

Empowering youth and women through sheep fattening in Ethiopia



INITIATIVE ON
Sustainable Animal
Productivity

Small ruminant value chain

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Outcome

The introduction of business-oriented sheep fattening by The International Center for Agricultural Research (ICARDA) has revolutionized the economic landscape for youth and women in rural Ethiopia, leading to substantial job creation and income growth. ICARDA has organized 270,000 youth and women into groups and cooperatives, thereby facilitating the establishment of 49 sheep fattening groups and four legally registered cooperatives and integrating sustainable practices into local economies and supporting community development. The sheep fattening activities in Ethiopia have been conducted as part of the Feed and Forage activities of the CGIAR Initiatives [Sustainable Animal for Livelihoods, Nutrition, and Gender Inclusion \(SAPLING\)](#) and [Mixed Farming Systems](#).

Partners

Key partners include the Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopian Agricultural Research Institute (EIAR), Regional Agricultural Research Centers (Amhara, Oromia, Central, Southern, and Southwestern), Debre Birhan University, Wachemo University, Jimma University, and media partners namely Fana FM and South Radio and Television Agency. This network of partners was bolstered by the involvement of non-governmental development organizations (NGO), namely, Ethiopian-based Charity and Development Association, and the UK-based Amanah Global Relief.

Why did we do this research?

Enhancing growth and reproductive performance in rams through research on improved feeds and forages to optimize sheep nutrition, promote accelerated growth rates, and improve overall flock health. By promoting locally available, affordable, and nutritionally rich forage options, the research reduced feed costs, benefiting resource-constrained farmers, particularly women and youth. Topics relating to collective action through groups and cooperatives, entrepreneurship and market-oriented approaches, financial literacy, gender and feed processing were integrated into the research because youth and women often face unique challenges, such as limited access to land, capital, skills and knowledge. The integration has helped to identify and mitigate these barriers, thereby enhancing sheep fattening as a sustainable pathway to economic stability and risk management through market-oriented approaches for farmers in rural Ethiopia.

Evidence

Job creation: The initiative created over 270,000 direct jobs, with 45% of the participants being women. This has significantly contributed to community resilience and economic empowerment.

Income growth: Beneficiaries reported an increase in annual income from ETB 16,000 (USD 570) to ETB 190,000 (USD 3653) by expanding their sheep fattening operations from four rams to 120 annually within a period of 3 years.

Participation and legal ventures: The program supported the formation and formal registration of four cooperatives and two enterprises ensuring that these ventures could access local support systems, engage in legal trade, and attract co-investment from the government and private sector.

Co-investment: Government co-investments included technical training, logistical support, direct funds and infrastructure development, helping to scale the initiative and enhance its sustainability.

"I have greatly benefited from participating in the sheep fattening program. Through the training, I learned how to scale my business from fattening less than 5 rams to fattening over one hundred rams within a period of 3 years. This knowledge has helped me track all my business transactions carefully and understand the importance of reinvesting profits instead of spending

the capital. With the current income from ram fattening, I can support my family financially and be a role model in my community.” Damitew Demise, Bonga, Ethiopia

Next steps

In the next phase, the program aims to technically support government initiatives, NGOs, and charity organizations to scale out and reach up to 500,000 youth and women, with an emphasis on achieving and maintaining over 50% female participation to ensure gender inclusivity. This expansion will include efforts to strengthen and scale up 100 new feed processing businesses that will support ready supply of balanced total mixed rations and foster partnerships with private sector actors to implement digital commercialization strategies, sustaining growth and market access. The initiative will also focus on building a more comprehensive framework to support economic resilience and long-term development, ensuring stable income and job creation for beneficiaries.

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