Background

Ethiopians Fighting Against Child Exploitation (E-FACE) seeks to reduce child labor, particularly in Ethiopia’s traditional weaving industry. In this sector, children constitute a significant portion of the workforce because they serve as a source of cheap labor.

A host of factors, including poverty, lack of education opportunities, population growth and other related dynamics combine to force children into the weaving industry. This complexity requires multi-faceted interventions to address the problem comprehensively and innovatively.

MEDA’s work on E-FACE targets working children in two critical and interrelated economic sectors – the textile industry and agriculture. In agriculture, MEDA has a two-pronged approach, targeting farmers as well as youth in subsistence households. E-FACE encourages farmers to supplement their income with the addition of low-intensity crops. Since these require less labor to produce higher incomes, there is less risk of reliance on children to work.

To provide additional support to the agricultural activities, MEDA is also training 250 youth aged 14-17 in Gamo Gofa and Wolaita in the SNNPR region of Ethiopia to become agricultural sales agents.

With the technical and entrepreneurial skills they acquire, these young people can work in safer jobs and ensure that farmers have access to necessary agricultural inputs, supplies and information.

Objectives

The Youth Agricultural Sales Agents Model complements two interdependent program objectives:

1. To increase skill sets and livelihood opportunities for motivated and entrepreneurial-minded youth aged 14-17. As agricultural sales agents, they could earn income by providing products, services and extension services within their villages and nearby areas.

2. To increase household resiliency through increased knowledge of and access to agricultural inputs. Coupled with agronomy training, this can provide additional food security and income generated from the sale of excess crops.
The Model

The primary challenges identified though our interactions with the farmers in Gamo Gofa and Wolaita include:

- Lack of basic understanding of agronomy practice, soil science and pest management
- Agro dealers operate from their locations and are often not known or accessible to farmers who live beyond these immediate surrounding areas
- Most seed and other input supplies are sold in larger quantities than many of the small-holder farmers can afford, or are appropriate for the size of their plots

To address these constraints, the youth agricultural sales agents could serve as compliments to the existing research and extension agencies, seed, fertilizer companies, and development partners to rapidly disseminate solutions to help as many farmers, as cost-effectively as possible, to sustainably increase crop productivity. This model would thus make the appropriate farm inputs more accessible to small farmers.

The aim is to empower farmers to experiment with inputs in small affordable quantities. Farmers “learn by doing” on their own farms and invariably return to their nearest farm input supplier to purchase larger quantities to improve their food security and/or income generation.

Along with providing training, MEDA will attempt to link the youth agricultural sales agents to a broker/distributor who acts as the wholesale supplier and aggregator of products from various sources. Ideally, these brokers can mentor the youth to build their portfolio of what they can sell.

In addition to providing youth with a path for income generation, there is a strong business justification for the youth agricultural sales agents since they can bridge a market gap between the farmers and the input/farm product suppliers. For the farmer, the value-add that they bring is selling in smaller packages, on-site sales and a source of growing information. For the agro dealers and brokers, the youth agricultural sales agents can provide access to smaller customers more efficiently, thus expanding their markets.

---

1 E-FACE Partners include World Vision, MEDA and Mission for Community Development Program. Funding provided by the United States Department of Labour under Subaward IL-22626-11-K-MEDA.
2 E-FACE households are targeted based on a set of established criteria as per project requirements and a process administered through local Child Protection Committees, Project Steering Committees, World Vision and MEDA.
3 SNNPR stands for Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region, an area which lies in the southern and south western part of Ethiopia. This region is particularly vulnerable to income insecurity and has a high rate of young children being incorporated into the weaving and agricultural sectors.