

Sesame Business Network Newsletter



Issue 2, January 2014

Major activities: training, demonstrations and field days



Farmers at Adebay receiving training

In June and July 2013, representatives of all 19 sesame business clusters came together in participatory workshops to design their action plans for the period 2013-15. One of the main issues raised during the workshops was farmers' lack of awareness on new sesame production technologies and their knowledge gap on improved agricultural practices.

As a result, the sesame business clusters set improving productivity and quality of sesame through the use of improved technologies and practices as one of their main economic objectives. In accordance with this objective, the Sesame Business Network (SBN) support programme has organised training of trainers (ToTs) workshops and demonstrated improved agricultural practices for sesame producer farmers in the different sesame business clusters.

Training on improved agricultural practice

ToT workshops were organised for a total number of 354 agricultural experts and development agents in both north Gondar and west Tigray zones in August and September 2013. The trainings were given with the objective of enhancing the knowledge of development agents and agricultural experts on improved sesame production techniques. The trainings helped professionals to consolidate their knowledge and skills so that they will be able to provide quality support to farmers.

Similarly, 320 farmers from Adebay and Bereket (Rawyan) clusters received training on good

agricultural practices, contract farming and marketing. This training was organised by the SBN support programme in collaboration with Dipasa Agroprom plc on October 5 and 6, 2013. The aim of the training was to capacitate smallholder farmers, who grow sesame traditionally, to produce good quality sesame that can meet world market requirements.

The training in Bereket area was supported by practical field visits. Trainees visited the nearby sesame farms and had a chance to see and evaluate the field management activities undertaken on an investor farm. Participants observed the different insect pests and diseases that attack sesame. Farm managers also explained on how the field was managed and what actions were taken to protect the major sesame insect pests. In the field discussions were held and answers were given to questions raised by participants. Participants further pointed out that the training helped them to have an increased awareness on improved sesame production techniques and marketing of products through contract farming.



Trainees in the practical training session at the field

About this newsletter

The purpose of SBN newsletter is to provide relevant and timely information about the overall activities of the SBN and its support programme.

In this issue we would like to highlight the major activities that have been done by the Sesame Business Network (SBN) and its support programme in the second half of 2013.

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Demonstration activities



Left, daily labourers making rows for sesame planting; right, farmers while weeding sesame

Based on the direct request of cluster members during action planning, demonstration activities on good agricultural practices and improved technologies were carried out between June and September 2013. The demonstration activities were undertaken by the SBN support programme in collaboration with the Offices of Agriculture of West Tigray and North Gondar zones.

The activities were carried out in 24 demo plots, nine in north Gondar and 15 in west Tigray zones. Of these plots, 11 were located at Farmer Training Centres (FTCs) while the remaining 13 were on farmers' fields.

Participating farmers were selected by the respective *woreda* agriculture office experts and development agents, taking into account their past experience and exemplarity. Field selection was done by SBN support programme staff and development agents in the respective *kebeles* jointly. All improved and locally available technologies and best production practices were packaged and applied in all the demo plots. This included land clearing, two to three times ploughing, use of seeds of improved varieties, row

planting, fertiliser application, tinning, repeated weeding, pest scouting and management, timely harvesting, proper stacking and drying, threshing, cleaning and bagging.

The demonstrations were held in 20 x 20m plots of land, with 10 cm between plants and 40 cm between rows. For demonstration trials four sesame varieties (Setit 1, Humera 1, Abasena and the local) were used. The local varieties differed according to the locality and preference of the farmers. Accordingly, in the Amhara side mostly Gojjam Azene was used while in the Tigray Hirhir and others were planted. Fertiliser was applied at the recommended rate (100kg DAP and 50kg Urea/ha) soon after planting and covering with light soil. Thinning, first, second, and third weeding was done as deemed necessary. Fields were scouted every week for pest infestation and spray application was made whenever the economic threshold level was attained for sesame webworm. Farmers were advised to participate in each field activity and this gave them the opportunity to learn about improved sesame agronomic practices and proper use of inputs.

Five key objectives of the Sesame Business Network

Based on the summary of all the sesame business cluster action plans, SBN support programme set activity domains and outcome indicators. Income improvement is the overall goal of SBN. Sesame clusters planned to have a 30% average increase in farmers' net income from targeted commodities, namely, sesame and sorghum. To achieve this goal, the SBN and its support programme focus on two major strategies: The first is **production cost price reduction** under which 30% cost price reduction of targeted commodities (sesame and sorghum) is expected. The second one is **product and market development**. Farmers, small, medium and large enterprises operating in the sesame zone of northwest Ethiopia improve their net benefits with 10% as a result of product and market development.

To arrive at production cost price reduction, there are three specific strategies and related economic objectives:

- i) productivity and quality improvement;
- ii) credit cost reduction and
- iii) harvest, transport and storage loss reduction

For product and market development, there are two specific strategies and related specific economic objectives:

- iv) post-harvest value creation and
- v) market linkages and sales

The economic objectives serve as the compass and reference for the cluster actors and for the SBN support programme.

Sesame field days organised in northwest Ethiopia

The SBN support programme in collaboration with Gondar and Humera Agricultural Research Centres have organised field days with the aim of popularising improved sesame production technologies through the demo plots to different stakeholders. Participants of the field days were exemplary farmers, primary cooperative leaders, investor farmers, development agents, researchers, *woreda* and zone administrators, invited public and private media.



Field visits of demo plots at Metema (left) and Humera (right) areas

In late August and early September, 11 field days of which four in Tigray and seven in Amara regions were organised. Field days were mainly organised in two sessions, one at flowering and the other at maturity or before harvest. The first visit was made by cluster members only, while the second ones took regional status as they included invited guests from the respective regions, zones and *woredas*.

The field days were organised with the assumption that farmers will start practicing what they see and experience in the demo plots as the adage goes “seeing is believing”.

In total, 721 participants (356 from west Tigray and 365 from north Gondar) visited the demo plots (see Table 1).

The field visits not only raised the interest of farmers, officials and extension staff, but they also gave farmers an increased awareness on the need of employing improved sesame production technologies (See farmers reaction under).

The demo trials add zest to change the way on how farmers do their agricultural practice pertaining to sesame. Inspired by what they have seen in the demo plots, a growing number of farmers have come to believe that,

Table 1. Field visits of demo plots , where and when they were organised and number of visitors

Zone/Region	Cluster	Specific location	Date of field day	Number of Participants
North Gondar, Amhara	Shinfa	Shinfa	31/08/2013	64
	Gendewuha-Brishign	Gendewuha	02/09/2013	42
	Metema-Yohannes-Kokit	Mender Sebat	04/09/2013	48
	Sanja	Yayra	09/09/2013	55
	Ashere	Filwuha	09/10/2013	30
	Ashere	Ashere	23/10/2013	35
	Metema Yohannes and Gendewuha-Brishign	Metema sub research station, Gendewuha	14/09/2013	91
West Tigray, Tigray	May-Kadra and Rawyn Clusters	Bowal, HuARC compound	28/09/2013	113
	Adi-goshu and Adebay	May-wayni and Hagere-selam	29/09/2013	62
	Division, Tirkan and Dansha Aurora	Divison, Wor-e	30/09/2013	112
	May-gaba	May-gaba	02/10/2013	69
Total number of participants				721

employing good agricultural practice would increase productivity and this in turn boost their income.

Results of the demo plots have shown that the average seed yield harvested from 400m² plot of land was 36 kg (equivalent to nine quintal/hectare). The demonstration activities undertaken in different clusters

proved that doubling sesame yields is possible, if improved technologies and agricultural practices are properly implemented.

The field days in Metema Yohannes and Gendewuha-Brishign from Amhara region and almost all filed days in Tigray region were reported in the Amharic and Tigrigna Programmes of the Ethiopian television.



Habte, a sesame farmer from Yayera kebele, Ashere cluster stated that she used to plant sesame in broadcasting. She is impressed by what she has seen in the demo plots. She said she will try new sesame seed varieties and row planting next season.

Abadit Taddess, a farmer from Division cluster was very happy by what she has seen in the demo plots at Mender Amest. She said “this work should not remain in the farmer training centres and in the plots of some selected farmers. This practice need to be expanded and practiced by many farmers”



Tiku Girmay, the owner of one demo plot in Division cluster, regrets for not employing improved sesame production techniques in all his other sesame fields. He said, “Had I known this before, I would have done the same in all my fields.”

Ahmed Nureye, a farmer from Gendawuha said he and his friends are happy to see the demonstration of improved seed varieties in their localities. He said he will try the improved seed varieties next year.



Inventory meeting of sesame-related service providers

On May 31 and June 1, 2013 sesame-related service providers in northwest Ethiopia had a two-day meeting not only to identify the current and foreseen support services but also to find out possible ways for future collaboration on their services.

A key component of the inventory meeting was that it provides the opportunity to identify the possible ways of intervention for the rainy season activity from the portfolios of agricultural season bound activities presented.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Humera Agricultural Research Centre (HuARC), Kafta Humera Sesame Producers and Sales Cooperative (KHSPSC), Setit Union, Dejena Trading PIC, Welkayit *woreda* Office of Agricultural, Western Tigray zone Office of Agriculture from the Tigray side and Gondar Agricultural Research Centre (GARC) and North Gondar zone Office of Agriculture from the Amhara side.

Clusters designing their action plans



Action planning workshop at Adi-hirdi

In June 2013, each of the 19 Sesame Business Clusters (SBCs) had a participatory action planning day. In each cluster, representatives designed a three year action plan which includes strategies, objectives, and foreseen activities for 2013 – 2015 through the facilitation of SBN staff. Frame of reference for the participants were also the baseline survey of the particular clusters (as collected in February and March, 2013).

During SBC action planning, cluster actors proposed to improve sesame yields by more than 100 percent, from 3.8 to about 8 quintals per hectare; to reduce the volume of informal loans by 50 percent and reduce harvest and storage losses by 67percent (from 28 to 9 percent)

The actors also planned to add value and to improve quality by enhancing storage practices, and by planting cleaning and grading facilities. As income increasing strategy market linkages and sales were targeted. To meet the targets, cluster actors identified activities that address major challenges, responsible actors, when and where the activities should be accomplished.

Secrets of Sesame

Have you ever heard of the fact that a regular consumption of sesame seeds or its oil has several proven health benefits? If not please enjoy your reading below.

Sesame:

- has a nutty flavor, unique test and aroma
- is rich in proteins, carbohydrates, fatty acids, amino-acids, vitamins, dietary fiber, fats, and antioxidants
- has medicinal properties (anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-fungal and anti-oxidant), skin care
- can be consumed as bread toping, bread sticks, cookies, pasta, with vegetables and curry dishes, meat sweetening etc)
- is rich in oleic acid (mono-unsaturated fatty acid) which helps to lower “bad cholesterol” and increases “good cholesterol” in the blood by activating the movement of blood in arteries.
- helps to prevent coronary artery disease and stroke by favoring healthy lipid profile.
- The proteins and amino acids (Folic acid) in the seed enhance DNA synthesis, children growth and development and prevent neural tube defects in the baby.
- The compounds such as sesamol, sesaminol, feryl-methanthiol, guajacol, phenylethanthiol, furaneol, vinylguacol and decadienal help stave off harmful free radicals from the human body.
- B-complex vitamins (niacin, folic acid, thiamin, pyridoxine, riboflavin and vitamin E helps reduce cholesterol in the blood; enhances GABA activity in the brain, thereby reduce anxiety and neurosis.
- Lignans (sesamin) and phytoestrogens reduce cholesterol levels, enhance immune response, decrease risk of certain kinds of cancers by protecting colon cells from cancer-causing chemicals.
- The incredible richness in essential minerals (calcium, iron, manganese, zinc, magnesium, selenium, phosphorus, potassium and copper) is vital for bone mineralisation, red blood cell production, enzyme synthesis, hormone production, and regulation of cardiac and skeletal muscle activities.
- has very high content of Etholeen which is essential for proper functioning of liver and kidney.
- reduces pain and swelling experienced due to rheumatoid arthritis, heal ulcers, burns and laxative the digestive system.
- play an important role in a number of anti-inflammatory and antioxidant enzyme systems.
- helps in maintaining the structure, strength and elasticity of blood vessels, bones and joints, prevent osteoporosis. Support vascular and respiratory health, discourage airway and trigeminal blood vessel spasms and lower high blood pressure.
- prevents migraine headaches, dizziness, blared vision, sleeplessness and hemorrhoids.

Source: Buzzle: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/sesame-seeds-nutrition-facts.html>

Increasing sesame production by reducing losses: A valuable finding for farmers

Among the various challenges that the sesame sector faces in northwest Ethiopia, post-harvest losses are one of the most pressing issues. Given that sesame farmers spend about four months of the year working in a grueling way, it is striking that they lose much of their sesame on the piling and threshing points. The losses do not stop there, but continue to occur in the multiple loading and unloading activities, in transporting to either to warehouses or home and then to market centers. Losses happen during storages due to pest damage, at marketing centers while taking samples for grading (buyers and sellers often pierce the sack to check the quality), during repacking and processing.

The sesame cluster members estimated that post-harvest losses across the sesame value chain may reach up to 30 per cent. One can imagine how much millions of US dollars have been lost due to mismanagement alone.

In order to quantify and design methods to reduce this loss the Sesame Business Network (SBN) has formulated "Reducing post-harvest losses" as one of its five main economic objectives. SBN support programme has been working hard in close collaboration with farmers and other stockholders to reduce the loss at least by 20 per cent by the end of 2015.

During the 2013 harvesting and marketing season, between late September and December, agronomists and extension coaches of the SBN support programme have undertaken action research to determine the post-harvest losses of sesame along its supply chain. The study has focussed on identifying potential stages where significant amount of sesame is wasted and it has also tried to quantify how much of the yield loss is attributed to each stage. Based on the findings, the study will devise mechanisms to reduce the losses.

Even though the study has not yet been completed, preliminary results revealed that the harvest losses are remarkably higher than expected. According to the field study result, during drying of harvested sesame in hillas approximately 60kg per hectare loss is recorded. This approximately value 10-20% yield loss which may amount 2,400 ETB or US\$ 126 (if harvest is between 3-6 quintals per hectare).



Above, sesame yield losses incurred during the different field operations ; below, stacking of hillas on plastic sheets

The findings also indicated the possibility of reducing the post-harvest losses by using simple and affordable techniques in the stacking, threshing, transporting and storing stages. During field studies, stacking hillas on plastic sheets helped to save up to 60 kg sesame per hectare. Covering the ground by plastic sheets for moving stacked sesame to the threshing sites saved up to 0.43 kg per hilla, for a 35m distance moving alone. During transporting the product to the nearby market centre, it was saved from 1- 10 kg per vehicle. This actually depends on the type of vehicle and bagging material used, the distance it travelled and the road type.

This study therefore gave an insight that thinking out of the box and doing the post-harvest practice differently will help farmers to save much of their produce.

The systematic measurement of stack, transport and storage losses received serious attention and interest from farmers and cooperatives. It is especially recognised as a valuable finding for farmers who have been grappling to produce more and lose less. The final results of the action researches may generate techniques which can help reduce the current enormous amount of postharvest losses.

The results of the studies will be shared with the SBN stakeholders in the upcoming regional workshops which will be held in Metema and Humera in February 2014. The major findings will also be published on the SBN website and our next newsletter. Most importantly, the findings of the study will contribute to design evidence-based interventions.

SBN support programme conducts credit and production cost study

The production of sesame ended in October. The marketing of sesame amongst small scale producers is reaching its end as well which means that many sesame producers will balance their success over the 2013/2014 production and marketing season. The SBN support programme undertakes action research on how successful this year was for sesame producers by starting two studies, namely credit cost and production cost.

In March and April 2013, the SBN support programme has done a thorough baseline survey. One specific item found during the survey was that the cost of sesame production varies per cluster. The agro-economy team of the support programme is identifying the production costs as accurate as possible, right now.

During earlier stages of the support programme's activities, it was already found that finance is the major issue in the sesame sector (see also the word-cloud on the right which depicts the challenges in the sesame industry as was identified during baseline activities). In order to overcome such challenges, the support programme researches the current situation of credit



A word-cloud which depicts the challenges in the sesame industry in northwest Ethiopia

taking amongst sesame producers. By conducting both studies simultaneously the support programme tries to identify the relation and significance of credit cost to production cost. The rationale for conducting this study is that evidence based data on these topics are considered beneficial to both the sesame producers, as well as financial institutions. Producers can benefit from this by getting better understanding on their expenses and income. What is

more, the financial institutions can get acquainted with investment opportunities that are present in the sesame industry by having tangible data of how credit is being provided to sesame producers right now.

Both studies are held in all the 19 clusters that are identified by the SBN support programme. It is expected that results will be delivered in the first half of 2014.

SBN: Sesame Business Now

The marketing of sesame is happening as we speak. In late September, the sesame producers started to harvest their produce. This is the moment many sesame producing households are waiting for. Farm gate prices for sesame have increased significantly in the past years. This trend has continued for this season as well. At the beginning of the marketing season, spot market prices were at 2,300 Eth. Birr (US\$ 121) per quintal, but in just a few weeks this reached levels of 4,200 Eth. Birr per quintal.

Unions have stated their marketing ambitions and the successes achieved in the past marketing season aspire a successful marketing season this year as well. Unions aim to directly export as much sesame as possible. The prospects for this are looking good. The government is supporting the Unions in their marketing activities and so are the programmes of SNV, Agriterra, ACDI-VOCA, and ATA.

Unions are well prepared for the marketing activities. In collaboration with the Woreda

Cooperative Promotion Agencies, and with the SBN support programme, several meetings and trainings were held to mobilise sesame supply from primary cooperatives towards the unions. Between November 2013 and January 2014 three marketing trainings were organised for more than 200 people. The trainees were drawn from primary cooperative management bodies and Unions. The trainings were organised in Metema, Tach and Mirab Armachiho *woredas* of Amhara region. The main objective of the trainings was to capacitate the participants' knowledge on marketing across the sesame value chain.

Besides direct export, Setit Union, Dansha Union, Lemlem Union and Metema Union can trade at the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange (ECX) in Addis Ababa this marketing season. These unions have collected an ECX seat which allows them to trade on the auction floor by their own means. The ECX favours producer organisations and has given the opportunity for unions to purchase these seats at very attractive



Spot market in Baker, Tirkan Cluster

prices. This allows the unions to spread their chances and choose the market outlet that is most favourable at any given moment.

In some occasions, unions have chosen to take the export route. The first export contract this season was made by Metema Union. They found a buyer for around 600 metric tonnes of sesame. Also Selam Union made their first export contract this season. The unions in west Tigray have not engaged in direct exports yet but they are ready to do so as soon as possible. We trust that this will be a successful endeavour.

In the picture

In the picture entertains the profile of individuals, cooperatives, unions, and/or any other service provider organisations in the sesame business clusters in northwest Ethiopia.

Seasons harvest within two days: Collecting leftovers of sesame to supplement subsistence life

It is November, which is the harvesting season of most crops growing in the low land of northwest Ethiopia. Farmers and daily labourers in Adebay, not far from the Humera town of West Tigray, have been toiling for sesame harvesting, stacking (making hillas) and threshing. In one sesame field spot, Hawa Anesh, a woman from the Kunama tribe, put her head down sifting the sesame leftovers from the soil. She and some of her neighbours have been spending the whole day in the fields bending their head down recovering the leftovers of the sesame seeds. They first collect the sesame with field dirt, and then sieve it with mosquito nets. After sieving, they take the seeds to river or other water source to wash and dry it.

Hawa, 44, lives in Hillet Koka kebele of Adebay. She is the breadwinner of a large family. She supports a family of eight, consisting of her daughter and her nephew's children. She owns two hectares of land of which she often rents out one hectare for another farmer. She plants sesame in the remaining one hectare and harvests two quintal of sesame per year. The meagre income that she gets from this and other activities hardly supports her family. This is why she pours all her energy in recovering sesame and sorghum that is left on the fields, from which she gets a reasonable amount of money.



Hawa, winnowing

Harvesting time seems a blessing for Hawa and other women in the Kunama tribe. Hawa usually collects 5 to 35 kg of sesame per day. While in areas where there is wind damage she collects up to 50 kg per day.



Hawa Anesha while separating the trash from the seed

In 2011, she collected 300 kg in 35 days and sold it at a price of 2300 ETB (which is approximately US\$121). In 2012 her rich harvest reached 200 kg out of which she fetched 7,000 ETB (US\$ 368). She managed to recover this amount without plowing, weeding, harvesting and threshing, but with a few days of arduous work.

In some exceptional occasions, Hawa and her friends work for farmers who experience higher sesame losses as result of wind and rain. They do this at a 50 per cent recovery deal. This year, for example, Hawa and her other seven friends made a seed recovery agreement with an investor farmer who had lost his hillas due to windstorm in Adigoshu cluster. They worked hard for two days and recovered 17 quintals of sesame. Out of this the women got 8.5 quintal sesame which is 106 kg for each. At this moment the price of 100 kg sesame is 4200 ETB (USD 221\$). Hawa and her friends made this amount of money within two days. They are happy because they were able to earn good money as a result of the good market prices.

Hawa and her friends also recover sorghum seeds and make a seasonal harvest of 8-10 quintals within 20 to 30 days. In 2012, Hawa collected five quintals of sorghum

seed in nine days and sold some of it at a price of 500 ETB per quintal. She used the remaining sorghum seed for making local beer called "Daga".

Hawa endeavours to support her family's subsistence life by doing this and other activities. In the dry season she brew a local beer called 'Daga' out of the sorghum leftovers that she collected in the harvesting times. Hawa has a dream to see her daughter becoming educated.

The experiences of Hawa and other women in the Kunama community, serves as a strong example that shows the enormous losses in the post-harvest processes of sesame in northwest Ethiopia. Hawa and her friends got this opportunity because of farmers' limited care during harvesting and storing practices. It is estimated that there are up to 20-30 per cent postharvest losses. If the total sesame acreage is 500,000ha and the loss is 60kg/ha, then the country losses 30,000 quintals which amounts more than 100 million ETB/year.

The main causes of yield loss in sesame in the Ethiopian condition are untimely harvesting, inappropriate staking and transporting of 'hilla', untimely threshing and losses during threshing and post-harvest pests

Training opportunities with the Centre for Development Innovation of Wageningen UR

Course name	Location	Period	Deadline NFP
Organised farmers as partners in agribusiness (OPPO)	The Netherlands	15 – 26 September 2014	04 February 2014
Local economic development	South Africa	29 September – 10 October 2014	04 February 2014
Facilitating multi-stakeholder processes and social learning	The Netherlands	29 September – 17 October 2014	04 February 2014

For the full course overview: <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Expertise-Services/Research-Institutes/centre-for-development-innovation/short-courses/CDIshortcourses2014.htm>

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More information about the SBN and its support programme will also be found on the SBN website which is currently under construction: <https://www.sbnethiopia.org>.

You can also find us on our facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SBNEthiopia>

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