Study on Identification of Gaps and Intervention Needs of Smallholder Organic Farmers in Ethiopia

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Abstract

A study on identification of the major gaps of organic farmers in Ethiopia in terms of technical, technological, institutional and financial is conducted in year 2011 in order to develop strategic programme that fill their gaps. Both primary and secondary information were collected from 80 respondents representing 14 cooperatives that covered 12 districts and 3 regions. The study revealed that 65% of the respondents identified technical and technological gaps are the number one where as financial, institutional and other developmental gaps are identified as major by 20%, 5% and 10% of the respondents respectively. Among the technical and technological gaps shortage of organic inputs (seeds, fertilizer and pesticides), limited access to modern information technologies, warehouse, farm and processing equipments, packaging materials and quality transport services are the prominent. Besides the intervention needs, the sector scenario and suggestion to tackle these gaps are also discussed.

Introduction

The Ethiopian economy is predominantly agrarian which is characterized by smallholder farmers accounting 11 million with an average of less than 1 ha of cultivated land and provides a livelihood for 85% of the population. Mixed farming (livestock and crops), agro-forestry, and pastoralist are the prevailing farming practices in the highlands, semi-arid and arid parts of the country, respectively. Even though the concept of organic agriculture have been co-existed and introduced in Ethiopian farming systems with the main driving forces: food security, biodiversity conservation and better income long time ago; certified organic agriculture was nonexistent until 1990s. Despite its vital contribution for sustainable livelihood improvement of smallholder farmers; the beneficiaries from organic sector is insignificant. The institutional supports and interventions were also minimal. In order to develop strategic plan which maximize farmers' benefits from the sector, this study is carried out.

Material and Methods

The study was conducted in year 2011 and both primary and secondary information were collected through a closed and open ended questionnaire and desk review. A field visit, key informative interviews and group discussion were also undertaken. A total of 80 respondents representing farmers' cooperatives, unions, individual farmers and private companies from 14 cooperatives that include 12 districts and 3 regions (Oromia, SNNP and Addis Ababa) were participated in the study. The managers of the eight unions and two cooperatives leaders from each selected model cooperative per union were used for the questionnaire and key informative interviews to collect the basic information. Five model farmers depending on the availability from each selected cooperatives with 3:2 male to female ratio were selected for the group discussion. The detail composition of the respondents is presented below and the age of the respondents ranges between 20 and 78 years.

The respondents were selected in consultation with the Ethiopian Association of Organic Agriculture (EAOA) and based on the criteria that all the responding organizations and individuals either has to be already organic certified or in process of application. In regard to private companies the information is collected from two organic certification companies. Then the collected data is well studied and compiled using simple mathematical tools of Excel and in order to enrich the findings of the study, secondary information was added from internet, books, published and unpublished sources.

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Table 1. Number of Interviewed respondents for the study by type of Organisation

No.	Type of Organisation	Number of selected respondents
1	Farmers Federation	1
2	Union	8
3	Cooperative Leaders	14
4	Farmers Group	52
5	Private Investors	3
6	Certification Companies	2
	Total	**80**

Results

Major Gaps

The study was conducted to identify the major technical, technological, institutional and financial gaps of organic producers in organic production, certification, and marketing at union, cooperative, private and farmer's level. The result of the study showed that the type and extent of the major gaps were different at different levels (private, farmers, cooperative and unions) where most of the challenges were clustered under technical and technological gaps. Among the 80 respondents 65 % grouped technical and technological gaps in to major gaps where as 20%, 5% and 10% of them identified financial, institutional and other developmental gaps respectively, as major gaps.

The major technological and technical gaps that were identified at farmers, cooperatives, private producer and unions are summarized as follow:

- Very limited access to organic inputs such as organic fertilizers (compost, liquid and vermi-compost) and improved varieties due to both shortage of raw materials, facilities and skills in preparation and application of compost or limited supply of organic fertilizer and improved seeds in the local market.
- Shortage of modern farm equipments and processing machineries such as coffee pulping and bee hives or use of out-off date processing machineries
- Lack of skills in farm equipment and processing machineries maintenance and accessories
- Shortage of quality packaging materials and transport services providers that meet the organic export standard and certification requirements
- Limited skills and awareness among farmers and cooperatives in organic standard, certification, marketing and production
- Lack of market research and information service
- Lack of skills in adaptation and mitigation of climate change such as high yield fluctuation, drought and flooding
- Shortage of extension services in organic production, quality management and certification
- Shortage of capital for organic and other speciality market certification and ICS development.

Moreover, limited source of revenue/income, shortage of sufficient and on time credit access and services, lack of timely and consistent quality product supply, weak membership base and limited communication and information system among cooperative and farmers and union were identified as the prominent financial and internal management gaps of the smallholder farmers. There were sixteen institutions that provided technical, technological and financial support for the unions, cooperatives and farmers. However, there were institutional gaps identified during the study and among them the major gaps were:

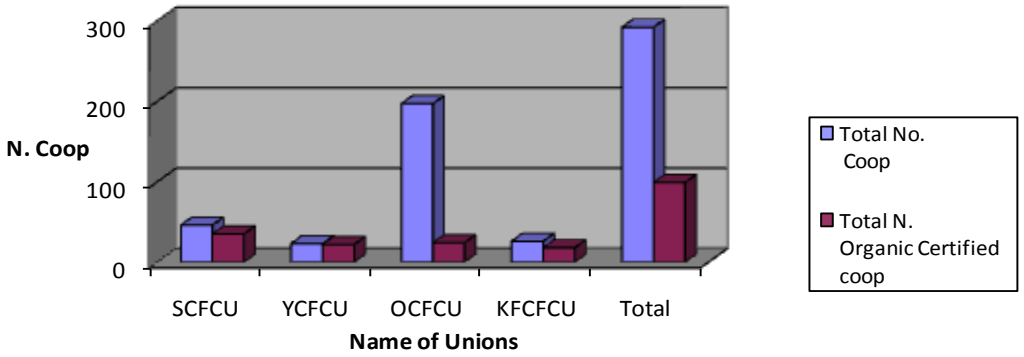
- No any institution that gave any kind of support in farm equipment and processing machinery maintenance and women organic farmers empowerment
- limited institutional support in facilitation of credit access and services
- There is no specialized institution that targeted to support organic producer groups except the frizzing Ethiopian Association of Organic Agriculture(EAOA)
- Lack of institutional integrated development programme that addresses the impact of climate change on smallholder organic farmers.

Besides, the study also found out that there were additional gaps that identified and clustered in to developmental gaps such as lack of adult education, limited access to family planning, health centre, schools, clean water, electric power and all weather roads.

The Organic Scenario of the Smallholder Farmers

Before analysis of the identified gaps the organic scenario of the four certified unions were collected. Out of the total 292 member cooperatives of the four unions 99 of them were certified organic which shared only 34% of the total member cooperatives. SCFCU has the largest number of organic certified cooperatives 35 followed by OCFCU with 24 cooperatives (Figure 1). There were 108,883 organic certified farmers which accounted only 37% of the total number of members of the unions. Among the four unions YCFCU had the highest percentage (99%) of organic certified number of farmers followed by SCFCU (87%) and the least percentage of certified number of farmers observed from OCFCU (11%).

Figure 1. Total Number of Organic Certified Cooperatives of the four unions in Ethiopia in year 2010



The total amount of certified area and production of the four unions were 124, 428 ha and 28,069.5Mt respectively (Table 2). In same year 136'436 hectares of certified organic land were managed by 123'062 certified organic smallholder farmers and three large processing companies in the country. The total certified organic production in country was 79'231.18 metric tons where it has increased by 47 percent and 50 percent respectively, compared with 2008 and 2009.

Table 2. Area, Production, Sale Volume and Value of Organic of four Unions in Ethiopia in Year 2010

Organisations	Total land Area(ha)	Organic Certified Area	Total Production(tons)	Total Organic certified Production	Total Export	Total Organic Export	Total Sale(USD)	Total Organic Sale(USD)
SCFCU	71091	54091	12531	9535	4290	589	20339572	2800833
YCFCU	28063	27804	30000	26843	1000	890		
OCFCU	313613	40252	234970	29623	5329	131	24590595	586556
K FCFCU	6098	2281	3194	1140				
Total	418865	124428	280695	67141	10619	1610	44930167	3387389

Among the core certified organic products, coffee continues to take the largest share followed by sesame, honey and beeswax. The four unions produce only coffee and the organic certified land area accounted 30% and SCFCU was with the largest organic certified area (54,091 ha). OCFCU was the second largest certified organic land area and KFCFCU had the least certified area. The share of certified organic coffee production

to the total production accounted 24% of the total production (28,069.5Mt) and out of which only 161Mt tons of certified coffee exported and rest exported as conventional.

Gaps Analysis and Intervention Needs

After Identification of the major technical, technological, institutional and financial gaps, the gaps were thoroughly analyzed and compared to the sector scenario to identify the intervention areas and to develop strategic plan that fill these gaps are estimated in numbers and percent. The results of the analysis showed that only 30% of area and 37% of total area under the unions' members' management and total number of members were certified which indicate there is gap of increasing the number by 63% and 70 % respectively. One of the main technical gaps of production is shortage of capacity building training for farmers and based on the average data collected form the selected cooperatives of the four unions, only 37% of the total farmers has got training so far which means there is a gap of 63 % farmers that need training. The percent of farmers that got access to organic improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides were less than 2% and covered only 25% of their organic inputs needs. Almost all of the 99 cooperatives were in shortage of qualified experts in wide range of professions particularly in mechanics, Industry and production quality manager, IT person, ICS expert, accountant and purchaser. The average numbers of educate employees per a cooperative were three out of the seven employees where the average number of female was one. The numbers of farmers that have got technological support were also very limited. None of the cooperatives and unions has got credit facilitation services from any of the supporting institutions except covering of certification fee costs. The institutional support was also limited in terms of the type, amount and geographical boundaries.

In order to address the major technical and technological gaps the following possible strategic interventions were suggested as quick wins and short term. Quick wins strategic interventions are improving extension service, cooperative governance, translation of organic standards, and production manuals into the working languages of the producers and organize training on quality management and processing machineries maintenance. In short term train one ICS expert and quality manager officer at each cooperative, improve the information and communication systems, facilitate supply of organic inputs, packaging materials, modern farm equipments and create access to market information.

Discussion

Even though the organic sector development has shown growth in the past 16 years, yet it is at infancy stages and this study identified the major gaps of the smallholder farmers that are clustered in to technical, technological, institutional and financial. The extent of the gaps also varied among regions, cooperatives and unions and their needs of interventions were also tremendous. Many of the organic projects in Ethiopia are focusing only in organic standard and certification where as the study showed there are other ignored or under estimated issues related to modern farm equipments, youth unemployment, processing machineries, marketing packaging, logistics, climate change, adult education, access to water and health care that are emphasized in the four principle of organic(IFOAM). So, there is a need of shift in the world and country organic agenda to address the mutisectorial challenges identified in this study or else other part of the world with similar research findings.

Suggestion to Tackle the Major Gaps of Smallholder Organic Farmers

The organic smallholder farmers challenges goes beyond regulation and equivalency where most of global funds goes and the distribution of other funds lack also equity. Personally I doubt the significant contribution of these policy projects for livelihood improvement of the smallholder farmer who has been a source of our pleasant organic life and delicious tasty food. On top of this I also suggest shift of the organic agenda to a comprehensive development plan with infrastructure, adult education, value addition, creating more job opportunities for youth and women.