



## Study Report

# FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A 2<sup>ND</sup> TRACK OF THE MOBILISE TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

## Ethiopia Country Focus

Alemfrie DERESE

Maryam DIALLO

*Maastricht School of Management*

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The MOBILISE project aims at launching a scalable and institutionally entrenched circular talent development program between the Netherlands and Tunisia, Egypt and Ethiopia for the strengthening of climate-smart agriculture. The project, which specifically targets the agricultural sector, seeks to meet the demands of the labour market in the participating countries by involving partners from the public and private sector while developing cooperation with local higher educational institutions.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AP	Academic Program
CSA	Climate-Smart Agriculture
EHPEA	Ethiopian Horticulture Producer and Exporters Association
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
EU	European Union
HU	Hawassa University
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
MPF	Migration Partnership Facility
ToT	Training of Trainers
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UM-MSM	Maastricht University – Maastricht School of Management

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## 1 Introduction

The MOBILISE: Circular Talent Development for Climate-Smart Agriculture project is a four-year initiative (2023-2027) funded by the European Commission and implemented by Maastricht University - Maastricht School of Management (UM-MSM) in collaboration with partners from the Netherlands, Tunisia, Egypt, and Ethiopia. The project aims to equip individuals from African partner countries with the skills and knowledge needed for adapting to Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), while fostering transversal competencies and exploring sustainable migration pathways. In such way, the program aims to address the growing need for skilled professionals in the agriculture sector by designing a talent development program within a circular migration framework.

The project's primary goal is to establish a scalable, institutionally embedded circular talent development program between the Netherlands and partner countries, contributing to the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) program. It focuses on three specific objectives: developing long-term circular migration systems, piloting a circular migration scheme to strengthen European climate-smart agriculture, and demonstrating the benefits of the program to participants upon their return. The project has implemented the first round of talent development program for university students and now planning to implement for non-student target participants specifically focusing on horticulture company employees. Hence this feasibility study will be conducted to explore the needs of the horticulture companies which will have an indispensable input for the design and implementation of the talent development program.

## 2 Objective of the Feasibility Study

The general objective of this feasibility study is to gather insights and input for the design and implementation of the MOBILISE Talent Development Program for employees of horticulture companies. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. **Identify Training Needs:** Assess the training gaps, training duration, and timing required by horticulture companies.
2. **Local Partnerships:** Identify suitable local partners for collaboration in implementing the Talent Development Program in Ethiopia.
3. **Participant Characteristics:** Analyse the demographic, educational, and motivational traits of potential participants, including factors influencing their decision to join the program and return to their home country.
4. **Legal and Administrative Requirements:** Clarify local legal and administrative requirements for participation, identify potential challenges, and define the necessary support to address these effectively.

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- 5. **Recruitment Strategies:** Develop strategies for recruiting and selecting candidates, and evaluate the relevance, format, and logistics of pre-departure training tailored to the target populations.
- 6. **Internship Assessment:** Assess and adapt internship tasks, durations, financial arrangements, and logistical plans to meet the needs of both participants and host organizations.
- 7. **Return Program Needs:** Elaborate on the needs and strategies for implementing a return program tailored to the target populations.
- 8. **Local Company Contributions:** Evaluate the potential roles and contributions of local companies in the recruitment, selection, and financial support of the program.

## 3 Methodology

To ensure a comprehensive feasibility study, both the sources of data and the approaches to collecting them were critically evaluated. The detailed methodology is described as follows:

### 3.1 Research Design

The feasibility study adopted a **qualitative design**, integrating both secondary and primary data sources. This approach enabled triangulation between primary insights from key informants and secondary data, ensuring a well-rounded and evidence-based analysis.

### 3.2 Selection of Key Informants

The first step involved mapping horticulture companies operating in Ethiopia. A list of 86 horticulture companies was obtained from the **Ethiopian Horticulture Producer and Exporters Association (EHPEA)**, which was selected as the primary source due to its broad membership, comprising many of the larger and export-oriented horticulture firms in the country. While there are other horticultural actors outside of EHPEA, most are smaller and focus predominantly on the local market.

Following the mapping, consultations were held with EHPEA to identify companies with a potential interest in international mobility programs such as **MOBILISE**, particularly those willing to invest in building their workforce's capacity. Based on this, a purposive sample of 20 companies was contacted, out of which **11 companies** (including the Association itself) participated in interviews. These were selected based on their existing engagement or strategic plans related to international market expansion.

In parallel, potential local partners for delivering training in Ethiopia were also assessed. In addition to **Hawassa University (HU)**—the MOBILISE project partner that

implemented the talent development program for Bachelor students—the team identified the **EHPEA Training Centre** as a possible institutional partner. Both institutions were evaluated through interviews and a review of secondary data to assess their capacity and relevance.

**Table 1: List of companies and training institutions interviewed**

No	Company name	Location	Products produced	Market Area (national/international)
1.	<b>Green Mark Herbs PLC</b>	Hawassa	Basil, Thyme, Mint, Sege, Chives, Rucola, Parsley	Export to Europe (NL, UK, Pol, Rus)
2.	<b>Klaver Flowers PLC</b>	Hawassa	Flowers	Export to Europe (NL)
3.	<b>Joytech</b>	Addis Ababa	Aromatic Herbs, leafy greens, vegetables, flowers, plants	Local market (Hotel chains, Restaurants, Supermarkets) and Export to Europe
4.	<b>Green Life Trading PLC</b>	Addis Ababa	Hybrid vegetable seeds, agro-chemical fertilizers, chemicals, agricultural input	Local market and export to Europe and others
5.	<b>Dumerso Coffee</b>	Addis Ababa, Yirgachaffe	Coffee	Global export (US, China, Germany, South Korea)
6.	<b>Mulualem farm PLC</b>	Wolyta Sodo	Fruits and vegetables	Supply to local market and now preparing to export
7.	<b>Hawassa University</b>	Hawassa	Produce graduates in different agriculture programs	-
8.	<b>EHPEA</b>	Addis Ababa	Supports its member horticulture companies	-
9.	<b>EHPEA TVET Training</b>	Addis Ababa	Designs and delivers different short term and TVET level training targeting the Horticulture companies and others	-
10.	<b>Tana Flora PLC</b>	Bahir Dar	Fruit and flower	Works for both local and export market

11.	<b>Shayashone PLC</b>	Addis Ababa	A combination of different businesses spanning from manufacturing , export and import of agricultural products	Works for both local and export market Europe Asia, UAE and others
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### 3.3 Data Collection Tools

The study employed two primary tools:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** These were conducted with company leaders such as general managers or owners, as participating in an international mobility program requires organizational commitment and resources. The interviews explored their interest to the program and training need, their capacity development target group and their willingness to contribute some portion of program related costs, the legal requirement for international mobility, their experiences in selecting their employees for international training and the mechanisms to minimize their employees illegal stay abroad, their interest to work together for the student talent program and other details. Interviews were conducted using a variety of methods, including face-to-face meetings, Zoom meetings, and telephone conversations. Interview data were transcribed and systematically organized for analysis.
- **Secondary Data Review:** Complementary data were gathered from websites, and previous documentation to validate and enhance insights from the interviews. This included performance reports, and capacity assessments of potential partner institutions.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews were transcribed and organized into meaningful thematic areas, aligning with the secondary data collected. The study applied multi-level analysis, incorporating: A qualitative thematic analysis of stakeholder insights, a comparative institutional review using document analysis, and a synthesis approach that integrated findings across data types to assess feasibility.

## 4 Discussion and key Findings

To ensure clarity and coherence in the analysis, the findings of the feasibility study are organized into three main pillars:

- **Company Reflections on Students:** Insights regarding companies' perceptions of students who participated and will participate in the MOBILISE Talent Development Program.
- **Interest in Participation:** Companies' reflections on their interest in engaging with the Talent Development Program.
- **Capacity Assessment of Local Partners:** Evaluation of potential local partners' capacities for the design and implementation of the MOBILISE Talent Development Program.

These pillars provide a structured framework for understanding the feasibility of the program and highlight key areas for further development and collaboration.

### 4.1 Reflection of Companies on Student program participants

One of the targets for the MOBILISE project is to engage students graduating from Hawassa University in various fields (MOBILISE report). According to the project documentation, the primary aim of the student talent development program is to equip students with practical skills and knowledge in Climate Smart Agriculture, thereby helping horticulture companies enhance their productivity. The project prepares students to become either self-employed or competent employees in the horticulture sector.

The program has been implemented for third-year students in Horticulture, Plant Science, Food and Postharvest, and Agribusiness. These students completed a three-month pre-departure training locally, followed by a three-month internship in the Netherlands. They are currently participating in a return program focused on entrepreneurship and career development support. This first batch of students is set to graduate by the end of the academic year, with plans to onboard a second batch next year.

To gauge companies' perspectives on hiring these graduates and their willingness to participate in the selection process for future students, three interview questions were specifically designed. One question addressed a future risk-mitigation strategy, asking companies about their willingness to provide intent letters of employment for prospective student participants.

Among the companies interviewed, 9 out of 11 expressed a positive interest in hiring students from the program. Most companies are more interested in horticulture and plant science students. This interest largely stems from their capacity to provide employment opportunities and the expansion of certain operational fields requiring additional manpower. Notably, EPHEA highlighted the potential to recommend students

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to its member companies, which could significantly benefit the students due to EPHEA's extensive network.

The remaining companies, Veg Box and Green Life Trading, expressed some interest but also voiced concerns. For instance, Veg Box is investing in expanding production for the export market, which necessitates doubling their current workforce. However, the manager expressed doubts about whether the students would meet the company's requirements, citing past experiences where students had limited practical knowledge. He noted, "Most students we approached in the past don't even know the names of plants or vegetables and expect to work in an office, showing little interest in fieldwork." Despite recognizing that students in the MOBILISE project have likely gained new skills compared to their peers, the manager remains concerned about graduates' commitment to working in remote areas.

Similarly, Green Life Trading showed interest but mentioned a lack of immediate job openings due to HR and budget constraints. However, they expressed flexibility to consider recruiting if opportunities arise.

All companies interviewed requested the project to facilitate connections with MOBILISE program participants and to share student profiles for further communication.

With regard to the students who will be joining the MOBILISE Talent Development Program next year, all 11 interviewed companies expressed a strong interest in participating in the selection process. They emphasized the relevance of this involvement, stating that it would enable them to enrol better-qualified students, which could positively influence their hiring decisions based on available vacancies upon the students' return from the program.

Another question posed to the companies was about their willingness to provide letters of employment intent for students participating in the program. Such letters would serve as a commitment from the companies to grant employment to participants upon successful completion of the program, thereby providing a strong incentive for students to return to Ethiopia.

Most companies hesitated to provide definitive answers regarding the intent letters. They expressed concerns that issuing such letters would imply a firm commitment to hiring. Most companies indicated that their ability to offer intent letters would depend on job openings and their capacity to manage follow-ups. Additionally, companies such as Klaver Flowers and Veg Box stated they would only consider issuing intent letters based on specific selection criteria that students must meet.

Conversely, companies like Dumerso, Mulualem, and Herburg Roses Plc responded positively, viewing the provision of an intent letter as a commitment but flexible to do it as an investment in young people who will be an invaluable asset for the companies.

The closer engagement of horticulture companies is essential for demonstrating the quality of the talent development programs and their impact on students' professional

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growth. Companies such as Joytech, Tana Flora, and Herburg have recommended that the project not only involve them in the selection process but also assign students to local companies during the pre-departure training.

By allowing companies to understand the program in detail and hear firsthand about students' experiences, they can better appreciate the program's quality, which will facilitate their hiring decisions. Companies like Joytech, Klaver Flowers, and Green Mark Herbs, which participated in both the selection process and student experience sharing, recognized the relevance of this engagement.

## 4.2 Horticulture Companies need to the program

### 4.2.1 Interest to participate and Training need of Companies.

The first question posed to the companies was regarding their interest in participating in the MOBILISE Talent Development Program and the reasons for their interest. All interviewed companies expressed a strong desire to engage their employees in the program. They emphasized that building their employees' capacity is crucial for competing with larger horticulture companies in the international market. Many companies cited the need to improve practical skills and knowledge tailored to their specific requirements as a key reason for their participation.

Additionally, few companies (Joytech, Klaver flowers and Green Mark Herbs) referenced their involvement in previous workshops and students' selection, which heightened their interest in this current training initiative. Overall, the interviewed companies view this program as an opportunity to enhance their employees' knowledge and, in turn, improve their overall operational capacity.

During the interviews, the project outlined the training areas it could provide, including production, post-harvest management, sales and marketing, and entrepreneurship as cross-cutting topics. Companies were asked whether these training packages met their needs and to specify any additional training they would find valuable for their employees. All companies expressed satisfaction with the existing training proposals.

However, the majority highlighted the importance of soft skills training in areas such as leadership, human resources management, communication, team management, decision-making, sales and marketing, product positioning, client relations, and problem-solving. They also emphasized technical skills related to greenhouse management, agronomy, organic or sustainable production practices, and pest management/crop protection.

Specific training needs were also mentioned by individual companies. For instance, Shayashone Trading Plc identified a need for training in Seed Science and Technology, covering topics like germination, dormancy, seed structure, and seed quality. They also expressed interest in training related to seed certification and quality control, including national and international standards, testing procedures, and labelling requirements.

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Furthermore, they sought training in supply chain management and distribution of seeds, encompassing seed inventory management, logistics, vendor coordination, and compliance with seed laws and intellectual property rights.

Mulualem Farm expressed a desire for training on the process of organic and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification. Joytech highlighted the need for specialized training in hydroponics, as they plan to implement this technology on a larger scale.

EHPEA also indicated a need for training mainly in training facilitation skills (ToT) and advanced production skills, including climate-smart agriculture, irrigation, soil conservation, organic farming, crop protection, and post-harvest management.

Lastly, Herburg Roses is seeking training in the area of soft skills, as mentioned earlier, along with technical skills related to Integrated Pest Management (IPM). They are particularly interested in practical knowledge of advanced tools for IPM, as well as sustainable biological, physical, and other non-chemical methods. Additionally, they are looking for training on Smart Farming and recent advancements in post-harvest technologies.

#### 4.2.2 Selection and Profile of potential participants

The ideal target population for the project consists of middle to senior managers who have attained a specific level of experience. Most companies agreed with this requirement, with the exception of EPHEA, which prefers junior trainers with no more than a few years of experience. Additionally, Green Life Trading specifically seeks senior agronomists, as they possess a better technical understanding compared to junior agronomists.

Dumerso Coffee Exporting emphasized that participant selection will be based on an internal process, and it has yet to be determined whether the focus will be on senior employees.

Moreover, companies indicated a preference for senior employees who have stable incomes, demonstrated performance, interest in professional development, English language proficiency, longer tenure with the company, and family commitments. This criterion aims to minimize the risk of illegal overstay by potential participants.

While companies have their own internal processes and criteria for selecting employees for such training, all companies confirmed their willingness to co-create the selection criteria and modify the process in collaboration with the project team.

#### 4.2.3 Companies' reflection on Pre-departure, International and return training programs

##### 4.2.3.1 Pre-departure training

Most companies view pre-departure training as important to their employees. Companies such as Green Life Trading and EPHEA emphasized that the relevance of the

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training content is key; if the training aligns with their needs, they are willing to invest in it. Conversely, Veg Box expressed concerns about the quality of locally provided training, citing past experiences where they found participation irrelevant due to poorly designed programs. They remain open to local training, provided that the quality and relevance are maintained.

Regarding the time commitment for participation, all 12 companies indicated a preference for a duration of one week to one month. Additionally, they recommended a blended learning approach that combines online and face-to-face training modalities, particularly if the pre-departure training extends beyond one week.

Finally, when asked about their preferences for the practical-theoretical mix in training, most companies noted that they consider both aspects important but with more inclination to practical training for their employees' development.

#### *4.2.3.2 International program*

In discussing the international training program, companies indicated a preferred duration of one month to three months, with the majority recommending a one-month timeframe. Most companies, specializing in vegetable, fruit crops, and herbs, suggested that the ideal time to send their employees would be during the summer period, when production is lower due to the rainy season. This period typically spans from June to August for most companies.

However, Dumerso Coffee and the EPHEA association have different timelines due to their specific focus and production processes. Dumerso noted that their low season extends from August to December, while EPHEA prefers a later timeframe, around January to February. This preference aligns with Ethiopia's summer season, which is not their peak period for providing training, as member companies are usually busy with production at that time.

Herburg Roses expressed a different perspective, stating they are open to sending employees at any time proposed by the project. They would appreciate the opportunity to select an active production season in the Netherlands to maximize learning outcomes.

Most companies expressed interest in sending one or two employees for this program, while Tana Flora indicated a willingness to send four or five employees in two phases, provided the project allows for such flexibility.

#### *4.2.3.3 Return Program*

Most companies believe that the return support program is relevant. They suggested a follow-up approach focused on coaching participants in their jobs, enabling them to apply lessons learned from the program to their daily work. Additionally, it would be beneficial to follow up with participants to share performance reports upon their return, detailing successes and challenges, which could facilitate further support.

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Companies like Mulualem emphasized the value of job mentorship tailored to address specific gaps in employees' skills, benefiting both the individual and the organization. Lastly, EPHEA expressed openness to the project's potential to implement a value-adding return program.

#### 4.2.4 Program cost Sharing

Most companies have indicated that they will be able to cover the additional travel and visa costs for their employees. For most companies the program quality and relevance to meet their needs is more important for them to participate than the cost burden. However, Green Mark Herbs and Green Life Trading were unable to provide a definitive answer regarding cost-sharing, as such decisions are made by their owners and management.

Conversely, Veg Box confirmed that they cannot cover any costs related to the program and stated that they would be willing to participate only if the project covers all expenses associated with participation.

#### 4.2.5 Legal requirement for International Mobility

Most companies have stated that no special legal requirements are needed to send their employees abroad for training. Several companies have prior experience in this area and noted that the only necessary compliance involves standard documentation, such as visas, invitation letters from the host company, and employment support letters indicating the company's willingness to send employees abroad for training purposes.

Currently, obtaining or renewing a passport in Ethiopia is a tedious process. Applicants must complete a passport application form, provide an authenticated birth certificate, and present a valid Kebele ID card. The ordinary application process costs 5,000 ETB (approx. ... Euro), and applicants typically face long waiting times to collect their passports.

For those needing urgent processing, the immigration office offers a premium service. Applicants can pay 25,000 ETB (150 Euro) for expedited delivery within two days or 20,000 ETB (120 Euro) for delivery within five days.

#### 4.2.6 Risk Mitigation strategies

One significant risk for the international mobility program is the potential for participants to illegally overstay in the host country. During the interviews, companies were asked about their strategies for mitigating this risk.

Some companies, such as Green Life Trading, EPHEA, and Green Mark Herbs, did not have specific standards or suggestions, citing their past experiences where they sent employees abroad without encountering this challenge.

In contrast, other companies recognized that employee motivation plays a crucial role in minimizing risk. For instance, Tana Flora PLC emphasized the importance of selecting

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individuals with better income, higher positions, and family commitments to reduce the likelihood of overstaying.

Additionally, some companies advocate for a rigid selection process, where employees must sign a guarantee and commitment agreement, making them legally accountable (as noted by Joytech).

### 4.3 Institutional capacity assessment for providing the predeparture training

This analysis evaluates two potential institutions—Hawassa University and the EHPEA Training Centre—for providing pre-departure training to employees of horticulture companies. Interviews were conducted with management from Hawassa University's College of Agriculture and the training centre head at EHPEA.

#### 4.3.1 Hawassa University

Hawassa University, as an implementing partner of the MOBILISE project, has co-designed the pre-departure training program for students participating in the talent development program in 2024. The college has infrastructure such as classrooms for the training and instructors in different agricultural fields. Facilitating the training for Hawassa University students was logically easy. The facilitation of the training for non-students (employees from horticulture companies) will have its own unique characteristics that require a different strategy to implement the talent training. So a question was asked to the college management to share their insights on how they think to implement the training for these groups.

The college management confirmed that they are committed to design a training program tailored to the needs of the horticulture employees as per the findings of the feasibility study. The college management also raised their interest to include the university's staff as part of the non-student program. They justified that engaging the instructors in this program will help instructors gain practical experiences which is already a great gap. They also added that building the capacity of instructors with practical and advanced technological experiences will help the university to provide quality of education to many students across different years.

During the interview, It was mentioned that the training needs will be collected from the companies. If these training needs are more practical, the university may have a challenge to meet these needs. To overcome this challenge the university has recommended to work closely with private horticulture companies for the practical training. The college dean also added building relationships with the private sector is not only helpful for these specific training but it will also create a long-term win-win relationship to ensure a better and competent workforce is produced.

Another concern the college management raised was about the irregular overstaying of program participants. The college has recommended establishing selection criteria for

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program participants through the joint involvement of companies, project management, and the college itself. In addition to the selection criteria, the college recommended a contractual agreement between the company sending its employees for the talent development program and HU as project implementing partner in Ethiopia. Furthermore, the company should sign an agreement with the employee to be part of the training program.

Another reservation raised by the college management was the willingness of the companies to cover some costs to send their employees to the program. They recommended reaching out to more horticulture companies with a better capacity and mindset ready to invest on training and development. In addition, the project may also need to find a strategy to accommodate those companies who are interested in taking part in the training but with financial challenges.

The training delivery methodology was also discussed during the interview as the non-students group will come from different places. The blended approach combining the online and face to face modality can be adopted. The online approach may be challenged as the participants may not have access to infrastructure like the internet to attend from their residential area. The feasibility of using the online training needs to be further checked when the actual program participants are selected.

#### 4.3.2 EHPEA Training Centre

The other potential institution assessed was the Training centre at Ethiopian Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association. The interview was with the training department head. The training institute was established in 2006 with the aim of providing different tailor-made training to member companies that aimed at enhancing horticulture companies' productivity and profitability. The training institute grew into a TVET in the beginning of 2021 to augment the efforts being made by the Association to enhance the international competitiveness of the country's horticulture industry, through capacity building and promotion of sustainable and responsible operation of the sector. Currently, the training centre is providing two basic services such as compliance related training and accredited TVET training programs. As indicated in the organization website, the training centre provides training in the area of Safe use of pesticide, Pesticide Store keeping, Supervision Skill, Crop Scouting, Internal Auditing, Environment Officer, Environment Committee, farm safety officer, and farm safety committee. The training institute has provided compliance related training for more than 100,000 participants across the horticulture value chain and TVET training for more than 15,000 students in level I and II status. As outlined on their website (<https://ehpea.org/about-the-training-center/>), the Level I training program covers the application of basic chemical safety protocols, principles of organic production, and practical horticultural production techniques.

Level II training includes certifications in the area of determination of basic properties of soil growing media, treatment of weeds, plant insects, diseases and disorders, harvest

horticulture crops. The manager also expressed their rich experience in designing training programs as per the need of the client. They have developed more than 40 short term training that could be covered within 2-15 days.

The training institute has 15 trainers, two satellite offices in Bahir Dar and Hawassa, and classrooms for training. The training centre leverages member companies' farms for the practical training.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis of HU and EHPEA Training centre**

Criteria	Hawassa University	EHPEA Training Centre
<b>Experience with pre-departure training</b>	Co-designed training for university students under MOBILISE project	Long-standing experience in customized short-term training for horticulture sector employees
<b>Target Group Alignment</b>	Historically focused on students; will require adaptation for industry professionals	Strong alignment with horticulture company employees
<b>Training facility (classrooms, trainers)</b>	Available classrooms; experienced instructors (mainly academic)	Equipped with classrooms, 15 trainers, in addition to the HQ, satellite offices in Bahir Dar and Hawassa
<b>Training Development Capacity</b>	Can develop tailored programs; recommends partnerships with private farms	Has 40+ ready-made short-term training modules that can be slightly adjusted  Can develop tailored programs
<b>Access to Practical Facilities</b>	Limited on-campus practical facilities; suggested partnerships with private farms	Strong existing collaboration with member farms for hands-on training
<b>Flexibility in Program Delivery</b>	Willing to adapt, proposed blended learning (online + face-to-face)	Delivering mostly in the conventional face to face approach
<b>Institutional Commitment</b>	Committed to successfully implement: Dual responsibility as project implementer	Committed to successfully implement

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

Based the discussion and key findings the following area the conclusions derived from the study:

1. All companies have a strong interest in participating in the selection process of students for the MOBILISE program. The project needs to engage these companies ahead of time.
2. For MOBILISE participants graduating at the end of this academic year, there is a high likelihood of employment opportunities with horticulture companies. The project should facilitate connections between students and companies.
3. Obtaining employment intent letters for students is not seen as a feasible strategy at this moment. However, proper engagement with companies may yield better results.
4. Companies are highly interested in participating in the project's talent development program, with many willing to share costs.
5. Companies require both hard and soft skills training. High-demand soft skills include leadership, human resource management, communication, team management, and decision-making. Business and technical needs include sustainable production systems, integrated pest management, greenhouse and hydroponic management, advanced irrigation techniques, sales and marketing, supply chain management, and post-harvest management.
6. Companies emphasized the need for technical skills in production, post-harvest management, pest management, crop protection, greenhouse management, agronomy, and sustainable production practices.
7. Some companies, such as EPHEA and Shayashone Trading, have specific needs, including seed technology for Shayashone and training of trainers (ToT) for EHPEA.
8. The profile of program participants should focus on employees ready to engage with training at both local and international levels. Companies prefer senior employees with stable incomes, demonstrated performance, interest in professional development, English language proficiency, longer tenures, and family commitments.
9. Companies agreed to collaborate with the project to develop a robust selection criterion for program participants.
10. Companies expressed interest in participating in pre-departure training and are willing to dedicate one week to one month for this training. For programs longer than one week, a hybrid training methodology was suggested.

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11. There is significant interest in international training, with most companies willing to participate for up to one month during the summer period (June to August). Companies prefer to send one employee and would like to be hosted by similar companies.
12. Companies recommended designing a return program to provide additional coaching support, ensuring participants can apply their learning in their roles.
13. Most companies are ready to contribute resources for program participation.
14. Regarding legal requirements, there are no unique prerequisites for companies sending employees abroad, aside from common requirements such as visas, invitation letters, and support letters from the respective companies. Advance preparation is necessary for passport acquisition, including financial arrangements for expedited processing.
15. Proper selection of program participants should focus on stability, income, performance, career goals, and motivation. Signing contractual agreements with participants that include collateral can serve as risk mitigation strategies.
16. Both Hawassa University and the EHPEA Training Centre have the infrastructure and commitment to design and deliver pre-departure training. Hawassa offers a strong academic background, while the training centre has extensive experience in delivering training for horticulture companies.

## 5.2 Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Successful Implementation of the MOBILISE Program

#### **1. Fostering Relationships with Horticulture Companies:**

- Engage horticulture companies early through regular discussions and create a common communication platform for project updates. Involve them in the selection and recruitment of students to enhance the project's relevance and ensure strong partnerships.
- Facilitate networking and job placement opportunities for graduating participants by organizing site visits and establishing digital portals where companies can view student profiles and vice versa.

#### **2. Designing Training Programs for Horticulture Companies:**

- Tailor training programs to meet the specific needs of horticulture companies to enhance their participation.
- Communicate training packages, delivery mechanisms, and schedules in advance to gather feedback from companies before implementation.

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**3. Implement a Joint Selection Process:**

- Collaborate with companies on a joint selection process that prioritizes stability, performance, and motivation. Develop and share a standardized participant profile rubric that includes English proficiency tests, motivation letters, and supervisor recommendations.

**4. Optimize Pre-Departure Training:**

- Limit the duration of pre-departure training to ensure effectiveness. Intensive one-week face-to-face training may help participants focus better without distractions from their other engagements.
- To expand the impact of the pre-departure training, it would be beneficial to provide more opportunities for horticulture companies to participate. The training program has the capacity to accommodate up to 30 participants in a session at no additional cost, allowing for broader engagement and collaboration.

**5. Limit International Training Duration:**

- Restrict international training to one month, as most companies may be reluctant to send key professionals for longer periods. Match program participants with companies similar to their own to enhance learning experiences.

**6. Consider Timing for International Mobility:**

- While many companies prefer the June-August period for international mobility, the potential learning benefits may be compromised. Analyse the trade-offs between time savings and experience gained. Sending participants during peak production seasons in the Netherlands may positively impact the availability of host companies and learnings by participants.

**7. Design an Effective Return Program:**

- Develop strategies for implementing the return program effectively. Consider assigning virtual coaches to support participants from various locations or appointing a senior internal coach within the company to assist and report on the coaching journey.

**8. Risk Mitigation in Selection Process:**

- Focus on selecting experienced adult participants with family commitments who are trusted by their companies. Including candidates with prior international travel experience can help minimize the risk of illegal overstays. Signing a contractual agreement with collateral could also minimize the risk.

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**9. Early Visa and Passport Processing:**

- Given the recent EU regulations regarding Schengen visas for Ethiopians, procedure to obtain a passport, initiate the selection process and start visa and passport applications early to avoid delays.

**10. Encourage Broader Company Participation:**

- Some companies may wish to send more than one employee. Allowing one employee per company can foster relationships with a wider range of companies rather than concentrating on fewer companies with multiple candidates.

**11. Focus on Cost-Sharing Companies:**

- Engage with companies willing to share costs for program participation, as this could enhance overall program sustainability.

**12. Leverage Training Providers:**

- The EHPEA Training Centre has substantial experience addressing the needs of horticulture companies. Some training needs could be met with available packages that require minimal modification, saving on development costs. Collaborate with Hawassa University to implement training in partnership with EHPEA.