

Report on AgKnowledge Africa Share Fair

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Introduction

With the invitation of my boss and Project Coordinator Dr. Fetien Abay and Dr. Ann Waters-Bayer from Prolinnova Ethiopia, our project LSB and the College of Dryland Agriculture and Natural Resources decided I participate in the Agknowledge Africa Share Fair representing Local Seed Business, Women Learning Women, Women and Food Science and the College of Dryland Agriculture and Natural Resources. Moreover, after I arrived at ILRI, in Addis Ababa on October 17, I met Ato Tesfahun from Prolinnova Ethiopia and together we requested for a spot to display our posters. The posters from Mekelle University and Prolinnova were displayed in one spot.



The LSB and Prolinnova Ethiopia display being visited by participants



Some of the participants loved the barley *kollo* displayed

Objectives of the Share Fair

The Share Fair day started on Monday, October 18, at 9:00am, the amazing Ethiopian horn blower called everybody to order and we all gathered in the tent for Day Zero – or what was called as "The I know HOW..... day".

The heart of the fair was a series of thematic 'learning pathways' in a process of mapping, sharing and connecting people and activities. These pathways showcased how African 'talents' are creating, sharing and using rural knowledge – at the grassroots, in research and policy, and through intermediaries. The pathways focused on agriculture and climate change, land, livestock and water. The very basic aim of the event was to share knowledge and to network among colleagues from different corners of the world. Basically it was an African event, organized primarily by Africans for Africans. I could reasonably say that most of the participants, about 90%, were Africans from different corners of the continent.



Some of the participants discussing during the session

The Share Fair also comprised:

- **SKILLS & TOOLS:** A learning day at the start where participants can share practical tools and approaches that enhance their own knowledge sharing and use in agriculture.
- **FOCUS GROUPS:** Self-organized spaces where participants get together to explore experiences in specific issues and topics. Examples are:
 - Africa's knowledge-sharing traditions: storytelling, traditional wisdom, etc
 - Making knowledge mobile
 - Relief, research, development – connecting along the continuum
 - Indigenous knowledge – listening to the roots
 - Telecenters – emerging roles in knowledge creation and sharing
 - Radio
 - Extension and advisory services across phones
 - Participatory GIS and spatial data
 - Lost in Translation - Traducture
 - Knowledge and communication along and in support of value chains.

- **FOCUS ON ETHIOPIA:** A forum for knowledge-sharing initiatives and actors in Ethiopia to showcase their activities and results.
- **MARKETPLACE:** An alternative to the usual exhibition, we aim to create (traditional) interactive spaces where goods and knowledge are transacted.
- **FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** Much traditional knowledge is ‘captured’ and passed on through food – the recipes and the ways it is prepared and presented. We aim to highlight and showcase the links between food and knowledge sharing.
- **BUNNA:** A traditional Ethiopian meeting space with coffee, wireless and conversation zone.



Some of the African dancing events at the fair

Totally Ethiopian!

In the strong spirit of knowledge sharing, the incredible team of organizers from ILRI did an amazing job of weaving in the local culture in almost every aspect of the Share Fair. Starting with the wonderful horn blower – the official time keeper, the Bunna ladies serving us coffee, to creating an Ethiopian marketplace where participants spent an entire afternoon learning and sharing with each other and, last but not least, the delicious Ethiopian food.



Traditional Ethiopian Horn blower announcing the session to start



Traditional Ethiopian Bunna (coffee) ceremony was important integral part of the afternoon session

Social reporting team

No matter which session you attended, be it a pathway or a focus group, we saw quite a number of highly engaged and passionate African colleagues facilitating the different sessions using different knowledge-sharing methods. There was also a relatively big and vibrant social reporting team which summarized the daily reports of the different sessions and presented the outcomes to the mass at noon every day. What was wonderful also was how participants immediately embraced and put to practice what they learnt on day zero.



One of the African ladies facilitating a session

Inspiring keynote address

Unlike other events that have a rigid and stiff opening session – with lots of rhetoric and formal speeches – the opening session for the Addis Share Fair ended up being pretty informal and genuine. All those who took the floor talked about how their respective organizations are engaged with and have embedded knowledge sharing in their core business.



Owen Barber providing a speech of 'food for thought'

Owen Barder – a charismatic and compelling speaker – delivered an inspiring speech on the importance of knowledge for development. Listening to him talk about the importance of concentrating on making knowledge in development more evolutionary and the fact that perhaps we do not really need authoritative answers but rather diversity in answers and as he said "We need diversity, engagement and feedback process", made me realize that, if we had more people like Owen who can so eloquently offer different perspectives, people who think and conceptualize out of the box, people who bring something new to the table, perhaps we would make huge leaps in achieving both our development and our knowledge goals.

Learning outcomes and results

The most important learning outcomes of this AgKnowledge Share Fair are summarized as follows:

➤ **Collaborative Writing Session**

During the day zero or “Oh I know now how to,” I participated in the collaborative writing session and in this session we covered different ways of collaborative writing tools such as google docs and wiki. The special thing about collaborative writing is:

- Focus on trust, accountability, and transparency rather than security/authority ownership
- Moderation/advocacy required
- Improves efficiency
- Help sharing and documenting knowledge together
- Wiki are good for sites (multiple pages, navigable, search required) and google docs for documents (text, spreadsheet, presentation etc)

Google docs: is a tool used to write collaborative projects among as many as 50 people located in different areas of the world. It helps to create and share documents/folders in real time, maintains only one version, and online presence which is you can chat with your colleagues while working

on the documents. You also track the revision history and export documents.

➤ **Social Media**

During the afternoon session of Day zero, I was in the social media session and Pete discussed what social media are and what they are used for. Some of the media tools discussed were blogs and twitting which could be performed through flicker, dig, twitter, Jaiku, Lost.fm, slideshare etc. Moreover, we have also been familiarized with different websites and blogs that can help us share different academic and research-related materials such as academia.edu (for research and academics), Orkut.com, dropbox.com, yousendit.com, netlog.com (for sharing files).

➤ **Climate Change and Agriculture**

A joint presentation was give by representative from AfricaAdapt and ALIN on what is climate change, what is the effect of climate change on agricultural productivity, and how can we curb it. Moreover, questions and comments have been provided by participants on the topic of climate change and its effect on agriculture.

➤ **Reporting Agriculture**

Another interesting session I participated was on reporting agriculture. In here a number of creative African Agricultural journalists presented their experience on how they report different activities that are undertaken in the field. Different media of reporting agriculture such as FM radio, posters, local language newspapers, etc have been discussed.

➤ **Documenting Farmers' Knowledge**

This session was among my favorite ones, because I am so interested in documenting and publishing farmers' knowledge. During this session, a presentation was given by a Netherlands-based organization publishing a magazine called '*Farming Matters*', on how we can document and present farmers' knowledge to the respective audiences. Explanation was given on

what is documentation, that it is not description but rather it is analysis or lessons shared widely, and that it is a learning process. Points also were raised on participatory process of documentation and on difficulty of documenting original knowledge of farmers.

➤ **Indigenous Knowledge**

This was another interesting topic that I was happy to be involved in. An interesting question, which was: “How can indigenous knowledge be active content in future farmers mind and action?”, was raised by the facilitator of the session and excellent ideas have been revolving around the participants. Among them were:

- Making sure farmers understand that their knowledge is crucial to development
- Integrating indigenous and scientific knowledge
- Policy (patent and copyright) regulations on indigenous knowledge should be developed
- Encouraging farmers to participate when developing extension programs
- Building farmers’ capacity in documentation such as video recording, photography etc
- Creating platforms.

➤ **Women and Knowledge**

The last but not the least was the session on women and knowledge. In here, the discussion was on what is the contribution of women to knowledge sharing, particularly at the farming community. Moreover, a speech by Helen M. Sheehy and Sylvia A. Nyana, both representatives from the State University of Pennsylvania in the USA, was very interesting on how to document some of the African knowledge and what an African library looks like. It was addressed that serious documentation on African knowledge, which was termed as Oral Library, is necessary.

On top of that, it was also mentioned that we have to develop a habit of communicating the research findings to the local grassroots communities in their local language.

Some creative ways of displaying brochures and pamphlets



Donkeys were part of the Share Fair sessions

Conclusion and recommendation

- ✓ This Share Fair was one of a kind on an African soil and I can heartfully say that most of us gained a lot of experience that we would not have imagined otherwise. It was one of the most memorable experiences I have gained in my working experience. I have learned how to use some of the most important social media for sharing information on development activities and developing common projects with other similar professionals in different corners of the world.

- ✓ I witnessed that almost all of the participants seemed to have enjoyed the experience and learnt from each other; however, it was commented that perhaps it could have got more interesting from this new learning and sharing paradigm by providing a space for the pathways to intersect. For example, a joint session could have been organized between the land, water and livestock pathways. This would have allowed participants to exchange and cross-fertilize ideas and would have provided the space to get to know more about each others' work, aspirations and challenges – and who knows perhaps we would have achieved different outcomes.

- ✓ Another innovation in this Share Fair were the numerous focus groups which provided an opportunity to discuss and share experiences on a wide variety of topics – ranging from reporting on agriculture, to use of mobile telephony, the future of telecentres, process of writeshops, how to make sure content travels, challenges and opportunities of working with researchers, and the hot topic of how to engage with young people and what is it that we need to do to make living in rural areas enticing. Talking of lessons learnt, at the penultimate session of the Share Fair, we finally had the pleasure of hearing the voices of farmers – the very people that we serve. The farmers were indeed the "missing link" in the Share Fair. Perhaps the biggest lesson learnt for future Share Fairs is to ensure adequate representation from all the people whom we work with and serve – this means smallholder farmers, producers but also decision makers. They would have gained a lot of experience and I am convinced they undoubtedly would have learnt from the participants and it goes without saying that they would have had a lot to offer. These should be considered when similar events are organized.

- ✓ It was really great to see some of the passionate and charismatic African colleagues facilitating the various sessions. However, a collective effort is necessary to train and build the skills of more new African facilitators.

- ✓ This was undoubtedly an eye-opener for most of us and, building on this excellent experience, we should try and organize more regional, district and village-level Share Fairs so that we involve more grassroots-level participants such as development agents, farmers and local decision makers and make a real impact on our farmers.