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Fact Two Rural and Agricultural Development Policies and Strategies for Ethiopia

1. The Basic Directions of Agricultural Development

As has already been emphasized, rural development cannot be confined to agricultural development. Nevertheless, in the Ethiopian context there is no question that the two are closely linked. Indeed, it is the development of the agricultural sector that will provide the basis for rural development. Hence, our rural development efforts will give priority to the implementation of appropriate strategies for agricultural development. In view of this, it is useful, at this juncture, to discuss the basic principles that govern agricultural development policy in Ethiopia.

1.1. The Labor-intensive Strategy

A basic premise of our strategy is that mechanized and sustained growth can be brought about in Ethiopia not through capital-intensive but through labor-intensive production methods. This is even more so for the agricultural sector than any other sector of the national economy. But what is envisaged? Clearly, it is not that agriculture employ superfluous labor, backward technologies and traditional agricultural practices. Neither is it to employ more labor than necessary, nor that labor is employed in a way that is a wasteful practice. The agricultural labor force in the future ought to be able to use a high level of productivity in the agricultural sector in the future extent possible. When we say that we should apply labor-intensive methods, we expect to promote advanced technology and farming methods that are, nevertheless, not labor-inefficient in nature.

Such a strategy would include enhancing and training the agricultural labor force to build up skills and enhance labor initiative. Some agricultural development can be brought about through the extensive use of technology by a few people. This strategy necessarily concentrates on agricultural methods that use land and capital intensively but require agricultural labor in a large scale manner. On the other hand, it is also possible to promote agricultural development with significantly increased labor and focus on high-value products by employing an agricultural labor force that is provided some training and information, and using non-mechanized machinery. Our main agricultural development strategy will be the latter more labor-intensive method. Both strategies are capable of yielding sustained results in terms of increasing agricultural productivity and promoting technological growth. But they focus on very different aspects of production and development in very different directions. Our strategy focuses on developing the agricultural skills and work initiative of farmers. The other is based on employing labor-saving, mechanized machinery. By adopting a labor-intensive strategy, we place emphasis on the farmer.

The labor-intensive strategy is well placed to promote quality as well as quantity of agricultural production, as its reliance on labor will allow close monitoring of agricultural processes. Focus on high-value crops that require close management and care is therefore possible. Conversely, the extensive and more capital-intensive production methods focus on agricultural products that are produced on a large scale and do not require such close follow-up. As in the case of the labor-intensive strategy, this approach emphasizes increasing output and productivity through the land through irrigation, application of chemical inputs, diversifying production, etc. to bring farmers' incomes and production outputs to a healthy level.

In sum, the labor-intensive agricultural development strategy we follow does not envisage employing backward technology and excess labor. Rather, it is a strategy by which only the required amount of labor will be employed on each plot of land. It is a strategy, which enables the development of the agricultural labor force to deal in more modern and/or improved agricultural technologies and methods. Relatively, it will enable the significant development of labor-intensive technologies in agriculture and large increments in output in such technologies and methods. It is a strategy, which enables the agricultural labor force to reach the level of mechanization and training. It is a strategy, which utilizes irrigation, promotes the production of high-value agricultural products and promotes production techniques that maximize yield per unit of land. In short, it is a matter of pursuing a productivity and technological growth path, which is based on skilled agricultural labor. As a basic principle, our agricultural strategies and policies shall keep to this development path.

1.2. Proper Utilization of Agricultural Land

Access and use of agricultural land is one of the most important development issues in Ethiopia. Indeed, ensuring agricultural development and sustained high rates of growth depends on the appropriate use of land. A fundamental aspect of proper use of land is to guarantee the availability of land to people who seek to make a living out of farming. Another aspect is its sustainable use, i.e. taking care not to deplete our natural resource base. This is critical for a stable agricultural sector and to increasing and even maintaining agricultural productivity. Finally, within the constraints of ensuring broad access to land and its sustainable utilization, land should be used to the maximum extent possible and all year round, through irrigation, multi-cropping and the diversified production per unit of land, etc. Agricultural output is thereby also maximized.

Identifying what land should be used for what type of activity and utilizing land accordingly is a key issue in the proper use of land in general. Moreover, ensuring a proper land use equilibrium is also an important consideration. It is well known that in our country there are regions where there are large populations but limited land and our water. Our land use strategy will necessarily take all these factors into account. In short, the issue is using the land to the extent that will contribute to overall development, the productivity, the sustainability of the natural resource base, and that ensures broad access to the path that will guide our agricultural strategies and policies. We strongly believe that an agricultural development strategy that lies outside this principle will, far from accelerating agricultural development, weaken and arrest it altogether.

1.3. A Foot on the Ground

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