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## About this newsletter

The purpose of the RAISE-FS newsletter is to provide relevant information on the latest developments and current issues in the Ethiopian food system and the project support activities.

In this issue we highlight the major activities that have been taken place between Oct to Dec., 2024

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## Empowering youth: Transforming ideas into sustainable ventures

Some of the most transformative and lucrative business ideas come from the young generation of Ethiopia. It is for this reason that the SWR Ethiopia project, Resilient Agriculture for Inclusive and Sustainable Ethiopian Food Systems (RAISE-FS), ran a competition for food system solution concepts within the four partner universities of Mekelle, Bahirdar, Hawassa and Haramaya.

The competition received large number of responses, with 164 concept submissions from students across various academic levels. After a rigorous screening process, 47 applicants advanced to the proposal writing stage. These aspiring entrepreneurs underwent extensive training in entrepreneurship, business plan

development, and pitching skills, supported by one-on-one coaching. Ultimately, 29 finalists were selected to present their ideas in the final pitching phase.

The judges were high profile professionals coming from business, research, and development. The finalists poured their whole energy and passion to convince the panel of judges. They told their stories, the impact their concept would bring if nurtured and the business model to ensure the sustainability of their venture. Hawinet Duguma from Hawassa University focused on producing vermicompost from plant biomass sourced from Hawassa

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SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS Youth Challenge Fund award winners



## Empowering youth:...

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Lake. Her idea aims to address environmental challenges while creating economic opportunities. *"If we don't win, we will still pursue other financial sources to realize our vision,"* she stated.

Abrehaleign G/Selasie from Mekelle University's Software Engineering Department proposed smart agricultural technologies designed to help farmers make data-driven decisions. *"Even if I don't win, I already have a customer who is ready to use my product,"* he remarked, highlighting the competition's role in refining his concept and fostering partnerships.



Abrehaleign G/Selasie from Mekelle

Similarly, Mohammed Juhar Musa from Haramaya University introduced a multipowered homemade egg incubator. *"Whether I win or not, I believe my business idea will succeed*

*in finding customers,"* he stated, praising the transparent and supportive nature of the competition.

Raula Yeshim from Bahirdar University pitched an innovative idea for cosmetics made from fish skin. She emphasized the value of the entrepreneurship training and coaching her team received. *"We are hopeful to win, but if not, we will continue refining our business and seek other financial sources,"* she said confidently.

As all competitions need to have winners, so did the competition of the last 29 youth. Hence, 12 winners were announced to be supported with seed money for starting up their business. Winning concepts included cosmetics production from fish waste, aquaculture production on GERD, earthworm production for poultry feed, potato harvesters, rice threshers and dehullers, sustainable charcoal briquettes, vermicompost and liquid fertilizer production,



Mohammed Juhar from Haramaya



Raula Yeshim from Bahirdar University

bioplastics from banana pseudo-stem, plant based RUTF and nutritious food paste production, and fish by-product use for poultry feed.

While only 12 were crowned winners, it was agreed by all judges that all the finalists were winners in their own way. The finalists had substantial technical capacity and the ambition to startup some of the most transformative businesses. What is next, for the twelve winners of the competition would be technical support to breakdown the initial capital cost of investment, seed fund support as well as business development support for a year when they are setting up their operations. This initiative underscores the potential of Ethiopia's youth to drive transformative change through innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship.

## YOUTH CHALLENGE FUND (YCF) FINAL AWARD CEREMO



## Institutionalising the Scaling Readiness Approach in RAISE-FS Intervention areas

The national research system in Ethiopia has made significant strides in developing various technologies; however, many of these innovations have struggled to reach end users and deliver the desired impact. Experts attribute this challenge to the current scaling approaches employed by research institutions and the extension systems, which often focus on isolated components of innovation. In response to these limitations, the SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS project initiated the institutionalisation of the Scaling Readiness Approach (SRA) in project intervention areas and regions. In the scaling

readiness approach, innovation is seen as a bundle of core and complementary innovations which add up together to make a comprehensive whole. It also entails the rating of scaling readiness of each component of the innovation bundle. Such an understanding of innovations leads to identification of scaling bottlenecks and the potential contribution of each actor in curbing these scaling bottlenecks. This implies that one project or one organization alone cannot undertake a successful scaling effort; scaling requires partnership. Accordingly, SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS project organized a

and explore enabling conditions. Group exercises were conducted to familiarize attendees with the step-by-step methodology of the Scaling Readiness Approach. These activities included characterizing innovation bundles, diagnosing bottlenecks, and assessing the readiness of scaling interventions. Furthermore, participants collaboratively explored strategies to address these challenges, established plans for partnerships and collaborations, and discussed the final navigation process. This process emphasized the importance of designing short- and long-term feedback loops to continuously



series of one-day workshops in Amhara, Oromia, Southern States, and Tigray regions, aiming to create a critical mass of experts within relevant institutions and strengthen partnerships to facilitate joint planning and execution of scaling activities. The workshop also aimed at strengthening partnership which facilitates joint planning and execution of scaling activities in the RAISE-FS project areas.

During these workshops, key concepts of the Scaling Readiness Approach (SRA) were highlighted and thoroughly discussed among participants. The discussions underscored the importance of fostering strong partnerships and suggested innovative ideas to enhance collaboration among stakeholders. Participants across all four regions stressed the necessity of raising awareness

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## Promoting consumption of nutrient dense food in Kofale *woreda* through recipe demonstrations

Kofale *woreda*, is one of the areas with abundant natural resource and production potential region in Oromia region of West Arsi zone. However, the areas face a paradox of nutrition insecurity despite the availability of diverse and nutritious food crops. Many reasons can be attributed for this but knowledge gap in preparing balanced meals often leads to the underutilization of these resources, impacting community health and well-being.

a food preparation and recipe demonstration event.

The event began with blessings from local leaders, followed by expert discussions on the nutritional value of vegetables, hygiene practices during food preparation, and the importance of light cooking to retain nutrients. The primary objective was to educate the community on preparing balanced, nutrient-rich meals using locally available ingredients. Through practical demonstrations, participants

different recipe preparation from the home garden crops, experts emphasized techniques to preserve and enhance nutrient content, empowering attendees to improve their dietary habits. The program was guided by Ethiopia's Food-Based Dietary Guidelines, which advocate for diverse food consumption, including at least four food groups per meal and six throughout the day.

The event also shed light on the economic and awareness



In response, the Kulumsa Agricultural Research Center (KARC), in collaboration with SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS project and the Kofale *Woreda* Agricultural Office, promoted year-round production of nutritionally dense crop types on selected farm household home gardens. To encourage farm households, consume what they produce in their home garden they organized

were taught how to maximize the nutritional value of home-garden vegetables and improve their dietary practices for better health outcomes.

A variety of food groups—including cereals, pulses, fruits, leafy greens, vegetables, milk, and oils—were incorporated into the demonstrations to promote diet diversity. The demonstration allowed participants to learn

barriers that have hindered diet diversity in the community. Before participating in the demonstration, many of them confessed that they were unaware of the nutritional value of their produce and often sold nutrient-rich crops to purchase less nutritious alternatives. Through this initiative, they reflected that they have learned to consume their produce and

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## From awareness to action: Community-driven gender transformation in focus

The Social Analysis and Action (SAA) dialogue has demonstrated significant progress in promoting gender equality and empowerment, as evidenced during a monitoring visit conducted from December 2–12, 2024. This impactful community-driven initiative is facilitating meaningful transformations in Ethiopia's South, Oromia, and Tigray regions by addressing entrenched gender roles and social norms. The initiative, which engaged six *kebeles* through discussions, home visits, and community interactions, is creating ripples of change in individual attitudes, household dynamics, and community structures.

Participants demonstrated a deeper understanding of gender roles and power dynamics within their communities. As one participant in Oromia reflected,



*"Before this, I thought change was impossible. Now, I see that even small actions can break long-standing barriers."* Another participant in Tigray expressed, *"I wish we had learned these lessons earlier; when we first got married. But now, we're teaching our children what our parents couldn't teach us."*

Women, in particular, have gained confidence in public speaking and advocating for equitable practices, with many now playing active roles in household decision-making and income management. Women were observed taking more active roles in agricultural decision-making and demonstrating greater

pursue personal and community activities with greater autonomy.

The program has fostered more equitable relationships within households. Men are stepping up to share domestic duties, leading to reduced tensions and improved harmony. Joint decision-making has become more common, with couples now managing finances together.

*"My husband used to sell cattle without informing me. Now, he consults me on every sale or purchase,"* said Chaltu from Oromia.

Improved communication between spouses has also brought families closer. In communities where husbands



*Ujuma and her husband*

control over household income, significantly boosting their autonomy and confidence. As men have begun contributing more to household chores and childcare, women have gained greater freedom to pursue personal and community activities, reflecting increased autonomy and mobility.

This new experience has also translated into greater mobility for women, as men increasingly share household responsibilities. Tasks like childcare and domestic chores are no longer seen as exclusively "female work," enabling women to

and wives once rarely ate or walked together, these barriers are fading. Stronger social networks have emerged as families collaborate more effectively and support one another.

The SAA initiative is challenging deeply entrenched social norms. Men performing tasks like washing dishes or fetching water are breaking down rigid gender roles. Harmful traditions, such as food taboos for pregnant women and adolescents,

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# Beating climate change with sorghum & mung beans intercropping

Farmers in Mahbere Genet *kebele*, Enderta *Woreda*, are experiencing a shift in their farming system with the introduction of sorghum-mung bean intercropping. This innovative farming technique is helping them adapt to climate change while improving yields, soil health, and overall profitability.

Traditionally, farmers in the area relied on long-maturing local sorghum varieties. However, delayed rainfall and unpredictable weather patterns forced many to abandon sorghum cultivation altogether. Today, thanks to the introduction of early maturing sorghum and mung bean varieties as companion crops,

improvements in both crop performance and overall farming sustainability.

Mr. Kalayu Hailu, one of the pioneering farmers hosting this practice during the 2024 cropping season, shared his inspiring journey of transformation.

"This year, I have witnessed marvelous improvements in sorghum production that have really revolutionized the way we do smart farming," said Mr. Kalayu. "Unlike the previous variety, which we planted in May and harvested in December, the new sorghum variety matures much earlier, allowing us to optimize our planting schedule and cope with unpredictable rainfall."

applying fertilizers at the right time.

The new variety of sorghum has shown tremendous resilience in the face of a complete lack of rain in September. Planted in early July, it grew robustly and is almost ready for harvest. Meanwhile, Mr. Kalayu's mung bean crop has also yielded promising results, with an estimated harvest of approximately 8 quintals per hectare.

This year's success has encouraged Mr. Kalayu to expand the area under intercropping in the next season. The new varieties have also received enthusiastic requests for seeds from fellow farmers.



farmers are regaining hope and achieving promising results. According to research findings, cereal-pulse intercropping systems have several advantages, including reduced pest and disease pressure, improved soil fertility, weed suppression, increased food diversity, and improved resource efficiency. Farmers in Mahbere Genet *kebele* are already reaping these benefits, with many reporting significant

Mr. Kalayu explained that the most important thing was to follow professional guidance in implementing the technological packages for the best growth of the crops, from land preparation, row planting techniques, application of fertilizers to timely weeding for good growth of the crops.

He attributed the success of their crops to the combined efforts of ploughing, leveling the soil, intercropping mung beans with sorghum, and

"We will involve more relatives and follower farmers next season," he shared. "I will share the seeds I can provide and hope to receive additional seed support from the project for the community. Together we can create a better agricultural environment that benefits all." The success of sorghum-mung bean intercropping in Mahbere Genet *kebele* demonstrates the potential of such simple but transformative techniques in addressing climate change challenges.

## Beating climate change with sorghum...



As we look ahead to the next cropping season, there is great optimism that these practices will continue to shift farming practices in the area, enhance food security, and promote environmental sustainability. By fostering collaboration between farmers, researchers, and agricultural experts, initiatives like this one will pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient agriculture in the region.

## From awareness to action: Community-driven ...

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are being reconsidered. One participant noted, *"Our daughter used to wait for her brother to finish eating before she could eat. Now, they eat together and get to school on time."*

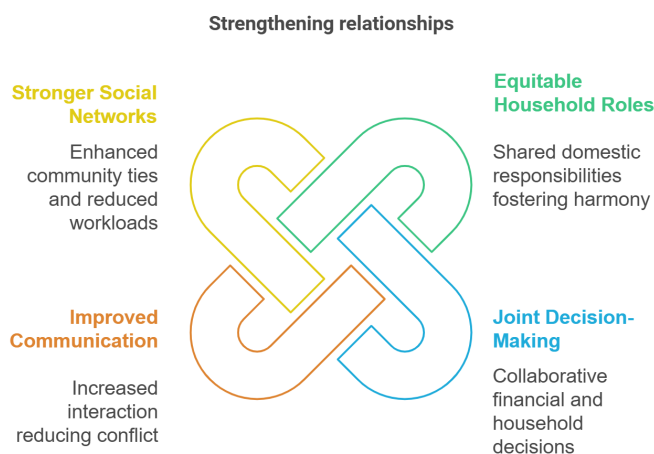
Women are also stepping into traditionally male-dominated spaces, such as participating in marriage negotiations for their children. These changes are inspiring broader community adoption of equitable practices. Support from RAISE-FS implementing partners, religious



leaders, local authorities, and public office stakeholders has been vital in driving these changes. Scaling and institutionalizing community-driven approaches like SAA is essential for building resilient, equitable communities.

For many, the transformation feels profound. Ujuma, a participant, shared her husband's emotional journey: *"He has apologized for his ignorance so many times. Galatooma Wollahi (Thank you in God's name)."*

By embedding gender transformation in food systems research and scaling these community-driven approaches, we can ensure lasting and positive impacts for future generations, enabling individuals and communities to flourish.





## Institutionalising the Scaling Readiness...

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about the approach among experts and decision-makers within relevant organizations involved in scaling innovations and related initiatives. They emphasized that popularizing the approach could drive significant improvements in scaling efforts, aligning them more effectively with the ongoing activities of regional government entities.

The interactive sessions provided a platform for participants to share their experiences in scaling innovations, identify bottlenecks,

refine and improve scaling efforts, ensuring sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Finally, an agreement has been reached among participants to collaboratively plan and implement the RAISE-FS scaling activities for 2025, employing the scaling readiness approach. Participants indicated that the workshop was instrumental in fostering a shared understanding of the topic and creating connections among institutions for future collaborative initiatives.

Furthermore, they suggested

that the approach need to be thought in universities and be incorporated in the extension curricula for broader impact. The workshops brought together 103 professionals and officials from diverse fields, including agronomists, extensionists, nutritionists, food scientists, gender experts, university lecturers, researchers, and representatives from regional bureaus of agriculture, seed enterprises, women and social affairs offices, universities, and the Food Systems Resilience Program.

## Promoting consumption of nutrient ....

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sell surplus produce to buy high-value commodities to enhance their diets.

Farmers were recognized for their efforts and encouraged to apply the lessons learned at their home to improve their family dietary diversity. Accordingly, many of the participants vowed to try and adopt the cooking techniques and hygienic practices that they have seen to ensure safe and healthy meals for their families.

The demonstrations were held across four *kebeles*, namely Kofele 01, Kofele 02, Germama, and Koma Mamo, within the Kofele *woreda*. These events brought together a total of 123 participants, comprising 69 men and 54 women. The participants included home garden host farmers, development agents, *woreda* experts, and *kebele* administrators.

From participants reflection the demonstration was successful. The collaborative effort between



Kulumsa ARC, RAISE-FS project, *woreda* office of agriculture, farmers, experts, and local leaders highlights the potential of fostering healthier eating habits and transforming local food systems.

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