in rural area? My field of study pushed me to Chacha town. Here I am a jobless searching for a job related to my training and experience. But you see there is no related job in this town. I am waiting for a good response from my uncle living in Addis Ababa to get me job there. If not I am planning to trek South*

*Sudan. Who knows I may also turn out delinquent, if life continued unchanged...'*

The incompatibility problems in TVET curriculum with the real conditions that has been sated above by the respondents seem similar in some other developing countries such as Ghana where a researcher, Osie (2004) observed that 'the ideas originally laid out in the National Education Policy [of Ghana], such as integrated approaches to subject matter, student involvement, and problem-oriented teaching methods have not been effectively implemented through classroom instruction'.

Similarly, one of the key respondents from Kuyu argues:

*'I am unable to get job in fields related to my study. I failed to do so mainly because there is no vacancy in my field of study in this area. I studied surveying and no one needs it at this time in this area. It is impossible to start my own business in this field of study. What own business to start in surveying? I am very much confused and I am on a cross-road. I will keep on searching for job in government offices or private sectors for sometimes. I do not have any option as I have no initial funding or no well-off relative to give me a loan to start business other than my training...'*

Another key informant recounts his desperation as:

*'I had good knowledge of bar bending. But now I put it out of my mind because I failed to get job though I tried many times. I tried to start a small business, but I couldn't get finance. Construction is not adequately available in our area...'*

The words of another jobless key informant are:

*'I graduated in natural resources management from ATVET College. My target was to be employed as a DA. But there is no vacancy in this woreda. I even tried to get job out of this woreda, but failed. I am thinking of starting my own agri-business, be it fattening or dairy or apiculture. How and where am I supposed to get a plot of land and finance? The situation in our woreda is not encouraging. There is no credit service. I even asked banks operating in this woreda for a loan. But they asked me collateral*

*..... Where to get it? So I am unable to practically show what I have learnt in the college. I could have been excellent beekeeper, but. ...'*

The aforesaid ideas of the respondents in series of quotations are in agreement with the research report of NEPAD (2013:19) that disclosed the challenges of shortage of startup capital for the TVET graduates in Benin that '...weakens the system's capabilities and willingness to see all trained people startup their own business, since the trained young people do normally not possess the financial means for a business startup and do not have any collaterals to get access to startup financing'. NEPAD (2013) reported the existence of comparable challenges in Sierra Leone.

Another key informant said:

*'My dream to become a doctor or engineer or a university teacher was shattered when I failed the exam at grade 10. I graduated from TVET (Level 4) in agricultural related discipline. I have no interest to live and work in rural areas. I know that TVET program is vital to transform the country. But nothing is adequate in the college that I went to. Food is insufficient, practical attachment lacks proper coordination, some teachers lack practice and know-how...Generally, TVET program is good in principle, but the government should rework on it and care should be taken during selection, training, job assignment as well as provision of startup capital for the graduates...'*

The direct words of the respondent above indicate that TVET in Ethiopia failed to meaningfully satisfy the policy targets. It is unable to satisfy the major role of TVET program as argued by several scholars, such as Anderson (2008) who argues that TVET is the major supplier of skilled and certified labor and fuels the engine of economic growth. Yet, the key informants are of the same opinion in that TVET is vital for those who have the interest and the startup capital. It is a good idea to alleviate poverty, transform the country from subsistence to commercialized agriculture, build an industrialized country and sustain development. But TVET should take in to account the interest of the trainees. A kind of revolving fund should also be in place to enable the graduates of TVET engage in their own business.

**TVET Graduates Engaged in their Own/Family Agribusiness**

The national TVET strategy clearly recognizes self-employment representing an important route into the labor market, especially in peri-urban and rural areas. The general objective of the National TVET Strategy is to create a competent, motivated, adaptable and innovative workforce in Ethiopia contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable social and economic development through facilitating demand-driven, high quality technical and vocational education and training, relevant to all sectors of the economy, at all levels and to all people. In line with this, for self-employed graduates to be successful, they need to be technically competent in their occupational fields, have basic business management skills, be entrepreneurs that are psychologically ready and self-confident, and creative, who can do a genuine assessment of the market opportunities and of risks.

Against this background, however, the researchers found only five TVET graduates engaged in their own businesses: two of them were found in Kuyu and other three in Angolela. They are graduates in Natural Resources Management, Construction Technology and Surveying.

Two of them were found engaged in agriculture in their family's land in rural areas. They did it only because they couldn't find employment opportunity. They are still ready to abandon their farming activities whenever they get another employment opportunity in urban areas. One of the respondents told the interviewers that the cereal they are producing is meant entirely for household consumption indicating that they are still engaged in subsistence farming.

The farmland management practices of TVET graduate farmers and their productivity is better as compared to other farmers in the area. This is because, says, one of the interviewees, 'The training we had in the TVET College helped us directly or indirectly to manage our farmlands and produce more than what the untrained farmers do in the area. Our performances are not the same by any means' said a TVET graduate in natural resource management. However, scarcity of farmland and water for irrigation, variability of rainfall, degraded farmland, lack of startup capital, and other socioeconomic drawbacks have been adversely affecting their endeavors.

The researchers tried to divulge why TVET graduates are not interested in starting their own business. The respondents underscored that the root causes are multiple and varied. But psychological setup of the graduates and socioeconomic factors are found to be most determining factors. Graduates are not psychologically ready to go back to rural-based businesses as frequently described hereinbefore.

A TVET graduate working on his family's plot of land says:

*'I am supporting my family in many ways to improve their farming systems and productivity. These include preparation of compost; proper use of farm inputs; ditch preparation and irrigation activities; post-harvest management; application of agrochemicals; natural resources management; saving and credit; biogas development and use; ... However, my family is still not self-sufficient in food because of scarcity of land, rainfall variability, input scarcity, degraded land....'*

Like those of the agricultural bureau officials and experts, the entrepreneur respondents agree that in principle TVET program is vital to agricultural transformation in the area. If properly implemented, the program has the potential to augment and transform the rural economy on a sustainable basis. But in order to make it more contributive much more should be done right from curriculum formulation and recruitment of the potential trainees.

#### **Assessment of the Role of DAs in the Study Areas**

As noted in Naseem, Pray and Oehmke (2015) in an effort to advance smallholder agricultural growth in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, several high-level government commitments were made. African Union member states, including Ethiopia, for example, pledged to allocate 10% of their national budget to agricultural development. In the same way, the Ethiopian government has been trying to enhance the productivity of the smallholders through the support of technical and vocational education since *National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Strategy*. As a result, the government is assigning agricultural extension workers, graduates of ATVET. As a result, about 71 DAs are found working in the 23 rural *kebeles* in Kuyu Woreda. Twenty one (16 males) of them were selected for questionnaire survey for this study. All the selected respondents properly filled and returned the questionnaire. They were found to be graduates of health extension, plant science, animal science and natural resources management. The average age of the respondents was 30 years. Fourteen (66.7%) of the respondents were married during the fieldwork. Their average year of service as a rural development agent (DA) is only 8 years, the maximum service being 16 years, and minimum service is 1 year.

The total number of DAs operating in Angolela is not clearly known. A questionnaire was distributed to 30 DAs. Twenty-six of the selected respondents properly filled and returned the questionnaire. They were found to be graduates of plant science (6), animal science (14) and natural resources management (6). The

average age of the respondents is 29.5 years. Eleven (43.2%) of the respondents were married during the fieldwork. Their average year of service as a rural development agent (DA) is only 4 years, the maximum service being 8 years, and minimum service is 3 months. This indicates that the turnover is very high as compared to the case in Kuyu. Key informants from sector offices also confirm the fact that many DAs leave their jobs and join other urban-based businesses. Most of them are attending distance education classes in business fields (such as accounting, management and economics) or teaching stream with the major goal of abandoning their jobs and rural areas. Likewise, TVET was planned to be gender-sensitive and that all TVET opportunities will be equally accessible to females (MoE, 2008), though most of the respondents in this study appear to be males.

All the surveyed DAs in both *woredas* responded that they have never attempted to start their own business related to their trainings. Although 96.2% of them are originally from rural (agricultural) family, none of them has reported to have thought about either initiating their own businesses or enhancing their parents' agriculture. They rather preferred to attend distance education courses in non-agricultural fields aiming at urban-based occupations. In fact, reports and empirical evidences indicate that DAs turnover is high in both *woredas* in that they frequently leave their jobs and join other urban-based occupations.

Most respondents in both study areas said that the time spent on practical attachments was small. Most of them replied that the practical attachment was less than 30% of the total time allotted for training. The supervision was only superficial. In fact, most respondents (85.7%) from Kuyu and Angolela (88.5%) replied that they had access to adequate and up-to-date reading materials related to their fields of study. Similarly, most respondents (88.5%) from Angolela responded that they had access to sufficient and recent farm and practical materials to work with during their trainings at TVET College. About 96.2% of the respondents in Angolela responded that their instructors lack adequate practical and theoretical knowledge to impart to the trainees while they were in the training institutes. Unlike the case in Angolela, only 2 (9.5%) of the surveyed DAs in Kuyu responded that they had access to sufficient and recent farm and practical materials to work with during their trainings at TVET College. About 42.9% DAs in Kuyu responded that their instructors had adequate knowledge to impart practical knowledge while they were in the training institutes. All the respondents from both study areas agree that they have not acquired all the necessary knowledge and skill in the TVET Colleges to contribute successfully to the intended target.

About 9.5% of the respondents in Kuyu replied that they are not satisfied with their profession as rural development agent. About 52.3% of them do not want to stay in rural areas as development agents as it is tiresome, distressing, degrading

and nonpaying job. They consider working as a development agent is very challenging and prohibits them from personal development. The low salary and the poor working and living conditions in rural areas coupled with the social disrespect and political interference are some of the sources of their dissatisfaction.

In case of Angolela, about 27% of the respondents replied that they are not satisfied with their profession as rural development agents. About 42.3% of them do not want to stay in rural areas as development agents. They consider working as development agents is very challenging and prohibits from personal development. The major causes of their dissatisfaction are poor salary, daily travel throughout the rural *kebele*, insecure rural conditions, social disrespect, political interference, and inconsequential outputs in agricultural productivity.

### **Concluding Remarks and the Way Forward**

Ethiopia is a low-income, landlocked economy and has the second largest population in Africa; and yet it is also one of the few developing countries to record rapid economic growth in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, as noted in Arkebe (2015), the high cost of acquiring new skills and the hesitation by industrialists in the face of perceived risk makes state promotion of infant industry an absolute necessity so that the structural transformation plays its utmost role in poverty reduction, technology transfer and sustainable economic growth and development. In fact, the selection of industries should be based on their contribution to the nation's economic interests and technological considerations as a result of which ATVET graduates could play an immense role in the process of agricultural transformation.

This research has briefly examined the contribution of ATVET graduates for advancement of agricultural productivity in Ethiopia with particular reference to two selected *woredas* in Oromia and Amhara Regional sates. The study has shed light on the contribution of ATVET to agricultural enhancement and the existing challenges in the sector. The study shows that the role of TVET to structural transformation from agriculture to industrial sector is immense, and that it can play a great role in employment creation, technology transfer, poverty reduction and rural economic growth. As structural transformation requires a systematic leveraging of technologies and approaches as well as clear goals and vision so as to guide selection of technology, interventions and solutions (Osei, 2004; Anderson, 2008; Hardwood, 2010; O'Donoghue and Heanue, 2016), the role of ATVET graduates would be vital. By and large, the research underscored that the contribution of TVET in principle is considerable to the ongoing structural transformation from agriculture to industrial sector in Ethiopia. Its contribution to

agricultural transformation and poverty reduction and sustainable development is found to be enormous.

In line with the national ATVET strategy of Ethiopia, the government has provided extension services in rural areas, with the aim of helping farmers to alleviate the technical problems constraining agricultural productivity. However, farmers in the study areas were found to have poor access to extension services though the ratio of DAs to farmers is high in Ethiopia as compared to other developing countries such as Benin, Namibia and Sierra Leone (NEPAD, 2013). This was partly attributed to *woreda*-level institutional constraints, including the limited number of extension workers and their lack of practical knowledge on how to address area-specific problems. In addition, there is lack of interest to work in rural areas.

Learning lessons from this study, the Government of Ethiopia should design location-specific rural extension programs. This would require, among other things, making provision of an adequate number of well-qualified extension officials, including field-level agents who would be effectively able to understand and address location specific production constraints. Ensuring the availability of an adequate number of well-qualified extension officials would entail a radical change in academic curricula and training course contents. Such changes to the curricula and training courses should take into account location-specific diversities in terms of production potential and constraints. Secondly, following the principles of participatory extension services, the new policy should require extension officials to work in strong cooperation with the farmers. Several latest studies (Hardwood, 2010; Al-Sharafat, 2012; Agbarevo, 2013; Mumtaz and Gopal, 2014; O'Donoghue and Heanue, 2016) on agricultural extension services indicate that participatory extension services have resulted in sanguine impacts on farmers' knowledge and skills as well as on production. In this regard, the government should reformulate the strategy in such a way that it familiarizes the extension workers with the location-specific constraints of the farmers and then to extend the necessary assistance required to address those constraints. This kind of approach would be particularly useful in addressing the problems of the farmers. Finally, as noted by Mumtaz and Gopal (2014), it is necessary to place emphasis on building and expanding rural transportation infrastructures, including all weather roads, in order to facilitate smooth interaction between farmers and extension workers.

Another key area calling for further strengthening for the proper implementation of the principle of ATVET in Ethiopia in general and the study areas in particular is Farmers Training Centres (FTCs). It is a marvelous idea that the Government of Ethiopia established FTCs in rural *kebeles* (the lowest administrative unit) as critical resources needed to enable extension delivery to the

farmers. However, these centers in the study areas are not well functioning and lack proper inputs. A similar research report by NEPAD (2013) also indicates shortage of training resources at FTCs due to limited budget. Hence, they should be well-organized and equipped in such a way that they serve as points for farmers to receive key information, trainings, advices and practical demonstrations related to agricultural, environmental and health set of circumstances. FTCs should also be focal areas where experiences should be shared among farmers.

In general, government sector offices, policy makers, ATVET training centers, private sectors and NGOs/CSOs are required to play vital roles in various ways so as to enable the ATVET program in Ethiopia to exceedingly contribute to the agricultural transformation process and sustainable economic growth of the country. It is highly recommendable to give greater attention to the program starting from curriculum development which should be more tailored and realistic. The trainings should be delivered through strengthening linkage between ATVET centres/colleges, local industries, farming companies and FTCs. Recruitment and deployment of trainees could be another key area of concern so as to produce technicians who have full interest and the stamina to work in rural Ethiopia. In attempts of strengthening self-employment, problems like lack of sheds/farmyard and seed money need to be carefully handled. Above all, more should be done on scaling up best practices of the graduates; encouraging them to attend self-sponsored distance higher education and augment their knowledge levels; facilitating continuous and frequent on-job practical trainings; strengthening rural electrification and road networking; providing adequate loan with minimum interest to the graduates; preventing political interference in professional procedures; and rewarding mechanisms for best achievers.

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