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The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

Livelihoods for Resilience Activity



Sheep fattening accelerates food security

Engaging in sheep and goat fattening can bring fast returns on investment and help put rural households on the path towards food security. This story of Worku and Sendnesh is just one example of how fattening can transform rural households' livelihoods for the better.

Meet Sendnesh and Worku, a hard-working couple who are delighted to tell their success story. In front of the couple's small but beautiful hut, there are all kinds of domestic animals—a heifer, a horse, a donkey, and sheep. Worku seems tired but has a big smile. He just came back from securing a second-round loan of 20,000 birr (USD 600) from a micro-finance institution. Sendnesh is making coffee to celebrate. “We could not believe that we were able to repay the first loan a year before the due date,” Worku says. “We did not know that sheep fattening could help us earn a good income within such a short period of time.”

Worku and Sendnesh, who live with their five children in Menz Gera Woreda of Amhara Region, used to rely solely on income from weaving and sharecropping for the family's livelihood. “The income from the weaving business alone could not support my family, and the harvest from sharecropped land was inadequate even though I worked hard on it,” Worku explains. To complement their meager

income, the family relied on cash/food transfers from the government's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) for six months of the year.

In the past two years, Worku and Sendnesh's participation in the Livelihoods for Resilience Activity brought significant changes to their family's livelihood. The couple participated in discussion-based trainings through their village economic and social association (VESA). “We learned a lot of things from VESA discussions and trainings, including how we can benefit from sheep fattening,” says Sendnesh.

The couple took the training to heart and successfully applied for a 10,000 birr loan from a micro-finance institution (MFI). They started by buying six sheep and fattening them for three months, which enabled them to earn 5,000 birr (USD 150). In three consecutive rounds, they fattened a total of 13 sheep and netted 10,000 birr (USD 300).

“We never expected to earn this much profit within a year. We received training from the project on animal selection, housing, proper feeding, health care and marketing. We used these skills effectively and found the return from the business to be rewarding,” Worku explains.

Sendnesh describes the impact this income has had on their family: “We gained our parents’ land, which had been rented to a better-off household for 5,000 birr (USD 150) for two years. We also bought a heifer and donkey. The donkey gives us relief as it carries grains on market days, and brings water from a long distance.”

The happy couple took the second loan from the MFI to buy more sheep. They have also increased their VESA regular savings fivefold, and are planning to graduate from the safety net program in the next two years.

Most rural households in Ethiopia consider livestock as an asset to acquire and keep long-term, rather than as a business investment that can bring a fast return. They typically only think of selling livestock to cover acute cash needs. With the right selection and improved feeding practices, household can fatten sheep or goats up to four cycles per year, earning a good profit.

Sheep and goat value chain interventions

Fattening sheep and goats (“shoats”) is a popular activity amongst PSNP households, as farmers are generally familiar with fattening practices and can earn a profit after just three months of fattening. Unlike other agricultural activities, which typically produce once per year, households can fatten multiple “rounds” of sheep and goats every year. If they choose the right animal, are able to access feed, and can time their sales to coincide with holidays, they can earn a good profit.

However, on their own, many PSNP households struggle to earn consistent profits from sheep and goat fattening. It can be difficult for them to obtain a loan sufficient for the initial livestock investment and purchase of feed, and they don’t always have all the knowledge or inputs needed to maximize their profits. To help households address these challenges, the project facilitates access to micro-finance loans and:

- Engages and strengthens **agro-dealers** to enable PSNP households to easily purchase concentrate feed and forage seeds from reliable sources and at affordable prices. The project also links households with **veterinary service providers** and animal health posts.
- Builds the technical and business skills of households by providing **hands-on training** and facilitating **experience sharing** on improved fattening practices, feed improvement techniques and shoaat handling and management. The project also organizes **demonstration events** on crop residue pre-treatment and improved forage.
- Establishes **multi-stakeholder platforms** to serve as coordination, collaboration and information flow platforms between traders, government institutions, agro-dealers, cooperatives, and target farmers. These groups meet biannually to identify challenges and share responsibilities to implement agreed action points.
- Facilitates linkages of households with **sustainable markets** by establishing and strengthening farmer economic and marketing associations (FEMAs). These groups serve as a training and knowledge sharing platform as well as a platform for aggregating input demands and communicating with traders.

To date, over 58,500 project participants (of whom 30,000 are women) are engaged in shoaat fattening.

About the Livelihoods for Resilience Activity:

The Feed the Future Ethiopia – Livelihoods for Resilience Activity is part of the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative. The five-year project is designed to help up to 97,900 chronically food insecure households to graduate with resilience from the government of Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Program. A consortium led by CARE and including the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), and SNV implements the project in 37 PSNP woredas of Tigray, Amhara, and SNNP regions.

