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FARMER TO FARMER
The USAID John Ogonowski and Doug Bereuter Farmer-to-Farmer Program



Building Capacity and Expanding Professional Linkages for Ethiopian Universities

Established in 1976, Hawassa University is a comprehensive academic and research institution with more than 50,000 students and 8,000 staff members. It recently added a new Center of Excellence for Nutrition to their offerings. It is designed to play a leading role in training and research for the improvement of nutritional status of the people and provide scientific evidence to address nutritional problems through high quality research. The Center has the potential to become a game changer for Nutrition research in the country.

Crucial to the Center's success are highly skilled and trained professors to provide high level technical training on nutritional research and development to their university staff and Ph.D. students. However, the University recognized there is a significant shortage of technical experts in this area, putting the center's progress in jeopardy.

In 2019, Hawassa University hosted CRS Farmer-to-Farmer volunteer Dr. Alemu Fite, a nutrition and biomedical research expert with over 25 years of professional experience. Dr. Fite came from Wayne State University in Michigan, USA, to provide technical support on human nutrition research and development. Dr. Alemu seamlessly filled in the gaps needed by the Center by training university staff, and PhD and MSc students on human nutrition research, data analysis, and development. He assisted and advised university staff and students on how to use research results to solve practical problems for malnutrition, covered 16 PhD courses for students who were behind on their doctorate deliverables, including a biostatistics course that had been incomplete due to lack of qualified lecturers.

Dr. Alemu's timely and needed support allowed the students to proceed to the next step of their studies and research. PhD students gained confidence and motivation to move forward with their selected dissertation topics. This would not have been possible without Dr. Alemu's assistance, as students would not have completed their prerequisite courses and seminars on human nutrition. Dr. Alemu also recommended that the University adopt



Dr. Alemu Fite (standing ninth from the left, back row) with Human Nutrition PhD students at Hawassa University. Photo taken by Lidia Retta/CRS

periodic research, academic follow-up, and seminars to monitor student progress which the University has since put into practice.

The true success of the assignment is the continued host-volunteer connection sustained even after completion of the assignment. Mr. Fikadu Retta, the director of Academic Center of Excellence for Human Nutrition, at Hawassa University recently shared updates on the lasting people-to-people connections that Dr. Alemu has nurtured. "He has continued his support after returning to US. He is advising two PhD students and teaching remote lectures, even with his busy schedule. He also created us good professional linkage with experts from US." Additionally, Dr. Alemu has also supported host staff by making online payments for publishing their research papers. Mr. Fikadu recently travelled to the US and Dr. Alemu facilitated several key meetings for Mr. Fikadu through his University networks.

These lasting relationships and outcomes are deeply relevant to F2F programming. Thanks to Dr. Alemu's support, Hawassa University will continue to make progress towards their goal of excellence through key linkages in important academic networks and through PhD students and staff equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to forge a path ahead.