



Ethiopia | October, 2019

Mulu Berhanu in Ethiopia:

‘GIRLS AND BOYS NEED EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL’

The Netherlands want to provide opportunities for young people in developing countries. In Ethiopia the project Bright Future in Agriculture (BFA), aiming at strengthening vocational training in agriculture and horticulture, started in March 2019. To make sure girls get equal opportunities in this field, Mulu Berhanu is involved.



Young girl being trained at an avocado growing company

85% OF THE POPULATION OF ETHIOPIA RELIES ON AGRICULTURE. AND TO FACE THE COMPETITION AS A COUNTRY, THESE SECTORS HAVE TO DEVELOP

Vocational education has a lower status in many countries than higher education such as universities. This is also the case in Ethiopia. While there is a lot of demand for skilled workers in the horticulture and dairy industries - 85% of the population of Ethiopia relies on agriculture. And to face the competition as a country, these sectors have to develop.

The BFA-project, part of the Orange Knowledge Programme, invests in strengthening this type of vocational education, through collaboration with Dutch education. In this case, a team of Maastricht School of Management, Citaverde College and Q-Point works together with their Ethiopian colleagues, to develop better curricula with more emphasis on practical and management skills.

Girls can also benefit from the opportunities in agriculture. In order to ensure that they do not stumble across barriers on their way to work, assistant professor at Haramaya University Mulu Berhanu has been asked to monitor gender equality in this project. In other words: she guides the people who'll do so in the long term. The project ends in December 2021.



Mulu Berhanu is involved in gender equality

We speak to Mulu when she is in the Netherlands to defend her PhD thesis at Tilburg University. It is about role conflict, coping strategies and the success among female entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa. We want to know how she ever made her own career. And how she wants to promote equal opportunities in the BFA project.

What is the conclusion of your thesis?

“The results show that female entrepreneurs experience role conflict in balancing social role expectations and entrepreneurial role demands. Role conflict and how they cope with the conflict were found to affect their success. My recommendation? First: responsiveness to this issue. And also to strengthen female entrepreneurs’ personal resources.”

Can you tell us how you became an Assistant Professor?

“I remember very clearly a visit to the hospital, I must have been 10 years old. I got a glimpse of a female doctor and turned to my mum, a bit surprised. She said: of course women can be doctors. You just have to study hard. And that’s what I did. In school and, whenever possible, at home. The curious thing: my mum didn’t like me to spend so much time on my schoolwork. Especially because of the neighbours, who openly insisted I’d help my mother more. She’s a single mum of five children, who at the time earned some extra money by cooking meals. Also, studying at night meant higher energy bills. At the same time, watching my mother struggle motivated me to study harder. That was not the future I wanted for myself.”

Did you have any support during this time?

“My late sister played an important role. She said: you have to keep going. You have to push. She was an exception. The problem was my family didn’t understand what the good grades meant, what I could achieve. When I went to university I got instant appreciation from everybody, including my family and neighbours. This they did understand: going to a university gives status. I became a role model overnight.”

For that matter: how do you feel about the fact that a university gives status, and going to TVET’s not so much?

“That’s a real shame, because especially horticulture and dairy industry need skilled, practically educated young people. At the same time a lot of graduates from universities have difficulty finding a job. Parents want their children to become doctors or lawyers, but we also need people with technical and management skills. Once they are in TVET, students are really enthusiastic about their education: they see they can play an important role for this country and its people.”



Young people working on a 'baby's breath' breeding company (partly dutch)

When did you first question the position of women?

“When I was in university I was more exposed to literature, research, facts and figures. Until then I had taken the subordinate position of women for granted. Suddenly it appeared to me things can and must change. In Holland you’re much more accustomed to women who raise their voice, who participate. However, when I studied here, for about 6 years for both MA and PhD, I noticed there is still work to do for Dutch women. I stayed with a family of farmers in Noord-Holland for a week in 2010. The father was worried his sons weren’t willing to take over his farm. When I asked him if his daughter was interested, it turned out the possibility didn’t cross his mind.”

How can the situation for the TVET’s change, so more young people apply and graduate?

“The system needs to change. Until recently there was a national exam: did you pass, you could go to university. Did you fail, you could go to TVET. So going there was not a positive choice. While TVET offers great opportunities on the job market. There is a possibility that this exam will be altered. BFA will further strengthen the involved TVET colleges s by training staff and improving the curriculum, but also address the TVET’s system at federal and regional level.”

IF YOU WANT TO RESOLVE POVERTY AND INCREASE EMPLOYMENT, YOU NEED MEN AND WOMEN. OTHERWISE YOU SIMPLY WON’T REACH YOUR GOAL

What will you do in this program to strengthen the position of girls?

“This program is for both boys and girls. That means they should have equal changes to succeed. With the other member of the gender-team I will do assessments to investigate what barriers girls are facing. Then we will support the gender-bureau of TVET-institutions. This person – the bureau often consists of one person! – has to make sure boys and girls get equal changes to participate and actually graduate. That may sound easy, but we live in a world where men are in charge. Often they make the rules.”

Can you give an example where that can lead to?

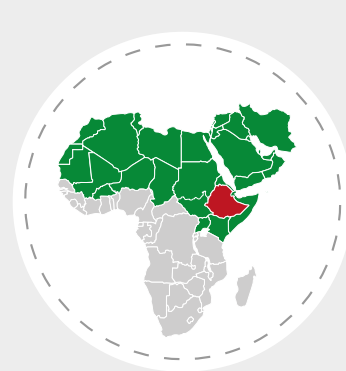
“I experienced it myself often enough. An example: you want to go to a multi-day training, but you just got a child you have to breastfeed. It would be wonderful if there would be a little budget to provide for a babysitter. So the young mother can bring her child with her. We should be more prepared and more open-minded about these things. You can point to numbers: look, there are five men and five women attending this course. Great, but are the women really equipped to attend and succeed?”

What do you tell young women who ask for your advice?

“They want to know how they can balance their roles at home and at school and work. Then I am honest: it will always be a struggle. When I’m abroad I miss my kids a lot. I tell them to push and to negotiate. With institutions and with their families. Show what you are capable of and they will help you.”

Why is this so important?

“Investing in women is an essential driver for economic growth. If you want to resolve poverty and increase employment, you need men and women. Otherwise you simply won’t reach your goal.”



The Netherlands places youth at the heart of its development policy. There are more young people in the world than ever. This offers an enormous opportunity, provided that young people are offered opportunities and the right skills. We invest in a better connection between education and work, for a better future for youth in the MENA region, Horn of Africa and West Africa.



Bright Future in Agriculture

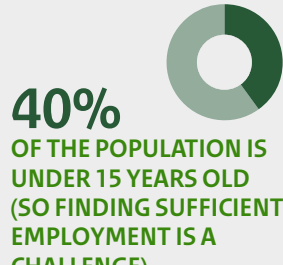
- A three-year project (runs from January 2019 until December 2021)
- Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Managed by Nuffic as part of the Orange Knowledge Programme
- 12 partners from the Netherlands, Ethiopia and South Africa
- A budget of about 2.7 million euro



Ethiopia



108 MILLION INHABITANTS (EXPECTATION: 250 MILLION IN 2100)



Source

The Future of Work for smallholder farmers in Ethiopia (Policy paper by The West Wing Think Tank for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs)