



Livelihoods for Resilience Activity



“The potato helps us to see a bright future”

Alemayehu Lemma, 52, and Abebech Debebe, 40, started to see a bright future when they discovered how to significantly increase their potato yield. They were astounded when they increased their production six-fold and harvested 40 quintals of potatoes in a single season.

The couple, parents to four children, live in the Menz Gera Woreda of Amhara Region. As a poor family with few productive assets, they have qualified for support from Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) for the past few years, and receive cash/food transfers for six months per year in exchange for participation in public works. “We do not have enough land and other means of income. We used to produce about a quintal of barley and a few quintals of potatoes in a year, which only covered family's consumption for a few months,” Alemayehu explains.

Their participation in the Feed the Future – Livelihoods for Resilience Activity for the past two years has brought many positive changes. They received multiple trainings on topics such as credit and saving, improved agronomic practices in potato production, sheep fattening, poultry, gender equity, and women's empowerment through a village economic and social association (VESA) established

by 25 members in their village. The couple also received 3.5 quintals of potato seeds as they were one of the households selected by the project and woreda agriculture office as model farmers to multiply the improved seed-potato variety. They also learned how to construct and use diffused light store (DLS) for potato seed storage. “The training and the improved potato seeds helped us have a good harvest. Adopting DLS, especially, helped extend the storage life of the potato seeds. In one season, we earned over 14,000 birr (USD 418) from selling potato seeds to 28 households, and another 10,000 birr (USD 300) from the sale of ware potatoes,” explains Abebech.

Her husband adds: “Earlier we used to store potato seeds near windows and sometimes we left some of the harvest in the soil to use it for a subsequent season, but both methods were not effective as the seed rotted, and sometimes sprouted in the wrong season.”

The income helped the couple to diversify their livelihood activities. They spent half of it on sheep fattening: “So far, we have done three cycles of fattening and netted 15,000 birr (USD 448). Now we are fattening 10 sheep and a goat, and they will be ready for market for the coming holiday.”

The discussion and understanding between the couple are the other factors that contribute to their success. “My husband and I work together both at the farm and home,” says Abebech. “We decide together on livelihood engagements, and how and on what to spend our income. We have opened a joint bank account in the nearby town, and deposited 10,000 birr (USD 300) so far.”

The couple predicts more good potato harvests in the current season as they planted potatoes on a larger piece of land. They are planning to expand the fattening business. They also have a plan to start ox fattening in the near future through an MFI loan. “We are planning to graduate from PSNP support in the coming two years, hoping the income from potatoes and sheep fattening will be regular. Our understanding of the value of potato is totally different since we have become part of the project. We now know that improved potato varieties generate a good income and that DLS is a key component to engage in potato production, and we know more about the nutritious value of the crop,” Alemayehu concludes.

Potato value chain interventions

Potato is produced nearly throughout the year—during the main rainy season (*Meber*), the short rainy season (*Belg*), and the irrigation season. Main season potato, which is harvested in September, provides a significant contribution to food security by filling the major food gap before the harvest of major cereals. Although the potential productivity of potato can be as high as 450 quintals per hectare (qt/ha), most PSNP households in the target woredas obtain no more than 96 qt/ha. Seed potato is heavy, bulky, and difficult and expensive to transport (requiring 20 quintals per hectare), which makes it expensive to transport and limits farmers’ access to improved and clean potato seed. This challenge is compounded by limited application of good agronomic practice and unregulated distribution of potato seeds. To address these challenges, the project implements three types of interventions:

- Helps farmers establish sustainable **local potato seed supply systems**, which is critical due to challenges in transporting seed potato. The project helps farmers access early generation clean seed and adopt **diffused light storage** for seed potato and ware potato storage, and facilitates linkages between seed and ware potato producers for exchange of seeds.
- Enhances technical and business skills of target households by providing **hands-on training**, establishing demonstration sites, and facilitating farmer-to-farmer experience sharing events.
- Establishes potato multi-stakeholder platforms at cluster level to **coordinate and facilitate information exchange among traders**, government stakeholders, researchers, seed producers’ groups, and project beneficiaries. The project supports biannual meeting amongst these key stakeholders to identify challenges and share responsibilities in implementing agreed action points.

So far, over 1,000 households have been participating in potato value chain.

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.

