

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. ASE's Profile

Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE) is an indigenous, non-governmental, non-sectarian and not-for-profit development organisation established in December 1969 by a French Catholic priest named Father Henry Ravaging. ASE is registered by the Ministry of Justice, and has signed operational agreements with the federal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC), and project agreements with the regional state governments.

Agri-Service Ethiopia is a membership association with a General Assembly of 20 members (five corporate and 15 individuals). Its second highest governing body—that is, next to the General Assembly (GA)—is the Board of Management (BoM), which has five members elected from among the members of the General Assembly for a two-year term, as well as the Executive Director.

The Executive Director is the CEO of the organisation and an ex-officio member of the BoM, to which he/she is accountable. Under him or her are three Departments: Department of Programmes, Department of Community Training, Education and Extension and Department of Support Services, and two Units (Fundraising and Public Relations and Internal Audit), as well as five Programme Offices located in Amhara, Oromia, and SNNPR.

ASE has given due importance to training and education ever since its establishment. For instance, between 1969 and 1976, it provided correspondence education to smallholder farmers by having their literate children read the lessons to them. The subjects it taught were the basics of agriculture, health and home economics. And they were delivered mainly

through printed materials and occasionally complemented with field visits. The correspondence education programme was aimed at addressing the needs of non-literate farmers, as the level of illiteracy in the programme areas was very high.

In 1977, however, ASE changed its strategy, with a view to making its efforts in this regard more fruitful. In other words, it began teaching the farmers face to face—though the subjects remained more or less the same. Thus, between 1977 and 1987, along with agricultural education, face-to-face elementary education was given to farmers in socio-economics, personal hygiene, environmental sanitation and women's education. The face-to-face education was backed by distant education, in collaboration with the Wolaita Agricultural Development Unit (WADU) and the Ministry of Education, through rural radio forums. This approach provided ASE with an opportunity to serve both the literate and non-illiterate members of rural communities.

It was soon realised that the face-to-face training programme has had a real impact, in that it greatly improved the knowledge and attitude of the learners. It did not, nevertheless, help bring about the desired behavioural change. Why? Mainly because the new technology and the ideas introduced by the training were neither available nearby nor affordable. Moreover, ASE found out that giving theoretical training *per se* to adults, without demonstrating for them the new ideas and technology, seldom bears the desired fruit. So it had to try a new approach in 1986, known as Action-Oriented Training Programme (AOTP). Through AOTP, ASE helped the farmers grasp the new ideas and technology by demonstrating to them. It also enabled them to access the technology through a revolving fund.

In 1986, an assessment of the impact of ASE's interventions was done. The assessment report disclosed that the AOTP programme has helped the target groups to significantly improve on their agricultural practices within a

relatively short period of time, but that it did not make any visible dent in their abject poverty, which has a multifaceted nature. Through time, many more new demands and development opportunities also came into the picture.

These situations compelled ASE to address the other felt needs of the communities as well, along with the AOTP. To this effect, ASE adopted a broader and comprehensive intervention known as Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) in 1987. In this approach, the AOTP was complemented with a number of income-generating activities and other community projects such as forestry, soil and water conservation, rural water supply, community-health and micro-finance services. ASE carried out three IRDPs between 1987 and 2000 in the SPNNRS, Amhara, and Ormoia regions.

ASE came up with a number of different approaches after 1987, but AOTP has remained to be its core function. The name AOTP was, nonetheless, changed at different times, although the concepts and purposes of the emerging training and extension approaches remained the same. At the end of 1996, a change in the Government's policy with regard to micro-finance services forced ASE to establish an affiliate MFI, known in short as PEACE—which stands for Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment.

In the year 2000, the first Strategic Plan was developed to cope with the ever-increasing demand for change. The document stated as ASE's vision that it aspires "to see a rural Ethiopia where poverty is significantly and meaningfully reduced and a favourable environment is maintained to the satisfaction of the present and future generations". It, however, put ASE's mission as being "to work with the poor communities in rural Ethiopia towards attaining food security, protecting and rehabilitating the environment and to providing adequate social services".

In the strategic period, the programme formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation were done using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools, to create an enabling environment for the participation of those who have a stake in all these. Each programme office was given the right to develop its own programme. Therefore, community participation was enhanced; attempts were made to target the needy community group; the needy also got linked to micro-finance institutions (MFIs); indigenous knowledge and practices were encouraged; and inputs were supplied and demonstrated. Training groups were organised, and training issues were categorised into two: General Awareness-Raising Training and Skills-Enhancement Training. The training sessions were held under the shed of a tree or in other convenient places for the trainees, all of whom were farmers. It was also supported with home and farm visits by the trainers. Experience-sharing visits were also organised to expose farmers to improved and field-tested practices. Moreover, unlike other phases, village-level development promoters (VLDPs) were recruited and assigned from among the community members, to assist development facilitators (DFs); gender issues were mainstreamed; community training and HIV/AIDS were considered to be crosscutting functions; and the community-based institutions (CBIs) were established and duly registered.

To realise its mission, the organisation implemented five integrated food security programmes (IFSPs): in Amaro, Berek-Aleltu, Enebsie-Sar Midir and Tehuledere woredas and an IRDP in the Lalo-Mamma woreda, which was terminated two years back. The first is situated in the SNNPR, whereas the second and the latter three are located in Oromia and Amhara regional states, respectively. The second and third IFSPs, which are financially supported by Oxfam Novib and certain churches in Germany (EED), are in the last year of their second phase (2004-06). Oxfam Novib and EED have of late shown an interest in supporting the same programmes during the next two years. The Amaro IFSP is a five-year programme. Trocaire and Ireland Aid financed the first three years, whereas the European Union and Trocaire/Cafod are jointly

financing the subsequent two years. A new IFSP programme in the Goro woreda, Bale Zone, Oromia Region, was launched in the third quarter of 2006, financed by the Dan Church Aid. A joint project to be implemented with a Lalo-Mamma CBI, in the Amhara Region, was recently launched with support from AAE. The whole programme covered 52 kebele administrations, with a total of 43,626 households (26.8% of them female-headed). The direct and indirect beneficiaries are estimated at 261,756 and 1,308,780 people, respectively.

The organisation has also been actively participating in 19 national and international networks/forums in various capacities. The networks and forums help to share experiences with one another, and serve as platforms for advocacy and lobbying of some important issues like community empowerment, HIV/AIDS, gender equity, participatory research, farmers' innovation development, sustainable land use, etc.

ASE currently has a total of 141 permanent staff, of whom 45 (19%) are female. Compared with its workforce of 1999, however, the total shows some decrease—four in the number of its permanent staff, and 7 % in that of its female staff. The proportion of skilled staff has, however, increased. Of the total staff, 25% have earned BScs/BAs and/or MAs/MScs, which shows an 8% increase in the number of employees who have had university education. Almost 38% have college or vocational diplomas. That, however, reflects an 8% reduction, compared with the number of such staff in 1999. And most of the remaining staff members have finished their secondary-school education.

The number of the households that ASE has been rendering its services to has shown a 4% increase, and that of the women-headed households a 16.8% increase.

The audit reports of 1999 and 2005 disclosed that ASE commanded revenue totalling Birr 10,340,756 and 19,815,083, respectively (depicting a 92%

growth), and that it deployed 23 vehicles, 24 motor cycles and three tractors. Of these, the POs used almost all the vehicles, including 12 of the better-off vehicles. That means, on average, three vehicles per PO. But the remaining were used by the Head Office to serve all the programmes. The organisation also deployed its single truck and another truck that belongs to the CRDA but has long been used by ASE on temporary arrangements. ASE's Head Office is housed in the organisation's own building. So are the POs, except the one at Tehuledere.

1.2. Major Achievements

Agriculture: During the 2001-06 period, the food-deficit months were reduced from five to three months at Enebsie-Sar Mider, and from four to two months at Berek. On average, cereal productivity increased from 8.5 to 18.5 at Enebsie, and from 7 to 12 qts/ha at Berek, in the last three years, whereas the productivity at Lalo-Mamma had reached 20.3 qt/ha between 1998 and 2002. Farmers engaged in honey production at Amaro harvested 13.2 to 18 kilogramme of honey per beehive/annum. These figures exceed the national average, which is 11.54 qt/ha for cereals and five kilograms for honey per beehive/annum. Moreover, compared with the milk production of the years before 2002, the inhabitants of Amaro were able to get more milk from the improved goat species introduced to them. A commendable result was also achieved in the prevention of trypanosomiasis.

Social services:

- ❖ Access to potable water supply increased as follows:
 - From 1% in 2001 to 22% in Enebsie;
 - From 37.8% in 2004 to 42.8% in Berek;
 - From 1.2% in 1998 to 51.2% in 2002; and
 - From 40.87% to 42 % at Amaro (2005).

- ❖ Access to health services, too, showed the following increases:
 - From 57 % in 2004 to 87% in Enebsie;
 - It was maintained at 65.8% in Berek;
 - In recent times, 80.4% of the intervention kebeles in the Lalo-Mamma woreda have ready access to health services; and
 - A total of 16,739 people were protected from malaria in Amaro (2005).

- ❖ And the picture with regard to access to education looked like this:
 - It increased from 88% during the previous year to 93% in Enebsie;
 - It was maintained at 68% in Berek;
 - The overall rate of enrolment reached 95.7%, and that of girls increased from 48.1% to 50.5% in the Lalo-Mamma woreda; and
 - A total of 799 (adults) were enrolled in the literacy programme, and 505 (school-age children) in the ACCESS programme in Amaro in 2005.

Natural resources management: The degraded marginal plots of farmland in the intervention areas were left to lie fallow for a certain period of time so that they will be productive again. For instance, about 308 hectares of farmland was made out of bounds for excessive human and livestock interaction at Enebsie. Between 1998 and 2002, soil and water conservation structures were built on degraded plots of farmland and communal areas, multipurpose tree seedlings were produced and planted on 516 hectares of individual plots of land in Lalo-Mamma.

Gender and HIV/AIDS: On average, females were made to benefit by 42% of the interventions in the programme areas. HIV/AIDS clubs have also been

established in each programme area to combat the pandemic. Moreover, an in-house HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy was formulated and enacted in order to protect and support ASE's employees.

CBI: The CBIs that were established at Lalo-Mamma, Enebsie, Berek and Amaro have been duly registered by the concerned government bodies. As such, they have since become strong development partners of both ASE and the Government. ASE and a Lalo-Mamma CBI jointly secured a total of Birr 1.6 million (85% of it for the CBI) and launched a capacity-enhancing project in October 2006. In May of 2006, Alem Birhan, a CBI at Enebsie, organised fundraising events for the construction and rehabilitation of school buildings at which more than three million Birr was pledged in kind and cash. Besides, Alem Birhan, in close collaboration with ASE, designed a feasible project, Lay Michael Integrated Water Shade Management, and secured Birr 217,000 from the Nile Basin Initiative Project (November 2006).

Staff training: Between 2000 and 2005, ASE provided a total of 14 staff members with training opportunities: five of them towards MAs, seven towards BAs and two towards college diplomas. Thus trained, the staff members were able to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the programmes.

Community training and education:

- ❖ A partnership was established with the Debre Markos Radio Station to disseminate information and promote extension services. In addition to that, preparations are underway to establish a community radio station, which will be the first of its kind in Ethiopia, at Amaro. The radio station will be called "Kore Radio Station FM 92.3". As a license has already been secured for it, it is expected to be operational within two or three months from now.

- ❖ The best practices such as farmers field school (FFS), ACCESS, participatory community training and extension and curriculum for community training have been taken up by the governments and replicated.
- ❖ A facilitation and communication training (FACT) centre was established in Tehuldere to share ASE's cumulated experiences with stakeholders and to enhance the capacity of the community, of GOs and NGOs as well as of ASE's staff.
- ❖ ASE has forged various networks with NGOs, GOs, forums, research centres and domestic and foreign universities. And it has already benefited a lot thereby.
- ❖ ASE has institutionalised participatory action research. And it supports farmers' innovation through FFS and participatory technology development (PTD) approaches. Farmers' research groups were organised and researches were conducted on their main problems. In the process, encouraging results have been observed; the farmers have developed self-confidence, as manifested by their eagerness to share with one another their newfound knowledge with regard to pest control through the use of botanical pesticide; and much indigenous knowledge was identified and documented.

1.3. Lessons Drawn from the First Strategic Plan

The first strategic document directed ASE to focus on strategic issues. As a result, ASE was able to win the trust and respect of the community, of the Government as well as of its donors. Besides, it was enabled to be on the right track, flexible to the constantly-changing environment and to give maximum attention to sustainable development and to thereby significantly contribute to the development of the rural sector.

1.3.1. Programmes Implementation Strategies

- The farmer-to-farmer extension through such farmers' promoters as village-level development promoters (VLDPs), community animal health workers (CAHWs) and village-level health promoters (VLHPs) at the grassroots level has proven efficient, effective and sustainable. The promoters, of course, do their promoting by going from house to house and through demonstrations.
- ASE has proven that the CBIs have won the trust and respect of the communities, that they are democratically established and non-partisan institutions—besides being truly instrumental in achieving the desired development. Hence, the structures ensure the long-term viability of the programmes.
- ASE considers participatory action research to be its major strategy. It has also learnt that farmers are creative and capable of doing much of their own investigation, analysis and planning. It has also proven the validity of indigenous knowledge.
- Following the first Strategic Plan, ASE aggressively forged regional, national and international networks, most of which its staff are serving either as chairpersons or secretaries. Besides, ASE has initiated the creation of different forums such as PROFIEET—which stands for promoting farmers' (including pastoralists and forest users) innovation and experimentation in Ethiopia. ASE has come to realise that institutionalising, planning and budgeting its involvement in networks are crucially important.
- ASE knows full well that dishing out services to communities is not a sustainable way of helping them (the communities), unless the community members and stakeholders are actively involved in whatever is being done for them. Hence it has been implementing its intervention programmes by organising communities at the village level, providing

them with the training they need to that end, mobilising local resources, helping the communities develop a sense of ownership and thereby ensuring the sustainability of the programmes.

- The effort exerted so far has adequately addressed the two pillars of food security—access and availability—whereas food utilisation and impact assessment have remained behind and, therefore, require aggressive work.
- Although ASE has put in place an efficient participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation (PPME) system, as well as a mechanism for analysing the situation during the formulation and documentation of its programmes, much remains to be done towards enhancing its Management Information System.
- ASE has gone beyond the strategic document, the criteria for area identification and targeting, and intervened in remote and challenging areas as well—areas that are known for their rough terrain and that are chronically food-insecure and conflict-prone. ASE’s staff have shown commitment to working with the rural poor. As a result, the interventions have made a significant difference in the lives of the poor. To its chagrin, ASE has, nonetheless, come to realise that the needs of the poorest of the poor have not been adequately addressed as per the strategic direction. Why? Because no workable strategy has as yet been designed for ensuring that and there is a paucity of resources.
- The implementation of ASE’s strategy for the sustainable management of natural resources is based on administrative boundaries/kebele administrations, and ASE has realised that the “piecemeal” approach to solving the problem of natural-resources depletion is ineffective and inefficient. So it has decided to capitalise on the Integrated Water Shade Approach.

1.3.2.Organisation and Management Strategies

1.3.2.1. Organisation and Human Resources

- The decentralisation process from the regional programme offices (RPO) to the woreda-level programme offices, redefining roles and responsibilities and merging related tasks, have resulted in an effective implementation of programmes, reduction of ASE's overhead cost, commendable follow-up and supervision, better networking and close interaction and partnership with local administrations and communities.
- ASE believes that DAs should be experienced and must have acquired both theoretical and practical skills, must be committed, favour participatory development and respect the culture, knowledge and beliefs of the farmers. Accordingly, ASE plans to deploy its own DAs to accomplish its mission.
- ASE has realised that human resources development results in an effective and efficient execution of policies and strategies, besides helping its staff assume higher positions.
- It has been proven that proper staffing invariably entails the optimum utilisation of human resources and a reduction in the overall cost of the organisation, as well as in the sustainability thereof.
- Frequent staff turnover impedes ASE's effort to properly and timely accomplish its mission. It will have to, therefore, address the problem by readjusting its salary scale as per the labour market's offer—besides coming up with additional ways and means of motivating its staff.
- Although the market fails to offer female candidates and remote and rough terrain discourages them to join ASE, it (ASE) gives due importance to improving the gender composition of its staff at all levels, from the grassroots level upwards, including the Board of Management.

1.3.2.2. Finance

- **Long-standing and new donors:** ASE's partnership with its long-standing donors has been successfully maintained, and much effort has been made to forge partnerships with new donors such as the Dan Church Aid (DCA). During the strategic period, too, ASE will do everything it can to expand its donor base.
- **Optimum utilisation of resources:** ASE has optimally utilised the assets at its disposal. It is also deliberating ways and means of establishing reserve funds.
- **Organising fundraising events:** ASE has found organising domestic and international fundraising events and linking the duly registered CBIs to GOs and NGOs to be useful exercises.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** ASE has made laudable efforts towards reducing its costs by decentralising its operations, optimally utilising its human resources, strengthening its financial monitoring, controlling its budget and restructuring its cost items. It has also tried to reduce its costs by resorting to bulk purchase, reducing its requisition of stationery and controlling telephone calls, as well as through an optimum utilisation of in-house capacity—instead of outsourcing. ASE is, nevertheless, expected to do more cost-reduction in the coming strategic period, too.

2. THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In 2005, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), using human development indicators, ranked Ethiopia 170th out of 177 countries. Of its population of 76 million, more than 50% lack access to sufficient food. The annual income per capita is estimated at USD 100.3. These, of course, bear testimony to the fact that Ethiopia is a very poor country. And the underlying causes for its proverbial poverty are, among others, the fact that democratic governance is just beginning to take root, its rapid population growth, low

productivity, structural bottlenecks, erratic rainfall, poor infrastructure development, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and malaria. The following are the detailed accounts of the operational environment, where ASE is striving to bring about change.

2.1. The Political Situation

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) adopted a federal system of administration back in 1995. Following that, the country was organised into nine National Regional States and two Administrative Councils. The regionalisation and decentralisation policies have empowered the regional and local governments and thereby helped them to enjoy unprecedented political, economic and social power. The country is signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are indisputably necessary for survival, dignified living, human dignity, creativity, intellectual and spiritual development and liberty and physical security. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) regards human rights as a crosscutting issue. And the Government has taken steps towards ensuring the full respect of human rights, including the establishment of a Commission for Human Rights and an Ombudsman's Office.

PASDEP acknowledges that the magnitude of Ethiopia's poverty is enormous. It has also enumerated the underlying causes for this poverty as being the population pressure, which has resulted in fragmenting farmland sizes, and in low productivity, low investment due to the subsistence economy and the yet-undeveloped infrastructure and an inefficient marketing system. The Government has also come to realise that poverty reduction can be achieved only in the following circumstances:

- A rapid economic growth;

- An equitable resources-sharing; and
- The existence of a sound economic policy that encourages the private sector's active involvement, maintains clear focus on social-sector development and poverty reduction.

ASE believes that the causes of poverty are multi-faceted. So it is appreciative of the fact that the Government has vested authority in the regional and local governments and thereby paved the way for them to make poverty a thing of the past by doing everything they can. ASE also acknowledges the fact that most of the measures taken so far towards attaining the millennium development goals (MDGs)—especially in education, health and water supply—are commendable. So is its nascent focus on economic growth, which is needed to generate the resources necessary for financing scaling-up and for speeding up progress. ASE is also aware of the fact that the resources that the Government has at its disposal are too meagre to enable it to effectively address these gargantuan challenges on its own, and that it, therefore, needs some support from other development actors. It is based on these beliefs and convictions that ASE is working towards complementing the national effort to halve the number of Ethiopia's poor people by the year 2015.

2.2. Gender

FDRE's Constitution recognises the rights of women, and the Government had expressed its commitment to reserving 30% of the seats in the Parliament for women, in the 2005 elections. In an apparent declaration of its determination to fully respect the rights of women, it has also established a Ministry of Women's Affairs and vested in it the authority of facilitating the conditions necessary for ensuring gender empowerment and developing policies aimed at addressing the gender imbalance. PASDEP, as we know, has given maximum attention to the full realisation of the potentialities of the 35 million Ethiopian

women that have been hitherto deprived of the opportunity to do so. It also considers gender as being a crosscutting issue in all its development efforts.

ASE is well aware of the fact that tradition-imposed drudgery, household chores, low access to and low control over capital and production inputs and inadequate participation in decision-making, both at the household and community levels have significantly contributed to the perpetuation of women's vulnerability and oppression. ASE has also learnt that gender issues are deep-rooted in the cultural and traditional practices of the communities and has, accordingly, decided to seize the emerging opportunities (the commitment thereto of the Ethiopian Government and international communities) to bring about gender equity.

2.3. Natural Resources

Natural resources are the main sources of livelihood for the majority of the Ethiopian people. Most rural communities, in particular, earn their livelihood directly from the soil. Ethiopia is endowed with rich flora and fauna due to its agro-climatic diversity. According to the Ethiopian Forest Action Programme (EFAP), in 1994, the total number of vascular plants was believed to be more than 7,000 species, of which an estimated 10% to 20% are endemic, whereas estimates of deforestation range from 150,000 ha to 200,000 ha per annum. According to estimates by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in 1995, of the overall irrigation potential in the country, only 3% was utilised. The rapidly growing human and livestock population, the internecine war that was waged for about three decades, coupled with the political instability, the recurrent drought and forest fires, settlements, investors' targeting of forest areas without conducting an environmental impact assessment, the absence of policies pertaining to ownership, the lack of accountability and of an

appropriate arrangement for benefit sharing with indigenous inhabitants have contributed a lot to the rapid depletion of the natural forests.

The current trend in the land ownership ratio in the rural setting, especially in the Ethiopian highlands where ASE is operational, suggests that 30%-50% of the rural youth, who are married and have begun to lead independent lives, are virtually landless. Yet the social and economic development in the rural area is not capable of providing them with other livelihood options. Nor are the nearby cities and towns ready to absorb and accommodate any migrating labour from the rural areas. Consequently, the pressure over land resources is very high, and is causing irreversible damages. Over the last few decades, environmental degradation (soil erosion, decreasing soil fertility, degrading of rangeland, drying water supplies, accelerated loss of biodiversity, etc.) has been impairing the livelihoods of millions of rural households, thereby exacerbating their poverty and food insecurity.

Of course, the Government of Ethiopia has not been sitting on its hands and indifferently watching all this unfold before its very eyes. Instead, it has introduced policies and strategies on land use, soil and water conservation and on controlling land degradation; it has also initiated participatory planning, managing and benefit sharing from forest resources. What is more, the international community has thrown its weight behind the Government's efforts in this regard, fully aware that environmental problems are not local problems to be left to the discretions of local governments, but to be tackled by all, in light of the fact that they have a global nature. Accordingly, international donor agencies have been availing adequate resources through many channels to support local efforts. The issue of natural-resources management is certainly one of the areas where the NGOs, government agencies and international communities are sharing similar views and concerns.

As our development partners would no doubt agree, the situation is not, nevertheless, beyond repair. There are still ample opportunities to live in harmony with the natural resources, if the stakeholders are committed at least to curbing the situation, if not to reversing it. To that end, ASE should join hands with the promoters of sustainable natural-resources utilisation. Investing in soil and water conservation activities is not, however, the only way of overcoming the complex and multifaceted problems of natural resources management in Ethiopia. Reducing the number of people who are depending on land, forest and water resources for their livelihood in the Ethiopian highlands, by providing them with other livelihood opportunities and building their capacity to innovate are crucially important, too. For a rapid and sustainable change to come into this dimension, it is, therefore, imperative that all development actors, particularly the state and the private sector, are involved in a concerted manner. Promoting the sustainable use of the resources; raising the awareness of the users of land, forest and water; promoting social learning about environmental issues; striking a balance between the investment needs of the country and its environmental concerns; lobbying the Government for the issuance of enabling policies are some of the broad areas in which NGOs, including ASE, could play a role.

2.4. Agriculture and Food Security

The agricultural sector in Ethiopia has been recognised as the main engine of rapid and equitable social and economic development. On average, the sector contributes about 50% of the GDP, and close to 85% of the population earns its livelihood from this sector (CSA, 1996). The country also earns about 90% of its foreign exchange from agriculture. Despite its prominent role as the main source of food, income and employment for the vast majority of the population,

the agricultural sector is still at its infant stage of development. According to the European Commission (2002), the average productivity of cereals and pulses between 1993 and 2001 was about 11.54 and 6.74 quintals per ha, respectively. Furthermore, PASDEP has observed that some 31 million people live below the poverty line and that between six and 13 million people are at risk of starvation.

Agricultural research and extension play very important roles in boosting agricultural production and marketing in the country. In this connection, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is extensively engaged in new approaches and methods that help to speed up the change process in the rural knowledge system. A brief account of the new approaches is discussed under the grassroots policy dynamics of this chapter. The Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) is under continuous reform and strategy development to make itself more relevant to the development efforts of the nation. Some of the major changes that took place in the research system include the growing emphasis on farmer participatory research, initiating pilot agricultural innovation projects that allow stakeholders' participation in the process, establishment of autonomous research institutions at the regional level, increasing the number of research centres all over the country, etc. In a bid to realise the Government's vision for rapid development and growth in the country, the major strategy of the EIAR is technology-shopping from the outside world. Apparently, the EIAR is expected to run adaptation trials of the newly-introduced technologies, to make them fit the different contexts in the country.

Two of the areas that the research system has paid little attention to are the indigenous-knowledge resources and the local innovations of farmers in the country. The EIAR and the extension organisations tend to pay exclusive

attention to technology-shopping and transfer. The establishment of farmers' research groups in different parts of the country is also needed, mainly to help the smooth transfer of new technology to farmers. Making more technological options available to farmers is indeed a very good idea, but exclusive dependence on the outside world for knowledge and technology may undermine the indigenous resources and the social capital, which has not as yet been consciously utilised, despite the significant role it plays in sustainable development. Some studies indicate (Chris and Ann 2001) that the potential of home-grown as well as better-fitting technologies to the realities of smallholder farmers is tremendous, although this potential has not as yet been consciously explored and utilised by the concerned institutions.

The constant environmental change, market, social and economic policies, international trade agreements, etc. are viewed as challenges by smallholder farmers. Those who are innovative withstand these "challenges" and survive, whereas others may not. ASE believes that the Government, NGOs, donors and other actors should come together and nurture and develop the innovativeness of farmers, build their self-confidence and help them withstand those challenges—instead of making them depend on outsiders for technology and ideas. The recent initiative of the Government to organise a national event to encourage model and innovative farmers is a step in the right direction. More remains to be done, however, in terms of changing policy directions to seriously accommodate indigenous knowledge and local innovations in the research and extension systems, making resources available to support innovative farmers, introducing agricultural innovation systems throughout the country so that the innovation theatre will open its doors not only to a few specialised institutions but also to various players. Creating a space to involve other actors (farmers, the private sector, NGOs, donors, etc.) in the innovation process is a new initiative of the EIAR at the pilot level. ASE is hopeful that this initiative will eventually be institutionalised.

As part of its extensive involvement in networking and partnership, ASE was one of the founding organisations of the national learning and advocacy platform: PROFIEET. The government institutions that are involved in research, extension and higher education are the main actors on this platform. A good number of NGOs that are keen to introduce the participatory approach to research and development are also part of the network. ASE needs to continue participating in this platform to make a meaningful contribution to food security and poverty reduction through policy reforms and adoption of new approaches.

2.5. Education

The education that is being provided in Ethiopia leaves much to be desired, even by sub-Saharan Africa's standards. According to the 2004 welfare-monitoring survey (WMS), the primary and secondary school enrolment rates were estimated at 74.2% (80.4% for males and 67.6 % for females) and 23.1% (28.3% for males and 17.9% for females). The dropout rates for primary and secondary schools in rural areas were 13.6% and 16.5%, respectively. The rate of literacy was also estimated at 37.9% (49.9% for males and 26.6% for females) (WMS 2004). Still, the Government of Ethiopia has declared its commitment to providing universal primary education by the year 2015 and that it, nevertheless, requires support from the international community, NGOs and the public at large to realise its commitment.

Since its inception, ASE has indisputably been focusing on education. It has, in particular, been active in adult and non-formal education as well as in promoting appropriate, cost-effective, children's education within the school system (ACCESS), also called "Alternative Basic Education (ABE)" by the

Government. In the previous government policy documents, educating adults and children who had no access to formal education was not given due attention; and the illiteracy rate and the number of the school-age children who were denied the opportunity to go to school were very high. It goes without saying that education sets people free from ignorance and poverty and that it is a prerequisite to building a democratic system, under which people can have the confidence to voice their rights and to learn the ethics of respecting the laws of the land. If the community were educated about the causes and consequences of such environmental crises as climate change and pollution, which have now become the major topics of discussion among politicians, economists, natural scientists and social scientists of almost all nations, it could do something about them. There is no denying the fact that the Ethiopian Government has, for these and other reasons, given formal education—especially at the tertiary level—the attention it deserves. That the rural adults who have no adequate access to formal schools and to informal learning (through radio, televisions, newsletters, etc.) have been left behind is, nonetheless, public secret. Yet this is the social group that can greatly influence the economic, social, political and environmental features of the nation.

The recently issued Education Sector Development Programme III, for the period 2005/06-2010/11, has, however, put adequate emphasis on this target group: "The Government attaches high importance to the development of adult and non-formal education, especially with a view to combating the high rate of illiteracy with particular focus on women. The participation of NGOs in the delivery of adult and non-formal education (NFE) is important, and their continuous and increasing participation is welcome" (2005, Ministry of Education). The programme focuses on literacy, numeracy and the environment, so as to enable learners to develop problem-solving skills and change their mode of life. The adult and NFE programme, through its

functional adult literacy component, will reach 5.2 million adults in the programme period. Moreover, 143,500 adults will be trained in different skills in the existing 287 CSTCs (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The NGO sector in general, ASE, ActionAid Ethiopia and other partners of ActionAid Ethiopia, in particular, have played significant roles in influencing government policy on the Alternative Basic Education Programme (Also called ACCESS by NGOs). In other words, having introduced ACCESS, they have gone on to impress upon the Ethiopian Government the wisdom of adopting it with little modification, including the naming. The ABE has, in fact, been included in the Government's policy and programmes for education. According to the Education Sector Development Programme III, the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) is considered crucially important as an emergency short-term measure for achieving universal primary education by 2015, and for reaching the hard-to-reach, remote, rural and dispersed communities, pastoralists, semi-agriculturalist societies. The Government will encourage communities, CBIs and NGOs to expand the provision of secular basic primary education through ABE in different localities to reach the un-enrolled children (Ministry of Education 2005).

2.6. Health

Malaria and tuberculosis (TB) have been recognised as the main killers of Ethiopians. According to the annual report of the Ministry of Information (2004), of the total people tested for malaria, about 46% turned out to be positive. The report also disclosed that the health coverage and family planning services have reached 63.3% and 23.3%, respectively. According to WMS, only 29.4% of the total population has access to health posts within a five-kilometre

radius, and only 44.7% rural and 73.4% urban dwellers visit health institutions.

More than 15% of all children die before they have celebrated their fifth birthdays, and 47% are severely malnourished. Maternal mortality is close to 871 per 100,000 mothers and recognised as being the highest in the world. The number of children per women, which is six, has a debilitating impact on women and children's health. In 2004, the child immunisation coverage against measles, BCG, DPT, and polio was 56.8%, 54.9%, 58% and 83%, respectively (WMS, 2004).

According to the national HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (HAPCO), the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 6.6%—its rates in the urban and rural areas being 13.7% and 3.7%, respectively. In the year 2003, 2.5 million people were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, and the pandemic has become not only a health problem, but also a developmental challenge.

The National Population Strategy that was issued in 1993 emphasised the compatibility of population growth with the prevailing natural resource base. The Government plans to reduce the number of children per women by 2015 from 6.74 to 4.0. The inadequate, ill-equipped health infrastructure—coupled with the reluctance of the Government, NGOs and the public to work to that end in a more collaborative and concerted manner—is, nonetheless, bound to hamper the attainment of this MDG.

2.7 Reflections of Relevant Policy Dynamics at the Grassroots Level

Farmers training centres: The Government of Ethiopia has made a strategic shift, with a view to addressing food insecurity and rural poverty by developing

human capital in the rural areas—that is, by upgrading the agricultural skills of farmers. Previously, it took nine months to train extension agents in Agarfa, Ardaita and other training institutions. Those who graduated from the institutions were then assigned to the kebeles (one person per kebele) as "generalist" extension professionals. Later on, nevertheless, it was found out that the nine-month training was inadequate and that the training capacities of the institutions were incompatible with the huge demand for extension agents (Jonfa 2005).

So, since 2002, the Government has established 25 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges throughout the country, and has drawn up a plan for training about 50,000 extension agents at the diploma level (10 + 3). More than 50% of the plan has already been achieved. And it is widely believed that the plan will have been fully implemented by the year 2008/09.

Concurrent with its plan to train such a large number of extension agents in the TVET College, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has made changes in its extension approach. Much emphasis is now made on training farmers in agricultural skills. And there is a plan to improve the marketing infrastructure by linking farmer cooperatives with agro-industries and other markets. The plan is to establish farmers training centres (FTCs) in every kebele of the country. Three extension agents per kebele will be assigned in each FTCs, and the professional mix of the extension agents will include Plant Science, Animal Science and Natural Resources Management. In those areas where livestock is the major source of livelihood, there is a plan to provide vet assistance—in addition to the three extension agents.

The Government has declared its commitment to achieving rapid economic growth and development in the country, in the coming few years. It is to that end that it has kicked off implementation of its plan for training a large

number of extension agents and for establishing countrywide FTCs. Training so many extension agents will no doubt help meet the huge demand for trained manpower at the grassroots level. ASE would like to, however, stress the need for critically scrutinising the competence, capacities and attitudes of the extension agents, the approaches and methods to be employed, the training's curriculum, etc., or for introducing an in-built improvement mechanism so as to provide the implementers with learning opportunities.

At the federal level, there is a unit that coordinates the TVET training programmes. The establishment and follow-up of the FTCs, however, fall under the purview of the regional bureaux of agriculture. The regional bureaux are, nevertheless, still busy preparing the FTC curriculum and familiarising the extension agents with it. At the woreda level, the offices of agriculture, in collaboration with the communities, are trying to build the training centres. The extension agents are well trained in such agricultural skills as poultry production, apiculture, vegetable production, etc. But they have not been provided with adequate training in extension communication, facilitation skills, appreciating and promoting farmer innovations (local knowledge), etc. Moreover, preparation of syllabuses and training modules at the local level and the whole art of training management are not properly addressed in the TVET's curriculum.

Paradoxically, the extension agents are expected to run and manage farmers training centres, without having acquired these essential skills. ASE cannot help but express its reservations about the wisdom of deploying the extension agents without at first giving them all the training they need to properly deliver the services. At the moment, some training centres are being opened and a few extension agents are being deployed according to the plan. Some NGOs are extending support to the woreda offices of agriculture, so as to make sure that the training programmes achieve what they are

meant to. For example, ASE has supported the woreda offices of agriculture in Enebse-Sar Mider and Tehuledera, by giving skills-training to the FTC extension agents and the woreda experts in communication, facilitation, promoting innovation, as well as by preparing the syllabus and training modules.

Health Extension

The Government's health extension policy focuses on addressing poverty-related health conditions—that is, communicable diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea, and health problems that affect particularly mothers and children. According to its health services extension programme (HSEP), female workers will be deployed to deliver 16 packages in four main areas: hygiene and environmental sanitation, disease prevention and control, family health services, and health education and communication on an outreach basis. It also involves the rapid training of health extension workers, two per kebele, and construction and equipping of health posts (one per kebele) through the accelerated expansion of primary health care (PHC) facilities. These health extension workers will render key health services such as personal and environmental hygiene, child immunisation and family planning to each kebele (5,000 inhabitants).

The HSEP will incorporate into it community health promoters such as community health agents (CHAs) and traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who will work under the guidance of health extension workers, and will provide support to households towards behavioural change (e.g., breastfeeding, complementary feeding, immunisation, use of mosquito nets, clean delivery, etc). Besides, new health centres will be built; and health stations will be upgraded to health centres.

Productive Safety Net

In 2005, the Government of Ethiopia launched a productive safety net programme as one approach to end the country's food insecurity. So far 4.8 million people have benefited by it (PASDEP, 2005). The programme has two purposes: (1) to help bridge the income gap of chronically food-insecure households; and (2) to mobilise the communities into building community-based assets for a fee.

The overall development objective of the productive safety net programme is to improve the ***efficiency and productivity of transfers to food-insecure households***, reducing households' vulnerability, improving their resilience to shocks, as well as ensuring their access to multi-annual and predictable resources. The programme is expected to continue addressing a minimum of five million chronically food-insecure people in 262 woredas over the coming years (until 2009/10) (PASDEP, 2005).

The development objective of the productive safety net programme seems smart at the policy level. Productive safety net is a different approach from employment generation schemes (EGS). The strength of the new approach was discussed at a meeting of the National Food Security Strategy/Programme of the Government, in comparison with EGS and from the point of view of the conceptual framework, resources, planning, institution and training. While trying to tackle a drought and famine situation in one of its programme woredas, ASE was able to gain some experience in EGS in the last two years. Working with EGS was no cakewalk for ASE, as the EGS' strategy was not well communicated and institutionalised at the woreda and kebele levels. Yet the people at the kebele and woreda levels are the ones that have to implement the strategy. Unless the productive safety net programme has been duly communicated to the grassroots partners, ASE is afraid that it would face a similar problem. The productive safety net programme has an extensive coverage in the food-insecure woredas of the country, and it certainly affects

(supports but also contradicts) the work and programmes of many partners in these places, including those of ASE.

It is common knowledge that the Government is good at issuing public policies. But not all its policies are translated into programmes and activities as and when they should. One reason is the incongruence between the newfound power that the woreda administrations are currently enjoying and their lack of capacities. The plans and programmes of the Ministry of Capacity Building are supposed to do away with this incongruence. Yet the complexity and diversity of the capacity problems at the woreda level seem to call for the involvement of other partners, too, including NGOs.

The implementation of the productive safety net programme is expected to make a big difference, as spelled out in the strategy document of the Government. ASE is, however, worried that the culture of participatory development as well as the socio-cultural practices, norms and values of the local people would be adversely affected. Then again, it might be possible to prevent that from happening once the capacities of the woreda partners have been enhanced, and a culture of critical review, debate and negotiation developed. As a development partner of local governments, ASE must be seriously engaged in identifying the gaps and problems and in giving feedback to the policymakers at all levels.

Institution Building

The Ethiopian Civil Code and the Associations' Registration Regulation state that registration of associations is necessary in order to make sure that their objectives and activities are lawful and moral (Art. 462 of the Civil Code and Art. 8(b) of the Associations' Registration Regulation), verify that the statements and information contained in their applications for registration and in their bylaws are accurate and reliable (Art. 7(1) of the Regulation), and verify

compliance with mandatory legal provisions (Art. 475 of the Civil Code and Art. 7(2) of the Regulation). These provisions, in general, show that people have the right to form any kind of association, including CBOs and CBIs, and/or to get those already formed duly registered. Although there is no provision that explicitly recognises CBOs and CBIs as distinct social entities, Article 404 of the 1960 Civil Code, which provides that a minimum of two persons can form an association with a view to obtaining a result other than the securing, or sharing, of profits, is applicable to the registration of CBOs and CBIs, as long as they pursue lawful purposes. Furthermore, Article 31 of the 1994 Constitution of FDRE provides that any person has the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose, as long as the activities of the association do not in any way violate the rule of law and the Constitution.

The legal and policy environment does not seem to get in the way of registering CBOs and CBIs and recognising them as legal entities. Indeed, the hitherto unfettered NGO-CBO-CBI collaboration bears testimony to the fact that there is little or no threat of intervention by government bodies, even when the collaborating CBO or CBI is not legally registered. That does not, nonetheless, preclude the fact that much remains to be done—in terms of putting in place a clear division of power and mandate at the regional level and below, and thereby shortening the bureaucratic chain and granting explicit provisions that encourage the involvement in the development arena of CSOs in general and that of CBOs and CBIs in particular. Concerned international organisations, bilateral and multilateral organisations and donor agencies need to, in fact, do more by way of lobbying the concerned government bodies to that end; and CBOs and CBIs will have to demand that their rights be fully respected.

2.8. NGOs' and Donors' Status

Though the Constitution of the Government of Ethiopia grants freedom of association, there is as yet no legal framework to guarantee the registration

and operation in the country of NGOs. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the government body hitherto responsible for registering NGOs, has taken the initiative in this regard and prepared a draft NGO Proclamation for review by the NGO sector. The NGO sector, for its part, has, through its consultative taskforce, subsequently reviewed the document and forwarded its suggestions thereon to the Ministry. It has also drafted an alternative piece of legislation and submitted it to same. The Government is, therefore, expected to enact an NGO Proclamation any time now.

Meanwhile, the Government has already made it known to NGOs that it considers the issue of constituency building an important indicator of their strength and efficiency. Building a constituency and gaining support from the general public has, therefore, become a major concern of all NGOs operating in Ethiopia of late.

The present Ethiopian Government, in its capacity-building programme document, has acknowledged that government institutions are major “stumbling blocks” to the unleashing of CSOs’ energy into achieving the country’s development objectives. The current institutional environment for CSOs can only be described as “disabling” in the sense that the laws, directives and institutional framework governing the regulation of CSOs’ activities impose heavy bureaucratic demands, and constrain CSOs’ ability to mobilise and control the resources they require to undertake development activities (MoCB, 2004).

To address the problem of capacity at the various levels and enhance CSOs’ participation in the democratisation process, in the delivery of services and in decentralisation, the Ministry of Capacity Building (MoCB) has embarked on several public-sector capacity-enhancing programmes. It has, in fact, recently drafted a Civil Society Capacity Building Programme. The objective of this programme is to create an enabling institutional environment and to enhance

the capacity that is necessary for effective civil society participation in promoting development, reducing poverty and strengthening democracy¹. The proposed strategy for achieving the programme's objective is expressed in three sub-programmes: creating an enabling institutional environment, forging partnership between the Government and CSOs, and building the capacities of CSOs.

The programme has various components and initiatives. The components include the following:

- Streamlining CSOs' registration, coordination and monitoring (the initiatives include amending and passing an NGO law, as well as amending legal and administrative regulations for CSOs);
- Increasing CSOs' access to resources; and
- Enhancing the Government's engagement with CSOs.

By and large, the Government's concern has been appreciated and welcomed by CSOs, and the programme components are generally perceived as relevant to addressing the identified problems in the Government's *modus operandi* and in that of CSOs, as well as in the relations of the two: the Government and CSOs. The NGO community could not, however, accept some of the initiatives under the first sub-programme (creating an enabling environment). The idea of a government-designed and government-led programme of partnership-forging and capacity enhancement of CSOs is unpalatable to them. Their preliminary observations report on the draft programme document (2004) stated: "*While we agree to the changes required both within the Government and CSOs, we strongly believe that the required change processes must be led and owned by the right and legitimate owners, if we are ever to see the desired changes. However, the overall strategy fails to make a distinction on the respective roles*

¹ According to the programme document, CSOs include informal traditional institutions, NGOs, membership organisations, etc.

and responsibilities of the Government and CSOs and, as such, it essentially imposes a top-down government-led change process under all the sub-programmes. Once again, while we agree to the change process needed both within the Government and CSOs, we do not subscribe to the view—indeed we strongly oppose it—that a change process in CSOs can be designed, directed and implemented by any government.”

It was a long-standing tradition for the Government of FDRE to enjoy a direct budget support from bilateral, multilateral and other donor communities in Ethiopia. This modality has, nevertheless, been changed soon after the third national elections were held in May of 2005. Following the dispute between the ruling party and the opposition parties with regard to the process and results of the elections, the donor community has come up with a new donation policy known as "protecting basic social services". The new policy is aimed at providing direct access to the woreda government bodies and making sure that the poor communities in the rural areas have adequate access to basic social services. It envisages the following four major components:

- A block grant to support the provision of such basic services as education, health, water and sanitation and agriculture;
- A pooled fund for health towards attaining the MDGs;
- Financial transparency and accountability; and
- Social accountability (institutional governance).

The last component, social accountability, envisages a number of activities such as community institution building, empowerment, community learning, participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation. This component is

accessible to NGOs and CBIs. That means, ASE and its partner CBIs stand to benefit by it.

2.9 Other Services

According to WMS (2004), of the rural communities, only about 17%, 42% and 28% have access to telephone lines, all-weather roads and public-transport services, within a five-kilometer radius, respectively. The report further explains that veterinary, agricultural inputs and micro-finance services were delivered to 31%, 30% and 17% of the population, within a five-kilometer radius, respectively. About 92.4% of all the people in the rural areas and 25.2% of all urban dwellers fetch drinking water from unsafe/unprotected water sources. And 68.9% (78.2% of the rural population and 19.2% of urban dwellers) do not have toilets. Moreover, only 75.3 % of the people who live in urban areas are believed to have ready access to electric power, whereas a mere 1.1% of the rural population is estimated to have access to the service.

3. THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN

3.1. Driving Forces

Empowering communities so that they will be in a position to decide what is best for them is the development thinking that is currently in vogue throughout the world. According to this thinking, the hitherto prevalent one-fits-all and centralised way of doing things must be replaced with a decentralised *modus operandi*. To that end, communities will have to be empowered so that they will be able to decide for themselves and tackle their problems on their own. ASE's rich experience in this regard has led it to believe that empowered communities develop self-reliance and self-confidence, which are prerequisites to bringing

about desirable changes. In fact, that is the main reason that ASE decided to change its strategic direction from service delivery to empowering communities and local institutions.

The rapidly emerging policies and directives of both the Government and donors, the new development approach, project/programme designing methodologies and implementation strategies, participatory monitoring and evaluation systems, MDGs and the competition for the scarce resources that are availed by the international community and the absence of a policy that allows NGOs to be engaged in income-generating activities are also the driving forces behind this strategy.

The Government of Ethiopia has gone on record as saying that it is committed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the services delivered to citizens. An arrangement was also made to deploy trained development agents (DAs), especially for rural development. Of the prevailing programmes of ASE, the second phase of Amaro Integrated Food Security Project (AIFSP) is close to completion (end of 2006) and the third phase of the ongoing IFSPs (BAIFSP and ESIFSP) will be terminated in December of 2008, while new programmes (TIFSP and GIFSP) and a joint programme with a Lalo-Mamma CBI were launched in 2005 and 2006, respectively. To continue operating as a competent organisation, in line with the Government's policies, as well as to optimally utilise its rapidly-increasing resources, ASE has to design a more realistic, appropriate and effective Strategic Plan.

As stated earlier, ASE has a 36-year experience in such rural development endeavours as community training, participatory development, and multifaceted interventions in food security, and community institution building. It also has highly qualified and experienced staff. These, coupled with its vested interest in the equitable development of the nations and nationalities, compel ASE to implement its programmes throughout the country in an evenly

distributed manner. For ASE to be able to do that, nonetheless, it has to at first have a new Strategic Plan.

ASE also strongly believes that educated people can make a difference. Accordingly, it has heavily invested in education for the last 36 years. As we all know, educated communities could initiate and implement self-mobilised development endeavours with little or no external support. These facts, coupled with the result of the stakeholders' analysis, have, therefore, compelled ASE to become a "centre of excellence in community learning". This, of course, requires designing a strategic direction.

3.2. The Preparation Process of the Strategic Plan

ASE's staff have been drawing up its second Strategic Plan since October 2005. At the outset, ASE' Board of Management decided that the task should be carried out by utilising in-house expertise. So a Team was formed and entrusted with the duty of designing the Strategic Plan. Soon after the first Strategic Plan was reviewed, several discussions were held to develop a guiding framework for this strategic planning. Detailed discussions were held with the programme participants, communities, donors and CBI leaders. Checklists and questionnaires were developed and distributed to the stakeholders to guide the discussions and interviews with ASE's Board of Management, government agencies at the regional, zonal and woreda levels, donors and NGOs. The process was participatory and included all who have a legitimate stake in the Strategic Plan. As such, their participation is believed to have added value.

The staff held frequent in-house discussions. Subsequent to that, the views of the stakeholders, which were aired at these discussions, were summarised. The Team also analysed the data collected from stakeholders, using the tools therefor—SLOT and PEST—and reviewed ASE's experiences and policy to determine the critical issues. A zero draft of the strategic document was

subsequently developed and distributed in-house for comments. An in-house consultative meeting of about 20 staff and critical stakeholders at the woreda level was held between October 16th and 18th and comments on the process and contents were collected to further enrich the document.

Moreover, extensive consultation was held with all stakeholders, including ASE's government partners at the woreda, regional and federal levels, NGOs, CBIs, ASE staff, representatives of donor organisations, Board members, former ASE staff, etc. This was done at the national workshop, which was held in Addis Ababa on December 28-29, 2006. The draft strategic document was prepared in English and Amharic (the official national language). The medium of communication of the consultative workshop, too, was Amharic. Why? Because it was believed that no participant would find it difficult to express himself or herself in it—as opposed to English. The two-day consultative workshop was very helpful, in that its outcome helped give shape to the Strategic Plan document. Most of the comments, especially those that had to do with the importance of looking into the logical links among the operational environment, ASE's core functions and the major strategies have added significant value to improving the quality of the document. Comments that focused on strengthening ASE's analysis of the operational environment and on the Government's strategies, too, were forwarded. Needless to say, these were also very helpful.

Following the crucially important consultative workshop, ASE's Management instructed the Team charged with the responsibility of preparing the Strategic Plan to incorporate into it most of the comments forwarded and make the final draft ready for submission to the Board of Management for approval.

3. STAKEHOLDERS' ANALYSIS

ASE strongly believes that its development endeavours concern its stakeholders—including those who have political power, its donors, its Board of Management, the General Assembly, its staff and the ultimate users of the programmes (communities), which have bargaining power over the interventions. The stakeholders in the activities that ASE is engaged in include the concerned government bodies at various levels, its donors, the communities it has been serving, NGOs, its General Assembly, Board of Management and staff. ASE has, therefore, found it necessary to analyse their characteristics, needs and expectations—as part and parcel of the designing of its Strategic Plan.

4.1. Communities

ASE's frontline development partners are the impoverished people living in degraded and food-insecure areas, characterised by low agricultural production, depleted natural resources and inadequate social services. The existence among them of indigenous institutions and their inherent capacity to organise quickly and productively, diagnose local problems, come up with solutions thereto and their social and peer groups' accountability are the strengths of these communities.

The communities expect an enhanced socio-economic status and participation in all development efforts, as well as in the decision-making process. They also expect acknowledgement of their culture, beliefs, knowledge and practices.

ASE will continue to make sure that the communities continue to actively participate in project identification, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It will also continue to enhance their capacities by imparting to them the knowledge it believes would help them to that end, besides giving them skills training. ASE will also be engaged in activities aimed at empowering farmers by helping them to get organised, linking them with such pertinent

partners as micro-finance institutions, justice offices and inputs suppliers and other market participants.

4.2. Government Organisations

As stated earlier, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia launched federalism back in 1995. Ever since then, it has been taking measures aimed at propelling forward the democratisation and decentralisation processes. The Government's strategy for economic and social development is Agricultural-Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI), and its guiding strategic framework for the second phase of the Poverty-Reduction Strategy and Programme (PRSP) is PASDEP, 2005-2010.

As far as ASE is concerned, the Government's commitment to developing agriculture, to giving preponderance to the development of the rural parts of the country, to strengthening the rural-urban linkage, to providing hitherto neglected segments of society with access to basic social services, to curbing the population pressure, to ensuring gender equity and to working in fully gear on other crosscutting issues is commendable. So is the fact that it has formulated and enacted a number of policies that would enable it to do so.

The Government expects all NGOs to register, or to renew their registration, as well as to respect all the laws, rules and regulations of the land. It has repeatedly expressed its appreciation of NGOs' and other CSOs' contributions to the overall national development effort—especially of their involvement in the effort to develop human capital in the rural areas of the country, to ensure food security and to enhance capacity towards attaining the MDGs.

The regional governments expect ASE to undertake activities as per the agreements it has entered into during its registration, to fulfil all its moral obligations, be transparent and honest and submit reports on a regular basis.

ASE, for its part, is appreciative of the fact that the governments at all levels are so committed to reducing poverty and to attaining the MDGs. What is more, ASE considers this commitment to be an opportunity that it should seize in order to work in partnership with them—the governments at the federal, regional and local levels.

4.3. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NGOs are not-for-profit organisations that are engaged in facilitating and supporting the fight against the root causes of human suffering: lack of political, economic and social empowerment, which has resulted in an inability of the people to meet their basic needs. They also pursue activities aimed at promoting the interests of the poor, ensuring gender equity and equality, as well as peace and stability, combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and sustaining development.

As development partners of the Ethiopian Government, NGOs expect their partnership to help bring about the desired change in the socio-economic conditions of the communities they are serving. They also strive to ensure the active participation of the communities in everything that concerns them (the communities), as well as in the decision-making process. NGOs, in general, have at their disposal the financial and human resources that will enable them to render the services they are out to render, besides a grassroots representation in their areas of operation.

ASE is expected to share its experiences with others and contribute whatever it can to attaining their common goals, by establishing and institutionalising networking as regular functions of its operations. It is also expected to contribute to the effort to empower communities by establishing CBIs, ensuring

the involvement of non-formal institutions in the national effort to reduce poverty and advocating good governance.

4.4. Donors

ASE's donors are engaged in facilitating and supporting the empowerment of communities and in ensuring food security. They are also very much interested in promoting the interests of the poor, gender equity and equality, peace, stability and sustainable development, besides being committed to combating HIV/AIDS.

The donors expect ASE to draw up a plan for the effective and efficient utilisation of its available resources, before it commences operation. They also expect ASE to do an assessment of the effects and impacts that its ongoing programmes will have on the target groups, select the best intervention possible, in line with its experience and competence, and limit the scope and area of its coverage. They also like to see the overhead cost of the NGO they have accepted as their partner in development minimised as much as possible.

Other requirements that ASE's donors would like to see it meet include playing a proactive role in networking, being actively involved in advocating good governance, ensuring transparency in everything it does and accountability to the rules and regulations of the Government. They also want to see ASE share its experiences with others and to thereby contribute to the attainment of their common goals.

4.5 Micro-Finance Institutions (MFIs)

Micro-finance, or micro-credit, institutions are committed to providing credit to the poorest segments of the population who have all along been denied access to credit services by the formal financial sector. As partners in the national

effort to reduce poverty, these institutions extend very small and short-term loans to very poor would-be entrepreneurs, so that they will use the loans as start-up capital and extricate themselves from poverty. They do so by making it easy for the poor to borrow and by minimising the risk to themselves through special arrangements.

It goes without saying that NGOs and MFIs are partners in the effort to reduce poverty. So they will have to work in close collaboration. Cognizant of this fact, ASE and the micro-finance institution known in short as PEACE have entered into an agreement so that ASE's development programmes will be complemented by PEACE's financial services. Needless to say, this arrangement is cost-effective and avoids duplication of efforts, as it means ASE will work on the software part, to make the participants in its programmes potential entrepreneurs, and PEACE will provide the financial services needed to that end.

In those areas where PEACE is not yet operational, however, ASE will have no choice other than working with other MFIs—even though, at times, this is easier said than done, given the fact many MFIs are hesitant to work in those areas where they believe their efforts will bring them little or no monetary benefits. And where there are no MFIs, ASE will have to initiate the establishment of credit and savings associations that will be run by CBIs.

The General Assembly and the Board of Management

ASE's General Assembly (GA) and Board of Management (BoM) are its highest governing bodies. As such, they are responsible for formulating its policies, for initiating the designing of a strategic direction as well as for overseeing its (ASE's) overall performance, to make sure that it is on the right track towards attaining its mission.

The two governing bodies expect ASE to design feasible projects, in collaboration with the stakeholders, in line with its experience and competence—as well as to properly implement them. The other things that they expect ASE to do include an optimal utilisation of resources, democratic management of its human resources, strict adherence to the strategic direction endorsed by the General Assembly and to the policies and regulations of the Government and donors. They also expect it to promote participatory development, to frequently monitor and review its projects and to do process and impact assessments. Moreover, the GA and the BoM would like to be regularly briefed about ASE's overall performance and about the impacts that the programmes have had on the target groups.

4.5. ASE's Staff

It goes without saying that ASE's staff are the ones who execute its programmes. As doing so is no mean feat, ASE has made it a point to make sure that its staff are highly competent, have rich experience in rural development and are committed to realising its vision and to accomplishing its mission.

ASE's staff, for their part, expect it to enhance their capacities by, among other things, getting them acquainted with the latest development trends and with the pertinent policies and regulations of the Government. They also expect to be given the opportunity to be actively involved in participatory management and in all decisions pertaining to the planning and execution of ASE's projects.

They need to participate in analysing alternatives, developing new ideas and to be involved in the decision-making process and to enhance team spirit by creating occasions that would help them do that.

ASE strongly believes that a workforce that has a sense of belonging, in addition to the required competence and experience, is determinant to the accomplishment of its mission. ASE, therefore, makes sure that its staff have no reason to seek employment elsewhere, by providing them with competitive salaries and benefits, as well as by making the working environment conducive for them to be as productive as possible.

5. A SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis has recently been done on ASE as a prerequisite to designing this Strategic Plan. The outcome of the analysis is depicted here below.

5.1. Opportunities

- The Constitution of FDRE recognises the rights of all citizens and favours decentralisation. The Government has also put in place the policies and strategies that serve as the appropriate legal framework for ensuring food security and gender equity, for combating HIV/AIDS, for promoting education, population control, health services, environmental protection, etc.—all of which are prerequisites to reducing poverty;
- Political and economic power has been decentralised, in accordance with the wishes of ASE's donors, thereby paving the road to the participatory development of grassroots communities;
- The international community is keen to support the attainment of the MDGs;

- Donors unreservedly support the effort to reduce poverty, and new donors have shown interest in following suit;
- The partnership between NGOs and the Governments at the different levels is strengthened;
- The NGOs have networked with one another, with a view to lobbying the concerned government bodies for an enabling environment and to advocating other issues of common concern; and
- Many of the smallholder farmers with whom ASE has been working have manifested, among other things, the will and ability to undertake certain activities in an innovative manner and have enough indigenous knowledge that ASE can build on.

5.2. Threats

- ❖ The still-lingering legacy of the centralised and blueprint development approach;
- ❖ The inadequate capacities of the local governments to properly implement the pertinent policies and strategies;
- ❖ The fact that the GOs at various levels consider the NGOs as nothing more than gap fillers;
- ❖ The fact that the international community (donors) seems to be currently focused on combating international terrorism, which could eventually compel it to divert the resources it has been donating to ASE to this cause;
- ❖ The increase in the prevalence of natural and man-made disasters;
- ❖ The fact that such pandemics as malaria and HIV/AIDS are spreading unabated;
- ❖ The fact that there is, at the moment, a high turnover of civil servants—the underlying causes of which seem to be the frequent

structural changes and the unpredictability of the political environment; and

- ❖ The absence of a policy that allows NGOs to be involved in income-generating activities.

5.3. Strengths

- ✓ ASE has gained extensive experience in rural development and is a trail-blazer in community training and in the production of training materials;
- ✓ It has a well-developed organisational set-up, competent staff, physical assets and facilities;
- ✓ It has already developed organisational policies, strategies, operational guidelines and systems that have made it possible for it to effectively manage its resources and to smoothly implement its development programmes;
- ✓ ASE is committed to creating an enabling environment for its target groups to actively participate at all stages of the implementation of its programmes;
- ✓ It is committed to empowering the rural poor by giving them the support they need to establish their own institutions as well as to strengthen them;
- ✓ ASE has been able to win the trust and respect of the communities it has been serving;
- ✓ It wholeheartedly respects the indigenous knowledge, culture, religions and beliefs of the communities it serves;
- ✓ It has forged strong relations with its long-standing donors;
- ✓ ASE has indisputably made a big difference in the lives of the rural households—in particular, in the lives of the poor and women—in the areas where it has been operating;

- ✓ It is used to working in remote, challenging, food-insecure and conflict-prone areas;
- ✓ ASE actively participates in various national and international networks/forums; and
- ✓ It has been able to scale up and help the Government replicate some of its good practices—notably, ACCESS, and farmers’ innovative activities.

5.4. Limitations

- The scopes and areas that ASE covers are not commensurate with the extensive experiences and competence of its staff—that is, it is compelled to underperform its potential;
- Although ASE is on the right track in this direction, a lot more is expected of it to be a *bona fide* centre of excellence in community training;
- Inadequate utilisation of its human resources and assets—such as its printing press, garage and office compound;
- ASE’s planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) exercises are focused on the programmes’ outputs, rather than on the impacts thereof;
- Its Information Management System is not yet fully developed;
- Many of its staff at the Head Office are occupied in networking, even though the networking has not yet been institutionalised at the programme office level;
- It is unduly incurring repair and maintenance costs, simply because it is using relatively old vehicles;
- The salaries it is paying its staff, as well as their benefit packages, are not competitive—which means, it could consequently lose some of its highly experienced and competent staff; and

- ASE does not as yet have a fundraising strategy; nor has it been exerting the effort needed to diversify its donor base.

6. STRATEGIC ISSUES

It is common knowledge that the long-term viability of an organisation has a positive correlation with the scope and coverage of the critical issues it is addressing. That in turn requires a proper identification of its challenges and threats. As per the stakeholders' analysis done at various levels, ASE has identified the following to be the main critical issues that it should address in the coming five years (2007-11):

- Participation;
- Participatory innovation development;
- Establishing CBIs;
- Ensuring food security and sustainable natural resources management in its areas of intervention;
- Promoting community learning and the productive safety net programme; and
- Mainstreaming crosscutting issues and organisational development.

6.1. Participation

ASE has been involving communities “whose voice is not considered decisive” in the development and implementation of all its programmes, knowing full well that community participation is the cornerstone to ensuring the success of a decentralised development programme. ASE has learnt that allocation of adequate time and budget and setting SMART indicators in the project cycle are crucial.

To its chagrin, ASE has, however, noticed that some community members expect immediate reward for participating in its programmes. That, of course, is a reflection of the dependency syndrome that the centralised and blueprint development approach brought with it. The fact that NGOs are seen as nothing more than gap fillers in the productive safety net programmes that are being implemented throughout the country, too, has led many communities to expect NGOs to dish out services to them and to pay them *per diem* for their participation. The third contributing factor to this distorted view of participation is the absence of a clear-cut definition of the word “participation” among the stakeholders. For these and other reasons, ASE is all the more determined to promote participatory development. This it plans to do by sharing with others its knowledge and experience with regard to participation, facilitating the setting of development agendas, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and decision-making at all phases of a development programme.

6.2 Participatory Innovation Development

The Strategic Plan document for the period 2001-06 had depicted ASE as an inward-looking institution. Accordingly, in the last five years, it was unable either to share its experience with other institutions or to learn from them. That was the reason that ASE’s involvement in networking was indicated as a new strategic direction in the plan document for the period 2001-06. Still, ASE was able to get involved in networking with many organisations. Its shining performance in this regard was, nonetheless, that it was able to play a determinant role in the creation of a national learning and advocacy platform for the promotion of farmers’ innovation in Ethiopia (PROFIEET). PROFIEET definitely is a vibrant network, and has gained recognition as such by all concerned—including donors, the Government and the international community. The networking was spearheaded by ASE’s Head Office staff. As a result, ASE is now acknowledged as an important international actor in the

global movement for the promotion of local innovations in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management (Prolinnova).

Rewarding though ASE's committed engagement (in terms of time, money, ideas, etc.) in the national and international networks for the promotion of farmers' innovation has been, there is no denying the fact that much remains to be done at the grassroots level. For one thing, the approach has to be institutionalised; for another, it has to play an exemplary role in the identification, development and promotion of farmers' innovativeness, besides influencing the policies and practices of woreda- and regional-level government bodies and partner institutions. ASE has, therefore, found it necessary to promote participatory innovation development and thereby empower the communities it is serving, so that they will be able to play a decisive role in the research and development initiatives that could affect their lives and their environment. To that end, it is imperative that ASE exert more effort at the grassroots level, so as to make sure that its success in the networking of the promotion of farmers' innovativeness is not lopsided.

6.3 Community-Based Institutions (CBIs)

Empowerment is ultimately aimed at changing the social, economic and political decision-making structures—assuming that, as they are, these structures are the root causes of all human suffering. Such change in turn requires the existence of a community organisation that can bargain on behalf of its constituency for due transfer of power.

The prevailing non-formal structures in the country are grassroots-oriented, maintain cohesive social bonds; they are also trusted by the members that constitute them, and have a permanent nature (Shifferaw, 2003). Some of these structures—for instance, *Idirs*—are often used by some NGOs to cater to communities' economic and social development agendas.

ASE, nevertheless, has reservations about using *idirs* and the like, as it holds the view that *Idirs* have been able to exist for so long and to be so popular mainly because they emanated from the true needs of the communities—with no outside interference by NGOs, GOs, donors, etc. ASE, in fact, balks at the idea of making them undertake its rural development agenda, afraid that burdening them so would make it difficult for them to properly play their traditional roles, and that it would entail for them conflicts of interest that may eventually force them to deviate from their *raison d'être* (Amanuel 2006). ASE's leave-*idirs*-alone attitude has, however, the support of most of the social anthropologists in the country.

Actually, ASE has an additional reason for not being enthusiastic about working with *idirs*: studies indicate that *idirs* flout certain democratic principles like universal franchise and gender equity and equality. In other words, their leaders are seldom elected in fair, free and periodic elections; women are rarely recognised as *bona fide* members, unless their husbands are deceased; nor can they be leaders of *idirs*. Moreover, ASE was established to respond to the development needs of the poor, women and other marginalised social groups—all of which are issues not adequately addressed by *idirs*.

These reservations and fears led ASE to initiate the establishment of development-oriented, democratic, non-sectarian CBIs that will not discriminate against anyone because of one's gender, occupation, wealth status, age, etc. True to form, the CBIs established in some of ASE's operational areas have proven that they are accommodative, that they treat all community members equally, and that they are dependable to ensure sustainability (Amanuel May 2006). ASE, therefore, considers the establishment of these CBIs to be its entry and exit strategy. What is more, a few of its partners have said that these structures are development-endeavour-friendly.

6.4 Food Security

ASE's food-security programmes have indisputably made significant contributions to improving the food-security situations in its intervention areas. The fact that the food-insecure months in these areas have been reduced from five to three months bears testimony to that. Moreover, the reviews made on the existing IFSPs have disclosed that encouraging results have been obtained in the accessibility and availability of food. But the effort made towards food utilisation and impact assessment leaves much to be desired.

That ASE has made food security its top priority development agenda may not be doubted, as its major criterion for selecting its intervention area remains to be "food-insecure woredas". ASE believes that during the coming years, nonetheless, the issue of food security must be viewed intertwined with community empowerment. As such, the community will have to play a bigger role in this endeavour and thereby give ASE the support it needs, the focus being not just on ensuring food security, but on ensuring **sustainable** food security. ASE' role, on the contrary, will have to be gradually reduced. To that end, ASE's major work will consist of facilitating the conditions necessary for undertaking activities that enhance production and income-generation and introducing appropriate indicators for measuring the impacts of its interventions.

6.5 Natural Resources

The natural resources of the country—that is, its natural forest, soil, water and wildlife—are being depleted at an alarming rate. The major contributing factors to this depletion are, of course, the rapid population growth, which has resulted in increasingly fragmenting farmland sizes, backward technology and

poor institutional setups. Since agriculture is Ethiopia's mainstay, farming is the only occupation that absorbs the rapidly growing population. That, however, means claiming more land for the cultivation of crops by clearing forests, woodlands, wetlands and rugged lands year after year. The fact that people have little or no choice to eke out a living during the food-insecure months, other than selling fuel wood and charcoal, have also exacerbated the problem.

The Government of Ethiopia has repeatedly expressed its commitment to bringing to a halt this depletion of the country's natural resources. It has also gone on record as saying that the best way to go about doing that is through a participatory planning, joint management of the natural resources and sharing of the benefits that accrue from them. The international community, too, is keen to support all efforts to manage natural resources in a sustainable way. ASE, therefore, plans to join hands with all promoters of sustainable natural resources management and utilisation—including the Ethiopian Government and international donors—as well as with concerned communities, and make its humble contribution to the whole effort.

6.6 The Productive Safety Net Programme

International donors have pledged to give financial support to the effort being made to end food insecurity in Ethiopia. As the benefits of this productive safety net programme will be extended to NGOs that are engaged in activities aimed at ending food insecurity in Ethiopia, ASE stands to benefit by it (the programme)—even though it cannot access the support directly. In other words, the sheer success of the programme will help ASE accomplish its mission.

On the other hand, ASE cannot help but worry that one of the provisions of the productive safety net programme could pose a serious challenge to its

development approach. As disclosed earlier, ASE has been engaged in such activities as participatory learning and action (community training), participatory research, natural resources management. And the communities with which it has been undertaking these activities have been throwing their weight behind them (the activities) voluntarily, with no payment whatsoever for their participation. As a matter of principle, ASE balks at the idea of paying community members for doing something that is aimed at significantly changing their situation for the better. Ever since implementation of the productive safety net programme kicked off, nevertheless, the number of people attending its community-learning sessions has been dropping steadily—apparently because, unlike those who run the productive safety net programme, ASE pays no money to participants. That, needless to say, has already had a knock-on effect on all its development projects.

6.7 Community Learning

ASE would like to reiterate the fact that it has, from its inception, attached the highest importance possible to training and education. Its 36-year experience in this regard has shown it that empowered communities adapt appropriate technology, initiate and implement self-mobilised development endeavours with minimal external support. Based on the result of the evaluation, conducted at the end of its five phases, ASE has introduced a training methodology that is needs-based, group-focused, interactive and action-oriented and thereby improved the quality of community learning. As it is a trail-blazer in community training, as far as Ethiopia is concerned, and because it is interested in sharing its cumulated knowledge and experience with others, ASE has also established a facilitation and communication training centre (FACT). As a matter of fact, it is now poised to make itself a “centre of excellence in community learning”. The following key issues of community learning, nonetheless, require the design and implementation of appropriate strategies.

- As part and parcel of its paradigm shift—that is, from service delivery to community empowerment—ASE has changed its approach from "training" its target groups to learning together with them as per its new approach: participatory learning. Likewise, having turned its back on "teaching", it has been facilitating learning, and instead of trying to "transfer knowledge", it has opted for knowledge sharing. It, however, goes without saying that such a drastic shift of approach requires enhancing the capacities of its staff. Moreover, the shift compels ASE to come up with a home-grown methodology and tools for efficiently facilitating community learning sessions with the farmers it is serving. ASE is greatly encouraged by the collective ability and readiness that its staff have so far manifested to quickly adopt its new approaches, which give preponderance to participatory learning and facilitation. The effort it has hitherto made towards the realisation of its participatory innovation development programme has not, however, been as yet able to bear the desired fruit.

- Community training has all along been ASE's core function and particular to it. And its own development agents (DAs) have been giving the training. ASE has, however, gladly noticed that the Ethiopian Government has of late adopted a similar approach and that establishing farmers' training centres and offering farmers courses in agriculture has now become the core duty of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. As a result of that, nonetheless, there are now certain questions that ASE's Strategic Plan will have to find appropriate answers to—including the following:

- Should the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and ASE run such training programmes in the same kebele simultaneously?
- Should ASE continue to deploy its own development agents to give this training as it has been doing all along?

- ASE has been implementing its adult and non-formal education programme mainly by organising community-training programmes that encompass social learning, participatory research and development as well as functional adult literacy. ASE has, of course, been implementing a number of other adult and non-formal education initiatives such as correspondence education in agriculture for farmers, community radio education and ACCESS as well. All of these initiatives, ASE believes, will help enable it to attain its strategic goal of becoming a centre of excellence in community learning. In the last strategic plan period, a number of activities that should have helped ASE attain this goal were initiated and implemented. Nevertheless, because they were not undertaken as seriously as they should have, and due to the fact they were not institutionalised within ASE, they were not able to. ASE will have to, therefore, come up with a carefully prepared roadmap this time round—that is, a roadmap that will definitely help it become a centre of excellence in community learning.
- The Government’s plan to establish FTCs, assign for them trainers and train farmers in agricultural skills presents ASE with an opportunity to work with it (the Government) towards attaining their common goal. The FTCs are aimed at developing human capital in the rural areas of Ethiopia—which is a goal that ASE, too, has been trying to attain. The FTC approach is, however, new to the Government. That means, translating it into action will inevitably be quite difficult for the extension workers it will deploy, given the fact that they lack the appropriate experience. ASE, on the other hand, has gained rich experience in these areas—that is, in community training, communication, facilitation, participatory research and development, as well as in promoting indigenous knowledge and local innovations, etc. So it is well positioned to help improve the

competence of the Government's extension workers who will be assigned to run the FTC. ASE will have to, therefore, figure out how it could work closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to that end.

6.8 Mainstreaming Crosscutting Issues

Mainstreaming is a strategy for addressing crosscutting issues. It involves identifying crosscutting issues that are central to policy development, research, advocacy, and PPME. The major crosscutting issues identified so far as such by ASE are gender, HIV/AIDS and conflict management.

Gender issues are deep-rooted in the cultural and traditional practices of the communities. And these cultural and traditional practices, by and large, have made it virtually impossible for women to fully exercise their human rights and meet all their practical and strategic needs. Fortunately, nonetheless, the Ethiopian Government is committed to reversing this situation by attaining the MDGs, which provide for the elimination of all gender-based discrimination. ASE believes that it and the Government must concert their efforts in this regard for an obvious reason.

As in many other developing countries, in Ethiopia, too, HIV/AIDS is no longer just a health problem, but also a developmental challenge. Aware of that, the Ethiopian Government has come up with a policy and a multi-sectoral strategy for combating the pandemic. ASE has noticed that HIV/AIDS has been spreading like wildfire in its intervention areas, mainly because such undesirable practices as alcohol abuse, polygamy and unsafe sexual intercourse are rampant. ASE believes that harmful traditional practices like cutting tonsils, extracting teeth and tattooing are making their own contributions to the spread of the pandemic, since the so-called traditional healers use blades and needles (often repeatedly) to render their "services".

ASE has been implementing a conflict prevention and resolution programme in conflict-prone areas—mainly in the weredas that are adjacent to both SNNPR and Oromia. ASE's aim in this is, of course, promoting peace and stability—in the absence of which development is unthinkable.

Conflicts arise for various reasons. For instance, the stakeholders' analysis has disclosed that the young generation, which is rapidly growing in number, often gets into conflicts with the Government because of land distributions. In and around ASE's intervention areas, occasional conflicts flare up between those who like to see their area further urbanised and those who prefer tilling the land. ASE is also led to believe that wherever there is a development intervention, there is bound to be some kind of conflict. The degree of such a conflict might be too low to be considered a cause for concern initially. If not resolved right away, or nipped in the bud, nevertheless, it could eventually get out of control. Development interventions, at times, bring a bonanza to one group of people, in the form of a better access to scarce resources, and leave another group to be just spectators. Such a situation, of course, is a recipe for a serious conflict between groups of people. A case in point is the development of an irrigation facility. This usually is a cause of conflict between those who live upstream and those who live downstream. So it is imperative that it be handled with care. Also, making an area free of the tsetse fly and malaria lures a large number of people to move into that area and settle down. The resources management in the area will, however, inevitably entail some kind of conflict. Most importantly, the fact that ASE's main strategy is building independent rural institutions (CBIs) is in and of itself a cause for concern. Why? Because ASE anticipates conflicts among the members of the institutions, between the leadership of the CBIs and ASE's staff, or between the CBIs and the local government, even between the CBIs and other social organisations. ASE, therefore, considers conflict resolution to be one of the crosscutting issues of its interventions.

6.9 Constituency Building

CSOs in general and NGOs in particular are expected to have informed constituencies that can articulate their interests. NGOs' constituencies are the communities and institutions whose concerns they (the NGOs) are trying to address through their work. For an NGO to be well anchored in its constituency is the hallmark of its commitment to promoting its (the constituency's) interests. It is the constituency that gives legitimacy and weight to all the efforts that the NGO is exerting to influence political and economic decisions.

An NGO needs to have a strong and fully-engaged constituency in order to be able to accomplish its mission. For its part, such an NGO will have to do everything it can, to establish them as viable entities over the long term and to enable them to advocate different issues.

Cognizant of the importance that building a constituency has, ASE will continue to work in full gear towards empowering the poor and marginalised people in its intervention areas. Likewise, it will keep on enlisting the support of volunteers who share its vision and mission and are, therefore, ready to work with it. Thus ASE will strive to develop for itself a positive image. That in turn should help it multiply its supporters and development partners.

6.10 Organisational Development

Organisational development refers to what takes place when there are changes in the organisation's mission, or when operations are restructured, new technologies or programmes are introduced, or when mergers and major collaborations occur. In short, it is a strategy designed to accomplish the

overall goal of an organisation following a fundamental reorientation of operations.

6.10.1 Organisational Structure

The fact that it has behind it a 36-year experience in rural development, competent and highly qualified staff, an interest in sharing with others its cumulated knowledge and experience—coupled with the change in government policies and the shift in global development trends—have inspired self-confidence in ASE to play the role of facilitator in development endeavours, with a view to empowering the rural communities and grassroots government organisations. This shift in its development approach, its determination to retain an optimal number of its competent staff, its commitment to ensuring gender equity and equality, as well as the need to pay its staff competitive salaries call for a change in ASE's organisational structure.

6.10.2 Human Resources Development (HRD)

For ASE, human resources development has been an organised learning experience. And it has hitherto been pursuing it mainly to improve job performance and growth within a given timeframe. As such, ASE has developed manuals to manage its human resources. Now that it has changed its mission and development approach, however, ASE will have to change its approach to its human resources development as well, and thereby make it congruent with the new situation.

6.10.3 Financial Sustainability

The financial sustainability of an organisation could be ensured through, among others, diversified fund sources, effective and efficient operations. Accordingly, ASE had drawn up strategies for directing its operations in the

last five years. Now that ASE has to operate in a different environment, besides the fact that it has revisited its mission and approach, it is imperative that it design a financial sustainability strategy that is concordant with the new situation.

7 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Vision:

ASE aspires to see “a developed Ethiopia where citizens enjoy a dignified life”.

Mission:

“Facilitate the empowerment of the poor and marginalised in Ethiopia towards a sustainable livelihood”.

Values:

Knowledge sharing/Organizational learning

We systematically incorporate new ideas (local and external) into the designing and execution of our programmes because we believe that everyone has knowledge of some type and that knowledgeable people make a difference.

Respect

We respect the rights, culture, beliefs and dignity of the communities we work with.

Simplicity

ASE duly values team spirit and a friendly working atmosphere.

People-centred

We value peoples’ potential in developing the capacity of the community we work with to ensure sustainable development.

Principles:

Transparency and Accountability

We are transparent and accountable to the community, our development partners and the public at large.

Participatory and gender-sensitive

We are in favour of a participatory and gender-sensitive development approach.

Recognition of indigenous knowledge

We recognise indigenous knowledge and local innovations as bases for all types of development initiatives.

Quality service

We provide quality service at optimum cost.

8 STRATEGIC GOALS**Organisational Goal**

Contribute to the overall effort to ensure a sustainable livelihood for the poor and marginalised.

Sub-Goals

To create an enabling environment for the communities to decide their destiny;

To ensure food security at the household level;

To realise sustainable natural resources management;

To become “a centre of excellence in community learning”;

To influence government policies and practices, with a view to bringing about positive changes;

To ensure gender equity and the full respect of reproductive health rights; and

To put in check the spread of HIV/AIDS.

9 DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Poverty has remained stubbornly high in Africa for decades now, so much so that the continent is associated with it. The main contributing factors to this situation are widely believed to be top-down plans and external-driven

investment programmes. It is, therefore, high time that the conditions necessary for letting local communities and institutions take the driver's seat are created. It is high time that they are given a new set of powers, rights and obligations (Callisto Madavo, Vice-President, Africa Region, the World Bank).

ASE strongly believes that communities can be organised quickly and productively to diagnose local problems, come up with solutions thereto, lay down priorities, draw up elaborate plans of action, and strengthen community organisations and accountability. Its 36-year experience has also led it to believe that devolving political and economic power to the local governments and communities paves the way for effective and efficient development.

There is also empirical evidence that social and peer pressure creates accountability within a community. The empowerment of communities and local governments will make it possible to harness this social capital and provide downward accountability and transparency to the users of the frontline services. ASE also believes that communities and local governments develop skills through technical assistance, learning by doing, and that these skills gradually make them competent enough to implement large projects.

As stated earlier, the development thinking that is in vogue nowadays focuses on participatory development, the commitment of governments to devolving power to communities' and local institutions, and down and upward accountability. One of the reasons that ASE decided to change its development approach from service delivery to community empowerment is its determination to move with the times. Accordingly, ASE will, from now on, play the roles of **facilitator** and **capacity enhancer**. That means, everything that ASE will be doing in the coming years will have **community empowerment** as its philosophical basis. Community empowerment is, of course, understood to mean "a product of a struggle through which poor people achieve more control over their lives and a fairer share of public services and government resources.

That means, ASE will make full use of all its resources and energies towards ***developing the social and human capital of local communities*** and to helping the local people to ***effectively communicate with the outside world*** and thereby maximise their socio-economic benefits, besides being able to fully enjoy their constitutional rights.

To ASE, the community empowerment approach will address two major dimensions of development. The first dimension is the one that will help a development organisation like the ASE to seriously and systematically look into such community assets as indigenous knowledge, local innovations, local materials, human power, local institutions, social trust, social networks, etc., so as to develop them in such a way that they can be put to use and improve the living conditions of the local people. The second dimension will help the community to establish effective linkages with other actors such as the local government, NGOs, donors, etc., with a view to maximising the benefits that should accrue to it (the community). This particular dimension will indeed enable the local community to be so empowered as to feel confident enough to demand that all their rights be fully respected—without having to compromise their rightful role in development.

The community empowerment approach that ASE has now adopted is, conceptually, a crossbreed of the Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which pays greater attention to developing a community's resources, and of the Rights-Based Development approach that makes meeting the basic needs of a community part and parcel of the concerned local government's obligations.

Even though the ABCD approach is a classic example of the bottom-up and sustainable development model, it does not indicate the specific actions that the local people could take to have their rights in development fully respected. The rights-based approach, for its part, assumes that the role of development

organisations like ASE is to make the people aware that they have a right to have their area developed. According to this approach, elected governments are obligated to meet the basic needs of the community. What a development organisation needs to do, therefore, is to make the people it is serving aware of their rights, so that they will demand that they be fully respected, and to enhance the service delivery capacity of the local government. As such, it has a limitation, in that it does not consciously take into consideration the need for developing and putting to use the huge assets of the local people. The rights-based approach, too, has its own limitation: by unduly focusing on the obligation of the elected government to ensure community development, it unwittingly encourages the development of a dependency syndrome among the local community—that is, a dependency on outsiders (duty bearers). In other words, it could gradually end up eroding the indigenous knowledge, the social capital, self-confidence, industriousness, and innovativeness of the community.

ASE has, therefore, designed its community empowerment approach by incorporating into it the positive sides of the two approaches and by making sure that their limitations are properly complemented. According to this approach, a community will be empowered by adopting a systematic approach to developing its resources, including indigenous knowledge and social capital, and to being deliberately engaged in human rights issues— through education and institution building—and by improving its communication with the local government, etc. This approach comprises four major elements. ASE's strategies, programmes and activities for the coming years will, therefore, be entirely dependent on these elements. In a nutshell, the four elements of the community empowerment are the following:

- Improving the community's access to information;
- Enhancing participatory development;
- Developing social capital and community assets; and
- Enhancing good governance.

What will be special about this plan document is that it will reflect a "complete transformation" in ASE's approach from service delivery to community empowerment. True, the previous Strategic Plan, too, had, to a certain extent, incorporated into it ASE's institutional transformation. Accordingly, a number of strategic and technical measures have been taken in the last five years—starting from the year 2001. However eager ASE was to achieve that, nevertheless, its effort to that end was not able to bear the desired fruit. Why? Because the legacy of the old thinking (the service delivery approach) was so pervasive that neither ASE's leadership nor its staff were able to completely break away from it. Besides, ASE's organisational structure and programme contents were such that transformational change proved to be unachievable.

Still, there is no denying the fact that every activity that ASE undertook to that end has helped it to learn much about community empowerment and about what it needs to do to make institutional transformation achievable during the new strategic plan period. For example, one of the lessons that ASE has learnt in the last five years is that withdrawal from service delivery does not necessarily mean that ASE will have nothing to do with making basic social and economic services available to the local community. What it means, instead, is that the local community's institution, the CBI, which will be made viable and vibrant through ASE's intervention, will take over the role of fulfilling the basic needs of the local people. Secondly, as stated earlier, ASE has carefully looked into the *pros* and *cons* of a number of development approaches. And, having done so, it has eventually come up with the right mix. The community empowerment approach, which has been given greater attention in this document, is not, therefore, an entirely new approach for ASE, but an approach that ASE has been able to fully adopt, after dabbling with it in the last five years. In other words, the whole purpose of this document is to build on ASE's previous experience in this regard and fully develop within ASE an institutional culture of "community empowerment". ASE will have to,

therefore, make sure that its institutional transformational process will not take it another five years. To that end, the following issues will have to be addressed in the coming years:

- Ensuring the complete transformation of ASE's leadership and staff—in terms of their knowledge about the conceptual and strategic issues of community empowerment, attitudes and behaviour;
- A strong commitment on the part of the leadership to bringing about institutional transformation—though it might mean losing staff whose positions will be less relevant to the new approach, seeing long-standing relations sour and facing unforeseen challenges;
- Developing strategies that could guide programme contents, in light of the community-empowerment approach;
- Adopting an organisational structure that will be congruent with the new approach; and
- Introducing new organisational culture and norms that will help speed up the transformation.

Thus, this time round, ASE is determined to make its institutional transformation a reality. That does not, however, mean that implementation of its ongoing programmes will come to a halt. Oh no! Implementation of ASE's ongoing programmes will continue, although some of the programmes might take as many as two or three years to fully implement. All the same, they will have to be implemented. Maximum effort will, nonetheless, be made to implement them in the spirit of the new approach. And those agreements that ASE has entered into with the Government and donors will be respected as they should—without being affected by this shift in approach.

In the event that ASE finds it absolutely necessary to introduce some change to the ongoing programmes, nevertheless, it will do so only after it has consulted with its stakeholders (mainly the Government and ASE's donors).

10 CORE FUNCTIONS

10.7 Community Learning (participatory learning and action)

- Agriculture, natural resources and social issues/infrastructure, gender, HIV/AIDS and conflict,

10.8 Empowerment of Communities and Local Institutions

- Supporting participatory development;
- Supporting community-based institutions;
- Supporting the formation of other economic institutions that strengthen the work of the CBIs;
- Identifying and developing the social networks, values and norms of the local community; and
- Enhancing the capacities of local government institutions.

10.9 Participatory Research and Development

- Supporting the identification and promotion of local innovations/indigenous knowledge;
- Facilitating participatory innovation development;
- Generating empirical evidence on selected themes for policy lobby and advocacy; and
- Facilitating systematic learning in programme approaches and strategies.

10.10 Networking and Advocacy

- Being engaged in policy advocacy and lobbying at all levels on selected themes;
- Initiating and forging networks relevant to ASE's mission and approaches; and
- Adopting new ideas from others.

11.IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

11.1. Programme Strategies

11.1.1. Identification of Working Areas and Targeting

In the last five years, the major area selection criterion of ASE was the level of food security because its mission was to secure food in the targeted areas. In the coming strategic period, however, ASE plans to play the role of facilitator towards community empowerment. Accordingly, it has designed the following strategic directions:

11.1.1.1. Area Identification

According to PASDEP, Ethiopia consists of at least three different economic and agro-climatic zones: the traditionally settled semi-arid highlands, the potentially productive semi-tropical valley areas and the hot semi-arid lowlands. In recent times, ASE has implemented its programme in the woredas labelled “food insecure”, especially in the semi-arid highlands. According to ActionAid Ethiopia’s Country Strategy, 2000-04, in pastoralist areas (hot semi-arid lowlands), drought and displacement recur and food insecurity is a major problem. Therefore, in the coming strategic period, ASE will operate in traditionally settled semi-arid highland and hot semi-arid lowland agro-climatic zones, provided that the woredas are categorised among the 267 “food-insecure” woredas (PASDEP).

- It has been learnt that the level of food security varies across the woredas. Hence, the regional state governments will be requested to provide the needy woredas. And, based on

resources, experience and efficiency, a woreda and a kebele administration will be selected, in collaboration with the stakeholders at the different levels.

- Rural towns and urban areas: Poverty is getting more rampant in rural towns and urban areas. ASE will, therefore, draw up an intervention strategy and work with woreda stakeholders and municipalities and intervene on HIV/AIDS and gender equity, and facilitate social infrastructure development (adult education, water points and pit latrines) and access to credit services.
- Remote and less developed regions and woredas: The magnitude of poverty in the regions and woredas mirrors a huge disparity in living conditions. Hence, ASE will develop appropriate selection criteria and intervention strategy and work on community education, institution building, participatory research, gender, conflict and HIV/AIDS.

11.1.1.2 Area Expansion

The expansion of ASE will be determined based on food insecurity, effectiveness (competence and other comparative advantages), efficiency as well as proximity with the programme woredas. Accordingly, ASE plans to expand in two woredas per year, so as to adopt a concentric (with a common middle point) expansion approach. As such, ASE's intervention will switch from service delivery to community empowerment—with the understanding that the CBIs will address community-driven development programmes. The operation areas of ASE in the coming strategic period are depicted in the following table.

Envisaged Geographic Expansion of ASE between 2007 and 2011

Region	Agro-climatic zone	Current operation woreda	Zone	Remark
Amara	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	Enebise Sar Mider	Eastern Gojjam	
Amara	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	optional	Eastern Gojjam	Based on the selection criteria
Amara	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	Tehuledre	Southern Wello	
Amara	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	optional	Northern Shewa	Based on the selection criteria
Oromia	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	Berek	North Shewa	
Oromia	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	optional	North Shewa	Based on the selection criteria
Oromia	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	Goro	Bale	
Oromia	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	optional	Bale	Based on the selection criteria
SNNPR	traditionally	Amaro	Amaro	

	settled semi-arid highlands		Special woreda	
Oromia	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	Guji	Guji Zone	Adjacent to Amaro
SNNPR	Welaita	old	Wolaita Zone	Long-lasting operation area (comparative advantage)
SNNPR	hot semi-arid/pastoralist	New	Not decided	New (comparative advantage)
Benishangul	traditionally settled semi-arid highlands	New	Not decided	New (comparative advantage and competence)

11.1.1.2. Targeting Programme Participants

Although development interventions are meant to benefit mainly the poor, it has now transpired that less needy community members have been reaping the benefits thereof. Extra effort will, therefore, be exerted to make sure that ASE's interventions focus on the poor and marginalised groups in the coming years.

The operational definition of the word "poor" is "households that cannot fulfil their nutritional requirements and other basic needs all year round". The definition considers social, economic, political, cultural and security dimensions. Marginalised groups, within ASE's context, are "people who are discriminated against by others due to their ethnic background, creed, occupation, wealth status, gender, or HIV/AIDS status".

The following strategic measures will, therefore, be taken to identify and target the poor:

- A wealth-ranking exercise will be used to identify their wealth status.
- The poor will be purposefully selected and encouraged to participate in the implementation of the project at all stages, as well as in the decision-making process.
- Preferential targeting will be used in order to direct scarce resources to the most needy and marginalised segments of the community. Facilitating access to credit services and agricultural and non-agricultural income-diversification projects will be the main areas that will be preferentially targeted.

ASE's direct involvement in identifying target groups is limited to the initial phase of the intervention period, where the CBIs are not yet formed, or they are yet in the process of formation. Otherwise, the CBIs are the ones that should identify the poor community members who deserve to be the main beneficiaries of ASE-CBI interventions. Once the CBIs are made institutionally strong, they will have to take over the entire role of identifying the target groups. ASE must, however, make sure that the CBIs have developed their own target identification criteria and a system of analysis.

11.1.3 The Mode of Programme Implementation

The new approach to community empowerment follows, more or less, the modality of programme implementation mentioned in the previous Strategic Plan document. While reviewing this section, the Strategic Plan Team has agreed that the mode of programme implementation described

in the previous document was appropriate for ensuring community empowerment, although some aspects of the strategy were not consciously considered, due to the unavoidable influence of the legacy of the old thinking. The current strategy document may, therefore, adopt the same modality, with slight modifications, but with greater attention to its realisation. It must, nonetheless, be noted that the overarching strategy of the new direction is that ASE will focus on the establishment and strengthening of community-based institutions that will shoulder the primary responsibility of taking care of the development agenda of the local people, which apparently require ASE's systematic capacity support, as well as that of other partners (in particular, the local government). The following strategic directions/options are hence crucially important to implementing the overarching strategy effectively:

- If the Government has adequate capacity, plan and commitment to execute the essential activities identified by ASE, the organisation will not intervene in such activities at all.
- If the Government has no capacity to undertake the activities, or if the activities are not priority areas of the Government, though they are very important to empowering the poor, ASE will make a full-scale intervention by itself.
- If the Government's regulations designate the execution of certain activities (which ASE believes to be relevant to its mission) for government agencies, even though those agencies do not have the capacity to undertake them (the activities), then ASE will enter into co-implementation arrangements with the agencies—through partnership.
- If some activities are out of bounds for NGOs (for example, micro-finance services) but considered indispensable to accomplish its

mission, ASE will enter into partnership arrangements with those agencies that have the right to undertake the activities.

- Whenever there are activities that can be undertaken by ASE, the local government, or any other CSO, ASE will enter into a partnership arrangement with it to ensure effectiveness, sustainability and avoid duplication of efforts and wastage of resources.

11.1.4 Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

The key strategic directions in these include the following:

- ASE involves the key partners, including the community, local government partners and other NGOs, in the process of programme formulation, drawing up of plans, periodic monitoring meetings, periodic review meetings and reflective and evaluative exercises. In order to make sure that the pertinent stakeholders are actively participating and that the community is duly playing its role in decision-making, ASE will develop indicators and mechanisms that will help it properly monitor the process.
- Develop the capacity of the CBIs to do participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation. This is a strategic intervention which is crucially important for developing the community's assets, local institutions, the democratic process, good governance and constructive dialogue within the entire local system.
- Support the local government's system for exercising participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation in some of the key interventions such as the productive safety net programme, participatory research, extension and training programmes, development of the forthcoming PASDEP and other specific development projects.

- Make sure that the CBIs participate in ASE's periodic planning, monitoring and evaluation sessions as well as in the development of new strategic plans.

ASE has long been working with participatory monitoring and evaluation systems that have certainly been instrumental to achieving the above-described strategic directions. To further strengthen the system, the following essential points need to be given due attention:

- Allocation of sufficient resources and time during the pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, to ensure stakeholders' participation, comprehensive data-generation and a sound project formulation;
- The principle of optimal ignorance will be adopted for cost-effectiveness in all programme cycles;
- Adequate qualitative and quantitative baseline data will be collected and timely analysed and documented;
- Planning will be an essential part of the ongoing functions of ASE, and on-shelf projects will be readily available;
- During the planning process, SMART indicators will be developed to monitor and evaluate programme performances and impacts;
- Participatory monitoring will be conducted frequently through surveys, field observation, interviews and review of documents; then its findings will be timely analysed, documented and disseminated;
- The various stages that a programme has already gone through will be reviewed after some essential events have taken place and feedback has been provided both downwards and upwards;
- A continuous evaluation will be done on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impacts of the programmes; and

- Vertical and horizontal communication will be enhanced by strengthening management information systems (MIS).

11.1.5 CBI Formation and Development

This is ASE's overarching strategy. As such, it determines the intention of the organisation to achieve the anticipated results in community empowerment. This strategy is also crucially important to speeding up ASE's institutional transformation, from a service-delivering organisation to a community-empowering one. ASE will pay greater attention to ensuring that the basic services are delivered to the needy community through the CBIs. To that end, it will give the CBIs considerable capacity-enhancing support. ASE has done some testing on the viability of the concept of CBI building in the past five years. It has also reviewed this particular strategy by involving the communities, pertinent government bodies and other NGOs. To this effect, it has developed strategy guidelines, two months before the process of drawing up the new Strategic Plan began. The following are, therefore, the major strategies of the CBI development, and the detailed account of these strategies is given in the main document of the CBIs.

- **ASE-CBI partnership:** This partnership will be initiated as soon as ASE is in the operational woreda. One of the reasons why ASE wanted to see the CBIs established at the kebele level from the outset is to start dealing with the representatives of the community in all matters that affect the lives and environment of the local people. In making a strategic shift from service delivery to community empowerment, the first important step for ASE is, therefore, to initiate, recognise and develop a community organisation that will be responsible for delivering all the social and economic services to the people and continues to exist with greater capacity, even in the absence of development partners like

ASE. The modality of the partnership at the **initial stage** is, therefore, characterised as follows: ASE will have more power in directing and controlling the development process for a few months. In the meantime, the first CBI (the *ad hoc* one) should get formed and begin to learn how to manage a development institution and work with ASE as its *bona fide* partner. Upon getting stronger, the community organisation, which presumably will begin to operate fully in about a year's time, will be the main decision-making body, whereas ASE will be limited to playing the role of capacity enhancer. ASE organises the CBIs on the philosophical ground that they are civic organisations that work in the collective interest of the community and towards the betterment of specific social groups such as the poor, women and other marginalised segments of the community. The lowest unit of the CBI is the one established at the kebele level, whereas the woreda-level apex organisation, which will eventually come into the picture, will formally represent the community at the woreda level. This body has to get registered with the concerned government body at the woreda, zonal or regional level.

- **The phasing-in and phasing-out strategy:** Supporting the formation and strengthening of CBIs is an entry-and-exit strategy for ASE. ASE begins its intervention by doing nothing else but exerting maximum effort towards setting up a community-based institution. Throughout the programme period, ASE is expected to enhance the capacity of the institution, and make sure that the local people are able to manage their own development affairs with a sense of ownership. Why? Because ASE has to make a gradual withdrawal from the programme area. A good indicator of the timeliness of the complete phasing out of the organisation will be the strength and capacities of the CBIs. ASE's roles at the different phases of a CBI development are indicated in the CBI strategy and in the implementation guidelines. The earlier the CBI

becomes self-reliant, the earlier will ASE withdraw from the area. As ASE has chosen the concentric area expansion approach (with a common middle point), the probability of having fully-operating ASE project offices in the nearby woredas will, however, be high.

• **Enhancing capacity:** ASE plays the roles of capacity enhancer and facilitator of an enabling environment for the CBIs to become robust institutions that are self-confident and self-reliant in initiating and leading the development efforts relevant to their respective constituencies. ASE continuously gives various training opportunities to the CBIs' leadership, so as to enhance their thinking capacity and enrich their experiences in project execution. Training in leadership and organisational development is a continuous process, but the types and intensity of the courses will vary in accordance with the development phases of the concerned CBI. Experience-sharing and educational tours are also very effective tools to enhancing learning within a relatively short period of time. The phrase "capacity enhancing", in general, refers to making the CBIs have all organisational management systems in place—so as to ensure proper management, reliable financial sources, adequate technical knowledge, effective networking and partnership. ASE is, therefore, responsible for making sure that all these indicators are achieved during the period of partnership with the CBIs. Most importantly, ASE should pay greater attention to helping the CBIs establish their own programme execution office, where programme officers and grassroots-level-development staff are recruited and trained.

• **Making community innovation and development funds available:** Community Innovation and Development Funds [CIDF] is a block grant of money that will be made available to the CBIs to help them learn how

to write project proposals, implement development projects, handle accounts, prepare reports and, in general, manage partnerships with development partners like ASE. The second objective of this fund is to support the innovative, technical and institutional initiatives of the community (groups and individuals) and the collective needs of the community, which were not duly addressed while developing the main programme document. This approach will be very helpful to developing an innovative spirit within the community as well as the organisational management capacity of the CBIs. ASE will manage the fund, but the CBIs and the other government partners will have a say in the decision-making process. Separate guidelines on how to use the CIDF will be made available.

• **Mobilisation of other resources:** ASE will encourage the CBIs to mobilise local resources by collecting registration and membership fees, organising fundraising events, soliciting donations from the private sector, linking with donors, establishing income-generation schemes, accessing bilateral funds by entering into partnership with the local government, etc. These constitute the most important activities of the CBI.

• **Supporting CBIs to own income-generating enterprises:** This is indeed part of the resource-mobilisation strategy mentioned above. It is, however, important to treat this strategy separately, as this particular strategy plays a decisive role in ensuring the financial sustainability of the CBIs. This is all about helping the CBIs establish viable income-generating enterprises that could also support the development efforts of the woreda. The CBIs will be encouraged to establish as many enterprises as possible during ASE's stay with the CBI in the programme area. The CIDF can be the main source of fund for

establishing the income-generating enterprises. The CBI's management capacity, its experience in transparency and accountability, marketing, etc. are, nevertheless, some of the important factors that determine the numbers and sizes of the enterprises to be owned by the CBI.

• **Networking:** The CBI is not expected to establish its own “island of development” and thus remain isolated. On the contrary, it should be encouraged to share its own development philosophy and approaches with others and learn from them in turn. Local traditional associations, the kebele administration, the woreda administration, line offices, kebele-level cooperatives, unions, NGOs, donors and other civic associations are the first category of actors with which the CBIs should network and thereby forge good working relations. This exercise should be an effective tool for maximising the benefits that would accrue to the CBI. The CBI must avoid networks that are not worth the trouble and are, in fact, highly tasking. At the various stages of the CBI's development, ASE will maintain with it a very strong partnership. At the post-phasing-out stage, however, ASE will forge a network with the CBIs. And this networking will be forged as it is normally done between any two equal partners. Once they are duly registered and have become fully operational, all CBIs will be made **corporate** members of ASE's General Assembly, if they so wish to. ASE strongly believes that the establishment of the CBIs at the woreda level will be a point of departure towards gradually establishing a network of smallholder farmers at the regional, or even national, level.

• **Constituency building:** To ASE, a CBI is an association created basically by the rural people/farmers, but it should be able to lure members or supporters from other domains. To that end, ASE will give the CBIs the support they need to get linked with those people who

originally come from the woreda but are now residing in Addis Ababa or in the major towns. All businesspersons, civil servants, religious leaders and members of the civic associations in the woreda and any other groups of people who live anywhere in the country are prospective constituents of the CBIs, as long as they originally come from that particular woreda. It goes without saying that, by accepting such groups of people as their members, the CBIs could create an environment favourable for these people to participate in the development affairs of their area. The decision as to which group of people qualifies for membership and which group does not, nonetheless, rests entirely with the leadership of the CBIs. In other words, ASE will have no say whatsoever in such matters. The CBE could also decide to accept some as **full** members, and others as only **associate** members.

• **Conflict management:** Inevitably, the CBI will face a number of challenges. These challenges could come in the form of a conflict between two members of the CBI, or between a member and one of the leaders, or between the CBI itself and the local government administration. However they appear, conflicts can be resolved by properly using certain tools—including transparency, accountability, joint planning, properly understanding one’s mandate areas, participatory monitoring and evaluation, constituency building, positive thinking, communication skills and forming strategic alliances. ASE should be able to introduce these tools to the CBIs at the different stages of their development.

• **Micro-financing:** The second important activity to be undertaken as part of ASE’s phasing-out strategy is making micro-finance institutions work in close collaboration with the CBIs. For instance, PEACE Micro-

Finance Institution is an important partner of ASE's—as stated earlier. It provides financial services to the farmers in ASE's areas of operation. It is, therefore, expected to continue working with the CBIs following the phasing-out of ASE. Nevertheless, ASE should also look into other micro-financing options like establishing a credit and savings cooperative, or working with other micro-finance organisations, in case PEACE is not adequately available to the CBIs at the right time, or its capacity to address the needs of the community proves to be low.

• **Making VLDPs and VLHPs accountable to the CBIs:** The Village-Level Development Promoters (VLDPs) and the Village-Level Health Promoters (VLHP) are those people who will be elected by the CBIs and assigned to support them in implementing their development programmes [VLDPs] and health extension matters [VLHPs]. These are usually farmers and provide their services to the community on a part-time basis. Through time, ASE will invest in the VLDPs and VLHPs and thereby enhance their capacities, so that they will be able to reach a level where they can adequately support the CBIs, even after the phasing out of ASE. These people should be accountable to the CBIs. The plan is for them to replace ASE's development agents as permanent employees of the CBI upon the partial phasing out of ASE.

11.1.6. Becoming a Centre of Excellence in Community Learning

Becoming a centre of excellence in community learning (participatory learning and action) involves much more than undertaking one or two activities. As such, it is not a goal that can be attained through the exclusive effort of a single unit of ASE. On the contrary, it requires the concerted efforts of most of the units in the organisation, including its (ASE's) leadership. This basically requires defining the roadmap that leads to the strategic goal of the organisation. Choices of themes and

directions depend basically on the track record and core competence of the organisation as well as on the critical analysis of the needs/gaps that exist in the country.

ASE's 36-year experience in community-learning-related activities is a huge asset for the organisation in this regard. ASE's ambitious plan to become a centre of excellence in community learning is, therefore, justifiable. Moreover, despite the critical need of the country for adult and non-formal education, there are only very few agencies (governmental and non-governmental) that are trying to address this issue in an organised and systematic manner. Obviously, many of the NGOs in the country are involved, in one way or another, in community education. We, nevertheless, know of no agency or organisation that was established for the sole purpose of making a difference in the sector at the national level. Excellence is all about developing the right competence, ensuring richness in information about and knowledge of the chosen theme, competence in research work, developing effective models and the capacity needed to answer academic and practical questions and providing policy options to the Government and pertinent institutions. ASE will have to, therefore, make sure that it has fulfilled all these indicators before trying to become a centre of excellence in community learning (participatory learning and action). Building a centre of excellence normally takes more than four, even five, years. Still, ASE will lay the foundation thereof during the current strategic period as follows:

- Develop a community-learning model (participatory learning and action) that is in line with the reality on the ground, so far as Ethiopian farmers and pastoralists are concerned. The model should

consist of a clear conceptual framework, methodological approaches and tools.

- Develop and produce audio-visual and printed materials of good quality that are compatible with the rural settings of Ethiopia. ASE has to develop the delivery techniques of these materials, too.
- Initiate, implement and share experiences in correspondence education in agriculture and other topics for smallholder farmers and pastoralists who live in remote areas, or for those who have little or no learning opportunity.
- Initiate, implement and share experiences in Community Radio, the main purpose of which is educating the people about contemporary issues and helping them to develop their culture, languages, values and social capital.
- Continue to institutionalise the concept of participatory innovation development (PID), the core function of which is the participatory learning of all the pertinent actors. ASE should take the lead in demonstrating the process, methods and products of PID, as an adult learning function.
- Establish CBIs that may adopt participatory learning as a basic principle of life.
- Establish a training centre where frontline development workers of NGOs and of the Government could be given skills-training in communication, facilitation and innovation.
- Establish a national database of the practices and experiences of the agencies that are involved in community learning in the country.
- Spearhead the forging of a national community-learning network (participatory learning and action).
- In close collaboration with universities and other interested agencies, conduct researches on community learning, participatory innovation development, ACCESS and others.

- Enhance the capacity of ASE's staff and thereby make sure that most of them are well versed in such fields as agricultural extension, agricultural education, communication skills, facilitation skills, participatory innovation development, knowledge management, participatory approaches to research and development, participatory learning and planning, monitoring and evaluation, rural sociology, etc. This capacity can be enhanced through on-the-job training, by sending staff members to institutions of higher learning and recruiting staff that are conversant in some of the above-mentioned disciplines.
- Initiate knowledge management activities by identifying Good, Bad and New practices in community learning and by organising learning and sharing events with partners.
- Be actively involved in the formulation and review of policies governing agricultural extension, adult and non-formal education, etc.

11.1.7 Participatory Learning and Action

As a perpetually-learning organisation, ASE has evaluated its community training and extension strategy and come up with a new strategy: participatory learning and action (PLA). This new strategy was designed to help ASE develop human capital in the programme areas. As mentioned earlier, it will also significantly contribute to ASE's efforts to become a centre of excellence in community learning in the country. As per the recently adopted strategy of PLA, the new strategy will comprise five major components: a community learning forum (CoLF), knowledge management (KM), establishing a training centre, community of practices (CoP) and making greater impacts at the national level.

11.1.7.1 Community Learning Forum/CoLF/

This will be implemented at the grassroots/village level by establishing community forums. CoLF will be utilised as an ideal development forum where the community will raise, discuss and analyse social and economic issues and exert maximum effort to bring about concrete results in their lives. CoLF is an approach that emerged from the systematic mix of the classic FFS approach, the traditional ASE training approach and the concept of functional adult literacy. The CoLF approach was developed mainly to amalgamate the dispersed and overstretched efforts of ASE in training, education, extension and research into one system, which helps to easily monitor impact and progress and has proven to be more cost-effective, in terms of time and energy. Above all, CoLF will be formed in such a way that it will be easy for the CBIs to continue supporting it even after ASE has completely withdrawn from the area. The fact that CoLF's members will inevitably develop a strong social and economic bond over the years will help them continue to learn and act as a group even after the phasing out of ASE. The CoLF is established at the kebele level (a minimum of two per kebele), and there will be a woreda-level learning platform that may address very specific and special learning issues—issues that the community believes have significant implications to the whole programme area. Representatives of each CoLF will come to the woreda-level learning platform, which is expected to convene once a month, or every other month or so (depending on the members' decision).

The CoLF, on the other hand, is an intensive learning forum involving 25-to-30 people, who will regularly meet once a week for about three or four hours. The CoLF will have the following five major components:

a) Social learning: The learning topics will consist of entirely social issues, and they will be chosen by the learners themselves. Such topics of global and national concern as HIV/AIDs, gender and the environment will, however, be included from time to time.

b) Participatory research: This activity has three major aspects, the details of which are given under the strategy for participatory research. The two aspects are local innovation-based participatory research and problem-based participatory research.

c) Participatory extension: This can be explained as making technologies and outsiders' ideas available to the community (CoLF) and assisting them in testing their practicability in their own circumstances. At the end of the day, the farmers may decide to adopt the technologies, or to reject them, or to modify and adapt some of them to their own situations. This is entirely a different approach from the persuasive technology transfer model that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is making use of. What is unique about this approach is that it **promotes collective learning**—as opposed to lecturing.

d) Upgrading agricultural skills: This training will be organised and given based on a needs-assessment survey, to make sure that it is exactly what the farmers need. And it will be given at the programme office level. Each training programme could last anywhere between two and six weeks. A CoLF will be given the right to choose three-to-five people that will participate in the training. When the trainees come back home, upon completion of the training, they will be assisted to start their own businesses in their backyards. They will also be made to serve as facilitators in the CoLF, if and when the need arises. Every CoLF member will be provided with the opportunity to participate at least in one or two skill-upgrading training programmes designed by the CBI and ASE. This

is the type of activity that overlaps with the FTC programme. ASE will have to, therefore, make arrangements to use the FTCs and the woreda experts to train the farmers more effectively.

e) Functional adult literacy: Most of the members of the CoLF are presumed to be non-literate. As such, they need to be taught how to read and write, using the functional activities that they are expected to be involved in in running the CoLF. Members of the CoLF are expected to meet once a week and spend time together for about four hours. The last hour will be used to teach the non-literate among them how to read and write—that is, to execute the functional adult literacy programme. Those who are literate will, nonetheless, be released earlier.

In addition to CoLF, the Strategic Plan calls for ASE to be engaged in the provision of awareness-raising education. This it will provide at marketplaces, social gatherings (like *Edir*, *Debo*, etc.) religious meetings, holiday ceremonies, etc. Using this approach, ASE will raise the awareness of the public about certain issues that it (ASE) believes are crucially important to the audience. The CoLF members will have to, however, be well versed in these issues before they go out to raise public awareness about them.

11.1.7.2 Knowledge Management/KM/

This embraces the generating of, the hunting for, storing, retrieving and communicating/sharing of knowledge on chosen themes. All the primary stakeholders will, collectively, be involved in and lead the process of knowledge management. ASE will also be involved in the Novib-initiated knowledge management pilot project (chairing the group) and share its experiences with interested partners and identify, enrich, share and

document good, bad and new (GBN) practices, and thereby create a linkage with all the pertinent stakeholders. The broad area of rural development, with particular emphasis on farmer participatory research and development, as well as innovative practices in agriculture and natural resources management and such crosscutting issues as gender, HIV/AIDS and conflict management will be the themes of the KM strategy. Primarily, this approach will be led by ASE's Head Office to identify and share knowledge within the organisation (programme offices) and with its closest partners in the field. More work has to, however, be done to explore knowledge and practices in ASE's wider network throughout the country. The findings of this exercise should be documented in the form of a book, special-issue journals, videos, etc. Then they should be made available to the universities and colleges in the country as well as to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, the Science and Technology Agency, etc.

Establishing a Training Centre

ASE believes that human-resources development is the centrepiece of development and that it has acquired a rich experience in developing community learning methodologies and tools. Accordingly, ASE has chosen to become a centre of excellence in community learning in Ethiopia and has, to that end, opened a training centre. The centre is aimed at undertaking the following activities:

- To make ASE's staff conversant with PLA methodologies;

- To acquaint field staff, particularly government extension agents, with the skills that improve efficiency and effectiveness in delivering training services in the FTCs;
- To impart in farmer facilitators/promoters knowledge about the crosscutting development issues;
- To enhance the leadership and management capacities of CBI members through intensive training in organisation and management (including recording, bookkeeping, etc.); and
- To extensively share the knowledge and practices obtained through the knowledge management initiatives with all the stakeholders.

11.1.7.3 Community of Practices/CoP/

This refers to the process of social learning by people who have a common interest in some subject or problem and who have to, therefore, collaborate over an extended period of time to share ideas, find solutions to the problem and develop innovativeness. As one way of realising its mission, ASE has designed CoP to work with organisations involved in community learning in the country through the following strategic measures:

- Develop a directory that has in it profiles of organisations engaged in community learning;
- Establish a database centre in community learning on the premises of ASE's Head Office, so that it will serve as a source of information to interested individuals/researchers and organisations; and
- Establish a community of practices that meets periodically and shares experiences on participatory learning and action.

It is believed that these strategic measures will help attain the following outputs: forge strong relations/network with organisations that are involved in community learning, explore opportunities, share information and experiences, set common goals, utilise resources efficiently and avoid duplication of efforts.

11.1.7.4 Making a Greater Impact at the National Level

ASE's Head Office staff should enhance their capacities to run more projects that may have greater impacts on subjects such as participatory learning and action as well as broader rural development themes, as such projects will improve ASE's contribution to the national development effort. Innovative ideas that pertain to ASE's mission and strategic goals should be encouraged to come forth, and ASE needs to approach more donors for additional resources. ASE will have to, nevertheless, handle (implement) such initiatives by hiring consultants or temporary staff for the specific projects. Why? Because the projects will be too many for its permanent staff to execute, given the fact that they are countrywide. To mention but a few, projects aimed at supporting the work of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on FTC and TVET, knowledge management initiatives at the national level, the project that ASE is currently implementing in collaboration with the Galilee College, the projects on correspondence education and community radios outside the regular programme areas of ASE, the staff training in communication, facilitation and innovation skills that ASE is giving to other NGOs and government staff on request, are just too many for ASE's permanent staff to handle.

11.1.8 Participatory Research and Development

ASE has been involved in participatory action research in the last five years. Its role in supporting farmers' research work has indeed significantly enhanced the capacities of farmers, especially of the members of the farmers field school, to make the most of what is readily available to them. The new strategy calls for a more systematic engagement in identifying farmer innovators and supporting participatory innovation development. The following are the types of participatory research approaches that could contribute to the empowerment of farmers.

Farmer innovation led: This approach is all about being able to identify and characterise farmers' innovations. CoLF members, with support from ASE's staff, will be involved in this exercise, and the community group will have to set the agenda for the research. Each CoLF should handle a few selected innovation cases. Participatory innovation development will be the approach used to work on the selected local innovations. The CoLF will have access to the community innovation and the development fund that ASE will avail to the CBIs.

Problem led: The CoLF, again with some help from ASE's staff, will conduct a survey to identify those problems that have no clear, indigenous-sourced or research-based solutions, but seriously limit the production and proper utilisation of resources. Such problems call for participatory research by extension workers and researchers. To that end, the CoLF must be able to set a few but important research agenda items that can be handled at the local level. It is also important to have a woreda-level platform, whereby the members thereof can come together and discuss, and learn about, the most important research topics for the woreda. For example, if trypanosomiasis is a common problem to the

whole woreda, each CoLF may run its own research activity at the kebele level, but the representatives of the kebele CoLF will have to meet at the woreda platform (every three months) to discuss progress and take back home new ideas for further trials. The woreda-level platform must handle one important research agenda at any one time. Researchers and concerned experts should be invited to attend these important meetings.

Outsiders' idea/technology led: This is a logical follow-up of the exposure visit of the CoLF members to those places where new technologies or ideas are available (research centres, technology multiplication centres, private farms, fellow farmers, etc.). Those ideas or technologies, which farmers are most impressed by, will be subjected to a participatory test in the CoLF meetings. This is a participatory adoption trial, whereby farmers will be acquainted with various technologies and ideas, so that they will subsequently adopt whatsoever they deem appropriate to them. This approach is different from the technology transfer model where farmers are told to adopt technologies without being exposed to them.

Apart from the above-described approaches to participatory research, ASE should adopt the following strategic elements that may help to facilitate the process more effectively.

Organising farmers' innovation fair: ASE believes that identifying farmer innovators and acknowledging their innovations by giving them prizes and publicising what they have innovated is crucially important not only to encourage them to keep up the good work, but also to encourage others to do everything they can to realise their potentialities in this regard. ASE also believes that it should do the same for the extension workers and local policymakers and other staff, who are keen to identify farmer innovators, as well as to promote and give them the

support they need. ASE is convinced that such acknowledgements go a long way to promote innovativeness among farmers and that more innovative farmers will come forth as a result at every innovation fair. The innovation fair will also present the farmers with an opportunity to learn from one another. It will also be an event where policymakers can see for themselves what farmers and extension workers will be able to do if given some support. Last but not least, the event will help create a linkage between researchers and farmers/farmers' organisations (CBIs). The linkage in turn could lead them to enter into a new contract for further research work on some of the important agendas.

Establishing a database centre at the woreda level: ASE should strengthen the capacity of the woreda offices of agriculture and help them to identify local innovations and establish a database centre of their own. Establishing a database centre is not an end in and of itself. But it should be able to encourage the office of agriculture to put research agendas on the tables of the nearby research institutions. This will create an entry point to exercise demand-led (at the woreda level) research projects. The woreda office of agriculture should also use the database centre as a source of information and, based on the information it obtains therefrom, prepare posters, brochures, leaflets, etc. so as to share some of the local innovations that are worth-sharing. ASE, for its part, can use such a database centre to initiate a higher-level participatory research, such as the one it is currently undertaking on rabies, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Health Nutrition Research Institute. The staff members of the FTC should be trained in the concepts of farmers' innovation. To that end, ASE should provide the woreda office of agriculture with the necessary facilities, such as personal computers.

Making innovation-supporting funds available at the local level: ASE will commit some of its own resources to make innovation funds

available at the local level through the CIDF. But it will do so only on a temporary basis. For the long term, ASE will have to exert much effort towards institutionalising innovation funds at the woreda level. ASE can make use of various techniques to do so. One of these is organising an innovation fair and experience-sharing visits for woreda officials. Another and more effective technique is entering into a partnership agreement with the woreda office of agriculture and rural development, in such a way that all the innovation fund will be made available by ASE in the first year, 25% by the local government and 75% by ASE in the second year, 50-50 in the third year, 75% by the local government and 25 % by ASE in the fourth year, and thereafter 100% of it by the local government.

Tracking the impacts of the participatory research: The purpose of promoting local innovations is to attain sustainable livelihood, with particular reference to agriculture and natural resources management. Local innovation normally results in low cost, but effective technology for improving agricultural production, utilisation, marketing, etc. Most importantly, farmers' capacities to address challenging situations on their own, with little or no outside help, will be enhanced; they will develop the self-confidence needed to say, "Yes, I can" and throw one's weight behind such endeavours; their resources and knowledge, too, will increase as a result. This approach will definitely have a positive effect on the research and extension systems put in place, in terms of making the agencies more responsive to the needs of smallholder farmers. ASE, for its part, will do a close and systematic follow-up on all these impacts and then do a cost-benefit analysis thereon.

Social research with farmers: ASE will encourage its staff as well as university students and staff of other research organisations to carry out social research on agriculture, health, natural resources, extension,

education, participatory learning, institution building, innovation, etc. ASE will do so by at first impressing upon them the need for upholding the general principles of the "participatory approach". These, of course, provide for the end users of the outcome of any research work to have a stake in the research process as well as to be the main beneficiaries thereof. When the need arises, ASE can launch nationwide social research projects, in collaboration with others. The theme of the research must, however, fall under its core functions for it to do so. All social researches that are to be conducted by ASE staff or by outsiders whom it will have to commission must at first get reviewed, approved, registered and documented. ASE should, of course, allocate the budget necessary to undertake such research work. The committee that will review such research projects will have to ascertain that, if properly implemented, they (the research projects) will generate information and knowledge that can be immediately utilised by ASE and/or the farming community it is trying to empower. ASE has developed guidelines to participatory research. So they will have to be strictly adhered to, as long as their provisions do not, in any way, contravene the general principles discussed herein above.

Documentation and sharing: ASE must document all research work systematically. And an annual review of the farmers' research projects should be conducted at the woreda level—in the presence of the farmers who were involved in the research project. Experts, researchers and policymakers should also be invited to attend the event. The outcome of the review process has to be documented in various forms (books, ASE's website, other websites, videos, popular journals, etc.). ASE should also share its experiences in this regard with other institutions through such networks as PROFIEET. Extra care must, nevertheless, be taken to make sure that the intellectual property rights of farmers and other experts are safeguarded against plagiarism.

11.1.9. Deployment of Own DAs at the Kebele Level

ASE strongly believes in avoiding duplication of efforts and wastage of resources. Its mode of programme implementation is, therefore, based on the general principle that "ASE should be physically present on the ground, if and when its presence is justified because of the uniqueness and innovativeness of the activities it is trying to implement". Otherwise, it will undertake most of its activities either in collaboration with its partner organisations—most probably local government bodies—or entirely through them. The detailed account of ASE's mode of programme implementation is given in a separate section. What is intended here is to justify the occasional need for deploying ASE's DAs in certain situations, by clearly showing the difference of approach between the Ethiopian Government and ASE—in executing their respective training programmes.

There is a marked difference between the ASE-initiated participatory learning and action programme (CoLF) and the government-initiated FTC. The FTC was basically designed to give training in agricultural skills to literate farmers. Such training, nonetheless, is just one aspect of the ASE-initiated CoLF. In CoLF, the target groups are non-literate, poor farmers, whereas those who have already acquired writing and reading skills will play the role of facilitator in the learning process. As stated earlier, the CoLF will have five components: social learning, participatory research, participatory extension, agricultural skills upgrading and functional adult literacy. The conceptualisation and the modality of the implementation of the CoLF justify the deployment of ASE's development agents who are capable of running the programme at the kebele level. The ultimate purpose of trying innovative extension approaches is to help the Government to look into different ways of undertaking extension

work. ASE will, therefore, stop deploying its own staff for community-learning purposes once the FTC has begun to adopt ASE's approach.

In addition to the uniqueness of the community-learning programme, there are other situations that will compel ASE to deploy its own DAs. One of these is establishing community-based institutions, which requires certain skills and approaches that are particular to ASE. This activity is one of the core functions of ASE's community empowerment programme. As the government's extension workers are not yet prepared to undertake it, simply because it is not indicated in any of the packages of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, ASE' DAs will have to undertake this activity.

11.1.10.1 Supporting CBIs to Provide Basic Social and Economic Services

This is one of the key strategies that ASE will need to consider as it tries to transform itself from a service-providing development organisation to a development organisation committed primarily to empowering communities. This paradigm shift will, therefore, make it necessary for ASE to focus on enhancing the capacities of local institutions—in particular those of community-based institutions. Enhancing their capacities in turn requires that ASE give them all the support they need to rise to the challenge of effectively providing the poor of these communities with the basic services they need in a sustainable manner. CBIs are membership, self-help organisations that spearhead the socio-economic development of their communities, with a particular focus on supporting those members who are very poor and marginalised. To do that, the CBIs could, of course, design a number of activities that may help them to ensure food security within their communities, introduce a sustainable utilisation of their communities' natural resources and to

meet their basic social needs—including education, health and water supply. The following are the particular areas that ASE will give priority to as part of its support to CBIs in their effort to bring about desirable socio-economic changes within their communities.

11.1.10.1. Education

The CBI should shoulder the responsibility of managing and running the adult literacy and children's education programmes, which, in most cases, are exactly what the local community groups in the remote, food-insecure woredas of the country need, as they have little or no access to formal education. ASE and the CBIs may work together in running the CoLFs, the functional adult literacy activity, which is considered to be the most important aspect of the programme. Moreover, ASE will continue to support the CBIs' education programmes as follows:

- ASE will respond to the CBIs' initiatives on the FAL and ACCESS programmes, by providing them with the resources and the technical assistance they will need;
- It will respond to the CBIs' initiatives to rehabilitate old school buildings and facilities by providing them with the resources and the technical assistance they will need;
- It will provide correspondence education to the people who live in the areas where it has previously implemented its programmes;
- ASE will create a linkage with local radio stations and provide radio education to the nearby communities;
- It will enhance the capacities of the CBIs to make use of a community radio station, whenever possible and necessary;

- It will support the CBIs' initiatives to construct ACCESS schools, by providing them with the resources and the technical assistance they will need;
- ASE will enhance the negotiating capacity of the CBIs to secure from the local government the plots of land on which they could build more schools, and to secure the money they will need to buy the facilities therefor from donors; and
- It will enhance the capacities of the CBIs to monitor and manage all ACCESS activities.

11.1.10.2 Health

The health sector is one of the few sectors that are high on the development agenda of both the Ethiopian Government and donors. It is so to donors because it is encompassed by their new framework of "protecting basic social services".

ASE, therefore, has no choice but to follow suit, given the preponderance that the sector is accorded by its partners in development. The information that ASE has in this regard is that the Government's health extension workers will be providing health education, family planning services and preventive treatment. The only way ASE can support the Government, without any duplication of efforts, is, therefore, by extending to it capacity-enhancing support. In addition to that, ASE will throw its weight behind such initiatives of the CBIs as follows:

- Prevention and control of the HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- Innovative community education initiatives with regard to communicable diseases, environmental hygiene and reproductive health; and

- Holding negotiations with local governments towards accessing adequate health services.

11.1.10.3 Rural Water Supply

ASE will support CBIs' efforts towards ensuring the supply of safe and adequate drinking water to their communities. It will do so with the aim of improving the health conditions of the communities and reducing the heavy workload of women and children. The following strategic elements will be used under this sector:

- Providing CBIs with the resources and the technical support they will need to construct springs and hand-dug wells;
- Providing technical support to the woreda water desk, particularly in site identification, water quality test, and training of community water committees and care takers;
- Encouraging the CBIs to promote various water-harvesting technologies, such as roof-water harvesting in those areas where water sources are scarce, and providing them with the technical assistance they will need to that end; and
- Enhancing the negotiating capacities of the CBIs to solicit more support from the local governments and donors in their efforts to improve rural water supply.

11.1.10.4 Food Security

From the outset, whatever ASE plans to do by way of ensuring food security seems to inevitably entail a conflict of approaches. As stated earlier, ASE has now transformed itself from a development organisation that provides services to communities to one that is committed to

empowering communities. Yet ensuring food security is a tricky venture, in that it requires some form of intervention. Moreover, ASE has a rich experience in such interventions. So how should ASE go about ensuring food security without giving the impression that it is travelling in reverse gear? Isn't its capacity-enhancing support a form of service delivery, anyway? And aren't two of its core capacity-enhancing functions—CoLF and participatory research—actually service-delivery functions?

ASE will have to come up with appropriate answers to these and similar questions, so as to forestall the creation of any space for exercising some form of service delivery in its name. In other words, this is something that ASE will have to carefully watch and manage. The best way to avoid any confusion in this regard is, of course, by making it clear to all concerned that ASE's role in the effort to ensure food security will be limited to **facilitation**. To ASE, facilitation is a methodological process by which the local community will be enabled to appreciate and use the resources (knowledge, material, funds, the intangibles, etc.) available to it in and outside the system effectively. The following will, therefore, be ASE's major strategic directions as it plays the role of facilitator in all food-security-related activities.

CoLF: This consists of ASE's major intervention, in terms of testing new technologies, identifying and developing local innovations, trying to come up with solutions to some of the problems that constrain productivity and utilisation of food, and providing special skills training. In short, this component envisages the "research and extension" activities that help to improve the food security status.

Linking the CBIs with service providers: The logical and immediate result of the research, training and extension activities under CoLF is the creation of new demands for inputs, technologies and services. ASE

should make some resources available through the community-innovation and development fund to help the community members explore more opportunity for food security. For example, the CBI may lodge a request for small grants from the community development fund to introduce new technologies through the revolving fund. Free handouts of inputs and technologies, under the pretext of "demonstration" must, however, be shunned altogether, during the new strategic period—with the exception of the research inputs that should be used by the CoLF as a group. The CBIs should also undertake innovative activities to sustain the introduction of the new technologies or to extend local innovations. They can do so, for example, by initiating local-level seed schemes, cereal banks, supporting small-scale irrigation activities, establishing own technology multiplication centres (e.g., poultry, highland fruit, vegetable seeds, etc.) etc. In the early development phase of the CBI, ASE will do everything in its power to link the farmers with providers of inputs, technology and certain vital services. ASE would like to, nonetheless, stress that it will do so only to eventually enable the CBIs to stand on their feet—that is, to eventually be in a position where they will need no one's help.

Developing rural entrepreneurial skills: Promoting rural entrepreneurial skills is an important intervention to improve the food security status of the rural community in particular and address the issue of rural poverty in general. This is one area that ASE did not give adequate attention to so far, despite the significant role it has played towards improving the income of the people and the services in the rural area. Through the CoLF, or otherwise, ASE will facilitate the provision of entrepreneurship skills as well as the expansion of same in the rural communities.

Improving the marketing infrastructure: Although ASE is working in food-insecure areas where marketing is assumed not to be a "first-generation problem", it is convinced that the marketing infrastructure will have to be improved by employing various interventions. Improving the marketing information system, linking production with the market, supporting the marketing cooperatives of the local community and improving the value chain of selected commodities are crucially important inputs to that end. ASE would like to, nonetheless, note that it has to at first enhance its own capacity to make its intervention in this regard bear the desired fruit. ASE will have to also prepare implementation guidelines to intervening in this specific activity effectively.

Improving access to savings and credit services: Savings and credit services play an important role in the effort to solve food-security-related problems. ASE will continue to nurture the partnership it has forged with PEACE as long as the latter continues to provide the right service at the right time to the local community. ASE will have to, however, encourage the CBIs to establish their own savings and credit cooperatives, too, in accordance with its commitment to community empowerment. Besides making it relatively easy for the poor to access credit services, this intervention will bring in for the CBIs additional income—in the form of interest.

11.1.10.5 Natural Resources Management

Experience has shown that the "piecemeal" approach to solving environmental problems seldom works and that the only way that they can be solved is through an integrated approach. As a unit for an integrated resource management, watershed has of late gained currency. It involves the management of not merely land, water and biomass, but

also integrating such management with the efforts to ensure the self-reliance and holistic development of the poor. Accordingly, ASE's natural resources management will adopt the integrated watershed management (IWSM) approach and take the following strategic measures:

- Define the watershed area (micro-watersheds, if necessary) and the pertinent stakeholders thereof, and discuss the stakeholders' needs.
- Make the CBIs play the leading role in the management of the micro-watershed on behalf of their respective communities.
- Encourage the networking of CBIs, under bigger watersheds, and give them the support they need to manage the watershed, by developing among them a culture of negotiations, joint learning, management of common resources, etc.
- Make sure, as much as possible, that operational kebeles are chosen on the basis of the watershed they belong to, as this will make it easier for the apex CBI to run integrated watershed management programmes in a holistic manner. Extra care must, however, be taken not to marginalise highly food-insecure kebeles in the process. In other words, make sure that relatively better-off kebeles are not presented with this opportunity just because they are located in the domain of the watershed. Occasionally, two or more kebeles may be located on the less fertile and food-insecure side of a mountain, whereas others are located on the fertile side, where food production is not a serious challenge. In such cases, ASE has all along been showing preference for the less fertile and, therefore, more food-insecure kebeles. ASE will have to continue upholding this tradition.

- Hold consultative meetings with local government officials who have a say in the formulation of private and community agro-forestry policies and laws as well as in participatory forest management.
- Organise and support the environmental clubs established in the schools to advocate environmental issues and mobilise communities to rehabilitate and protect natural resources.
- Incorporate into the topics of CoLF's social learning environmental issues and the management of common resources.
- Give training to the landless youth in non-agricultural skills.
- Give training to the landless youth in agricultural skills and encourage them to start up land-intensive agricultural business.
- Promote entrepreneurial skills and innovativeness in the rural areas of the country, with a view to reducing the number of land users.
- Give rural communities the support they need to improve on their indigenous knowledge about soil and water—focusing on promoting local innovativeness.
- Do a study on the land tenure system. Then, based on the findings thereof, undertake advocacy work at both the national and regional levels. But be sure to do it through the pertinent networks.

11.1.9 The Productive Safety Net Programme

ASE needs to learn more about the productive safety net programme, so as to identify the opportunities therein that it and the CBIs could seize.

ASE should provide its woreda government partners who are spearheading the implementation of the productive safety net programme with the support they need to enhance their capacity to properly implement the programme. The support could be provided to them in the following forms:

- Acquainting the public at large with the underlying principles of the programme; and
- Giving the target groups training in participatory planning and participatory review.

ASE also needs to strategically explore and look into the shortcomings of the productive safety net programme, if any, and into the policy-practice discourse. It needs to do that in order to be able to cogently argue for a change of approach or content, if its findings so dictate. In other words, the exercise will enable it to be engaged in evidence-based advocacy work. Of course, ASE should not confine itself to pointing out how the approach, or content, of the productive safety net programme is flawed, for that will only make it a fault-finder. Instead, it should also come up with alternative approaches that could help overcome the problems it has identified. ASE must also make sure that its advocacy work focuses on providing feedback to the concerned government body at all levels: the woreda, the regional as well as the federal levels. It could provide feedback to the donor community, too, through the pertinent national networks that it has working relations with.

ASE may be able to run its community learning and action programmes, particularly the learning sessions in social issues, simultaneously with the productive safety net programme. To that end, ASE will have to do the necessary arrangement with the coordinators of the productive safety net programme.

11.1.10 Crosscutting Issues (Gender, HIV/AIDS and Conflict Resolution)

11.1.10.1 Gender

ASE will attach the highest importance to effectively addressing the deep-rooted gender imbalance that is prevalent throughout the areas of its intervention. ASE will do so by doing everything it can, as facilitator, to fulfil the short- and long-term strategic needs of the women in the areas where it is working, as well as by making sure that all its programmes are gender-responsive. More specifically, ASE will take the following strategic measures:

- Undertake gender analysis at the start of the project period to better understand the root causes of the gender imbalance prevalent in the particular area, and design the measures that must be taken against it.
- Give preference to the treatment of women households (HHs) in all development interventions.
- Organise and hold workshops that those personages of the community (e.g., elders, religious leaders, etc.), representatives of the kebele administration (particularly the members of the judicial body) and of the concerned local government bodies could attend. Give pertinent training as well.
- Conduct a gender self-assessment in order to make sure that all ASE's development interventions are gender-responsive.
- Provide grassroots women associations and the woreda women's affairs office with the material and finance support they need, especially in their effort to develop their human resources.

- Hold consultative meetings with the representatives of the concerned local government, with a view to enforcing the existing policy and laws against gender violence and harmful traditional practices (HTPs).

11.1.10.6 HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is now viewed not only as a health problem but also as a serious developmental challenge. Combating this pandemic, therefore, requires considerable support from all development partners. ASE, for its part, will combat it as follows:

- Conducting a survey on the HIV/AIDS-related behaviour of the communities in ASE's programme areas;
- Conducting community conversation/dialogue to encourage the community to benefit from the VCT services available in ASE's intervention areas and thereby find out their HIV status, as well as take appropriate caution during marriage and antenatal care;
- Using community-based reproductive health agents (CBRHAs) to educate the community about HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, as well as to mobilise it into combating HIV/AIDS;
- Establishing school anti-HIV/AIDS clubs and giving their members appropriate HIV/AIDS-related training;
- Designing appropriate interventions aimed at supporting people who live with HIV/AIDS;
- Providing the VCT centres in ASE's intervention areas with the support they need;

- Creating a linkage between PLWHAs and NGOs that run care and support programmes, with a view to helping the former get the support they need; and
- Properly implementing ASE's Staff HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy.

11.1.10.7 Conflict Resolution

ASE believes that conflict is a part of human life, and that it is bound to occur off and on for one reason or another. Accordingly, ASE has been implementing a conflict management project in partnership with Mercy Corps. So it has gained valuable experience, in this regard, that it is ready to happily share with others. During the coming years, ASE plans to resolve conflicts as follows:

- Do a peace and conflict impact (PCI) assessment at the start of the project's formulation. The findings of this assessment are expected to enable ASE to identify possible and potential conflict issues and peace building mechanisms.
- Develop a community-based conflict resolution (CBCR) mechanism by enhancing the capacity of the local community to negotiate and broker peace through appropriate training. ASE believes this will go a long way to help the community resolve conflicts on its own—without having to seek legal recourse, which could be costly to it, in terms of time, money and energy.

11.1.7.3. Constituency Building

ASE is aware of the fact that an NGO that is properly and efficiently fulfilling its duties and responsibilities stands to muster the respect and

support of the communities it is serving, as well as of its volunteers, donors and the public at large. Accordingly, it plans to do all its work more efficiently and effectively by upgrading the quality of its management. More specifically, ASE will give greater attention to the enhancement of its internal capacity so as to be able to undertake the following constituency-building activities:

- Gaining the support of the communities it is working with by being transparent and by making them members of its General Assembly through their CBIs;
- Enlisting the cooperation of volunteers, former staff members and prominent national figures who are widely believed to have compassion for the poor and marginalised by acquainting them with its mission;
- Playing key roles in networking with other organisations that share its vision and mission;
- Launching and implementing countrywide projects, in partnership with the concerned government bodies; and
- Raising public awareness about ASE and its visions, missions, values, etc. by organising different events, giving out press releases, producing publications, developing own website, as well as making full use of the various print and electronic media that are within its reach.

11.1.7. 4 Networking and Advocacy

In the last five years, ASE has pursued networking as one of its major functions. As such, it was involved in a total of 19 networks; it even had established a separate unit and charged it with the responsibility of coordinating all its network-related functions. ASE's involvement in

networking during this period had, therefore, shown a marked increase over its involvement prior to the year 2000. The main reason behind this surge in ASE's involvement was that the Strategic Plan document for the period 2001-06 had criticized ASE's overall approach to development as being too inward-looking, and no better than navel-gazing, and recommended that ASE be proactively engaged in networks that are pertinent to its mission. The other reason was that in the past five years there was a craze for networks among those NGOs who saw the need for a paradigm shift—from service delivery to community empowerment through advocacy and other means.

ASE considers its active involvement in networking up until the year 2006 to be a positive development. There is, nonetheless, no denying the fact that it took up a lot of its staff's time—notably that of those at the Head Office—so much so that they did not always have enough time to properly perform their regular duties. The fact that ASE's regional programme offices were totally excluded from this networking was not a desirable thing, either. The current Strategic Plan will, therefore, focus on the following:

- Reducing the number of the networks that ASE would get involved in;
- Being engaged in selected networks proactively and effectively;
- Encouraging the programme offices to take part in networking activities;
- Creating a strong linkage between the networking and advocacy functions of ASE; and
- Mainstreaming the networking and advocacy functions across all ASE's departments, units and programme offices.

To that end, ASE has identified the following.

- **Frontline networks:** These are the networks that are highly relevant to ASE's advocacy work that it plans to undertake systematically and proactively—with the aim of advocating the interests of the poor and marginalised. ASE will also need to undertake carefully designed research, so as to make its entire advocacy evidence-based. The networks that ASE will want to work with in this regard are the ones in the establishment of which it had a role, besides the fact that it has been serving them in leadership capacities. Such networks as SLUF, PROFIEET and LIFE Net fall under this category. ASE will, moreover, continue to work closely with the CRDA, CS-CAFÉ, PANE, Gender Network (initiated by ActionAid Ethiopia), in light of their relevance to its advocacy work.

- **Second-category networks:** Those networks that are less relevant to ASE's functions but once in a while take up agendas that are quite pertinent to its work fall under this category. ASE will work with these networks if it believes its staff can spare the time needed to do so and whenever they advocate an issue of interest to ASE.

To ASE, **advocacy** is the process of influencing government policies and practices by providing the Government with evidence-based feedback as well as by piloting new approaches and methods that have added value. Accordingly, in the coming five years, ASE will be advocating the following issues.

- **Promoting farmer innovations:** The purpose being the recognition by the formal research, extension and education

systems of the country of the creativity and innovativeness (indigenous knowledge) of the local people in agriculture and natural resources management (**through PROFIEET**);

- **Productive safety net:** With a view to identifying the drawbacks of the approach in terms of affecting participatory and sustainable development, as well as the traditions, norms and values of the community, as well as the environment (**through PANE and SLUF**);

- **FTC:** Adoption of the participatory learning approach, which considers collective learning, farmers' research and innovation as core functions of the process—instead of focusing on the linear model of technology transfer (**through PROFIEET**);

- **Poverty issues (PASDEP):** Monitoring the level of the community's satisfaction with the basic services that the Government has been providing it with, and promoting the formulation of pro-poor policies and practices to ensure delivery by the Government of better services (**through PANE**);

- **Environmental issues** (land tenure): Doing research to find out exactly how the land tenure and the land use policies of the Government have been affecting sustainable development and the environment (**through SLUF**); and

- **Creating an enabling environment for NGOs** (including NGO legislation): Creating more space for CSOs in the social, economic and political life of the country, with particular emphasis on the

issuance of NGO legislation and GO-NGO communications **(through the CRDA).**

10.11 Organisational Development

Organisational development refers to what takes place when there are changes in the organisation's mission, or when operations are restructured, new technologies or programmes are introduced, or when mergers and major collaborations occur. In short, it is a strategy designed to accomplish the overall goal of an organisation following a fundamental reorientation of operations.

10.11.1 Organizational Structure

The fact that it has behind it a 36-year experience in rural development, competent and highly qualified staff, an interest in sharing with others its cumulated knowledge and experience—coupled with the change in government policies and the shift in global development trends—have inspired self-confidence in ASE to play the role of facilitator in development endeavours, with a view to empowering the rural communities and grassroots government organisations.

ASE acknowledges the fact that its preceding organisational structure had helped it to, *inter alia*, properly facilitate decentralisation, minimise cost and enhance the implementation capacity of the POs and easy communication in all directions. But ASE cannot help but admit that it had certain drawbacks—including the following:

- It had hampered the integration of the programme offices with the Head Office, thereby entailing a yawning information gap

and an egregious lack of coordination, especially in technical matters;

- The professionals of the programme offices had little or no direct contact with the communities;
- ASE's human resources were underutilised both at the Head Office and at the programme offices;
- A lingering of the tendency to still view ASE as a service-delivering organisation;
- An inadequate utilisation of the Government's support; and
- A high rate of staff turnover.

The shift in its development approach, its determination to retain an optimal number of its competent staff, its commitment to ensuring gender equity, as well as the need to pay its staff competitive salaries call for a change in ASE's organisational structure.

10.11.2 Human Resources Development (HRD)

For ASE, human resources development has been an organised learning experience. And it has hitherto been pursuing it mainly to improve job performance and growth within a given timeframe. As such, ASE has developed manuals to manage its human resources. Now that it has changed its mission and development approach, however, ASE will have to change its approach to its human resource development as well, and thereby make it congruent with the new situation.

10.11.3 Financial Sustainability

The financial sustainability of an organisation could be ensured through, among others, diversified fund sources, effective and efficient

operations. Accordingly, ASE had drawn up strategies for directing its operations in the last five years. Now that ASE has to operate in a different environment, besides the fact that it has revisited its mission and approach, it is imperative that it design a financial sustainability strategy that is concordant with the new situation.

11.1 Organizational Structure and Management

11.2.1 Roles and Functions

In accordance with the new Strategic Plan, in the coming five years, ASE's Head Office will focus on coordinating participatory action research, programme formulation, impact-oriented and strategy-focused monitoring and evaluation, documentation (ASE's achievements, researches, and resources), networking and undertaking advocacy work at the national level, fundraising, income generation, capacity enhancing, provision of advisory services, running projects that have national impact, and provision of managerial and administrative services to support POs' operations.

The major duties of the programme offices, on the other hand, will be programme implementation, monitoring, networking and undertaking advocacy work at local and regional levels, conducting baseline survey, managing human and financial resources, and getting prepared for audit.

11.2.1. Organizational Structure

ASE's current organisational structure has been found to impede the full attainment of its goals. As stated herein above, it did not help bring about the integration of the programme offices with the Head Office.

Consequently, there was a wide information gap and the Department of Programmes and COTEE were not involved in the operations of the programme offices as actively as they should have. That means, it had resulted in an underutilisation of the organisation's available human resources.

The fact that the organisational structure was so hierarchical, with too many tiers in between, had made it difficult, if not impossible, for the professionals at the PO level to have a direct contact with the communities, thereby minimising their contribution.

ASE also plans to expand the geographic areas of its intervention, given the fact that it has the capacity to help a larger number of poor and marginalised people change their situations. Besides, the respect it has been able to muster from all its stakeholders prompts it to strive to that end.

ASE will, therefore, restructure itself in such a way that the merits of its preceding organisational structure will be retained, whereas maximum effort will be made to do away with its limitations. That means, the restructuring will take into consideration ASE's redefined roles and functions, as well as the envisioned geographic expansion of its operations and the changes in its strategies. In other words, ASE's new organisational structure will create a working environment that is conducive to ensuring its efficiency and effectiveness at all levels. As a result of all that, ASE's Departments at its Head Office will be empowered technically, so that they will, more than ever before, be able to properly coordinate the implementation of ASE's programmes and strategies, as well as to fully fulfil their other duties and responsibilities. Thus the Executive Director will be able to focus on networking, organisational image building, fundraising, and the like—as he or she

should. In short, ASE's new organisational structure will help it upgrade the professional and managerial competence of the Departments, make the structure of its project offices less hierarchical, reduce its costs and greatly ease communication in all directions.

11.2.2. Optimising Utilisation of Human Resources

ASE's current staffing is a reflection of its first strategic direction. Accordingly, on average, it has about five programme officers and two supervisors in each programme office, whereas eight programme officers are assigned to its Head Office. Hence close to 43% of ASE's overall workforce are support staff, and its female staff comprise only 20% of its total manpower.

On top of that, ASE has a number of senior professionals among its staff at its Head Office. In all honesty, however, it has not as yet optimally utilised its human resources. With its envisaged change in the role of its Head Office, nonetheless, ASE will be able to do so. More specifically, it will have its professional staff at its Head Office be occupied in the formulation and implementation of projects that have national impact.

ASE's present staffing will be reviewed, so as to merge a few closely related tasks/jobs and thereby ensure an optimal utilisation of its human resources. Moreover, ASE will continue to deploy its own DAs to achieve its mission. ASE will also work in full gear, more than it ever did before, to come up with a workable scheme—something of an in-house affirmative action—that will help it to balance its gender composition—all the way from the Board of Management down to the DAs at the grassroots level.

11.2.3. Human Resources Development (HRD)

11.1.6.1 Human Resources Development

During this strategic period, ASE will do everything in its power to see to it that its staff are fully acquainted with its intervention strategies and new development approaches. Induction will be regularly given to newly recruited staff, so as to make sure that they have sufficient knowledge about ASE's history, mission, vision, values and principles. ASE will do so because it wants to make sure that its employees know what kind of organisation they are working for, in the hope that such knowledge will help them to eventually develop a sense of belonging. Moreover, ASE will give high priority to strengthening its human resources management and to enhancing its capacity to develop same—both at the Head Office and at the PO levels. To that end, ASE's Human Resources Development System and Procedures will be revised. The programme offices will also be given the support they need to be able to manage training and development, and to do so in such a way that the outcome thereof will have impact and reflects value for money. What is more, ASE will give due attention to the gender aspect of all its HRD-related measures—with a view to improving the gender composition of its staff.

11.1.6.2 Staff Retention

Staff Retention

During the previous strategic period, ASE was plagued by an unusually high rate of staff turnover. The exit interviews held with those who left have indicated that they did not find ASE's salaries and benefit packages to be commensurate with the services they gave the organisation. In the coming years, ASE will do everything it can to make sure that its salaries and benefit packages are competitive on the labour market. It will also

redesign its recruitment system in such a way that it will enable it to select more competent employees with a greater sense of belonging. Another thing that ASE will give more attention to is the upgrading of the leadership skills of its managers at all levels, as part of the measures it will have to take to ensure an effective human resources management.

11.2.4. Financial Strategies

ASE has maintained its long-standing relations with its major donors and has organised a Fundraising Unit to enhance its fundraising capacity. There is, however, no denying the fact that the absence of a clear national policy on income generation for NGOs has compelled ASE to continue relying on external funding. Still, since the envisaged strategic direction and expansion of programmes requires adequate and secure financial sources, ASE plans to take the following strategic measures.

11.2.4.1. Diversifying ASE's Donor Base

ASE will continue to strengthen its partnership with its traditional donors and to facilitate the conditions necessary to make its financial funding as secure as possible. To that end, its Head Office will formulate viable projects and aggressively mobilise resources. The POs will also come up with project ideas, submit concept papers to the Head Office and formulate mini-projects. Moreover, ASE will design a fundraising strategy and approach other funding agencies.

11.2.4.2. Internal Income-Generation Sources

The assets it has developed over the years give ASE a comparative advantage. So it will enhance the capacities of its Printing and Vehicle

Maintenance Units and use them as means of generating income. ASE also has plans to construct a building that it could let by mobilising fund with the consent of its donors and the Ethiopian Government.

11.2.4.3. Advisory Services

As repeatedly stated, ASE has gained a 36-year experience in rural development, especially in community training and participatory research. It also has highly qualified and experienced staff. It is, therefore, well positioned to render advisory services in certain areas on a cost-recovery basis—if need be, even by commissioning non-staff experts. To that end, ASE will work with its partner organisations and others in the NGO sector, provided future government policies will make it possible for it to do so. This, ASE believes, will have the following advantages to it:

- It will greatly help ASE's image building efforts;
- It will give it an outlet for sharing with others the vast amount of knowledge it has acquired and the rich experience it has gained in certain fields of activity; and
- It could help it generate the income it will need to attain its goal.

12. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This Strategic Plan was developed through an active involvement of the stakeholders. Their involvement will continue during its implementation as well. During its implementation, two reviews will be carried out. The first review will take place at the end of the second year, and a report thereon will be presented to the stakeholders. Subsequent to that, a consultative workshop will be held whereby the participants will decide whether or not ASE is on the right track and recommend the

adjustments it should make, if they reach a consensus that it is not. At the end of the fourth year, an independent consultant will be deployed to review and check the progress with regard to the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Finally, in the middle of the fifth year, a list of the lessons learnt from the whole process will be prepared and submitted both to the Board and staff. Thereafter, the designing of the third strategic plan will commence in earnest.

13. RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

As stated earlier, ASE has of late been plagued by a high turnover of its high-calibre staff, especially the females. Yet many of ASE's interventions require a substantial number of female staff. The underlying cause of this high turnover is, of course, the fact that ASE's salary scale and staff benefit packages are way below the average of what the labour market offers. Besides, at the moment, there is a high demand for female professionals, in light of the fact that many organisations are under pressure to properly balance the gender composition of their workforce. The other reason, which we have repeatedly stated, is the fact that ASE's intervention areas are, for the most part, situated far away from cities and towns. As such, getting there normally requires trekking for hours on end—which discourages female staff. There probably is not much that the organisation can do with regard to the remoteness of its intervention areas. It will have to, however, improve its salary scale, with support from its development partners.

ASE does not have the capacity to effectively respond to any adverse climatic conditions, or to the occasional vagaries of the elements. Nor is it well positioned to effectively resolve trans-boundary conflicts that emanate from stiff competition over scarce resources between

neighbouring woredas. As pointed out earlier, ASE has come to realise that the landless among the young generation often get into conflicts with the local governments and conservationists due to the scarcity of arable land brought about by the fragmentation thereof due to the population pressure. ASE is, therefore, expected to put in place an early warning system and a conflict-resolution mechanism to properly respond to these dangers—based on its experience.

Devolving power to grassroots communities and local governments, where the literacy rate is very low and the capacity of the stakeholders to rise to the challenge that their newfound power brings with it is inadequate, has its own problems. Still, ASE will do everything in its power to facilitate community empowerment and thereby reduce poverty, by taking advantage of the commitment to decentralisation of both the Ethiopian Government and the international community.

The NGOs operating in Ethiopia are financed entirely by the developed nations. Yet these donors have of late begun to give preponderance to the global war on terrorism. Many NGOs operating in this country are, consequently, worried that that could entail a diversion of scarce resources to the war on international terrorism. ASE will have to, therefore, brace itself for such a scenario by diversifying its fund sources, lobbying the Government, together with its partners, to create for it an enabling environment so that it could be engaged in income-generating activities.