

21th KUASS
(Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)

The Political Economy of Agricultural Extension in Ethiopia:
Economic Growth and Political Control

Date: Feb. 3, 2014 (Mon.), 15:00 – 17:00

Venue: Small Seminar Room II, 3F Inamori Bldg.,
Kawabata Campus, Kyoto University

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ABSTRACT:

It is to be recalled that state-led agricultural extension in Ethiopia is implemented since the last two decades. This is undertaken by excluding other players in general and non-state actors in particular from proactively and meaningfully involving in policy making processes and attendant practices associated with the country's agricultural extension program. In this vein, I argue that the practice of state monopoly over agricultural extension to the exclusion of other players is driven by the quest of the Ethiopian ruling party (EPRDF) for ensuring the uncontested control of smallholder farmers that constitute the bulk of the electorate.

The political imperative of control of smallholders whose votes in electoral contests are crucial for ensuring the regime's perpetuation in power is envisaged to neutralize existing potential and actual threats (internal and external) that are inimical to regime survival. Hence the need for winning the hearts and minds of smallholder producers through catering for their basic and essential livelihood needs is considered of paramount importance. Accordingly, agricultural transformation characterized by land and labor productivity and surplus production through embarking on state-sponsored extensive agricultural extension schemes is deemed instrumental in realizing stated goals that are both political and economic in nature. In the light of the aforementioned, the ramifications of agricultural extension in Ethiopia are viewed from several angles that include: increased smallholder production resulting from improved access to inputs, credits and technological diffusion; government persistence in implementing agricultural extension

schemes despite reservations and criticisms by detractors; ensuring donor support for the initiative; deployment of tens of thousands of extension workers in all the rural areas of the country to assist the furtherance of the political and economic goals and objectives designed by the mainstream political establishment; and facilitating the entrenchment, penetration and broader outreach of party-government structures all over the country thereby laying the basis for effective control.

In conclusion, in as much as realizing fast economic recovery and growth is a genuine desire of the EPRDF-led regime, the implicit goal in establishing uncontested monopoly over the country's agricultural extension system is driven by the lust for obtaining legitimacy and acceptance from smallholders whose support is instrumental in averting threats and boosting prospects for unhindered regime survival and security under the façade of periodic electoral exercises.

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