

Issue 12 June 2025

About this newsletter

RAISE-FS is one of SWR Ethiopia projects. 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 March to June 2025

Inside this issue

Empowering Ethiopian professionals through international .01

Ethiopia’s spice industry has immense potential03

National Nutrition-Sensitive Agri-Food System Forum04

From Data to Dialogue: Co-created Stories of Shiftin05

Transforming healthier lives through home gardens06

Hydroponic fodder production: A promising alternative07

Empowering Ethiopian professionals through international capacity building trainings

In an era where global food systems face unprecedented challenges, from climate change to population growth, the need for skilled professionals to lead sustainable and innovative solutions has never been more critical. Ethiopia, a nation with a rich agricultural heritage and immense potential, is taking significant strides by adopting a food system transformation approach as its development pathway. SWR Ethiopia, in collaboration with Ethiopian partner organizations across four regions, has been spearheading projects to support the transformation of Ethiopia’s food system. Through the Research for Food System Transformation (R4FST) approach, SWR Ethiopia focuses on generating evidence, building stakeholder capacity, and scaling proven innovations for broader impact. As part of its effort, SWR Ethiopia (RAISE-FS project) in collaboration

with Wageningen University & Research has facilitated international short courses to address critical aspects of Ethiopia’s food system. The courses— “Governance from Farm to Fork for Food Safety” and “Food System Transformation”—were specifically tailored to the Ethiopian context, equipping professionals with the knowledge and tools needed to drive change.

Adapting global concepts to the local context

One of the most significant benefits of international capacity-building trainings, such as these ones, is their ability to bridge global expertise with specific local realities. Ethiopian professionals are given the opportunity to

Continue reading on page 2



Empowering Ethiopian professionals through international ...

Continued from page 1

learn from experts in food systems, technology, and policy while sharing insights about Ethiopia's unique challenges and opportunities.

Dr. Dawit Alemu, Wageningen Research Ethiopia Country Representative and RAISE-FS Project Manager, highlighted the importance of these initiatives. "Safeguarding food safety requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders," he emphasized. The courses are aimed at building awareness of the food systems approach, facilitating understanding of its application in agriculture and food system transformation and adapting global concepts to Ethiopia's local context.

This course is part of our efforts to contribute to the transformation of Ethiopia's food system by addressing key challenges in policy, practices, and institutions. We're building capacity and fostering wider engagement among all relevant actors at federal and regional levels," he added.

On food safety, both Dr. Wondale Habtamu, Deputy Director General of EAA and Head of NPPO, Mr. Negash Sime, Deputy Director General of EFDA addressed the complex dynamics of the Ethiopian food system. Dr. Wondale identified food safety, quality, and traceability as priority concerns and highlighted the critical roles of governance training, private sector engagement, and trust-building in ensuring success in these areas. Mr. Negash spoke about the National Food Safety Master Plan and the importance of farm-to-fork strategies. He highlighted stakeholders' collaboration, especially with research, academic institutions and private sectors for food safety. Mr. Negash stated that reducing foodborne disease and safeguarding public health

is everyone's role and requires the active participation of all stakeholders in the food value chain.

Learning in action: From theory to practice

The courses were not just about theoretical knowledge—they included field visits to government institutions and private sector organizations excelling in food safety practices and food system transformation. These hands-on experiences allowed participants to see best practices in action and develop actionable plans for their own work.

Dr. Atsede Solomon, a researcher from the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Institute, shared her insights after participating in a face-to-face training session held in Addis Ababa. Reflecting on the experience, Dr. Atsede remarked on the uniqueness of the training, stating, "The training is new to me. I learned a lot about food system concepts, approaches, and tools." She further expressed how this newfound knowledge has been both inspiring and transformative, highlighting its potential to influence her approach to research and development interventions moving forward.



Dr. Atsede Solomon, researcher at EIAR

Similarly, Degenet Teferi from Bahir Dar University praised the relevance of the training: "We learned food system concepts and tools tailored to Ethiopia's specific context. We worked on our own cases, developed concrete proposals, and created action plans that we are ready to implement at our duty stations."



Degenet Teferi from Bahir Dar University

A vision for the future

The initiative has been widely praised as a transformative step for Ethiopia's agriculture and food security. Dr. Getachew Diriba, Senior Advisor to the Minister and Principal Coordinator of Ethiopia's Food System Transformation, called the training a "huge investment" in the country's future. He urged participants to share their knowledge widely: "The knowledge and skills gained from these trainings should not remain with the participants alone. They need to cascade this learning to their duty stations and actively contribute to enhancing Ethiopia's food systems."

Ethiopia's spice industry has immense potential for development

Ethiopia, a land known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse agriculture, holds an untapped treasure trove in its spice sector. According to a recent working paper by RAISE-FS ([link](#)), the country has over 50 spice varieties registered for the major 10 types of spices, including korarima, cumin, pepper, and fenugreek. Despite Ethiopia's favourable agroecological conditions and the significant role of smallholder farmers in

spice production, the sector remains underdeveloped, contributing only minimally to the national economy.

With Ethiopia's population rapidly growing and urbanization on the rise, domestic demand for spices has surged. However, the country is still importing spices worth over \$800,000 annually to meet this demand. This reliance on imports highlights a crucial gap in the local spice value chain—one that

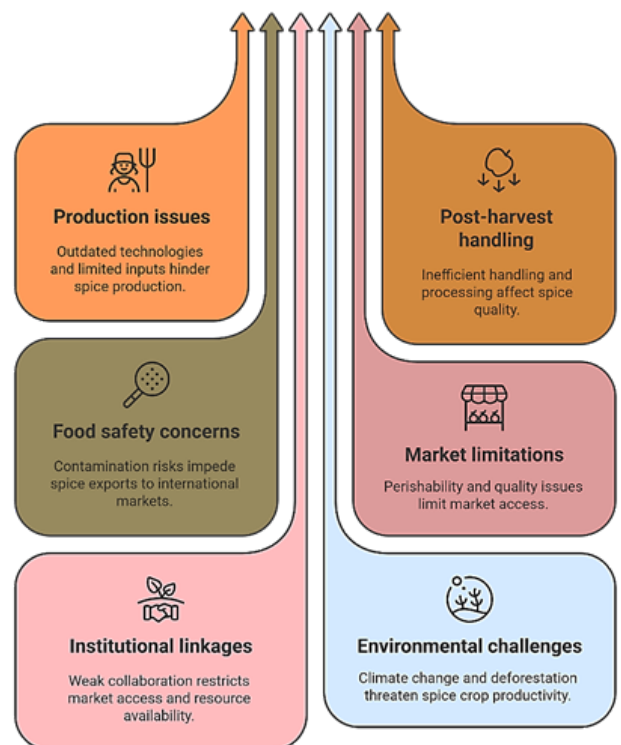
presents a golden opportunity for growth.

The RAISE-FS working paper sheds light on the immense potential to transform Ethiopia's spice sector. By enhancing production, adding value through processing, and boosting exports, Ethiopia could not only reduce its dependency on imports but also position itself as a competitive player in the global spice market.

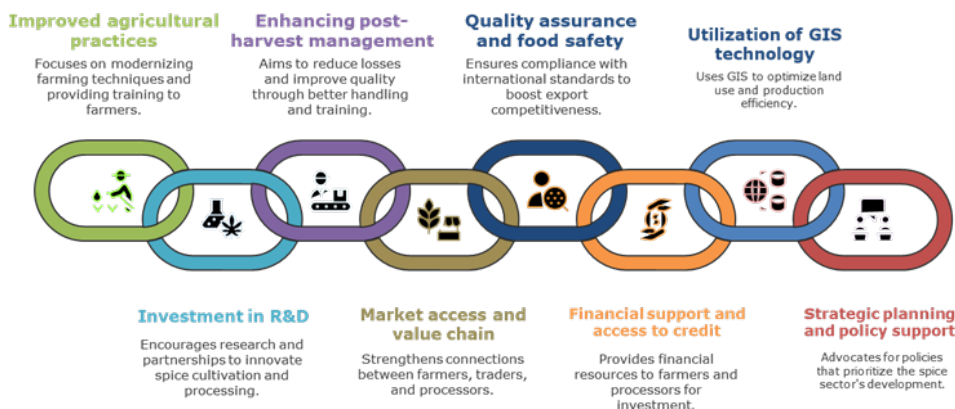
Key insights from the study

The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic and market factors influencing the spice sector. It also outlines evidence-based strategies aimed at promoting the production and marketing of Ethiopia's major spices. Among these are innovative approaches to improving yields, creating value-added products, and strengthening market linkages.

One of the standout features of the study is its agro-ecological suitability analysis, which includes detailed maps highlighting areas ideal for cultivating key spices. The report focuses on ten main spices with high potential for development: cardamom, black cumin, white cumin, black pepper, coriander, fenugreek, ginger, hot pepper, korarima, and turmeric. These insights provide a roadmap for stakeholders—farmers, investors, policymakers, and exporters—to make informed decisions that could unlock the sector's full potential.



Enhancing Ethiopia's spice industry



Looking ahead: Building a thriving spice industry

The findings from this working paper come at a critical time for Ethiopia. With strategic investment and collaboration among value chain actors, the country has an opportunity to transform its spice sector into a thriving industry. This would not only boost rural livelihoods but also contribute significantly to national economic growth.

National Nutrition-Sensitive Agri-Food System Forum update

RAISE-FS contributes to strengthening national nutrition-sensitive agri-food systems. The Food and Nutrition Office (FNO) at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), in partnership with the SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS project, successfully hosted the 6th quarterly meeting of the National Nutrition-Sensitive Agri-Food System (NSAFS) forum in March 2025. The event took place at Nexus Inn Hotel and brought together over 29 participants representing government and non-governmental institutions.

The NSAFS Forum, established by the MoA's FNO on November 13, 2022, serves as a vital platform for coordinating and advancing Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (NSA) initiatives within Ethiopia's agriculture sector. The forum aligns its activities with the Ministry's NSAFS strategy and the National Food and Nutrition Strategy (NFNS). It aims to promote harmonised planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of NSA programs, fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

The forum operates under a structured system with a chairperson, co-chair, and secretariat to ensure effective coordination and accountability. It reports directly to the FNO

and works to align efforts among implementing partners. SWR Ethiopia, an official member of the forum, has been actively involved in its development since its inception.

Highlights from the forum

The meeting commenced with an opening address by Ms. Alemtsehay Sergew, Head of the Food and Nutrition Office at the Ministry of Agriculture. In her remarks, Ms. Sergew underscored the importance of strengthening the NSAFS Forum through enhanced coordination and collaboration among stakeholders. She emphasised that the gathering was a valuable opportunity for experience-sharing and mutual learning.

The forum featured several key presentations which included MoA–FNO progress report highlighting updates on ongoing NSA initiatives and achievements, experience sharing by Sasakawa Africa and SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS project.

The RAISE-FS project presented compelling evidence generated over three years on improving access to nutrient-dense foods, implementing Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategies to promote healthy diets, and conducting

implementation research on EFDBG. Additionally, the project highlighted significant achievements in food safety, including:

- Food control assessments.
- Research on mycotoxin prevalence in selected commodities.
- Piloting mycotoxin mitigation technologies.
- Capacity-building efforts on governance and farm-to-fork food safety practices.
- Outputs from the food safety technical working group.

Engaging discussions and suggested strategies for the way forward

Following the presentations, participants engaged in a dynamic Q&A session and discussions. These interactions provided an opportunity to reflect on best practices, lessons learned, and challenges that remain in advancing nutrition-sensitive agriculture in Ethiopia.

The meeting concluded with a strong call to action to further strengthen the NSAFS Forum and enhance coordination among stakeholders. Responsibilities were delegated for organising the 7th quarterly forum meeting, ensuring continuity in efforts to improve Ethiopia's agri-food systems.



From data to dialogue: Co-created stories of shifting norms

How a participatory approach helped communities and experts reflect, learn, and transform together

Between June 8th and 14th, RAISE-FS teams from four regions convened in Gumer *woreda*, located in the Central Ethiopia Region, to mark the conclusion of a year-long pilot of the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach. This gathering was not merely a wrap-up event; it was a profound opportunity for reflection, learning, and transformation. Across the *kebeles* of Denber and Aselecha, where the SAA process had been unfolding, the visit became a space for

community members and facilitators to revisit their shared journey and uncover powerful stories of change.

Practicing empowering data collection

The week began with an immersive exploration of SAA tools designed to empower rather than extract. Through interactive sessions, participants practiced facilitation techniques, learned active listening skills, and engaged in simulations that fostered honest dialogue.

These tools were intentionally participatory and visual, ensuring accessibility and replicability using locally available materials. Throughout the week, several creative tools were used to uncover rich stories of change:

- **The interactive timeline:** this tool helped participants reflect on how they felt at different stages of the SAA journey—from their very first day of engagement, to moments of realization, and how they perceive their current situation.
- **The community mapping tool:** these invited men and women to illustrate how they interpret change across different spaces such as the home, market, school, and water point.
- **The basket tool:** with this, participants voted on the types and depth of change experienced at individual, relational, and structural levels, using local symbols and visuals to guide discussion.
- **Community visioning and pledging:** during this final activity, participants shared gender-related goals for their families and communities and made personal commitments to help realize these goals.

Each day in the field offered regional participants the chance to facilitate sessions, gaining confidence in applying these tools. Community members shared compelling stories of transformation, including men taking on roles traditionally seen as women's work and women gaining greater influence over



Continue reading on page 8

Transforming healthier lives through home gardens and social behaviour change communication

SWR Ethiopia's RAISE-FS project is making strides in dietary diversity and improved nutrition, with a focus on empowering communities to grow safe and nutritious food by promoting home gardens and Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) interventions using the Ethiopian Food Based Dietary Guideline (EFBDG). In Angot, one of the food-insecure *woredas* in the North Wollo Zone of the Amhara region, early observations from a recent survey signal positive changes in household nutrition and dietary diversity.

Tayech's promising journey

Tayech Melaku, who lives in Angot *woreda*, Eshet Amba *Kebele*, is one of the participants who received training on vegetable year-round production and SBCC intervention through the RAISE-FS project and Sirinka Agricultural Research Centre (SARC). Tayech with her spouse received start-up vegetable seeds, training and continuous advisory services. Additionally, she was provided with monthly key messages promoting healthy dietary practices. The impact of this intervention has been very significant, yielding remarkable results for Tayech and her household.

"I sold about 9,000 ETB last year (2024), beyond what I consumed and shared with my relatives, I eat vegetables almost every day with shiro and kik, and I provide them when my family members come to visit."

With the money that she gets from the sale of the surplus vegetables, Tayech purchased foods that were not available at home to ensure a more balanced diet such as peas, beans, and grass pea for *shiro*, while maintaining a garden

with crops for the rainy season and seedlings for the next. *"I am very happy with what I am doing, and I want others to have this chance too,"* she adds.

The SBCC training sessions included monthly discussions on key health messages, assignments with reflection opportunities, and practical training on incorporating diverse food groups into meals within the local context. *"We were taught to eat a variety of foods even in small amounts for better health,"* she explains. *"Now, instead of buying vegetables which are expensive, I grow them in my garden and share with my family and neighbours."*



The food patterns of Tayech's family have changed as a result of her newfound understanding. She said, *"Previously, we did not intentionally eat vegetables. We now eat them regularly, and I always encourage my neighbours to do the same"*. Her garden has not only improved her family's nutrition but also strengthened community ties as she shares her produce with others. *"When a guest comes, I collect vegetables from my garden, cook with shiro, and feel happy serving them,"* she added.

Tayech's success is not limited to her garden. She consults with her husband on how to use the income she gets from her vegetable sales. Together, they save weekly earnings in Tseday Bank-Microfinance and purchase grains for yearly *shiro* preparation. She said, *"We collaboratively work with my husband"* emphasizing the collaborative decision-making in her household. Even without future seed support from the Sirinka ARC, Tayech is adamant about moving forward to sustain her progress independently. *"They showed us how to do it once, and I will keep producing by buying seeds myself,"* she affirmed.

Tayech's story highlights key lessons for sustainable and scalable home gardening, emphasizing the importance of improving the vegetable seed system for affordable, quality seeds, empowering farmers and communities with knowledge on vegetable production and consumption, and utilizing SBCC strategies to influence social norms, provide clear information, and promote healthy eating habits for better health and well-being.

Hydroponic fodder production: A promising alternative to rising poultry feed costs

The Ethiopian poultry sector, grappling with escalating feed costs, is turning to an innovative solution: hydroponic fodder production. This sustainable alternative promises to alleviate the financial strain on farmers by providing an affordable and nutrient-rich feed option.

The soaring prices of conventional feed ingredients such as maize and soya bean have placed a heavy burden on poultry farmers across Ethiopia. This challenge is compounded by the competing interest of cereal grain, which puts human food needs against poultry feed demands. In response, stakeholders are exploring hydroponic fodder as an alternative.

In 2023 and 2024, a joint effort between the Bishoftu Agricultural Research Centre (BARC) and the SWR Ethiopia RAISE-FS project was initiated in Ada'a woreda. The initiative aimed to showcase the potential of hydroponic fodder as a non-conventional feed resource for poultry farmers. Thirty participants, covering various scales of poultry enterprises, received both theoretical and practical training, with over 80% being youth and half being women, highlighting the role of this technology in empowering marginalized groups.

The results of the demonstration were promising. Farmers reported improved egg production, with inclusion rates of up to 15% in layer diets boosting output and profitability. The switch to hydroponic fodder

also significantly cut feed costs while enhancing egg quality by deepening yolk colour, indicating its superior nutritional value. The system's efficiency was evident, producing 6-8 kg of fodder per 1 kg of seed within just 7-9 days, optimizing land and water use.

Beyond economic benefits, hydroponic systems are environmentally friendly, requiring negligible pesticides and fertilizers. This approach supports a year-round supply of poultry feed, reducing reliance on rain-fed and irrigated fodder production.

The implications of this tech-

nology extend beyond poultry farming. By reducing dependence on conventional feed sources, hydroponic fodder contributes to national food security by easing the demand on cereal grains intended for human consumption. It also opens new income-generating opportunities for rural communities, particularly for youth and women involved in feed production and distribution.

The successful demonstration of the hydroponic fodder technology showed a promising pathway for improving poultry production sustainability in Ethiopia. By integrating this technology with insect farming, particularly the production of Black Soldier Fly (BSF), and organic composting, it contributes to a robust circular economy, contributing to food security and environmental resilience. Despite its promise, the scaling-up of this technology requires concerted efforts involving awareness campaigns and supportive policy frameworks. It is imperative for local authorities and communities to actively consider the economic and environmental outcomes of the hydroponic fodder production to enhance wider adoption. Furthermore, it is crucial for government entities and development partners to facilitate access to necessary resources, offer technical support, and assist smallholder farmers in adopting these innovations.



Hydroponic fodder production is a soil-less technique that allows farmers to cultivate nutrient-rich fodder in a controlled environment using minimal resources. This method ensures a consistent supply of fresh fodder, packed with essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals crucial for optimal poultry growth and egg production.



From data to dialogue: Co-created stories ...

continued from page 5

household decision-making. At the same time, deeper discussions revealed ongoing challenges such as unequal inheritance rights—highlighting the complexity of change.

Each evening, the team reconvened to reflect on the day's activities. These debriefs allowed them to identify lessons learned, adjust tools or facilitation approaches, and ensure responsiveness to community contexts. This iterative process of learning and adapting helped refine the approach throughout the week. On the fourth day, influential community members—including newly elected SAA team leaders—joined core groups for a joint dialogue focused on sustaining gender transformation. Participants shared their personal commitments to support ongoing change efforts within their communities.

The final day was dedicated to reviewing the week's experiences. Teams assessed

the effectiveness of the tools, reflected on facilitation techniques, and tailored rollout plans for their respective regions. What began as a pilot initiative evolved into something far more profound—a shared space for learning and transformation that empowered both communities and researchers alike.

This participatory approach marked a significant departure from conventional research methods. As one facilitator shared, "This helped me understand what it truly means to listen, not just collect answers." The experience in Gumer vividly demonstrated the power of inclusive dialogue to inspire change and set the stage for deeper, more sustainable impact. This same transformative approach will now be contextualized and replicated across the Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray regions, paving the way for even more co-created narratives of shifting norms.



New publications

- [Harmonizing nutrition behavioural change communication materials using the Ethiopian Food-Based Dietary Guidelines: A scoping review](#)
- [Exploring the growth potential of Ethiopia's spices industry: Opportunities for development](#)

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