



Labour in the sesame sector in Northwest Ethiopia

An analysis on the characteristics, dynamics and conditions of labour and labourers

This brief shows the importance of labourers in the sesame sector and how important it is to improve labourers' working and living conditions, farmer - labourer(s) relation, transportation for labourers to and within the sesame area and labourers' capacities and quality of labour service for the sesame sector in Northwest Ethiopia.

Introduction

The Sesame Business Network (SBN) is a largely informal innovation network that is driven by local entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to work towards more competitive, sustainable and inclusive sesame value chains in northwest Ethiopia. The SBN Support Programme is a three-year project (2013-2015) funded by the Netherlands Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) and its Embassy (EKN) in Addis Ababa. It provides various support facilities for consolidating efforts towards ensuring that stakeholders of the SBN jointly develop improved value chain performance and farmer benefits. Currently it is operating in 38 local sesame business clusters (SBCs) organised in eight *woredas*. The overall goal of the programme is farmers' income improvement. To achieve its goal, the SBN and its support programme focus on reducing production cost price and product and market development.

Unpublished reports indicate that at peak times (June to October), more than 500,000 labourers, both family and hired labourers, work in the sesame fields. In the effort to develop more competitive, sustainable and inclusive sesame value chains, and improve producers' income, labourers play a key role as most activities are done manually by labour. Therefore, to understand the migration pattern, employer-employee relationship, conditions of labourers and labour services, the SBN Support Programme undertook a study from July to August 2014 in the north Gondar and west Tigray zones.

Significance of the study

Despite the significant importance of labourers in sesame value chain (production, harvesting, threshing, loading/unloading, transporting and marketing) less attention was given to studying the labour conditions and labourers situations in the sesame sector in Northwest Ethiopia. Although there were some studies about labour (numbers, conditions, migration, etc.), the available information is mostly incomplete and not well documented. Therefore, there is a strong need for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, documentation and information availing.

Objectives

The general objective of the study was to get a better understanding of the dynamics; conditions of labour and labourers in the sesame sector in northwest Ethiopia.

Specific objectives

1. Generate information on farmers' labour requirements and costs and labourers' capacities and income;
2. Understand labourers migration patterns, working and living conditions; and
3. Indicate areas that need serious attention and improvement for consideration by concerned government offices, bureaus and policy makers.

Approach

The study was conducted in eight *woredas* of the west Tigray and north Gondar zones. Primary data was collected by conducting meetings with farmers, labourers, government officials and non-governmental organisations employees; consulting key informant groups, interviewing labourers and making farm visits. Secondary data was collected from concerned zone departments, *woreda* and *kebele* offices and NGOs.

For the purpose of this research study, farmers (27) were classified into: (1) small scale (≤ 10 ha), (2) medium scale (10 – 30 ha) and (3) investor farmers (≥ 30 ha). Labourers (37) were distinguished into: daily wage labourers (*Wemya*), which included 11 students; contract labourers (*Gual*); farm managers (*Kobrari*); share cropping labourers, and family labourers.



Mother and daughter making hilla's on their farmland

Main research topics covered were: labourers' migration pattern to and within the sesame areas; farmers' selection criteria of labourers; labourer - farmer relations; labourers' income; expenditures and savings; labour costs; labourers' capacities; quality of labour services and farmers' quality assurance of work; labourer's living and working conditions; services provided to labourers from hiring farmers and government and non-government organisations; and challenges faced by labourers during their stay in the area.



Sesame labourers on their way to the sesame field

Results

Importance of labourers: Labour is the most important component in the sesame production system in the northwest. Previous unpublished research show that more than one million labour force is required for a successful sesame production, threshing, transporting, storing and marketing. Findings of this study indicate that more than 540,000 labourers work in the sesame areas during peak times, June to October; of which 324,000 (60%) are hired and 216,000 (40%) are family labourers.

Migration: Hired labourers are mainly coming from the highlands, mid altitude areas and the lowlands of Tigray and Amhara regions in two waves. The first move is in July mainly for sesame weeding and the second one at the end of September for harvesting, stacking and threshing. Migration within the sesame areas (between *woredas* and *kebeles*) is most common by hired labourers and within *kebeles* by family labourers.



Migration map of Ethiopian labourers to the sesame areas

Note: Also a small amount of non-Ethiopian people, like some people from Sudan, work in the sesame business.

Labour shortage: Most labourers are motivated by high earnings that can be made within a short period of time in the sesame sector. In many cases the agitation come either from friends or relatives who had experience or heard from neighbour. Despite the huge number of labourers migrating from different parts of the country to the northwest; labour shortage is commonly observed in most sesame producing areas specifically less accessible ones. This sometimes create fierce competition in the labour market and expose farmers for high payments and predispose fields for crop loss due to late weeding and/or harvesting.

Transportation service: transportation from homeland to sesame areas, within the sesame areas and back home is the most limiting factor that largely contribute to labour shortage. The most common transportation means is either taking buses and minibuses, trucks or walking on foot. Labourers are forced to pay 2-3 times higher rates; mistreated or abused by transport service providers and cheated by brokers; badly beaten or harassed by street boys, in the transportation vehicles their safety and comfort is not observed; looted by pickpockets and robbers; and dropout somewhere halfway from agreed destination.



Besides public transport labourers commonly use Isuzu trucks to travel from homeland to sesame areas and vice versa

As a result, labourers favour walking on foot in groups, even though it takes days and weeks. These are very few of the challenges migrating labourers face during their journey. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to bring the issues to the immediate attention of concerned organisations (labour and social affairs and transportation offices, zone, *woreda* and *kebele* administration, regional security and police forces, judiciary bodies, etc.).



Labourers walking from one sesame to another looking for work

Labour price and labourers saving: prices differ mainly due to shortage or abundance of labourers; geographical location of fields; type of field activity and contract agreement entered, and field conditions (intensity of weeds for weeding and sesame stand for harvesting). Labour is more abundant in areas where transportation is easily available and fields are accessible. Labourers prefer to work for farmers who avail trailers for transporting to the farm and vice versa; have large hectare; have good behaviour and reputation (pay wage immediately when work is done without cheating); living conditions are fair (cooking utensils, water, and food items are provided at reasonable prices, shelters maintained or plastic sheets provided). During harvesting labourers have a preference to work on fields with good sesame stand.



Labourers and farmers and/or farm managers discussing at labour markets ; labourers would like to earn money, farmers need labourers for finishing the agricultural activities

Farm managers make verbal or written agreement with commercial farmers for in cash or in-kind, or for both types of payments. The in kind payment has two modalities; certain quintals of sesame seeds after harvest or cultivating certain piece of land. The third, mixed type of payment is less practiced. Farm owners use the three types of payment modalities to motivate managers to control all their farm activities and manage the business correctly.

Labourers spend part of their earnings on food and drinks, transportation, clothing, farm tools and shelter. As estimated labourers save on average from 2,000 to 4,000 birr per person and spend the remaining for different purposes which include fulfilling some basic needs of their family and the remaining is used either for education or investment on a small village businesses.

Labourers management: Without labourers active participation there is no good harvest of sesame. Therefore, farmers and other stakeholders in the sesame value chain should understand the importance of labourers well and handle them carefully. Nevertheless, seasonally migrating labour force live and work under extremely poor conditions.



A shelter for labourers in which they can spend their time during the night and/or when it is raining; only provided by some investor farmers



A labourer who is cooking porridge and shiro in the night, when his fellow labourers are harvesting the sesame in het field

Labourers are not provided with good shelter, sufficient clean water, food items with minimum diet requirements and cooking utensils; no health service is provided or taken to health centres when sick; working safety is not observed and in certain cases wages are not paid on time and according to agreements; there is no enforcing rules and regulations for improving labourers conditions except nominal checklists (see annex) for large scale farmers; labourers living conditions and the services provided by farmers is not periodically monitored; and those commit a breach do not get punished.

Labourers' capacities and quality of labour service: Improvements in labour capacity result in perfection of labour efficiency, that in turn decrease time required to finish a certain activity and costs and increase productivity thereby contributing to higher incomes. Unfortunately, labourers coming from different parts of the country lack knowledge, skill and experience in sesame farming. Because, crop weeding in the lowlands and the tools used for such activity are entirely different from the experiences in the highlands.



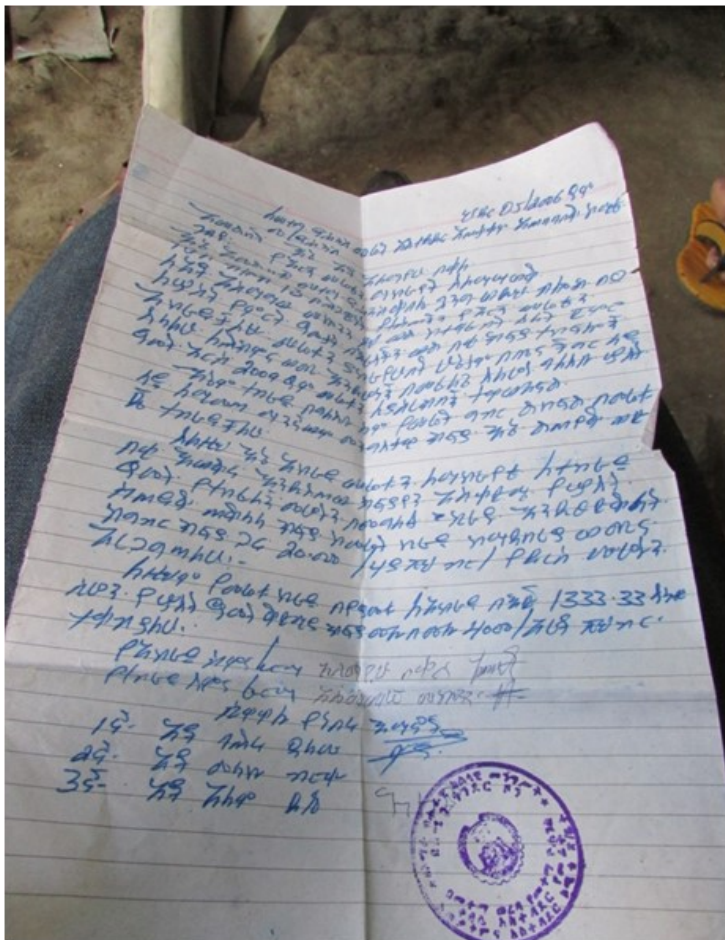
Labourers weeding a sesame field

Except in few farms, where there are farm managers, farmers do not give orientation on how to do the job and get better services from labourers. Therefore new comers learn either from friends or do the job as they think is right, learning by doing. Experienced labourers also do not opt to go to the area repeatedly as experience is not rewarded. Labourers perform all field activities using century old farming tools that does not increase labour efficiency. As a result capacity of most labourers is limited and the service they provide is poor.



A labourer who just finalised harvesting a sesame field

Farmer-labourer relations: Most farmers would like to hire labourers to work on their farmlands for lower price by providing either low quality or with no additional services. Most labourers in turn wish to earn more money in a short period of time without giving the service to the required level. Because of these contradicting attitude of farmers and labourers both use different strategies for attracting each other. In the market both try to be smart and win each other without appreciating the others in the sector. Farmers and labourers use different criteria for selecting each other. Farmers select labourers mainly based on physical posture, expression and on hand available tools. They also attract labourers by advertising for better payment and extra services such as shelter, food, clean water supply and transportation. Labourers select farmers mainly based on the amount of negotiated wages; timeliness of its payment; type and quality of services offered. Sometimes labourers try to collide to work for a certain pre-set price. But effectiveness of the collusion depends on the availability of competing labourers in the market and stage of the crop. After extended discussion both parties come to agreement and fix the price. But this conflict between farmers and labourers may exert negative impacts on motivation of labourers; sesame productivity and quality.



A relation between farmer and labourer(s) should be put in a formal contract; this happens now very rarely

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this and other similar studies the following recommendations are forwarded:

- Besides the harsh working environments, living conditions of labourers are extremely poor almost in all sesame growing areas. Thus, immediate attention should be given to improve at least basic necessities and health services by farmers and other concerned organisations;
- The current uncontrolled transportation service provision system should be replaced by well coordinated, fixed tariff rated, secured and comfortable, and systematically monitored system.
- To solve the labour shortage problem in most sesame growing areas specifically during peak weeding and harvesting times, different attraction and popularisation methods should be employed such as mass media (radio, TV), mobile call centre service; newspapers, leaflets, posters, ... etc. First of all up-to-date information on area planted and geographic location, amount of labourers required, at least minimum wage rate or the range, improved conditions of living, engaged security services, transportation arrangements made, health and other services to be provided, availed contact addresses at zone, *woreda* and *kebele* level should clearly be notified throughout the crop season. When notified on legal breach immediate action should be taken and the decision or action taken announced through radio and TV programmes for warning others.
- The importance of labourers and their significant contribution to the sesame value chain is not well recognised and thus handled carelessly. For efficient utilisation of the migrating labour force, basic necessities (shelter, clean water, food and cooking utensils) must be provided sufficiently; health service should be fulfilled; secure safety and wages must be paid as agreed upon. Enforcing rules and regulations should be in place; periodically monitored and those who violate penalised and the good ones acknowledged. Besides to prevent conflicts between farmer and labourers, a third party should be involved in smoothening farmer-labour relations by facilitating the agreement process.
- To get quality labour service, training or at least briefing labourers on the activity to be accomplished is very important. This can be done in different places at the same time by actors (farmers, cooperatives, or farm managers) seeking the service. In commercial farms, managers should take the lead to train labourers to do the job correctly and neatly, as the result significantly affects his earnings.

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Annex: Checklist for large scale (investor) farmers

የባለሀብቶች የዕውቀት ስፈራዎች /ፕሮፍዬሽን/ መመዘኛና ልገረት ማድረጊያ ቅጽ

1. እንደሆነውን የሚያሳዩት ዋና ለ/ጎንደር ወረዳ መተማ ተበሌ-----ልዩ ስሙ-----በሌት-----
2. የባለሀብቱ ሙሉ ስም/ድረጅት/-----ጾታ----- የት/ደረጃ-----እድሜ-----
3. የእንደሆነውን ስያሜ -----የመሬቱ ስፋት በሜ/ር-----
4. እንደሆነውን የተጀመረበት ዓ.ም-----መንሻ ካፒታል-----አሁን ያለ ካፒታል-----
5. የተፈጠረ የስራ እድል-----ገዢ የሆኑ-----ቋሚ-----

ተ.ቁ	ዘርዘር መሰረድት	ስማሚያዎች መሰረድት የተሰጠ የኮይዶት ነጥብ	በሙሉ/ፕሮጀክት ፕሮፖዛል ላይ የተቀመጠ	የተከናወነ	መጨረሻ
1	የባለሀብቱ ተቋማዊ አደረጃጀት	20			
1.1	እርሻው በሰለጠነ ባለሙያ የሚመራ	8			
1.2	ቋሚ ጽ/ቤት ያለው	2			
1.3	በጽ/ቤት ውስጥ ተደራጅተው የሚገኙ ሰነዶች	4			
1.3.1	የእርሻ ስራውን እንቅስቃሴ ማድረግ የሚያሳይ የተደራጀመረጃ	1			
1.3.2	የውጭ ዝጊ ሰነዶች	1			
1.3.3	ፕሮጀክት ፕሮፖዛል ሰነድ	1			
1.3.4	አመታዊ አቅድና አፈጻጸም ሪፖርት	1			
1.4	የሃሳብ ስራ-ተኝ ያለው	2			
1.5	በፕሮጀክት ፕሮፖዛል መሰረት የሰው ሃይል የተጠራ	4			
2	የልማት አረጋገጫ	45			
2.1	የልማት መሬት ስፋት	25			
2.2	የተፈጥሮ ሃብት እንደሆነው	10			
2.2.1	የተከናወኑ የሰነድ-ዕይታውን ፈቃድ አሰጣጥ ሰነድ ለውጭ ዘዴዎች	5			
2.2.2	በቂ ሃይል የተከፈለ	3			
2.2.3	የተፈጥሮ ሃይትን በውሉ መሰረት መንከባከብ	2			
2.3	የእርሻ መሳሪያዎች ዝግጅት	5			
2.3.1	በቂ ትራክተር ከሚረዱት	5			
2.3.2	ትራክተር ተከራይቶ ማረስ	3			
2.3.3	የእንስሳት ፕላን መጠቀም	1			
2.4	የእርሻ አሰራር	5			
2.4.1	ማሳን ደጋግሞ ማረስ	3			
2.4.2	ከአረም የጸዳ ማሳ	2			
3	ግብዓት መጠቀም	20			
3.1	ጥቅም ላይ የዋለ ማዕቀፍና ምርጫ ዘር	20			
4	የሰራተኞች አድራሻ	15			
4.1	ንጹህ የመጠየቅ ውግ አቅርቦት	4			
4.2	የተረጋገጠ በቂ ምግብና የምግብ ቁሳቁስ	4			
4.3	የህክምና መስጫ አገልግሎት ከህ ባለሙያው	3			
4.4	የተዘጋጀ የሰራተኞች መጠለያ/ሰራተኞች ሰውነት-ተለይ-የ/	2			
4.5	የተዘጋጀ በቂ መጻጃዎች ዜት	2			
	ድምር				

የባለሀብቱ ስም ----- ፊርማ -----

የኮሚቴው አባላት ስም ----- መ-ያና የስራ ድረሻ ----- ፊርማ -----

1. -----

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