



Our research suggests that this de facto lesser degree of subsidy of extension is an issue for the poorer farmers. But it also shows that there is a general dislike of the extension approach and in particular, the enforcement and the lack of accountability of the system. Also, even for better-off farmers (often with more land, labour and capital) the balance between higher output prices (pushed up by the inflation of the past few years) and higher costs of inputs remains in many instances uncertain given the uncertainty of the weather and decades of under-investment in irrigation.

We also find that there are cases where government extension advice is useful, but many cases in which positive developments (let's say, developments leading to higher incomes for some farmers in a community) are unrelated to the extension system (no advice on *enset*, a critical staple crop in many parts of Southern Ethiopia, or on *chat* which is proving to be a booming cash crop, or on spices or higher value crops while the Development Agents continue to focus on grain...). Finally we find that marketing is left to farmers. This may be 'just as well' in the neoliberal approach, but in a vast and fractured country where road access and market information channels are slowly improving but from a very low base... the lay person in me believes that more effort in developing market information systems and ensuring smallholders' access

to them should pay...

In other words again, I think it may be misleading to look at the issue of the role of government in extension without also thinking of its role (including abstaining from any action!) in relation to the myriad other factors that matter in making agriculture a viable or even attractive proposition for the millions of African households that still live on and off the land.

Last, but not least... From our research it also becomes clear that an increasing number of Ethiopian households will have to rely more and more on non-farm livelihood options, even though this need not mean that they should move to towns – which would be unviable as well, anyway. What does this mean in relation to extension advice to rural households? It seems that what is needed is a cadre of people who would be much more multi-skilled and able to advise households on different types of options, or a network of different cadres but working closely together. Could this be left to the private sector? Would households spontaneously turn to seek business development skill training from private providers if they could be found? And again, I guess this necessity of finding ways of nudging rural dwellers to embrace non-land based and profitable activities isn't specific to Ethiopia.



Catherine's reflections on agricultural extension are based upon her experiences in Ethiopia on the WIDE 3 project: village level research that a Mokoro team has been working on since 2009. Here from left to right: a farmer using pesticides (Gamo Gofa, SNNPR); this Amhara farmer has immigrated into this Southern village bringing his own initiative with him; drip irrigation (Harresaw, Eastern Tigray); and intercropping of chat and sorghum (Aze Debo'a, Kambata, SNNPR).