



Scaling up Improved Sheep Fattening Practices and Technologies in Ethiopia

Implementation of Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) Livestock Compact

A Synthesis Report on Stakeholder Mobilization
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Introduction

Sheep fattening has the potential to provide a wide range of economic benefits to communities through direct sale of fattened rams as well as stimulating economic activities along the value chain in the Ethiopian highlands. ICARDA has been promoting the use of improved technologies in sheep fattening in the Ethiopian highlands since 2014. This TAAT funded sheep fattening scaling project is designed to take sheep fattening a notch higher in two directions: i. adding entrepreneurship to the overall improvement in sheep fattening and ii. Empowerment of rural unemployed youth in the Ethiopian highlands to act as promoters of sheep fattening as a business.

While adopting sheep fattening practices, farmers desire to reap financial gains from their efforts. Nevertheless, there has been minimum progression by farmers towards commercial based fattening associated with clear production objectives and financial capacity. This project will target youth for this role. Youth entrepreneurs as role models to sheep farming communities. It will involve continuous engagement and interventions through trainings and support to create an environment in which youth can establish sustainable entrepreneurial options around sheep fattening as well as being linked to markets. This approach is intended, not only to directly benefit the participating youth but will also create spin-off employment opportunities for local and surrounding communities.

Ideally, interventions in rural development have an obligation to improve grassroot stakeholder involvement in activities. Therefore, during inception of the TAAT sheep fattening project, key stakeholders were mobilized and sensitized with an aim to:

- i. improve understanding of existing stakeholder involvement in youth engagement, specifically in sheep fattening.
- ii. capture the capacity of rural networking to support the project.

Workshops, office visits and personal communication with the stakeholders led to an increase in the available knowledge, expertise and viewpoints in the design and implementation of the scaling strategy. A synthesis of the views and perspectives of the stakeholders who were approached is presented below.

Entrepreneurship and youth engagement into sheep fattening: Views and perspectives of key stakeholders

Key stakeholders and partners currently engaged with ICARDA livestock activities are the National Agricultural Research Centres (NARS), Government experts, Government Administrators and Community-based Breeding Programme (CBBP).

The NARS were instrumental in contributing to the development of the overall framework of the scaling project. Together with the NARS, planned activities were assessed for relevance and responsibilities apportioned to the work plan. The beneficiaries to be engaged and selection criteria were outlined. Technologies and practices of sheep fattening to be included in the project were assessed for relevance and practicability. Capacity building activities, monitoring and reporting were outlined. The term “youth” was clarified as those aged between 15 and 29 years old according to the Ethiopian youth policy (2004). However, the NARS argued that the project needed to extend the age limit to 35 years old, due to prevailing interest in sheep fattening. A target of at least 30% of young females was set for each youth group to accommodate female skills and experience in sheep production and group organization. Active involvement of the Community-Based Breeding Programme (CBBP) was recommended as most of its members are sheep farmers. During mobilization

and sensitization of stakeholders, the NARS took lead in soliciting views on improved sheep fattening and engagement of youth from grassroot stakeholders.

The NARS would play an active role in capacity building of beneficiaries in improved sheep fattening practices. The NARS have over the years received a lot of training on sheep fattening from ICARDA, they are, therefore, best positioned to undertake the training of beneficiaries in the local languages. But beyond this, successful farmer-entrepreneurs do not only require technical competent but also innovation and ability to plan ahead so they can steer their farm businesses through stages of enterprise development – from establishment and survival to rapid growth and maturity. However, there are many challenges that farmers face: social barriers, economic barriers, regulations, access to finance and information, and their own managerial capacity to cope with risks and changes and to seize opportunities. Innovation is becoming central to the ability of farmers to cope, exploit and compete in rapidly evolving technical and economic conditions. In the agricultural sector, there has been a long tradition of the linear model of research-extension-farmer linkages. Yet there is growing recognition that while public agricultural research and extension is necessary, on its own it is not sufficient to create dynamic innovation capacity. Contemporary patterns of agricultural development which involve entrepreneurship demand fresh thinking on how innovation can be promoted in ways that can deal with rapidly evolving production and market conditions. But is the agricultural research system suited to the emerging reality of innovation and entrepreneurship? The TAAT project will incorporate “Training of Trainers” (ToT) courses for the National researchers in response to the emerging entrepreneurial needs of youth sheep fatteners.

Government experts recommended training for youth sheep fatteners and adoption of proper husbandry skills. They asserted that youth and farmers in general need detailed theoretical and practical training on sheep feed preparation and utilization, housing for highland areas or cold areas, health management and marketing. The government experts were able to articulate what the farmers and youth require to increase their knowledge and skills. Interestingly, none of the government experts suggested training for themselves or their own staff members. Do they believe or assume they have adequate knowledge and skills? Do they see no need for an upgrade in their agricultural or communication skills? Do they have the knowledge and skills but feel limited in the extent to which they can disseminate them? How inadequate do they feel, what do they lack, what do they require to enable them empower farmers with knowledge and skills? This remains an open question as it was not addressed during the meetings. Inevitably, their role in disseminating agricultural technology is unprecedented, refresher skills are necessary, this needs to be done so often. Are they aware of this? Or do they have other more pressing problems. “Data collectors and veterinarians should be well equipped with proper tools, motivated with good pay to reach every participant’s home”. “Poor remuneration”, that was their hue and cry. Financial facilitations should not be overlooked and result in derailed focus on more important issues. Government expertise and extension agents ever so often need knowledge and skill upgrades to cope with changing or new approaches to enable them replicate and scale them successfully. Consequently, TAAT would involve Government experts in ToT trainings in both entrepreneurial skills development as well as improved sheep fattening techniques.

Grassroot Administrators, i.e the *Kebele* Administration were most concerned about rural-urban migration of youth in search of jobs. They viewed sheep fattening as a viable income generating opportunity to mitigate outward migration. Viable also, because communities in Doyogena district have been practicing sheep fattening for a long time, therefore the youth are familiar with it and have some experience in it. However, the youth are jobless, have no sheep and no initial capital to begin

fattening. They highly recommended start-up support in any form. They are willing to register organized youth groups working in sheep fattening. Clearly the role of village/*Kebele* administrators in authenticating the groups would be very useful. The administrators are fully aware that local people cannot fully influence government plans and policies unless they are sufficiently organized, legally registered and trained to put forth a united effort. Farmers' association also act as channels to make government plans and policies known to all farmers. By the same token, the youth would be able to express their views about government plans regarding them or make their problems known to the government. Currently, government programmes regarding youth and sheep fattening have superficially organized youth, giving them a one-time short training on sheep fattening as a business, with no follow-ups thereafter. Those efforts have gained no momentum. In Menz, the Bureau of Agriculture, highlighted the view that coordination among development partners, particularly those working for a similar goal, was necessary and critical. They had information on an NGO working with youth in stone-gravel, potato and lentil farming, some microfinance institution like ACSI and Vision fund working closely with farmers in *Sustainable Land Management Project*. The Bureau also gave information on a recent value chain survey done by the Mehalmeda extension group, whereby 950 young people showed interest to engage in sheep fattening. Evidently, the Bureau is aware of organisations working in the area, but they are playing no coordination role in their activities. They are willing to support any forthcoming assistance to youth; however, they have no prioritization of assistance that is required. They have a long list of needs that should be accorded to the youth. Indeed, a list of prioritized interventions would abet formulation of new "packages" or "blends" that complement ongoing interventions. Prioritization would also aid in preparedness to ensure available and qualified cadre from public sector agencies and private sector organizations to drive momentum of interventions; Prioritization would also abolish old regulations to combat stifling bureaucracies, a case in point is where only groups of 50 or more persons can be registered as a cooperative. Consequently, the TAAT project plans to form a Community of Practice (CoP) in each target region that would engage players from development actors as well as government expertise to tap existing synergies. Farmer-entrepreneurs operate in a complex and dynamic environment. They are part of a larger collection of people including other farmers, suppliers, traders, transporters, processors and many others. Each of these has a role to play in producing products and moving them through to the market – through the value chain. Each one needs to be an entrepreneur. They also need to respect each other and work together to make the whole system work better and be more profitable. Consequently, value-chain actors will also be engaged in CoPs.

The role of CBBP would be useful in identification and mobilization of youth and champion farmers. As long-standing cooperatives, they have a lot of experience in community mobilization and organization. They agreed to assist in formation of the fattening groups, within and outside *Kebeles* of their jurisdiction. They were willing to undertake oversight responsibilities to ensure continuous coordination among the youth groups and between the youth groups and champion farmers. However, they insisted that this would require finances. This in itself presents a challenge to sustainability of their role, considering the short duration of the TAAT project. How would financing the CBBP functions be sustained? Therefore, the role of CBBP in identification and mobilization of youth, youth groups and champion farmers beyond the life of the TAAT projects needs to be elucidated.

Conclusion

This TAAT project recognizes that there is need for removing barriers to employment among youth; and it is within this context, that the project will engage the effective use of sheep fattening innovations to establish successful enterprises for the youth. In addressing youth's lack of skills, this project will engage stakeholders; the NARS to conduct training in improved sheep fattening technologies and practices, Government experts and Administrators (through the CoPs) to facilitate in entrepreneurial development skills and CBBP in group management. The application of all these three broad areas of skills by the youth will provide them with opportunities beyond sheep fattening.