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SNAPSHOT
Training Helps Trader Reach New Export Markets

Investments in quality attract new business opportunities

Photo by Fintrac Inc.

Elias Helina changed his way of doing business after taking the USAID-CIAFS training. He is pictured here at a bean farm where he is working to improve productivity and quality to attract more buyers.

"The CIAFS training was an eye opener for me as far as standards and competitiveness are concerned."

- Elias Helina

Two years ago, Elias Helina earned a marginal income buying cereals, beans, and oil seeds at local markets and re-selling at larger urban markets. When prices fell, he had few ways to manage the risk. Today, he has a thriving trade exporting seeds, spices, and other commodities to Kenya, with plans to expand his business. He credits his transformation from retailer to exporter to skills learned through the Capacity to Improve Agriculture and Food Security (USAID-CIAFS) training.

The December 2011 USAID-CIAFS training looked at the critical role of quality in competitiveness and ways to add value to products. Participants learned the importance of meeting and exceeding quality standards, through measures such as improved inputs and product refinement. Helina left the training with the knowledge that traditional ways of doing business would not be enough to meet global demands for quality. To attract new business opportunities, he needed to provide added value.

Using the skills learned in the training, Helina invested in methods to improve the quality of his beans by offering a more refined product. This allowed him to market his goods successfully to a Kenyan buyer seeking high-quality beans, and eventually to diversify into other commodities such as ginger, kidney beans, coriander and ground nuts. "Since then," Helina said, "I never looked back."

Helina's experience inspired others in his community in Shone Town, 400 km south of Addis Ababa, to make similar investments in the quality of their own products and services. Using improved seeds, some smallholder bean farmers have been able to increase productivity.

A higher quality product has generated more income for Helina and farmers in his community. The increased income allows smallholders and entrepreneurs like Helina to save and make investments in good years, and to cope with the impacts of shocks like price fluctuations during bad years.

In the future, Helina hopes to access a loan to build his own bean husker and shelling machine, allowing him to further raise export volumes and expand to other markets. Building on the foundation established in the USAID-CIAFS training, Helina continues to push for improved extension services for farmers, investments in quality, and innovations in product development.