A planning workshop for the year 2023 and beyond held

From 20th to 22nd of September 2022, RAISE-FS held a planning workshop for 2023 fiscal year and beyond at Adama town. The aim of this workshop, which gathered around 35 experts from research institutes and universities, was to identify leverage points and prioritise concrete action for innovation testing and validation related to transforming food systems in the identified food system typologies.

Dr. Dawit Alemu, RAISE-FS project manager, indicated in his welcoming address that the planning will stretch beyond 2023 fiscal year and extend till the end of the project period. He emphasized that participants should think about the full project duration because innovation testing and validation takes time. Dr. Irene Koomen RAISE-FS project coordinator during the opening speech said “food systems transformation approach is about breaking the “silo” and creating strong collaboration and synergy among stakeholders in the system to have the bigger picture.” Dr. Irene, added that “food systems transformation is about how we can have a greater impact together, not about demanding what is in it for one.”

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The baseline study, the Rapid Food System Appraisal (RFSA), gender and youth scoping study and the nutrition scoping study results provided a useful framework for providing direction where the 2023 and beyond plans should focus. Together they provided the context for the discussions in the planning workshop. On the first day of the workshop, the three regional RAISE-FS teams showed the status of ongoing activities per the three food system typologies. The presentations were produced on posters that were displayed in the meeting hall, and participants went on a gallery walk to see them. Regional team leaders provided further clarifications to participants’ concerns. From the presentations and discussions, it was noted that the 2022 RAISE-FS plan has implemented and everything is on track.

The gender and nutrition scoping studies done by RAISE-FS national team were also presented in brief on a poster. The gender and youth scoping study provided input to translate gender and youth related challenges into more concrete implementation plans. The gender transformation approaches were discussed in detail and so that the planning focus on these approaches that have the potential to empower women and youth. These scoping studies provide an evidence-based logic that proves the need for inclusiveness to bring about sustainable food system transformation.

Then, the baseline study result was presented in a similar fashion. Participants reflected on the baseline results and additional explanations given by the survey team. Workshop participants formed into groups per the three food system typologies, namely food insecure, high potential and commercial. The groups discussed and identified from the baseline result two key intervention areas.

On the second day, a list of identified challenges from the RFSA was presented. Workshop participants were asked to form group and select the challenges which they considered a priority and subsequently comment on what exactly needs to be done for each of these priority food system challenges per food system typologies. Accordingly, participants clustered and prioritized key leverage points per the three food systems which have similarities in the three regions. The groups also indicated potential thematic intervention areas to address those prioritized challenges.

Finally, the team discussed the next action points and set deadlines. It was announced that for innovation testing and development three woredas from the regions will be added to increase the innovation woredas to sixteen. The other woredas to be included will be scaling pathways to disseminate innovations tested and validated in the intervention woredas the project currently working in. The team agreed that the regional teams will further work on and consolidate the plan by engaging relevant stakeholders in their respective regions. Then, share the final plan with RAISE-FS national team for review and feedback.

The planning workshop emphasize the importance of the transition to sustainable, healthy, safe and inclusive food systems, and the role of knowledge and research institutes as a key partner in innovation testing and validation. About 35 researchers from Wageningen University and Research, Ethiopian Agricultural Research Institute (EIAR), Amhara Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI), South Research Institute (SARI), Bahir Dar, Haramaya and Hawassa Universities, national and regional RAISE-FS team attended the planning workshop.
Women farmers benefited economically from vegetable production

Home gardening is serving as source of income beyond women farmers’ food and nutritional security in Killilit and Adet Zuria kebeles of the Yilman Densa woreda

On the 4th of October 2022, Adet Agricultural Research Center (AARC) in partnership with Resilient Agriculture for Inclusive and Sustainable Ethiopian Food System (RAISE-FS) hosted a field day to show the home garden vegetable production trials in Killilit and Adet Zuria kebeles of Yilman Densa woreda. About 50 participants, including 20 farmers from the two kebeles, experts from the Woreda office of Agriculture, researchers from AARC and ARARI and RAISE-FS staff were in attendance.

As of last June 2022, 20 farmers from the two kebeles, with more than half of them being women, have engaged in year-round vegetable production activities. Some of these farmers not only started consuming their products but have actually begun selling them.

On the occasion, farmers said they like the activities that they do at their home garden as they have started to earn additional income other than their main agricultural activities.

Mr. Aynalem Mekonnen from Adet Zuria kebele stated that his wife is very active in the vegetable garden. “She is very active in the home garden activities. I support her in activities such as applying compost and others. She earns some money from the sale of the vegetable produces, which she uses to purchase other household necessities.”

Mr. Minibel Alemu and Mrs. Emye Asnakew are a married couple who live in Killilit kebele and work together in their home garden. This year, they cultivated carrot, swiss chard, beetroot and cabbage in their garden with the support of horticulturists from Woramit, Agricultural research sub-center of Adet ARC. “I found swiss chard very interesting.” Mrs Emye said. “We have tested it and we found it to be quite nice. Our kids also enjoyed it. We would like to have access to the seed sources.” Mr. Minibel in his part said they used to grow vegetable in a very conventional way, but they are now experimenting with new vegetable crops, that can be harvested all year-round. He added that they had limited experience in consuming them but his family now tried the new vegetables and they found it nice.

Following the field visit, participants convened and discussed some of the pressing issues related to vegetable production such as the difficulty in distinguishing between good and bad quality packed seeds; low level of producers’ awareness regarding consumption, poor market linkage and chemical use are among the issues raised. Participant stakeholders, in particular Adet ARC, Woreda Office of Agriculture and RAISE-FS projects will work to address these challenges raised. The year-round vegetable production is part of RAISE-FS project endeavour to address the issue of safe and nutritious dense food availability and utilization in the intervention woredas.
In the week of 25 September, an Ethiopian delegation representing both the public and private sector visited the Netherlands. The mission focused on exchanging knowledge and experiences in the field of food safety, phytosanitary and quality for vegetables, fruit and cut flowers. The delegation visited amongst others, LNV (the Dutch ministry of Agriculture), NVWA (the food and product safety board), KCB, CBL, BIONEXT, GroentenFruitHuis, WUR, Koppert and Royal Flora Holland.

The visit to Wageningen University & Research (WUR) focused on food safety through a visit to Wageningen Food Safety Research (link to website) and Wageningen Research presented its past and current activities in Ethiopia with regard to Integrated Pest Management (IPM), biological control and horticulture. Irene Koomen RAISE-FS coordinator from Wageningen University & Research highlighted on the RAISE-FS program and what it is doing, and potential for collaboration of food safety, the pesticide life cycle and capacity development.

Overall, the delegation agreed to intensify cooperation with Ethiopia in the coming period on phytosanitary issues (false codling moth), biological crop protection (IPM, BCAs), electronic certification and food safety, and to set up a platform in Addis Ababa for regular consultations with authorities and the (Dutch) business community active in Ethiopia.
Validation workshop and consultative meeting on national food safety system assessment conducted

RAISE-FS organized National Food Safety System Assessment Validation meeting with the objective of presenting findings, validating possible recommendations, and prioritizing key points to be addressed and stakeholders to be involved.

An opening speech and introduction to the RAISE-FS project were given by Dr. Dawit Alemu, the project manager and country representative for SWR Ethiopia. He mentioned in his introduction that the nation has a diverse range of agroclimatic conditions that allow it to produce almost all types of crops. But according to Dr. Dawit, there are a number of reasons why the nation isn’t making the most of its potential. Such platforms, he continued, would facilitate to assess the opportunities and difficulties facing the Ethiopian food system. He added that the validation meeting will focus on validating the food safety system assessment results, prioritizing actionable points, and sharing responsibilities.

The consultant who conducted the assessment, Dr. Abebe Ayelign, presented the overview and findings of the assessment. According to Dr. Abebe, the assessment was conducted on the poultry, potato, pulses, oil seeds, and spice sub-sectors. The assessment was done based on the five main pillars or categories that make up a national food safety system as per the Food and Agriculture Organization. The pillars are: 1) food laws and regulations, 2) official food control management, 3) inspection and certification, 4) official food control laboratory, and 5) information, education, communication, and training. A literature review and key informant interviews were used to gather information for the assessment.

According to the five pillars of the national food safety system, major challenges identified to ensure food control management include frequent turnover of officials, budget constraints, and a lack of awareness about food safety. Regarding to laws and regulation, Ethiopia lacks a national food safety law, responsibilities are dispersed across institutions, there are no safety standards for some food types, less attention is paid to pesticides, and some regulations are outdated and do not reflect current reality. There is no regulation and law enforcement for poultry slaughtering, no strong inspection and regulation system in the perspectives of specific food value chain, regulatory mandates overlap between Ethiopian Agricultural Authority and Ethiopia Food and Drug Authority, and no strong coordination and collaboration with all legally mandated food safety sectors for food inspection and certification. The availability and service of official

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Stinging Nettle (Urtica simensis): a potential food crop for highlands with food insecurity

"When highlanders get hungry, they boil stinging nettle...", an old adage that was once used as a poetic line attest to the fact that some highlanders in Ethiopia consume stinging nettle (Urtica simensis), which is a wild vegetable harvested from the field during times of food scarcity.

Due to prolonged periods of food scarcity, drought, and starvation, communities in some highlands of the Amhara region use some wild green vegetables, the most common of which is stinging nettle, which is known locally as sama. The plant, which is primarily associated with the diet of the underprivileged, has also long been consumed for its many medicinal benefits.

Stinging nettle is a very tasty and healthy cuisine as many who have tried it attest. People used the leaves of stinging nettle after collecting fresh from the field, cut into slices, cooked in boiling water, and crushed into a stew. Sometimes the leaves are cooked with either potato or barley flour, and served with injera, though occasionally it is eaten by itself with injera.

The shrub-like plant, which is widespread in many highland areas of Ethiopia, is infamous for scorching stinging skin when it comes into contact with it. This is because of the sharp hairs on the leaves and stem that can easily irritate the skin. The leaves should therefore be picked up and handled with care.

In August 2022, RAISE-FS in collaboration with implementing partners conducted a rapid food system appraisal (RFSA) in different woredas. Angot is one of the food insecure woredas in the North Wollo zone of Amhara region, located at a high elevation, with some kebeles reaching 3,500 meters above sea level. The study allowed to have in-depth discussions with different sections of society including women, youth, adult farmers, and stakeholders of the food system in the woreda. The result of the study indicated that residents of the woreda have been experiencing long-time food shortages yearly, in some kebeles the food stress lasts between four and six months. In order to survive the food crisis period, it is common for most people to consume stinging nettle. Despite not being formally cultivated by the local farmers in the area, the study demonstrates how important stinging nettle has been in helping the local population to survive periods of extreme food stress.

Incorporation of stinging nettle into the formal food production system is necessary to achieve food security and sufficiently meet the needs of the local population. With its multiple important characteristics such as the fact that it is a resilient crop that can grow anywhere in the highlands, its ease of access, its ability to withstand various climatic conditions, and most importantly its nutritional values, RAISE-FS believes that it is crucial to further evaluate the importance of this crop and the team set out to delve deep and further examine the significance of the crop in the area and see whether this crop can be integrated into the formal production system as a food security crop.

Food shortages have plagued the woreda for many years, lasting between four and six months in some kebeles.
Stakeholders visit technology testing and validation efforts to revitalize lentil production

Lentil provides important economic advantages to the small-scale farm households in providing food, feed, cash income, and at national level, it also provides advantage to earn foreign currency, import substitution and job creation through value addition and processing. In spite of its importance, lentil productivity had remained very low mainly due to the use of low yielding local cultivars, lentil diseases, lack of improved seed producers and suppliers and poor practices of integrated disease and agronomic management practices. Furthermore, farmers did not adopt available lentil technologies owing to the lack of awareness and knowledge about available technologies. Currently, the crop is under immense threat due to the occurrence of devastating lentil diseases and other pests.

On September 6, 2022, RAISE-FS in collaboration with Debrezeit Agricultural Research Center (DZARC) organised a field day to showcase the validation and demonstration of lentil production technologies conducted in two kebeles in Ade’a Woreda. The validation activity is conducted on farmers’ field in Ada’a Wereda at two kebeles (Denkaka and Akako).

The program begun with the blessing of local elders as per the traditional norm of the community followed by the opening remark of Dr. Dagne Modjo director of DZARC who briefly presented the available agricultural technologies from their center generated so far including the lentil technologies. In addition, he presented the collaboration work their center has with RAISE-FS project.

The field day focused on showcasing the technologies for wider awareness creation and to test and validating the innovations for sustainable supply of available technologies. The host farmers presented how they implemented the experiments based on the knowledge and technical support they obtained from researchers to the participating and neighboring farmers. Farmers who attended the event promised to share their learnings with their neighboring farmers by disseminating these technologies for increased lentil production and productivity.

It was explained that, though the experiment was set a bit late, the demonstrated technologies showed a promising result and there is also a clear treatment differences that allow farmers to make a choice among the technologies. The result of this study could be used as evidence to justify the importance of promoting the available lentil technologies in an integrated manner to scale up lentil production in the area and beyond.

About 60 participants which constituted from local government organization and partners and regional office and farmers attended the event.

Welcome address and brief presentation on lentil technologies by Dr. Dagne Mojo, Debrezeit Agricultural Research Center director
food control laboratories are limited by biomedical engineers’ limited knowledge of how to maintain lab equipment, lack of lab equipment, reagents, chemicals, and spare parts, lack of collaboration to access and use lab facilities, lack of access to exact specifications for purchasing lab equipment, and a limited number of accredited labs in the country. In terms of communication and training, there is no food safety awareness at any point along the value chain, no risk communication platform, limited media coverage of food safety, and food safety issues are not well integrated into the education curriculum.

The participants then discussed a few clarity-related concerns. Participants consented that that almost every challenge brought up is a true reflection of the situation on the ground. They emphasized that there is a conflict of interest among the institutions as well as scattered responsibility among public institutions, which is a significant challenge. They questioned the justification for the commodities selected in the assessment and raised clarification concerns.

In response to the concerns, Dr. Abebe stated that the commodities selected for the assessment are RAISE-FS project priority commodities and they also prone to food safety problems. Additionally, they mentioned how the federal government’s structure made it difficult to have a robust national system for food safety because of regions’ autonomy.

After that, participants divided into groups to discuss each of the five pillars of the food safety system. The groups generally agreed with the suggestions made in the study and added some additional recommendations to strengthen the country’s food safety system. The establishment of a national working group on food safety has been discussed and agreed upon. Then, individuals from EFDA, MoA, Agriculture Authority, Ethiopian Conformity Assessment, Ethiopian Public Health Institute, Addis Abeba University, Alliance of Bioversity International, CIAT, EIAR, and SWR Ethiopia have formed the working group.

Finally, participants expressed their gratitude for SWR Ethiopia’s RAISE-FS project for bringing the issue of food safety to light. They mentioned their concern that the population is experiencing food safety-related health issues, but the issue of food safety isn’t receiving the attention it deserves. They expressed their wish for the national working group to act as a crucial platform for advocacy of a strengthened food safety system.

The workshop was held on 6th of December 2022 at Azzeman hotel, Addis Ababa. More than 20 people attended the event, including key actors in the national food safety system, NGOs, private sector, and SWR Ethiopia.

“Ethiopian food and nutrition policy give due attention for the safety and quality of foods from farm-to-table. However, ensuring food safety remains a significant issue in Ethiopia.” Dr. Abebe Ayelign, a consultant who did the national food system assessment