

Opening remarks DREAM Pre-Event on Strengthening Woreda Level Planning and Coordination in Lowland, 16 June 2021

I am happy to provide the opening remarks to this DREAM Pre-Event. The DREAM events as you may know are instruments to come to closer cooperation, coordination and capacitation in the development of Ethiopia's lowlands. These Pre-Events of which there were seven so far in the last 7-8 months offer good opportunities to develop coalitions along the topic of strengthening drought resilience and provided a platform for bringing together different stakeholders such as federal and regional government partners, national and international NGOs, research institutions and international development partners active in the lowlands of Ethiopia. There has been a large interest to share experiences and approaches on topics of common interest as well to strengthen more formal cooperation through the development of the Task Force, for which discussion is going on. In the last months there has been intensive discussion between the team working on strengthening coordination for lowland development in the context of the USAID Backbone program in close alignment with the DREAM Initiative and with key stakeholders. We are happy to see the development of a strong joint effort.

When discussing coordinated lowland development in Ethiopia, we have all come to realize that woredas will play a crucial role in the development of the lowlands. They are close to the ground where activities need to be aligned and to contribute to one another and not compete and overlap. They are close to the communities – and provide a mechanisms to bundle the aspirations of the communities into an integrated development plan for the area. They can bring together the different sectors – agriculture, water, rangeland, roads, disaster risk reduction, education and make sure activities from one sector reinforce the performance of other sectors. They are also the place where own visions on the future of the woreda should be developed

Yet there are also many challenges – the lack of integration of federal and regional programs, the lack of capacity, the lack of own budget or the inability to reach out to communities, to name a few.

This DREAM Pre-Event will more in particular discuss the planning and development coordination at woreda level. There is a consensus that for lowland development to succeed coordination at the woreda administrative level is highly necessary. This in principle can align the different development efforts with local/ community priorities, create coordination and added value between the program in different sectors and can help build up a longer term perspective and vision on the development of the woreda. There are however also weaknesses to be addressed , such as low capacity, staff turn-over, local ownership, transparency and threats that need to be overcome; think of budget control, lack of connect in regional/ federal programs, changing strategies or lack of a plan or vision.

The pre-event will take stock of the different developments at woreda level and the immediate and medium term opportunities to strengthen planning and coordination at

woreda level and the facilitation to the woreda offices in this regard. The event will identify current bottlenecks in effective coordination and planning at woreda level, looking at local programming, financing, interlinkage with lower level government and communities, supervision capacity. Most importantly we want to take stock off what we can do to strengthen the role of the woredas and to make decentralization work for lowland development.

I wish you intense and interesting exchange of ideas.