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LIVESTOCK FEEDS & FORAGES | SHEEP FATTENING IS CREATING ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH, INCLUDING YOUNG WOMEN IN ETHIOPIA

KEY MESSAGES

- Traditionally, subsistence sheep fattening systems in rural Ethiopian Highlands offer limited income potential for the farmers. Improved sheep fattening practices and technologies adopted by 44 youth groups in 50 kebeles (Peasant Associations) across Bonga, Menz and Doyogena are enhancing productivity and market orientation to enhance incomes.
- Action by youth groups and cooperatives in sheep fattening has high potential to reduce youth unemployment through the collective pursuit of economic opportunities along the Small Ruminant Value Chain (SRVC).
- Converging partnerships in the form of “Community of Practice” platforms involving youth cooperatives, the local community-based breeding organizations, local governments, research centers, micro-finance institutions and media, all need strengthening for dissemination of innovations that are theme-based and focused on smallholder farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Sheep fattening is a long-standing practice in Ethiopia, particularly focused on meeting the surge in demand typical during festive seasons. It is perceived to be a low-risk activity that is more profitable than rearing large ruminants. Since 2014, small ruminant feed and nutrition interventions by ICARDA, targeting sheep fattening, have revealed that fattened rams using commercial techniques accrued a higher net profit compared to traditional techniques. However, there has been minimum progression by farmers towards commercial-based fattening.

The traditional sheep fattening cycle can last six or more months. Farmers attribute the long fattening period to a lack of adequate and quality feed as well as poor management arising from a lack of skills and knowledge of improved fattening practices and supplementary feeding methods. Thus, improving the feeds and nutrition aspects of the small ruminant value chains became one of the core intervention areas for ICARDA. Focus was put on sheep fattening that entails short-term intensive feeding prior to sale using formulations from locally available feed sources.



A study conducted by ICARDA revealed four main types of sheep fattening systems in Ethiopia: commercial, urban and peri-urban, smallholders, and cooperatives. However, commercial and cooperative sheep farming are not widely practiced in the highlands of Ethiopia. The study revealed that sheep fattening cooperatives mainly for the youth, initiated by local governments across the country were barely in existence because of insufficient training and funding opportunities for youth members. Lack of coordination among government bureaus exacerbated the constraints, further creating a stifling business environment. Since 2017, ICARDA has facilitated the formation of youth groups to promote market-oriented sheep fattening in the Ethiopian Highlands.



Photo ICARDA/Nahom Ephrem

Yeshareg Tesfa is a leader of one of the youth groups who have participated and benefited from the youth sheep fattening program.

THE INNOVATION

The core aspects of market-oriented sheep fattening are:

- **Sustainable availability of feed resources:** Identification and testing of indigenous forages for enhanced fattening performance.
- A **sheep ration balancing tool** has been developed to promote formulation of balanced diets for ram fattening using locally available feed resources.
- **Collective entrepreneurship** via formation of sheep fattening youth groups and cooperatives.
- **Training in entrepreneurial skills development** along with covering core topics on improved sheep fattening technologies and practices.
- **Engagement of youth groups** in sharing, co-generation and knowledge transfer of good practices, through participation in field days.
- **Public and private sector engagement** co-opted through coordination committees termed “Community of Practice Platforms” to improve vertical and lateral engagements.



Photo IIR/Apollo Habtamu

A core aspect of sheep fattening is the identification of locally sourced feed, which ensure sustained feed availability, reduced feed costs and reduced risk of adulteration.

THE DRIVERS OF THE INNOVATION

- **Adoption of improved practices:** Trainings encourage short-term fattening, castration, use of good quality rams.
- **Sustained availability of feed resources of high nutritive value:**
 - Encouraging use of locally available feed resources and minimizing use of commercial feeds.
 - Bonga ARC, a youth cooperative in Bonga, has been testing indigenous forages for use in fattening.
 - Youth groups are taking up production of both indigenous and improved forages to enhance their income base.
- **Well formulated balanced diets for fattening** to achieve optimal daily growth rates: Training of extension agents on the use of a ration balancing tool. The tool is currently excel-based, however, there is progress towards developing android versions of the same to enable on the spot support ration balancing with farmers.
- **Supply of good quality rams:** Close collaboration with CBBP is vital; presence of top quality rams and ewes in the communities guarantees good quality ram lambs for fattening.
- **Institutional support:** Sheep Fattening Community of Practice platforms are encouraging collaborative efforts by stakeholders to promote market-oriented sheep fattening.
- **Collective action:** For enhanced negotiation of fattened ram prices, input supply and purchase, labour saving and market penetration.
- **Women and youth empowerment:** These are two social groups that communities and Governments are focused on.
- **Low start-up capital:** The project initially encouraged ownership of one ram to be eligible to participate. This demystified high investment costs usually associated with the start of a business.

PROGRESS SO FAR

- 838 youth (37% female) are members of 44 sheep fattening youth groups.
- Eight youth groups are currently fully legalized as cooperatives.
- Business models for sheep fattening developed.
- Piloting scaling of improved and market-oriented sheep

fattening practices through radio programming. Bonga ARC, led by Muluken Zeleke is championing radio broadcasting in SNNPR Regional State with weekly transmissions in 5 local languages namely Kaffa, Sheka, Chara, Nao, Majang that target a reach of 9.1 million people.

24-year-old Mitiku Abate from Serera, Doyogena Mitiku. He bought his first ram at 2800 ETB (USD 60) to qualify as a beneficiary of the sheep fattening project that then gave him a second ram.

“ I questioned how my life would change by starting a fattening business with two rams until I received Entrepreneurial Skills Development training. ”

After three months of fattening, he sold his ram for 7200 ETB (USD 155). He is now a proud owner of 24 fattening rams during every 3-month fattening cycle.



THE IMPACTS

Sheep fattening youth groups have been piloted in three regions of Ethiopia. Examples of impacts of CBBPs in Ethiopia are highlighted below:

- 100% of original members of the 44 youth groups are still participating after three years, and there is a 42% increase in new memberships.
- Nine sheep fattening coopeatives, including two women-only cooperatives have been registered to date.
- Fattening weights of rams have increased by up to 87%, while utilizing only locally available feed resources.
- Increase in fattening rams by youth during each fattening cycle of three months, from two rams three years ago to between 12 to 16.
- Average individual youth income from fattened rams have increased to ETB 19000-24000 (USD 410-520) during each fattening cycle which lasts three months.
- Youth have adopted the full package of improved sheep fattening practices at a rate of 83%. This entails: 3-month fattening, castration, deworming and clean feeding , watering using troughs and planting at least one type of forage in their backyard.
- Women members have been empowered to participate in leadership and managerial roles within cooperatives. Bonga boosts the only **women-only** sheep fattening cooperative (Shaya Shaditi Women's Sheep Fattening and Input Supply Cooperative) that has been successfully fully registered.

CRITICAL FACTORS OF SUCCESS

Based on the experience and lessons learnt from the implementation of market-oriented sheep fattening in Ethiopia, critical factors for success have been identified:

1. Enabling registration of sheep fattening youth groups to become legalized cooperatives. Existing cooperative by-laws that stipulate “registration of only one cooperative per Kebele” are hindering of sheep fattening youth cooperatives.
2. Outlining approaches to operationalizing women's empowerment within sheep fattening. This involves promoting women's participation, access to benefit accrued, and decision-making on financial capitals.
3. Strengthening community of practice platforms that engage a diverse range of value chain actors from the traditional market, public sector and civil society through a collective action platform to jointly identify critical issues, design and test solutions to specific bottlenecks along the demand and supply chains and inform and influence public policy and decision making with the goal to improve commercialization of sheep fattening.
4. Complementary services including market linkages, disease prevention and control.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The competencies required to manage cooperatives is lacking among the youth, particularly in women-only youth groups, because of their low literacy levels. Continuous need for upgrade for skills to manage cooperatives is vital.
- Further identification of existing indigenous forages. These will aid to increase sustained availability of locally available feed resources.
- Current cooperative by-laws need to be revised to accommodate consolidation of youth groups into legalized cooperatives.
- Strengthen the roles, coordination and collaboration of community of practice platforms for enhanced engagement of policy and value chain actors.
- Develop digital tools for collaboration, sharing and dissemination of technical and market information to youth group and cooperative members.

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Video

Sheep fattening in Ethiopia:
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Photo ICARDA/Nahom Ephrem

Amsalech Hailemariam, Chairperson of the women-only fully registered Shaya Shaditi Women's Sheep Fattening and Input Supply Cooperative in Boka Kebele, Bonga.

Partners

The SmarT-Ethiopia project is led by ICARDA in close collaboration with ILRI, Ethiopian NARS and other international partners.



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Cover photo: Improved sheep fattening methods entails in part short-term intensive feeding prior to the sale of sheep using formulations from locally available feed sources.