Ethiopian livestock farmers hope for a modern future

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Young farmers in the vicinity of Wukro in northern Ethiopia see a future in which their livestock production is improved, where their animals get balanced feed and modern shelter, and where they have access to adequate veterinary services and clean water. They also envision a future where they are able to adopt modern technologies such as milk processing plants, so their dairy production can be effective and efficient, where agricultural inputs are readily available in local shops, and where they can use their animals' manure properly in their farming activities.

This is according to researchers at the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), who recently talked with farmers in the Astibi Woreda district of northern Ethiopia, to gauge their expectations and needs for improvements in livestock farming there.

As a country, Ethiopia has the largest livestock sector in Africa. In spite of the country's long history of working with livestock, and the significant size of its herds, the sector is still using traditional technologies and has failed to modernise, researchers say.

Since the livestock sector relies on resources that depend on climate, it is prone to climate change risks such as changes in rainfall patterns, increases in evaporation in response to rising temperatures, and more frequent and prolonged drought. All these can result in shortages of feed and water for livestock, and can reduce farming productivity in general, causing a decrease in the mature weight of livestock.

Most of Ethiopia's pastoral farmers are dependent on limited water from sources such as rivers, hand-dug wells and hand pumps. This water is unevenly distributed and farmers need to travel some distance

Ethiopian pastoralists are hungry for modern information and technologies to improve their livestock farming.

from their homes to access it. A projected increase in evaporation and changes in rainfall patterns may further reduce availability of water for farmers.

In June 2017, the EDRI collaborated with the Swedish-based Environmental for Development (EfD) initiative, the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) to bring together various stakeholders from the livestock supply chain, including farmers, feed and livestock traders,

milk processors, and those on the retail side such as butchers and hotel managers. The workshop was an opportunity for local administrators and researchers to work with participants to identify the challenges and opportunities facing the sector now, and to discuss ways to improve the livestock sector in Wukro.

The workshop was held in Wukro, Astibi Woreda in northern Ethiopia, where the livestock sector is one of the major sources of income for small-scale farmers. The area is mountainous and suitable for livestock production, mostly sheep. Despite its potential, though, most farmers are still using traditional methods. Livestock productivity is also low because animal feed is poor in quality and quantity. Veterinary services are limited, farms are poorly managed, and farmer knowledge tends to be low.

Researchers used the workshop as an opportunity to gather information that would allow them to better understand the issues impacting on farming here, such as the type of environment in which people are farming with livestock, what sort of livestock systems they use, and farmers' living conditions.

Researchers also sought to better understand farmers' political and economic situations, including their levels of knowledge and how empowered they feel in their sector, what their levels of access to water and electricity are, and whether they have access to improved technologies, better education, and better health care service.

Researchers asked farmers for information on the number and type of livestock per household, what the feed sources are, livestock-related infrastructure, manure management methods, and market access.

Participants also marked out on maps of their districts where their homes are, and where any other significant landmarks are, relative to where they farm, such as a nearby church or school. They also had an opportunity to note on the map what kinds of livestock and farming methods are most widely used in the area.

Farmers listed a few main uses for their livestock, including dairy production, keeping oxen for ploughing, selling live animals as a source of income, or selling animal products such as hides and manure.

Farmers said their biggest challenges include limited access of feed, lack of knowledge on improved management practices, and poor access to infrastructure such as roads, health services, schools, electricity, and telecommunications. They also said that they needed better access to credit services, that they would benefit from improved market access, and that they would like to find ways to reduce loss of livestock products.

When asked what their immediate needs are as livestock farmers, most were optimistic about the potential for improvements within the next decade, including that they would be able to get better access to nutritious food and clean water for their livestock, that they would be able to improve their farm management practices, learn more about advances in technology, and that they would get better infrastructure.

Researchers involved

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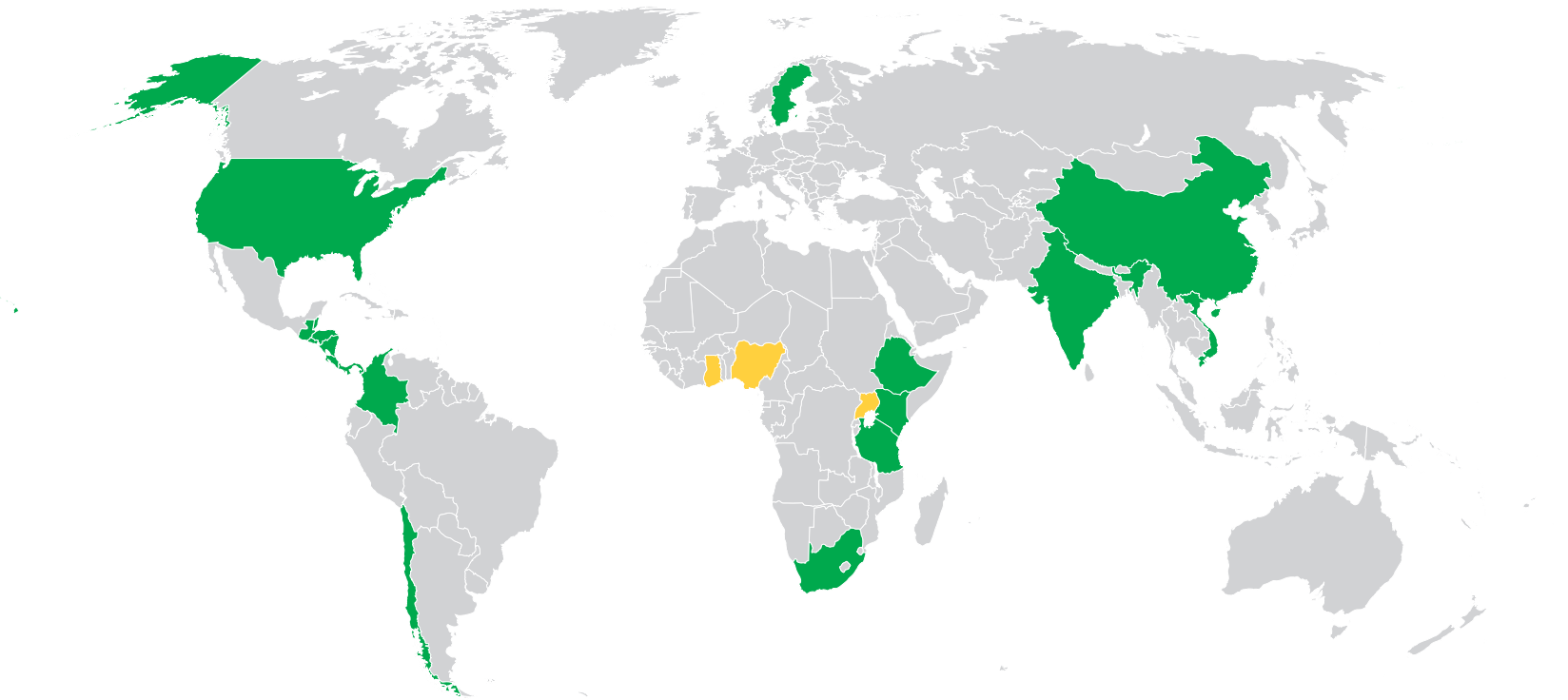

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