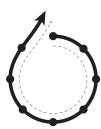




Participants at a scientific track session during the Grand Challenges Annual Meeting, Ethiopia | © Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation / Mulugeta Ayene

Holding a Convening in Ethiopia

This document is part of the 'Convening for System-Level Impact Toolkit.' It provides useful background information about Ethiopia and incorporates learnings from experts and grantees hosting multi-stakeholder convenings in the region. This document provides guidance, suggestions, and recommendations for hosting convenings in and across Ethiopia. Further practical information can be found in this [IWMI Case Study](#): Prioritisation of Climate-Smart Water Management Practices in Ethiopia.



Ethiopia is in the north-eastern part of Africa, commonly known as the Horn of Africa. It is a country that shares borders with Eritrea and Djibouti to the north, Somalia to the east and northeast, Kenya to the south, South Sudan to the west, and Sudan to the northwest.

Ethiopia is a federal based multi-ethnic country. The regional state arrangement is ethnic based. Currently, the country has 11 regional states and 2 administrative cities, of which one is the capital, Addis Ababa.

Cultural diversity

Each regional state has distinct cultural practices which requires respecting the cultural difference and speaking in a precise, region-specific manner specially if it is a convening at community level. For example, they might start their convening with men elders' blessings and you may be required to dress professionally not to divert attention. Some words may have different meanings across regions or even within the region, be aware of them especially if it is a community level convening. This may require discussion with people/experts from the region.

Although Amharic is the federal language, each regional state has a different official language specific to their region. Some people might be more comfortable speaking in their regional language to express their ideas freely in convenings. If the convening is at the regional level, it is better if the facilitator can speak the language and know the cultural context of that region or use a translator to give participants language freedom. One option to consider is using small group discussions as

part of the convening to bring people with the same language together to allow for better participation and expression (for further guidance and context on managing cultural diversity, see [Choosing and Briefing a Facilitator](#) or [Designing the Convening](#)). English is the most widely spoken foreign language and is the medium of instruction in secondary schools and universities.

Agricultural development context

80%

Amount of national workforce devoted to agriculture

37.57%

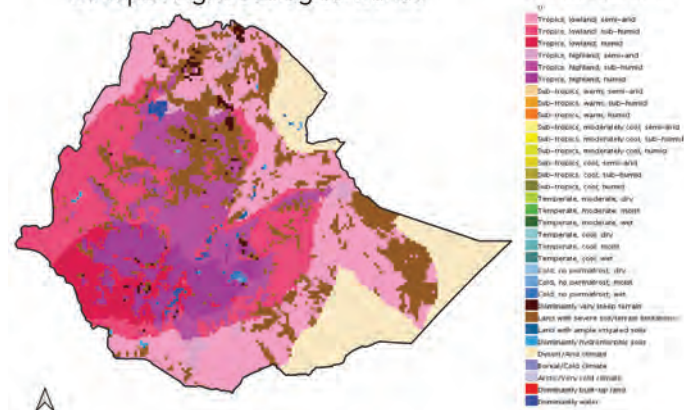
Contribution of agriculture to the national GDP

Agriculture is the largest sector in Ethiopia. It accounts for about 35% the national GDP and 75% of the nation's workforce. Different stakeholders engage directly and indirectly across the agricultural value chain. There might be overlapping responsibilities of multiple stakeholders at some value chain points. You may find a difference in the structure of the national and regional government which needs to be understood when mapping stakeholders for a convening. A ministry in one sector may not mean that there is a bureau in regions with the same structure. For example, at a national level there is the Ministry of Irrigation and Lowland, however there is no bureau with this naming in regions. Irrigation is under the Bureau of Agriculture at the regional level. Unless you know which sector is under which ministry or bureau, you may miss some important stakeholders to

Ethiopia: Geo-political Zones



Ethiopia: Agro-ecological Zones





be mapped for the convening (For more on stakeholder mapping see [Module 2, Defining the Stakeholders](#)).

In agricultural development the challenges are interlinked which can lead you out of scope or stretch a convenings purpose. This highlights the need for focus in planning a convening to stay within scope and achieve the specific purpose. If the purpose of the convening is related to some sensitive issues like politics, ethnicity, and issues across different regions it might be a cause for conflict and might create discomfort for some of the participants (See [Purpose-Led Convening](#) for guidance and context on how to deal with conflicting ideas on planning convening agendas).

Power dynamics at play

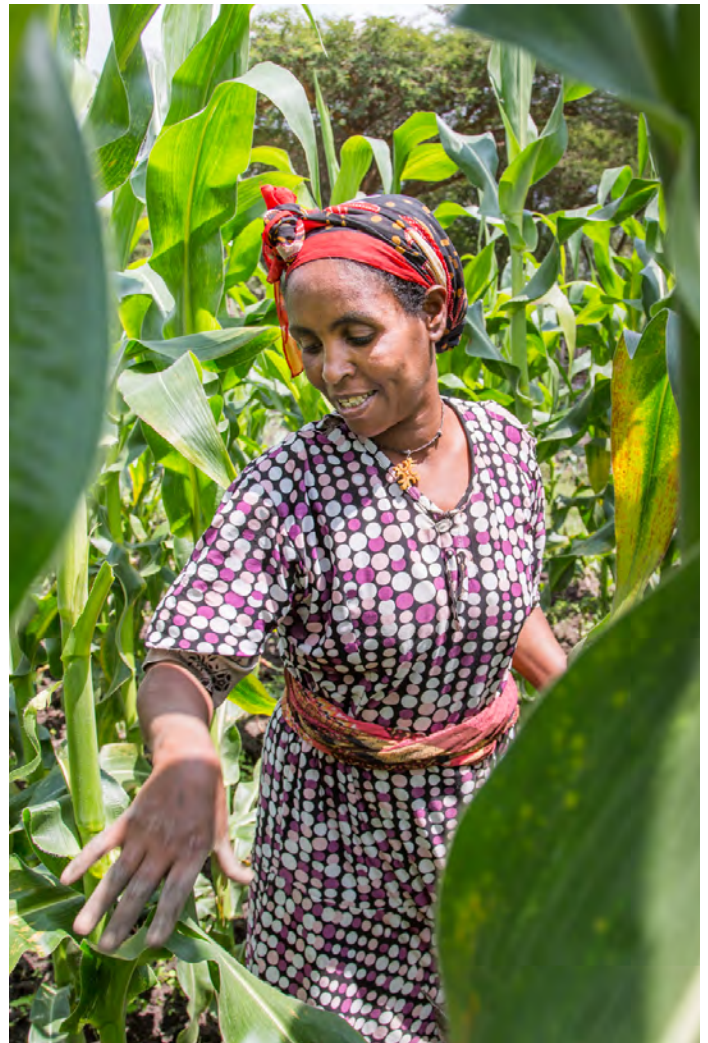
Ethiopians are mostly reserved and shy to speak, especially in the presence of authorities. This is due to different factors including language barriers, power imbalance or fear of talking in public. Encourage them to speak, give language freedom or use different approaches like small group discussions or check-in at the beginning of the convening.

There is also a reserved and conservative culture, a facilitator needs to be patient and take longer at the beginning to build connection and trust slowly (see [Module 5, Designing the Convening](#)).

People have a huge respect for authority figures. There is a culture of respecting titles. People prefer to be called with their titles like Professor, Dr., etc. Government officials (Ministers and State Ministers) are addressed as "Excellency" – e.g. Your Excellency Mr/Mrs XXX (for more guidance and context see [Choosing and Briefing a Facilitator](#) and [The 'Being' of the Facilitator](#)).

Gender equity

Women represent half of the population and contribute to about 45% of the food production in Ethiopia; however, they do not equally enjoy the fruits of development. Across the agricultural value chain, production has more focus and attention. Here we see less access and control over power and participation and the benefit of women and youth within the agricultural value chain. To address these inequality issues, in all government ministries including



A smallholder farmer tends a corn planted plot in Butajira, Ethiopia | © Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation / Mulugeta Ayene

Ministry of Agriculture and regional bureaus, there are national gender equality machineries. These gender machineries could be institutions like the Ministry of Women Affairs or directorates or departments like the Women Affairs Directorate in Ministry of Agriculture. The purpose of these machineries is to make recommendations to improve the status of women in the country and mainstream and institutionalise gender equality in government structures, policies, and programmes. Make sure these gender equality machineries are equally represented in and well informed about the convenings to ensure their participation (see [Defining the Stakeholders](#)).

There is a perception that technical issues are men's domain and women are not technical. Therefore, there might be a gender bias if the convening facilitator is a woman especially if the issue is more technical. If the facilitator is a woman, she has to be confident and



assertive, and is expected to demonstrate her capabilities. It might be important for women facilitators to briefly introduce themselves, communicating their expertise, experience and role in the convening (for more guidance and context on this see [The 'Being' of the Facilitator](#)).

The place where you organise the convening would make a difference on the level of women participation. Women, especially women with young kids, prefer not to travel for meetings. In these cases, make sure there is a conducive environment for women to ensure their participation (see [Planning for Meaningful Representation](#)).

Virtual convenings

If not by NGOs, online convening is not commonly used, although there are some emerging experiences after the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are planning to have an on-line (full or hybrid) convening, make sure that participants have internet connection and check the preferred digital meeting platform. There is low access to internet connection across the country with cities and big towns having internet access in hotels and some institutions. There is electric power fluctuation across the country as well, which requires you to think of alternatives like using mobile data for example. There is also a lack of knowledge and skill in using online technologies which requires a short briefing before the convening.



A student engages in a lively and frank conversation during a roundtable discussion, Ethiopia |
© Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation / Jiro Ose

Investment considerations

In Ethiopia, participation in convenings has a cost implication. Participants expect, in most cases, the cost related to the convening to be covered by the convener. Whether the convener covers the cost or not it has to be clearly stated on the invitation. Paying per diem and/or accommodation and transportation for participants is common. Consider the budget planning especially when the convening is not in the city where participants dwell. Not covering the required cost might result in less participation and not having the intended participants in the room (see [Planning for Meaningful Representation](#)).

Etiquette at a convening

In Ethiopia, at the time of writing, there are internal and border conflicts. When organising and traveling to convenings, it is advisable to check security alerts of the government and different embassies.

Navigating security

Greetings are an important aspect of the culture and can be a lengthy process. It is important to ask about one's family, work, day etc., before starting a convening. At the beginning of meetings, a handshake is customary. However, for some Muslim men and women, touching might be taboo, so a simple nod of acknowledgment will suffice.

Showing respect is important to Ethiopians therefore it is important to treat participants with utmost professionalism and not make them feel they could lose dignity or respect.

Ethiopians generally speak in soft tones. Loud voices are seen as too aggressive.

Post convening

People need a gentle push to take action, so follow up is important. Follow-up communication should be made with both the individual representing the institution and the institution itself. After the convening, inform the institution of the action items that the person representing the institution is accountable for (for more on this see [Module 7, Sustaining Momentum and Relationships](#)).



Conclusion

Generally, understanding the sub-regional context will help the facilitator or convener, who may be unfamiliar with the area, to know the dos and don'ts and conduct an effective convening. This may require communicating with people familiar to the area.

There are things that need to be considered at all stages of the convening - pre, during and after. These considerations might be common to other regions, or might be exclusive to Ethiopia.

All information accurate as of July 2022.

Sources of inspiration

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