



Government
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Programme

Scaling Up
NUTRITION
Ethiopia Civil Society Coalition



THE ECSC-SUN PROJECT'S
IMPACT FOOTPRINT

ENHANCING HOUSEHOLD DIETARY DIVERSITY: THE IMPACT OF THE ETHIOPIAN CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION FOR SCALE UP NUTRITION (ECSC-SUN) PROJECT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Background

Ethiopia continues to face high levels of food and nutrition insecurity, driven by recurrent droughts, conflict, displacement, and rapid population growth. These crises have contributed to acute malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and high rates of stunting among children under five, undermining health and development outcomes nationwide. In response, the Ethiopian Civil Society Coalition for Scaling Up Nutrition (ECSC-SUN), with support from Irish Aid and in partnership with Amref Health Africa and Mums for Mums, has been implementing the pilot project “Enhancing Leadership, Commitment, and Accountability to Improve Nutrition Outcomes” in the Tigray, Afar and Somali regions from October 2023 to September 2025. The project aimed to strengthen food and nutrition strategies, establish and support ECSC-SUN coordination platforms, promote gender equality, and enhance evidence-based decision-making and accountability systems to accelerate progress in nutrition outcomes.

Objective

The impact booklet aims to capture how the ECSC-SUN project has strengthened food and nutrition governance, promoted gender equality, and improved dietary diversity at the household and community levels. It systematically documents the project’s objectives of enhancing leadership, commitment, and accountability for nutritional outcomes. The documentation highlights the project’s relevance to vulnerable populations, its contribution to national nutrition priorities, and the key lessons learned for scaling effective approaches.

Methodology

The documentation of the ECSC-SUN impact booklet employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to ensure a comprehensive analysis. An extensive desk review was conducted to collect quantitative data and qualitative insights from project progress reports, routine monitoring data, and Food and Nutrition Strategy (FNS) guidance documents. In addition, qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions with women and men project participants, key informant interviews with regional and woreda sectoral focal persons, as well as the documentation of human-interest stories and field observations. The collected data underwent content analysis to identify key themes, which were then triangulated with desk review findings to enhance validity and reliability.



BACKGROUND

Ethiopia has experienced food insecurity challenges that have worsened due to internal conflicts and environmental challenges. This reality has disrupted livelihoods and hindered access to essential services, including food, healthcare, education, and shelter, for many people.

The northern conflict erupted in November 2020 and led to widespread displacement, while limiting access to food and nutrition services. There have been improvements since 2022 (Pretoria Agreement); however, malnutrition persists, particularly among children under five and pregnant or lactating women (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

In drought-prone Somali and Afar regions, consecutive failed rainy seasons have triggered severe droughts, decimated livestock, dried up water sources, and increased malnutrition rates, with children and women being the most affected (FAO, 2024).

In response to nutrition and food security needs, Save the Children (ECSC-SUN Secretariat), in collaboration with AMREF Health Africa and Mums for Mums, has

been implementing the pilot project: “Enhancing Leadership, Commitment, and Accountability to Improve Nutrition Outcomes” from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2025.

Funded by Irish Aid, the project focuses on the national food and nutrition priorities in Afar, Somali, and Tigray regions, which are heavily affected by conflict, drought, and high malnutrition rates.

The project aims to strengthen national food and nutrition strategy implementation, coordination platforms, promote gender equality, and build stronger systems for evidence-based decision-making and accountability.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



1 STRENGTHENED FOOD AND NUTRITION STRATEGIES, GOVERNANCE, AND TOOLS

Through continued advocacy and with substantial financial and technical support, food systems and nutrition councils have been established at regional and lower levels across all regions. Dedicated food and nutrition structures have been created within implementing sectors, with professionals assigned to lead them, thereby strengthening institutional capacity.

Both national and regional food and nutrition implementing sectors have begun allocating budgets to support implementation, and food and nutrition agendas have now become a high priority at all levels of governance. The project supported the finalization of the national multi-sectoral community lab training manual to ensure ownership and guide nutrition programming across sectors.

It also facilitated the updating of key tools, such as the Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) guidelines and the Unified Nutrition Information System Ethiopia (UNISE) manual and promoted evidence-based practices.

2 PROMOTED MULTISECTORAL COLLABORATION AND ORGANIZED ACTIONS

The project supported the pilot testing of the Food and Nutrition M&E SoP in five regions. This initiative improved integrated nutrition service delivery, introduced diversified nutrition interventions, home gardening, and created a strong model for nationwide scale-up. Joint field visits and experience-sharing visits enhanced community awareness, strengthened ownership of nutrition-sensitive interventions such as home gardening, and school-based nutrition clubs.

3 STRENGTHENED FOOD AND NUTRITION GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ECSC-SUN supported national and regional coordination structures to review their progress and address bottlenecks. These have strengthened nutrition leadership, coordination, and collective accountability for advancing the food and nutrition security agenda.

4 ENHANCED CAPACITY OF FRONTLINE WORKERS AND LEADERS TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE SERVICES

Over 150 experts from across the health, agriculture, and education sectors gained technical and leadership skills to deliver more accurate, timely, and effective services to women and children at the community level.

The training enhanced skills in preventive nutrition, child growth monitoring, and food systems approaches.

Communities directly benefited through improved access to integrated nutrition services, school-based interventions, and diversified diets from home gardening and cooking demonstrations.

5 IMPROVED HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY AND DIETARY DIVERSITY

The ECSC-SUN project has empowered families to enhance their nutrition and overall well-being through integrated interventions.

The project supported targeted households in Afar and Somali regions with two milking goats and ten egg-laying chickens and provided two sheep to targeted households in Tigray. Additionally, all target groups received vegetable seeds and fruit seedlings selected according to local agroecological conditions.

To strengthen dietary diversity, the project promoted home gardening, facilitated regular women's discussions, and strengthened school-based clubs to raise nutrition awareness.

Cooking demonstrations further encouraged the preparation of diversified meals.

These combined efforts significantly improved household dietary diversity in the Afar, Somali, and Tigray regions. Families now plan and prepare meals that include at least four food groups (cereals, vegetables, milk, and eggs), ensuring better nutrition for children and adults alike. With men and boys increasingly supporting domestic tasks, women have gained more time to focus on childcare, timely feeding, and jointly deciding on nutrition spending and sustainability in family nutrition.

6 ENHANCED WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Promoting gender equality within households is critical to achieving improved nutrition outcomes. The ECSC-SUN project introduced the Gender Model Family (GMF) approach in Afar, Somali, and Tigray regions to address discriminatory practices that limit women's participation in household decision-making, perpetuate time poverty, and weaken family nutrition.

Key Changes Are

- **Cultural Shifts in Gender Norms:** Women felt empowered to openly communicate with spouses and participate in family meals—previously considered taboo in some areas.
- **Challenging Inequalities:** Households have begun to address long-standing disparities in division of labor, decision-making, and access to resources.
- **Reduced Time Poverty for Women:** Men and boys are increasingly supporting domestic chores, mothers have sufficient time to rest, feed children on time, and better manage household responsibilities.
- **Stronger Household Financial Decisions:** Joint decision-making and shared control over resources improved efficiency in spending, allowing families to diversify diets with additional food purchases.
- **Improved Family Communication:** Families reported more transparent dialogue and mutual respect, and reduced conflicts, particularly in relation to household expenditures.
- **Early Adoption of Positive Gender Norms:** Children, especially boys, showed greater willingness to support mothers and sisters, which demonstrates a shift toward more equitable gender roles.

GMF CORE INTERVENTIONS

Conducted three-day gender relations analysis exercises using adapted Harvard Gender Analysis tools, including daily activity profiles, access to and control over resources, and decision-making patterns.

Trained 40 community facilitators, comprising representatives from target households, development agents, health extension workers, and school principals, on the GMF concept, facilitation techniques, and communication skills.

Engaged 254 participants (127 men) from Women's Economic Empowerment target groups and their spouses in a practical gender relations analysis.

Supported households to develop household gender improvement plans tailored to their specific needs.

Facilitated weekly family discussions and monthly group meetings to promote joint reflection, peer learning, and accountability.



SMALL INVESTMENTS, BIG TRANSFORMATIONS: WOMEN DRIVING HOUSEHOLD CHANGE



Before the ECSC-SUN project, women undertook nearly every household responsibility, including childcare, cooking, fetching water, and collecting firewood, while also struggling with limited awareness of dietary diversity. Families relied mainly on injera and wot, while nutrient-rich foods such as eggs, milk, and vegetables were sold at markets instead of being consumed at home. Harmful food taboos further denied pregnant women and children essential nutrients. To change this trend, the project has reached 127 HHs. One mother recalled,

“Mothers would cuddle the child, make injera, cook, fetch water, and handle all domestic chores. Now our husbands and older children share these tasks, collecting firewood, washing clothes, and even cooking. So we finally feel more at ease.”

The Gender Model Family (GMF) program, regular women’s discussions, and practical home gardening and poultry initiatives brought dramatic change. Women organized into savings groups (ekub), pooling resources to start poultry and sheep-rearing businesses. Each woman contributed minimum of 50 birr per month and 127 women across the three regions are organized in saving groups.

“We formed a group of 15 members, each depositing 50 ETB every week. Now most members have at least 13 chickens, some more than 50, and some even bought sheep,” one participant explained proudly.

At the same time, families began transforming their diets. Once limited to injera with sauce, children and pregnant women now consume porridge and meals enriched with spinach, carrots, eggs, milk, vegetables, and locally available cereals. Cooking demonstrations and nutrition dialogues led to healthier eating habits for children and pregnant women.

“We started cooking a balanced diet from a variety of what we cultivate and own,” another woman said. *“Our children*

now eat nutritious meals, comprised of at least four food groups daily.”

Through home gardening support, families grew more diverse crops, meeting household needs and selling the surplus for income. This boosted savings and strengthened resilience.

“I now have 50 chickens, 5 sheep, and I have deposited 4,400 ETB from selling vegetables, chickens, and eggs,” shared one mother.

The GMF program also revived male participation in domestic and caregiving roles, reversing cultural decline in shared responsibility. Women further highlighted improvements in family unity, communication, and decision-making. Women have more time for child and self-care. Most of the women in the FGD explained,

“Since joining the GMF program, our husbands share almost everything: cooking, chores, and childcare. Families now sit together, make decisions with love and respect, and even men proudly shop for the household.”

Notably, women’s regular nutrition dialogues debunked harmful food taboos. Previously, pregnant women were forbidden from eating eggs, milk, or cheese due to myths about childbirth complications. Through discussions, cooking demonstrations, and school messages, communities challenged these beliefs and embraced healthier practices. One participant said,

“The community was convinced and started practicing healthy eating for their kids and themselves.”

The ECSC-SUN Project Showed That when women and men work together, families not only share responsibilities but also eat better, earn more, and raise healthier children!





RISHAN'S STORY OF CHANGE

“I SEE MY IMAGES IN MY KIDS”



Rishan Aregawi, a 35-year-old mother of three, relocated to her current kebele six years ago. She lives with her husband and their three children: a 16-year-old son, a 7-year-old daughter, and the youngest, a 12-month-old girl.

Before the project interventions, Rishan's household diet was monotonous and nutritionally inadequate. Her children often ate only what was available at home. At the time, she had little awareness of the importance of dietary diversity or how to prepare balanced meals using homegrown and locally available foods. Although she maintained a small garden, it was not utilized effectively to improve her family's diet or generate additional income. Rishan explained,

“Before the project, I used to feed my children whatever was available in the house, mostly injera and shiro. I did not know how to prepare diversified meals using locally available food items. Even though I had a small garden, I was not using it effectively to grow vegetables for my family.”

Everything began to change when Rishan participated in the ECSC SUN project's awareness-raising sessions on infant and young child feeding, food diversification, and cooking demonstrations. She also received training in business skills, gender equality, and home gardening, along with agricultural inputs, including vegetable seedlings. As part of the livelihood support, the project also

provided her with two sheep.

“Thanks to the project, our household's feeding has completely changed. My family and I now eat diversified meals made up of at least four or more food items, including mixed cereals, spinach, kale, cereals, eggs, carrots, and tomatoes.”

She added:

“The business skill training helped me cultivate a variety of vegetables in my garden and strengthen my poultry business. Today, I have more than 30 egg-laying chickens.”

Her two sheep have now multiplied to four, providing her family with a reliable source of assets and resilience. She proudly shared:

“...The project offered me two sheep, and they have become four now. I have 30 chickens, and on average, they produce 13 eggs daily. My children eat eggs regularly, something that would not have been possible if we had to buy them from the market.”

The most visible positive changes in the family's nutrition practices are evident in the health and well-being of Rishan's youngest daughter. Unlike her older siblings, she was exclusively breastfed until six months and then introduced to a diverse range of home-prepared complementary foods. Rishan proudly shares,

“My 12-month-old son is healthy and has never been to the hospital. I prepare soft porridge with cereals, spinach, tomato,

eggs, and milk to keep him strong.”

Beyond nutrition, the Gender Model Family approach brought meaningful changes to Rishan's household. Her teenage son, who participated in gender equality training, now actively supports his mother in domestic chores and childcare. Rishan explained,

“He helps me cook, fetch water, and take care of his younger sisters,” Rishan said with pride. “The intervention enhanced our family's love, care, and support for each other.”

Rishan has not only improved her family's diet and income but also taken deliberate steps to secure her children's future. She opened a savings account for her eldest son's university education, saving 100 ETB each month from the sale of eggs and vegetables.

“I no longer worry about my children's health, nutrition, or education. I see my images in my kids.”

Today, Rishan and her children are healthier, happier, and more secure. Regular community discussions have strengthened her social bonds, leaving her better supported and confident about the future. Her story illustrates how integrated project interventions, including nutrition, livelihoods, and gender equality, can work together to transform lives and build resilience.

SEED OF CHANGE

BUILDING HEALTH, DIGNITY, AND A FUTURE



Frewoini Gebre, a 35-year-old mother of five (three boys and two girls), lives with her husband in a rural kebele where food insecurity and limited knowledge of nutrition practices were common. Although she owned a small home garden, a milk cow, and a few chickens, her family's diet was largely inadequate, and she did not use vegetables, milk, or eggs for her family's consumption. Instead, she considered them cash crops, selling them at the local market to purchase household necessities such as oil, salt, and sugar.

As a result, her family's meals were repetitive, relying on one type of local food. This lack of dietary balance severely affected her children's health, and her youngest son became malnourished and required treatment with therapeutic food. She recalled,

"I did not provide milk, eggs, and vegetables for the children, nor did I put even a small amount of butter in their food. I believed these products were only for the market, to generate income for other necessities."

The ECSC-SUN project identified Frewoini as one of the women to participate in its women's economic empowerment and livelihood support pilot initiative. The goal was to improve household nutrition, strengthen livelihoods, and promote gender equality through integrated interventions. She received improved vegetable seedlings for home gardening, two sheep, and training in business skills. At the same time, she became an active member of women's discussion groups

where she learned about optimal infant and young child feeding practices and participated in diversified food cooking demonstrations. Her husband also took part in the Gender Model Family program, which addressed household roles and gender equality.

The support transformed the way Frewoini cared for her family. She strengthened her home garden and began producing a wider variety of vegetables. Equipped with new knowledge from the women's discussion groups, she diversified her family's diet by preparing meals with vegetables, milk, and eggs. The positive impact was immediately on her child, who had been malnourished but quickly recovered and regained weight, and is now healthy and active. She explained,

"... After I learned about the preparation of diversified food in the group discussions, I started cooking meals made up of mixed cereals, milk, eggs, and vegetables for my family. Thanks to God and the project, my child who was suffering from malnutrition is now healthy and has gained weight."

The business skills training also helped her expand her poultry activities. Today, she owns 15 egg-laying chickens, producing an average of six eggs daily. This not only covers her family's needs but also generates extra income from sales. With improved financial management, she opened a savings account and has already saved 2,000 ETB after meeting her household's consumption needs. She said with pride,

"For the first time, I am saving money for my children's future!"

Frewoini's change was not limited to only nutrition, and equally important has been the transformation in household dynamics. Her husband, after participating in the gender model family training, began sharing responsibilities at home. She said,

"He supports me in everything. He cooks, washes clothes, and takes good care of our children. Above all, we openly discuss and plan our resources and expenditure together."

Beyond her own household, Frewoini values the women's discussion groups as safe spaces for learning, connection, and mutual support. These regular gatherings not only strengthened her knowledge but also built her confidence and sense of belonging. She reflected,

"Before, I was lonely and had no confidence to interact with neighbors. I am now an active member of the community. Even my communication skills have improved, and I feel secure knowing we support each other."

Frewoini's story shows how small but integrated interventions, supported by community collaboration, can transform lives. Her children are healthier, her family more resilient, and her household more united. Most importantly, she has become an empowered woman whose voice and actions inspire her community. This demonstrates that lasting change occurs when practical support is combined with shifting social norms.





STRENGTH IN COORDINATION **FROM EMERGENCY RELIEF TO SUSTAINABLE NUTRITION**

In the Tigray region, years of conflict devastated systems that once supported nutrition initiatives, leaving children and women vulnerable to high rates of malnutrition. Essential services for planning, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation of nutrition programs were rendered non-functional across most districts. Amid this crisis, the ECSC-SUN project emerged as a catalyst for recovery, revitalizing the region's ability to address food and nutrition challenges.

The project played a pivotal role in establishing the Regional Food and Nutrition Council, uniting multiple government sectors to foster coordinated action. Through comprehensive training on food and nutrition strategy, plan development, and the appointment of dedicated focal persons, the initiative strengthened regional capacity. The translation and distribution of the Food and Nutrition Strategy into local languages ensured accessibility, empowering communities at the grassroots level.

These efforts enhanced inter-sectoral collaboration, and a reinvigorated steering committee cultivated a shared vision for

sustainable nutrition solutions. The sectoral mindset shifted from reliance on emergency nutrition support to collaborative, development-focused initiatives. Regional coordination platforms further amplified impact by enabling timely responses, such as promoting home gardening, distributing improved seedlings, and producing fortified foods to enhance dietary diversity and food security.

“Strong sectoral collaboration is bringing a paradigm shift from dependence on emergency nutrition support to collaborative development initiatives, thinking for durable changes in the community.”

The ECSC-SUN project's interventions have laid a foundation for lasting change, demonstrating the power of unified action in rebuilding region's nutrition landscape.



THE GENDER MODEL FAMILY

Some male participant reflections:

"... the Gender Model Family Program opened our eyes to the heavy burden women carry at home. Now, we actively support our wives in fetching water, caring for children, collecting firewood, and even cooking. Beyond chores, the program strengthened love, care, and joint decision-making, including budgeting for food, basic needs, and our children's education. We've seen real improvements in household feeding practice and overall family wellbeing."



GENDER CLUB MEMBERS, MIKUAT PRIMARY SCHOOL

"Before the project, we had limited awareness of proper feeding practices. With the support and training provided to our school clubs, we now share key nutrition messages with students through mini media, role plays, and dramas. Students take these lessons home, influencing their parents, improving feeding frequency and diversity, and even started home gardens. This has strengthened nutrition practices both at school and in households."

BEYOND SURVIVAL

A FAMILY'S PATH TO NUTRITION, LIVELIHOOD, AND EQUALITY



Asia Abdu and her husband, Mohamed, have been married for more than thirty years. Their livelihood has always depended on rearing small ruminants, cattle, and maize production, with occasional daily labor to supplement their income. Their life, however, was filled with hardship; recurring floods destroyed their assets, daily labor was often their only fallback.

Their diet was repetitive, and meals lacked diversity, often limited to 'Injera with shiro' or 'mufe with milk'. Household responsibilities were considered a woman's duty, leaving Asia overburdened and unrecognized.

Asia's journey began when she was targeted by Save the Children's Gender Equality Program, where she benefited from livestock fattening livelihood opportunities. Building on this foundation, the ECSC-SUN project provided further support. She received two milking goats, ten egg-laying chickens, and improved vegetable seeds. Alongside these inputs, the project delivered training on nutrition, diversified diets, gender balance within households, small business skills, and cooking demonstrations. Mohammed also participated in the GMF program's household chores analysis, which encouraged men and children to share responsibilities.

The changes were remarkable. Asia's children began drinking milk from the goats, while eggs and vegetables diversified household meals. Reflecting on the impact, she said,

"I can get everything from my farm without going to the market with money."

She added with pride,

"One of the goats gave birth and is giving milk now. My children are drinking it." For Mohamed, the transformation was equally striking. Once unaware of Asia's overwhelming workload, the chores analysis helped him recognize the imbalance.

"I didn't know the overload on women. I thought it was their usual responsibility. But after the training and chores analysis, I understood the pressure," he explained.

He began sharing domestic work, contributing to decisions on sales and income, and even preparing coffee at home. He explained,

"Before, a husband who helped with chores was labeled a 'female-like male.' After the GMF training, this attitude improved."

Mohamed, once unaware of Asia's overwhelming workload, also realized the unequal workload his wife carried, an eye-opening moment from the household chores analysis. He explained that decision-making in the household also shifted. He admitted,

"Before, I sold animals without asking her. Now we discuss which one to sell and why. We decide together."

Their son Seid confirmed the changes, saying,

Their son Seid also noticed the changes at home. He started sharing tasks like fetching water and firewood collection, that it was the first time he saw his father and himself actively helping their mother. Weekly family discussions became a new tradition, strengthening cooperation at home.

Before, my mother did everything. Now my father helps, and I collect firewood with him. We are sharing responsibilities."

Beyond their household, the community itself has shifted. Cooking demonstrations helped families overcome taboos against chicken, eggs, and fish, leading to more nutritious diets. Men's involvement in housework, once ridiculed, is now increasingly accepted.

Floods and drought remain real challenges for families like Asia's. Yet, by combining livelihood support with gender and nutrition interventions, the projects gave them tools to work together, adapt, and envision a better future for their children.





BREAKING TRADITIONS, BUILDING FUTURES

FATUMA AND ABDU REDEFINE FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY



Fatuma, a mother of five, and her husband Abdu Gedo have long relied on livestock rearing and maize production to sustain their family. Their diet is usually limited to 'mufe' with milk, which cannot meet nutritional needs. Nutrient-dense foods such as chicken, eggs, and fish were avoided due to local taboos. Fatuma recalled,

"No one in this area can eat eggs, chicken meat, or fish. We considered them wild birds, and even no one could slaughter a chicken."

Backyard vegetable and fruit production was minimal, and household responsibilities overwhelmingly fell on women, leaving Fatuma overburdened.

Fatuma was selected as a member of a GEP Self-Help Group and targeted by the ECSC-SUN women's economic empowerment intervention. She attended training sessions on food and nutrition to grow and prepare meals that would nourish her family. She participated in hands-on cooking sessions to learn how to prepare a diversified, balanced, and healthy diet for her family from local foods.

Fatuma received a variety of vegetable seeds such as kale, beetroot, carrot, tomato, onion, green pepper, and head cabbage, along with fruit seedlings, including papaya and mango. To strengthen her household's nutrition and income, she was given two milking goats, ten egg-laying chickens, and a chicken cage.

Fatuma's family has experienced a

remarkable improvement in their nutrition and dietary diversity. Where meals were once monotonous, mostly 'mufe' with milk, they now regularly enjoy fresh vegetables, fruits, eggs, and goat's milk. Fatuma reflected,

"Eating a variety of foods is very important for health and development. Even if we can't afford meat, diversified foods can replace it." These changes have significantly enhanced the family's overall health and well-being.

Backyard food production has also flourished. Using rainwater and river water, Fatuma's family now grows a variety of vegetables and fruits, while chickens consistently provide eggs, and goats supply fresh milk for the children. This shift toward self-reliance has strengthened household food security and reduced dependence on market purchases.

The project's interventions have also generated tangible income opportunities. Surplus vegetables are sold in local markets and women's day bazaars, providing the family with additional resources. Fatuma proudly shared, "The income earned from the project allowed me to buy a calf, building our household assets and future stability."

Gender equality within the household has improved dramatically. Through the Gender Model Family (GMF) approach and household chores analysis, Abdu recognized the unequal workload his wife had carried for years. He now actively participates in household chores, cooking,

and childcare. He noted, *"Helping improves women's health and brings agreement and love in the family."* These changes have fostered more balanced decision-making and cooperation between married couples

The intervention also challenged long-standing food taboos. Community attitudes toward eggs, chicken, and fish have shifted through cooking demonstrations and training, enabling families to include these nutrient-dense foods in their daily meals. Fatuma has gained confidence in managing both production and nutrition for her household, stating,

"Now we produce, consume, and earn income from our farm."

The impact extends beyond their home. Regular family discussions and shared responsibilities have become a household norm, and neighbors have begun adopting similar practices, inspired by Fatuma and Abdu's example. This ripple effect is fostering sustainable changes in household dynamics, nutrition practices, and community attitudes, highlighting the broader, long-term impact of the ECSC-SUN intervention.



BREAKING BARRIERS AND BUILDING FUTURES

FATUMA'S STORY OF RESILIENCE AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



Building on the inspiring journeys of families before her, Fatuma Endris's story also underscores the transformative impact of combining livelihoods, nutrition, and gender equality interventions, which continue to empower households to break barriers and create brighter futures.

Fatuma Endris, a widowed mother of two sons and two daughters, has been the pillar of her family since losing her husband a decade ago. Her livelihood once relied solely on farming maize and sorghum, as well as rearing a few animals. To cover her household's basic needs, she also worked as a daily laborer. Life was complex and repetitive, with her family's diet often limited to bread made from maize flour and milk.

Already part of a women's Self-Help Group under the SCI's Gender Equality Program, Fatuma was later selected for the ECSC-SUN project. Through this, she gained training on nutrition, home gardening, small business skills, and the Gender Model Family approach. She recalled how even the business skills training, delivered through drama, made lessons on customer care and market choices practical and memorable.

Fatuma also received vegetable seeds, fruit seedlings, ten egg-laying chickens, and two milking goats. Although one goat died and the other had to be sold, her family still consumed milk and yogurt, and over time, she grew her herd to five. The chickens quickly turned into a steady source of eggs, not only

improving her children's diet but also giving her an income stream she never had before.

"Before, I used to borrow from neighbors for social contributions," Fatuma said with pride. "Now I sell eggs and cover these costs myself."

In a community where traditions and food taboos once shaped daily life, Fatuma's household has become a living example of transformation. Through the ECSC-SUN project, she and her family have embraced healthier diets and redefined what it means to share responsibilities at home. Foods once avoided, such as chicken, eggs, and fish, are now part of their meals.

Fatuma recalled with laughter,

"Before, no one would touch chicken or fish. But after the cooking demonstration, we started to consume them. Three days ago, I prepared a sauce with chicken and invited my neighbors. They were amazed at how tasty it was!"

The changes went beyond what was on the plate. Fatuma's son, Seid, realized that household chores were not solely women's responsibility after participating in the GMF training sessions. He explained,

"Previously, we thought household chores were just women's duty. But after the training and work analysis, I understood that women are overloaded and need our support. We must share the work."

True to his words, Seid began fetching

water, collecting firewood, and preparing cooking ingredients, even as he faced peer pressure and ridicule, yet remained committed. Over time, his example inspired other trained peers, creating a ripple effect throughout the community.

Seid's transformation reflects the far-reaching impact of the project on his entire family. The household now holds weekly meetings to discuss and plan responsibilities, fostering collaboration and shared decision-making. No longer just a helping hand, Seid has grown into a true partner in running the household. When asked what kind of husband he aspires to be, he replied with confidence,

"I am educated, and I want to marry an educated girl. I will do what I already do for my mother. I hope to complete my education and serve my community."

Today, Fatuma's family enjoys a diverse range of meals, including milk, eggs, vegetables, and occasionally chicken or fish. Her income has grown, her reliance on loans has ended, and her household has found a new balance. Despite challenges like drought, Fatuma has a plan to sustain the gains, continuing vegetable production, raising chickens and goats, and ensuring her family's diet remains diverse and nutritious. She concluded,

"I am so happy with this support! We improved our consumption habits and our income. I sell eggs, contribute to savings, and cover costs on my own. We will sustain this."



CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS

1 WATER SCARCITY FOR HOUSEHOLD AND SCHOOL GARDENS

Limited water availability, particularly in Afar and Somali pilot areas, hampered household and school-level vegetable production. To address this, the project assessed and implemented water harvesting mechanisms, especially in the Somali pilot site, including the adoption of roof water catchment technology. In Tigray, vertical and pot farming techniques were promoted to optimize water use. In Afar, preservative mechanisms and value addition were recommended to store surplus production from the rainy season for consumption during the dry season.

2 EXTREME TEMPERATURES AFFECTING CROP YIELDS

In Afar, excessive heat during the dry season severely affected vegetable and fruit production, limiting the success of household gardening efforts and discouraging wider adoption. While climatic conditions could not be changed, the adoption of improved water harvesting and climate-resilient farming techniques helped mitigate some losses.

3 BUDGET LIMITATIONS RESTRICTING SCALE-UP

Funding shortages constrained the expansion of interventions beyond pilot woredas. To minimize this limitation, the project enhanced community contributions. In the Tigray intervention area, households contributed egg-laying chickens to diversify food consumption and support project goals at a low cost, demonstrating local ownership and sustainability.

5 RESISTANCE TO GENDER TRANSFORMATION AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

In the Somali region, some spouses resisted developing household gender relation improvement plans due to fear of community backlash. To overcome this, the project worked with spouse volunteers to pilot household plans and used these successful examples to encourage other families to adopt similar strategies.

4 FUNDING CUTS AFFECTING CSOS AND PLATFORMS

Recent donor funding reductions significantly impacted member CSOs, weakening regional and thematic support platforms. The project responded by prioritizing capacity building within the remaining resources and leveraging partnerships to maintain core activities.



LESSONS LEARNED



Early Stakeholder Engagement: Engaging stakeholders from the project's inception and throughout its implementation created a sense of shared responsibility, improved alignment with government sector plans, and maximized the provision of technical and material support. For example, water pumps were provided to women's economic empowerment (WEE) target groups in Tigray, reflecting strong sector commitment and consistent support from government staff in intervention regions.

Layering Interventions for Efficiency: Integrating the ECSC-SUN project with the Irish Aid-supported GEP project enhanced efficiency and utilization of resources. Experienced staff from the GEP project supported WEE interventions, contributing to smoother implementation and better outcomes.

Community Contribution and Local Investment: Community involvement proved critical for promoting production diversity. In Tigray, beneficiaries pooled resources through local savings mechanisms (equb) to support poultry production, demonstrating ownership and sustainability of project activities.

Males' Engagement in Household Chores: Before the Gender Model Family (GMF) approach, men were generally

not responsible for household chores. Following the intervention, significant behavior change was observed: males began washing clothes, fetching water, collecting firewood, and even participating in cooking, promoting more equitable household dynamics.

Ripple Effects on Neighboring Communities: The project generated a ripple effect that extended beyond the target households. Observing the benefits realized by participants, neighboring community members began adopting similar practices, amplifying the project's impact at a broader community level.

Improved Consumption Habits: Target groups diversified their diets and began consuming previously neglected nutrient-rich foods such as eggs, chicken meat, and fish. This dietary shift contributed to improved household nutrition and challenged longstanding food taboos.

Effective Coordination and Partnerships: Strong coordination among multiple sectors, including health, agriculture, education, and women and social affairs, was instrumental in the success of the pilot. Collaborative planning, implementation, and monitoring enhanced efficiency and ensured that interventions were well integrated.





ECSC-SUN is a leading voice for nutrition in Ethiopia. We work to realize the vision of a world free from malnutrition in all its forms, by 2030.

Vision:

Civil society organizations are harmonized to influence national policies, strategies, programs and regulations to see a nation without hunger and malnutrition.

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