At the Regional Female Food Heroes Award Ceremony, women farmers were celebrated for their resilience, innovation, and impact in feeding nations. Their leadership lights the way to food justice. Credit: Kinde Teshome/Oxfam

WOMEN ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

A Case Study of Female Food Heroes (FFH) Ethiopia's Program

In Ethiopia, rural women produce most household food yet remain marginalized in policy and services. Oxfam's Female Food Hero (FFH) Initiative, launched in 2012, recognizes exemplary women farmers to elevate their status and influence. A case study of alumni and partners found that FFH strengthened leadership, expanded incomes, diversified livelihoods, and increased recognition. Awardees gained platforms to present policy asks, prompting some commitments and progress. The program also generated evidence that partners used in advocacy. However, weak regional platforms, reliance on government implementers, limited resources, and persistent cultural norms constrained impact. Future efforts should focus on strengthening partnerships, building alumni networks, expanding capacity building, increasing media engagement, and establishing robust monitoring systems to ensure sustainability and deepen policy influence.

Acronyms

BoA	Bureau of Agriculture
CSO	Civil society organization
EBC	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FFH	Female Food Heroes
FFHAP	Female Food Heroes Award Program
FFHI	Female Food Heroes Initiative
FFHP	Female Food Heroes Program
GDP	Gross domestic product
KII	Key informant interview
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OiE	Oxfam in Ethiopia
RC	Regional coordinator
SEDA	Sustainable Environment and Development Action
SNNP	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
TAP	Together Against Poverty
WISE	Women in Self Employment

Executive Summary

In Ethiopia, rural women are responsible for all household chores, in addition to their reproductive roles and the responsibilities they play in agricultural, pastoralist production, and livelihood activities. Women farmers perform up to 50 percent of farm labor and produce 70 percent of household food production in the nation. Yet, they are hardly recognized as farmers and remain largely sidelined in policies, strategies, institutional structures, and subsequent improved technical and technological services supporting their productivity. Moreover, Ethiopian women are entangled with negative attitudes and deterring cultural norms that repress their household, economic, social, and political roles and benefits.

As a rights-based, justice-focused, and feminist organization, Oxfam International initiated the global GROW Campaign advocating for smallholder and women's rights in developing countries, including Ethiopia. Accordingly, determined to challenge the negative attitudes towards female smallholder farmers, Oxfam in Ethiopia initiated the Female Food Heroes (FFH) Award in 2012, partnering with the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Media Agency, and local partners forming the civil society organization (CSO) Alliance Platform for Food-Secure Ethiopia. The FFH concept was developed with the notion that the sector is underperforming in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. In Ethiopia, the FFH Initiative is organized around a contest ("FFH Award") to find the most outstanding women farmers—ones who have overcome challenges and made significant gains in their farming, thus serving as role models in their homes and communities. Their stories are used to promote the status of Ethiopian women food producers and make their working and living conditions understood and visible to unwrap their potential and address the multiple bottlenecks of female small-scale food producers by recognizing them, building their leadership capacities, and empowering them to speak about themselves and demand better policy environment. The Initiative was through direct engagement with FFH and collaboration with partners in implementing the program.

TAN Consultancy was tasked by Oxfam to undertake a case study analysis of the program, focusing on its strategies, achievements, challenges, and opportunities, and capturing valuable lessons learned in engaging women farmers and FFH implementation that can inform sustainability and identify key insights that contribute to Oxfam's future program development.

Methodology: The case study utilized qualitative methods and gathered insights from 24 participants (FFH alumni and Oxfam's partners). The research employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure a diverse representation of voices, capturing a range of experiences across different farming systems and award years. Data collection involved both in-person and telephone interviews, alongside secondary data from relevant reports and policy documents, maintaining ethical standards, including informed consent and data and quality assurance.

Key findings: Oxfam, along with its partners, engaged with FFH awardees and FFH alumni through capacity building, awards, and platforms for

policy advocacy. Over the past 12 years, the Female Food Hero Award Program (FFHAP) has been successful in empowering smallholder women food producers through building their leadership capacities, boosting their income, and diversifying their livelihoods. The FFHAP has also benefited FFH alumni who have experienced increased recognition and space to present their policy asks to decision-makers. As a result, some indicative promises and progressive actions in support of women farmers have been secured. Moreover, the FFHAP has generated concrete pieces of evidence for further use in policy engagement. Despite the remarkable success, the FFHAP also faced specific challenges, such as weak regional platforms, undue reliance on government structures and personnel for implementation, poor monitoring and tracking system, limited capacity of FFH awardees, insufficient staffing, smaller funding with stringent allocations, and unpaid staff. Furthermore, the complexity of working with diverse stakeholders and the persistence of cultural norms that limit women's participation in agriculture were other broader challenges. As a result, the analysis concludes that while the FFH Initiative is well positioned to make lasting policy impacts for female farmers in Ethiopia, it faces some key issues, including the limited vibrant collective action or unison voicing among FFH alumni, weak policy monitoring and tracking of advocacy results, and dubious sustainability of the overall results and outcomes.

Recommendations: The analysis makes the following recommendations for the future of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia:

- **Strengthen partnerships and collaboration:** Foster strong partnerships with the government, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector to ensure the sustainability and scalability of the Female Food Heroes Program (FFHP).
- **Improve the capacity-building training:** Invest more resources in capacity building for women food producers to further boost their skills and knowledge.
- **Capacitate regional platforms:** Develop and support an alumni network for past awardees to foster ongoing connections and development opportunities and build the capacity and facilitate them to form strong regional platforms and coalitions that can take group action with more long-term benefits.
- **Synthesize, disseminate, and use the findings of the research:** Utilize the significant number of Oxfam research reports to craft policy asks and advocacy messages to be used in Oxfam and partners' policy-influencing work.
- **Engage women's organizations and promote gender-transformative approaches:** Incorporate gender-transformative approaches in the FFH Initiative to challenge and change the underlying social norms and power dynamics that limit women's participation and leadership in agriculture.
- **Diversify funding sources and improve project management:** Explore diverse funding sources, including government, private sector, and international donors, to ensure long-term sustainability of the FFHAP.
- **Increase the number and diversity of awardees:** Consider increasing the number of female farmers recognized each year, aiming to honor

at least 50 participants annually.

- **Revisit the strategy to enhance communication and media engagement:** Invest more in media engagement, including traditional media and in-person outreach efforts, to raise awareness about the FFHAP across Ethiopia.
- **Develop the FFH Award Program into one with a full-fledged multisectoral program approach:** Consider designing and implementing a multiyear program that meets the Fraser's Gender Justice Framework (Recognition, Redistribution), with development and activities at grassroots level that help to develop success stories and good practices and generate evidence alongside policy-influencing actions.
- **Enhance tracking, documentation, monitoring, and evaluation:** Develop an FFH database, monitoring tools, and data collection and repository mechanisms to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Ethiopia, with a 2024 population of 129.5 million (51 percent female), relies heavily on smallholder, subsistence farming, which generates 34 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), 90 percent of foreign exchange, and employs 80 percent of the labor force. Agricultural growth aligns with reductions in poverty and food insecurity (World Bank, 2023; MoA, 2023).

Rural women constitute 50 percent of the agricultural labor force and produce 70 percent of the household food. Yet they face systemic challenges in landownership, access to training, and inputs that affect their productivity. For instance, women farmers own 21 percent less land, receive five times fewer training opportunities, and constitute only 20 percent of multipurpose or agricultural cooperatives membership (MoA, 2023). Furthermore, these women remain under repressive cultural norms, high work burdens, less access to education and services, and lack of access to appropriate technologies that limit women's productivity and impact food security (MoANR et al., 2018) Addressing these disparities and challenges could raise agricultural productivity by 20–30 percent and output by 4 percent. The country loses 1.1 billion United States dollars (USD) annually from its GDP due to the gender gap in agricultural productivity (MoA, 2023).

Cognizant of this, the Ethiopian government has made efforts to mainstream gender and benefit women through various social and economic growth policies, strategies,[1] and instruments; women in agriculture is the case in point. Yet, the implementation of these policies and instruments is at the infant stage and not yet fully addressing the gender issues, particularly in terms of the demands of vast rural women farmers (MoANR et al., 2018). In accordance with this, there have been several concerted efforts of government and development partners at large to bridge the gap. The FFH Initiative is one of those efforts.

Oxfam is an international confederation of 21 organizations operating in 79 countries in 2023 fighting poverty and injustice, prioritizing intersectional feminist approaches and rights-based actions that promote diversity in its governance and program management (www.Oxfam.org). Among its global agricultural development- and policy advocacy-focused programs, the GROW Campaign evolved into the FFH Initiative in African countries, including Ethiopia. Thus, in 2012, Oxfam

[1] These include the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, Family Code, and National Women Policy and Rural Development Policy and subsequent plans (Growth and Transformation Plans I and II).

partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Media Agency, and CSO partners to develop the Female Food Heroes (FFH) Initiative by creating an alliance platform called "Together Towards a Food-Secure Initiative Ethiopia (TFSIE).”2

The FFH concept was developed with the notion that the sector is underperforming in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. In Ethiopia, the FFH Initiative is organized around a contest (“FFH Award”) to find and spotlight the most outstanding and resilient women farmers who have overcome challenges and made significant gains in their farming, thus serving as role models in their families and communities, and to promote their recognition to collectively ask for inclusive policies and subsequent application in supporting women farmers in their agriculture and related business endeavours.

As a strategy in the FFH Initiative, Oxfam in Ethiopia has been working with communities, CSOs, and government bodies to empower small-scale female food producers, drive policy changes, and foster public awareness using media and tailored capacity-building outreaches. The Initiative has focused on the visibility and recognition of FFH alumni to collectively voice and advocate on behalf of smallholder women farmers to get the policy attention, resources, technologies, and technical support they need to ensure their agricultural productivity and food security, and to thrive. Oxfam and its partners raised awareness of stakeholders, nominated and recognized/awarded FFH alumni, built their capacitates through training, mentoring, and experience-sharing events, initiated FFH alumni national and regional platforms, generated pieces of evidence on FFH, and guided alumni in advocating for their rights.

The Initiative has been instrumental in empowering and promoting the role of women in the agriculture and food security of the country to overcome the attitudinal, systemic, and technical challenges to their productivity. Hence, better awareness about the challenges faced by women small-scale farmers has been created among stakeholders. They have a better platform, visibility, recognition, empowerment, and leadership skills to challenge and influence policies that directly impact their lives and livelihoods. As a result, the FFH alumni also got positive responses to some of their policy asks and better technical support from the government. Nevertheless, no updated and independent thorough analysis of the Initiative or documentation has been done, which is critical for a better understanding of the process and results for further learning and future action.

Accordingly, TAN Consultancy has been tasked by Oxfam in Ethiopia to undertake a case study analysis of the program, focusing on its strategies, achievements, challenges, and opportunities, and capturing valuable lessons learned in engaging women farmers and FFH

2 TFSIE is a think-tank kind of platform includes government, international and local civil society organizations and networks, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

implementation that can inform sustainability and identify key insights that contribute to Oxfam's future program development.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The case study analysis examines the effectiveness of Oxfam's engagement strategies with the Female Food Heroes (FFH) and explores how Oxfam's internal systems and processes have impacted its engagement with the FFH/alumni. Furthermore, it reviews and documents lessons for long-term sustainability of the FFH Initiatives results, such as FFH's/alumni's capacity to voice and influence policy and their engagement in other livelihood and governance initiatives in their communities beyond the program. By capturing these insights, the study seeks to enhance future initiatives and foster ongoing collaboration. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess how Oxfam's engagement strategies have contributed to, or hindered, the long-term sustainability of the FFH Initiative and its ability to maintain relationships with the women involved.
2. Examine the role of Oxfam's internal systems and processes in supporting the sustainable

1.3 Scope of the analysis/review

Based on the Terms of Reference, the study focuses on the engagement strategies of Oxfam's Female Food Heroes (FFH) Initiative in Ethiopia, specifically examining system- and practice-level approaches, success factors, and challenges. It is neither a comprehensive review of Oxfam's entire program in Ethiopia nor an impact evaluation of the FFH Initiative.

The analysis draws on insights from interviews with FFH alumni, Oxfam and partner staff, and a desk review of relevant Oxfam's internal policies and systems, and project documentation. The findings of the study and recommendations are based on the information generated from the target informants and reviewed documents and is crafted to meet the interests and demands of the small-scale female food producers/alumni, Oxfam, local partners, and back donors.

The findings of the analyses bolster the FFH alumni and fellow female farmers, equipping them with knowledge that can lead to greater empowerment and advocacy within and beyond their immediate environments. Similarly, Oxfam and its partners shall get a full picture of their engagement with FFH alumni from their internal policy, systems, and practice perspective, and learn success factors and challenges. The back donor also gets insights into the worthiness of the funding, accountability of partners, and the future of their investment. The recommendations will guide Oxfam in refining their strategies, policies, and systems in engaging FFH women, and their partnership with local partners and public, private, and nonprofit CSOs (mainly women's organizations) in the country and beyond, globally. The insights will help address internal challenges that affect collaboration, such as

communication gaps, resource allocation, and strategy implementation of such initiatives in the country and elsewhere based on similar contexts.

Overall, the analysis benefits actionable recommendations for Oxfam and its partners to enhance collaboration and effectiveness in women-centric policy advocacy programs, while also offering valuable information for donors for a robust and impactful collaboration.

2 Research methods

2.1 Research design

The study utilizes a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the success factors, and challenges faced and opportunities for Oxfam and its partners in engaging Female Food Heroes (FFH) alumni in Ethiopia. The aim is to understand how these alumni can effectively voice their needs and advocate for improved policies that enhance their agricultural production and productivity, contributing to the country's food and nutrition security goals.

2.2 Population and sample

Sample population: The study's sample includes FFH award-winner women farmers, Oxfam and partners' staff (Oxford Country Team (OCT), Sustainable Environment and Development Action (SEDA), Women in Self Employment (WISE), and government (Federal Ministry and Regional Bureaus of Agriculture, Women and Social Affairs Bureaus). Regarding sample size, any number of informants available for interviews shall be considered until the information saturation level is reached. Oxfam and partners, management and experts of Oxfam in Ethiopia, SEDA, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), and Regional Bureaus of Agriculture (RBoAs) who were engaged in FFH implementation in the last five years were considered as key informants, and those willing and available were included in the interviews.

Sampling technique: The study employed a mixed-methods technique: both purposive and snowball random sampling techniques were used to select FFH alumni sample respondents. Firstly, purposive sampling was done by clustering the FFH alumni based on three major categories: **major farming system/livelihood zones** (crop-dominated, mixed farming, livestock-dominated/pastoral systems, and urban agriculture), **development level** (major production/advanced and emerging), and **cohort of awardees' year** (2012–2015, 2016–2019, 2020–2023). Following the purposive sampling, the snowball sampling technique was employed to identify specific FFH awardees within each of the established categories. This approach allowed for the selection of respondents in a manner that aimed to ensure randomness and representation, as existing participants were encouraged to refer additional alumni for inclusion in the study. Efforts were made to interview as many FFH alumni as possible until data saturation was reached. The combination of these sampling techniques aimed to generate a diverse and representative sample of FFH alumni, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

Respondents' profile: Given the constraints of time and accessibility, the

study conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with 24 participants, comprising 12 FFH alumni and 12 individuals from Oxfam Ethiopia, partner CSOs, and government sectors focused on agriculture and women's affairs at both federal and regional levels. Alumni interviewees were randomly selected from Oxfam's FFH awardee roster, grouped by farming systems, regions, and award years to represent a diverse set of perspectives from female smallholder farmers across Ethiopia. Alumni chosen for this study were largely participants from 2015–2020 to ensure respondents had substantial experience with the FFH program.

Respondents represented various geographic regions in Ethiopia, including urban agricultural centers (Addis Ababa, Harari), primary production areas (Oromia, Amhara), extensive emerging farming zones (Gambella), and cash crop regions (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP)), as presented in Table 1 below. This diversity provided a comprehensive view of the FFH Program's impact and challenges across Ethiopia's agricultural landscape.

Table 1. Summary of respondent profile

Parameters	**Category**	**Sex of Respondents**			**Remark**
		Female	Male	Total	
Role in FFH	FFH alumni: women farmer/awardee	12	0	12	
	Oxfam staff		2	2	
	Partners: CSOs and gov't partner staff	7	5	12	
Major farming system/agro-ecology/livelihood zone	Urban and peri-urban	3	0	3	Commercial, improved
	Pastoral and emerging	2	0	2	Low and/or dry land
	Intensive and cash crop	3	0	3	Wet mid- and highland
	Mixed farming: crop and livestock	4	0	4	Wet mid- and highland
Cohort of alumni /year of award	2012–2015/16	4	0	4	National winners/1 per region
	2016/2017–2019/20	5	0	5	3 winners per region
	2020/21–2023/24	3	0	3	3 winners per region

Source: Field survey, 2024

Furthermore, from the Oxfam and partners' side, the informants were selected based on their involvement with the FFH Initiative at various levels in Oxfam, Ministry of Agriculture structure (federal and regional), and CSO partners (SEDA, WISE, Pellum), ensuring a diverse representation of views and experiences that enriches the data, providing multiple perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by

female food producers in Ethiopia. For more detailed information about the specific participants and their positions, please refer to Table 2 (Annex III).

2.3 Data collection and tools

Primary data: It is mainly interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including FFH alumni, Oxfam staff, local partners, and relevant policymakers. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding engagement strategies and advocacy efforts.

Secondary data: It includes a comprehensive review of existing FFH project documents, including proposals, agreements, and reports, and various policy research outputs. Internal monitoring information and systems documents from Oxfam were examined to assess program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

The primary data collection was guided by Oxfam's research protocol (Annex I: Oxfam Forms) and used semi-structured interview checklists (Annex II: Key Informant Interview Semi-structured Checklists). The interviews were conducted for a minimum of an hour with each person using telephone, Zoom, and WhatsApp platforms as applicable using local languages (Amharic and Afaan Oromo). Only a few informants were met in person in Addis Ababa. The discussion was audio-recorded with participants' consent to capture detailed responses and ensure accuracy in data analysis. Travelling to regions was not possible due to shortage of time, logistical feasibility to reach dispersed informants, and the security situations in the regions.

2.4 Data triangulation, presentation, and analysis

Data triangulation: Data from interviews were triangulated with insights gained from secondary sources to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

Presentation and analysis: The triangulated data were presented with short narrations, success stories, and quotations of direct speech and opinions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns within the qualitative data, focusing on the barriers and enablers of Oxfam's effective engagement with FFH alumni and their advocacy efforts. This analysis was helpful to inform recommendations for enhancing the impact of the FFH Initiative and supporting the sustainability of the achievements of the alumni.

2.5 Research ethics and quality assurance

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study, member-checking techniques were utilized. This process involves sharing key findings with participants to validate the accuracy and interpretation of their contributions. Recognizing the potential limitations of this study, including participant bias and the subjective nature of qualitative research, measures were taken to minimize these risks. Efforts included maintaining transparency and reflexivity throughout data collection and analysis (Byrne, 2022).

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the research process. The consultant strictly adhered to Oxfam's code of conduct and accepted research ethical standards like obtaining informed consent from all participants during data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and how their data would be used. All data collected were used exclusively for this analysis and will not be shared with any third parties. The final report was submitted to Oxfam, ensuring the confidentiality and integrity of the information provided by participants.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Overview of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia

3.1.1 Purpose and design

The ultimate purpose of Ethiopian FFH Award Program is to recognize, celebrate, and empower women farmers who achieved their household food security by their innovative farming and agri-business and eventually contributed to the agriculture-led national economy development. Ultimately, the program intended to transform biased and repressive perceptions about women farmers and build respect for their roles in sustainable agricultural development by promoting these women as innovators, entrepreneurs, social stewards, and vital contributors to food security and economic growth. Thus, the Initiative aimed to promote equity and increase opportunities for women farmers, encouraging them to advocate for an inclusive policy environment that addresses systemic, technical, and attitudinal challenges faced by small-scale female food producers in Ethiopia's agrarian and pastoral communities.

Specifically, the outcomes of the FFH Award Program include enhancing visibility and recognition of FFH by the government and communities; building leadership capacities; increasing productivity and income; creating vibrant regional and national platforms of FFH alumni for collective voicing of policy asks; and engaging youth and family members in honoring FFH alumni for their role in ensuring food security and the national economy. Pertaining to these, the core activities of the FFH Award Program include familiarization; nomination of winners; capacity building for finalists; organizing award events and follow-up policy engagement, experience-sharing, and discussion platforms; and supporting research and documentation for evidence generation and media engagement, monitoring, and evaluation.

In terms of its design, the FFH Award Program in Ethiopia is part of Oxfam’s Global GROW Campaign designed and rolled out by Oxfam in Ethiopia since 2012; in fact, partnering with relevant stakeholders: CSOs, government, media, and private sector. The program has been an integral part of and feeds into Oxfam’s multicounty, multiyear, and comprehensive agricultural and economic justice advocacy grant “Together Against Poverty” that principally seeks to increase the quantity and quality of investment in agriculture both by selected African countries and donors’ countries. The “Together Against Poverty” grant is a broader agricultural program and focused on sustainable agricultural investments and the resilience of small-scale farmers to address hunger and poverty in Ethiopia and has been designed based on the strategic plans (preceding and

ongoing 2030 Strategic Framework[3]) of Oxfam following its feminist principles and of course in alignment with key agriculture and women-focused policies[4] of Ethiopia.

As observed in the desk review, and reported by the KII respondents, the FFH Program's goals, objectives, and activities planned over the years remain mostly consistent, demonstrating a significant focus and persistence of actions towards the set goal. The planning process is largely done by the Oxfam Country Team (CT) with inputs from local CSO (SEDA) and government partners. In fact, the following were reflections from KIIs regarding the planning.

> *Oxfam request inputs (as concept note from LNGO [local nongovernmental organization] partner SEDA) when it develops the proposal for fund raising. Otherwise, we often prepare an inclusive FFH Award. But due to limited resource allocation, we could not add new activities. Moreover, as policy advocacy, we do not support grassroots intervention through materials and technologies. But, based on experience and lesson, we were modifying and customizing activities somehow.*
>
> (extracted from KII-Info-017)

> *We submit concept notes, and Oxfam develops the full proposal. Then, FFH nomination and an award focused list of activities are shared with us, and we comment. But we cannot add brand-new activities as such; hence, it somehow lacks flexibility in terms of additional activities that could be supportive and innovative interventions tailored to local contexts based on lessons learned from the perspective of local implementing partner.*
>
> (KI-Info-020 and KII-Info-022)

In general, the purpose of the FFH Initiative is to create and foster an empowering and enabling environment for female food producers to improve and sustain their agriculture while assuming leadership roles in their communities and articulately ask for progressive policies and supportive services for their enhanced productivity. To this end, the program has good design consistency with minor flexibility, relevance of action, and somehow participatory planning that could contribute to better impact and sustainability of the program actions.

3.1.2 Oxfam's FFH engagement strategies

Oxfam in Ethiopia adopts both direct implementation and sub-granting in implementing the FFH Program. The desk review and KIIs show Oxfam

[3] According to Oxfam's 2030 Strategic Framework, Oxfam intended to exist not as a development project implementer but as a convener and amplifier of global movements for social justice, empowering young people and leading feminist movements, and with other social justice activists establishing authentic relationships with marginalized communities and maintaining the hard-won trust of governments, companies, and individuals that wield outsized power and influence.

[4] The FDRE Constitution (1991), Rural Development Policy (1994), Growth and Transformation Plans (2010–2020), Agricultural Extension Strategy (2017), Women Development Policy (1994), Land Administration Proclamation (2001), MoA Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2023).

has been directly engaged and interacted with FFH alumni throughout the program implementation, though it sub-grants some activities to local partner SEDA. Oxfam leads the planning and is closely involved in all FFH alumni events (nomination, business skills training, award and platform meeting for policy dialogue sessions, and media interactions). Hence, it has been interacting face to face, mentoring, supporting, monitoring and documenting FFH alumni status and achievements, jointly with SEDA and the Ministry of Agriculture. Furthermore, Oxfam directly meets FFH alumni and engages them to speak on high-level forums and hosts and supports meetings with policymakers to present their policy asks by supporting evidence generation and communication of key messages (desk review, KIIs conducted in 2024).

Oxfam's FFH engagement strategies, which are also the overall implementation management strategy of the FFH Initiative in most cases, include the following, based on findings from reviewed documents and discussions with informants at various levels.

Collaboration with and engaging partners for reaching out to FFH: Oxfam facilitated required modalities for FFH alumni engagement by selecting and setting frameworks for working with civil society organizations (CSOs) and government bodies at various levels.

Media engagement to sensitize and empower FFH to speak out about their demands: Leveraging media platforms to mobilize and raise awareness of the public and women food producers, particularly using Goodwill Ambassadors to do the announcement and convey the message on behalf of the women farmers to promote the program and garner support.

Direct outreach, mentoring, and interacting with alumni: Oxfam, along with partners (SEDA, MoA, regional coordinators (RCs)) visits FFH contestants before vetting, and guides and mentors their journey along the platform.

Capacity building for alumni: Equipping FFH alumni to advocate for themselves.

Research-based evidence generation for FFH policy asks: Researching various issues and constraints of women small-scale food producers to support relevant messaging and seek support policy engagement.

Mentoring and guiding FFH during in-person engagement with policymakers: Facilitating meetings and discussions between FFH alumni and policymakers to present their policy asks.

Creating and using national and regional platforms for FFH alumni in issue identification and policy dialogue: Organizing platforms for alumni to discuss their issues and set agendas for further tabling.

The desk review and KIIs pointed out that the organization continuously reviewed the added value of these strategies, learning from the process and adjusting based on their effectiveness, feasibility, and available resources. Over the years, the FFH engagement and implementation

strategies of the FFH Award Program evolved to suit the operational context and nature of the activities. A detailed presentation of Oxfam FFH engagement and program implementation strategies, summary of progress, achievements, status, identified gaps, and reflection for the future has been documented (Annex III, Table 3).

3.2 FFH Initiative implementation process and stages

3.2.1 Partnership and resources for FFH Initiative implementation

Oxfam in Ethiopia's long-term development, humanitarian response, disaster prevention, and advocacy engagement are guided by its partnership principles outlined in its policy document, "Working Together: Oxfam's Partnership Principles," issued in February 2012 (Oxfam, 2012). Both the desk review and key informant interview findings confirmed that the FFH Award Program followed a multistakeholder partnership approach from its start. Hence, Oxfam partnered and jointly implemented the FFH Program with the Ethiopian government (Ministry of Agriculture) and civil society organization (CSO) SEDA.

Oxfam conducts capacity assessment and selected SEDA as a sub-grantee to co-implement FFH activities (mainly nomination, training, award and platform meetings). According to KIIs with partners, SEDA's capacity and long experience in community outreach, good collaboration with government, and longer partnership with Oxfam America made it eligible for FFH implementation partnership at the start. Since then, the partnership assessment has been conducted every two years and SEDA's eligibility sustained to date (KI-Info-022, 024, and 025). After the assessment, Oxfam signed a sub-grant agreement with SEDA for the FFH Award implementation partnership for the first time in 2014 and renewed it every year afterward. This partnership was rooted in mutual alignment of purpose and adherence to Oxfam's partnership principles. SEDA's grassroots experience and logistical capacities made it the preferred local partner. It also successfully delivered the programmatic results (Forsythe et al., 2016). In addition, Oxfam established a no funding collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture through signing a Memorandum of Understanding. These partnerships are based on Oxfam's core values, ensuring alignment of purpose and mutual complementarity of roles (KI-Info-020 and 022).

Oxfam availed the human and financial resources required for the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia. The budget is often raised from one or multiple back donors based on the availability of resources. The FFH Program has one full-time staff at Oxfam Ethiopia country office level for overall coordination, planning, and executing of Oxfam-allotted activities, overseeing and monitoring activities allotted to SEDA, and partnership issues. Oxfam in Ethiopia's communication, monitoring, and evaluation and finance staff are also involved in FFH management, sharing their time (10–20 percent) budget. Similarly, SEDA has one full-time staff coordinating the FFH Program all over the country, and it engages most of its staff in the head office in implementing the FFH Program; only the executive director,

finance person, and driver get a small percentage of their full-time equivalent (FTE) salary. By and large, the FFH grassroots implementation has been done using the Ministry of Agriculture experts (two at the Ministry office and one at each region), with a meager top-up payment (Together Against Poverty (TAP2) proposal document; KI_info-023 and KI_info-024).

3.2.2 FFH Initiative implementation stages

The FFH Initiative in Ethiopia is implemented in three stages: Pre-Award (nomination and training), Award, and Post-Award (policy engagement). Throughout these stages, Oxfam and SEDA collaborate with key stakeholders, including FFH alumni, CSOs, government entities, media, and private agencies.

Stage 1: Pre-Award

It includes launching and kick-off of the nomination, nomination, vetting, and training. Each FFH round begins with a regional launch event featuring government officials, stakeholders, alumni, goodwill ambassadors, and media. These workshops introduce the Initiative, showcase past achievements, and mobilize actors to support subsequent stages. Then, nominations are announced via workshops, media, and posters distributed at grassroots levels.

Nominations were done by eligible women farmers themselves, or else development agents along with local administrators suggested potential candidates. Then, nominees submit their application to kebeles[5], and applications proceed to woreda[6]. Woreda agriculture office experts screen and shortlist up to 10 nominees and pass the applications over to their respective zones. The zonal agriculture office expert consolidates and shortlists some 10 applications and sends them to their respective regional FFH coordinator based in the agriculture bureau. The regional coordinator consolidates all nominations from the region and passes them over to the regional juries. Regional juries, including representatives from agriculture, women's affairs, and NGOs, vet finalists based on criteria emphasizing food production, innovation, and community impact. The criteria have evolved to include young women, individuals with disabilities, and resource-constrained innovators (KII_Info-014 and KI_info-015). Regarding the nomination, the interviewed jury members reflected the following.

> *The application is self-initiated or else nominated by experts. There is no community nomination or voting at grassroots level. Though we are doing our best at the regional level, we have shortlisted 10 nominees. We trust that the kebele and woreda agriculture office person do their best to be fair. Yet there is no confirmation due to*

[5] A kebele is the **smallest administrative unit**, like a **village or neighborhood**.

[6] A woreda is an **administrative district** and is one of the main local government units.

bulky applications. As juries, we often conducted on-site visits to verify the information provided by nominees, eventually selecting the top three finalists based on their findings.

(KI-Info-017 and KI-info-019)

Regarding the criteria, Oxfam and SEDA provided generic ones but that has also been revised based on comments from regions over time to avoid bias towards factors like capital accumulation or land size, ensuring a more inclusive approach that considered young women, individuals with disabilities, and those with innovative ideas but limited resources (Annex III, Table 4).

After the finalists were known and vetted by the juries, Oxfam, and SEDA officers, then capacity building for finalists was done. Since 2016, the top three finalists from each region attend a three-day training on business planning, marketing, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Conducted by Women in Self Employment (WISE), the training uses participatory methods, practical exercises, and local languages. Finalists also visit farms, research centers, media outlets, and parliament to gain broader exposure. So far, all the FFH awardees attended the three days of business skills training.

Stage 2: Award and recognition events

Award events honor the top performers at national or regional capitals, decentralizing participation and raising awareness. Activities include presentations, speeches, music, and documentaries. National TV broadcasts the events, enhancing recognition. Alumni note that the FFH Award boosts their confidence, visibility, and advocacy capacity, enabling them to interact with government and private sector representatives effectively in the following way. “The Award is beyond money for me. I am lifted from the dust and became an influential person, even at court defending for my rights and beyond,” said KI-Info-002. Similarly, two informants said: “The Award leaped me forward to work harder, knock on government and private company doors without fear, and helped me to be heard and valued” (Ki_Info-006 and KI-Info-007).

Stage 3: Post-Award (establishing platforms and policy engagement)

The Initiative created a national alumni platform to advocate for policy changes. Alumni present policy recommendations during dialogues with parliamentarians and policymakers, though tangible outcomes remain limited due to challenges rooted in grassroots issues. Regional platforms have been established in nine of 11 regions and used for policy engagement. In line with this, the interviewees from FFH and partners appreciated the progress regarding regional platforms formation, progress made so far, and the gaps they explained in the following way:

We have made significant efforts in creating and making regional platforms active; however, due to security and budget we were not able to run bi-annual meetings and communication skill capacity building and other supports,” said KII-Info012. The second KI said, “I

was elected as chairperson of the regional platform. The meeting and discussion were so interesting. We were eager to meet regularly, interact, share our experiences, and present our challenges to the duty bearers. However, the organizers (Oxfam and SEDA) did not call us for about two years though the promise was bi-annual. I was even checking our regional coordinator through phone, and he did not know the reason either. He advised us to wait.

(KII with Info-006, 2024)

3.2.3 Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of the FFH Initiative

Oxfam has a clear result framework, milestones, indicators and tracker, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan for FFH both in its internal system and donor templates as observed in the desk review and interviews. The local partner also adheres to the plan as a requirement. Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting are done based on Oxfam's internal system and donor requirements. The FFH process monitoring is often done jointly by Oxfam and SEDA at the field level in collaboration with regional coordinators just before the award. The monitoring observes the ground reality of the nomination, visits applicants, meets with the jury, and verifies finalists. A field monitoring report is compiled by local partner and jury minutes of the selection are attached (SEDA 2023).

The review noted that Oxfam and SEDA created a roster of alumni over the years; which is mainly name lists with some address details. A comprehensive time-series database and efforts to track the progress of alumni over the years are limited. Annual monitoring is limited to nominees of the year/round due to resource limitations. Both desk reviews and key informant interviews revealed gaps in maintaining a full database of alumni, closer follow-up after the award, tracking of progress and challenges of the awardees, and results of policy asks presented (including promises committed by policymakers during face-to-face meetings) for long-term outcomes.

Regarding reporting, Oxfam in Ethiopia has been receiving regular narrative and financial reports from SEDA as stipulated in the Letter of Agreement (LoA) (Oxfam and SEDA, 2019).

By the same token, Oxfam in Ethiopia (OiE) has been further reporting to donors as per the donor requirement on a quarterly and annual basis.

3.3 Key Achievements of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia

Oxfam, along with its partners, successfully implemented the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia for the last 12 years in 11 rounds (each round

covering three to four regions) and crowned over 193 women farmers from all 11 regions and two city administrations. All major farming systems and big regions got the chance for five rounds, and more than 10 women farmers were crowned as FFH alumni; hence enhancing their visibility, audibility, threshold of influencing, and expanding possibilities for other fellow women farmers in their region or even zones or woredas to have a role model to follow (KIIs conducted in 2024; SEDA, 2023). The Initiative has been on steady progress in terms of incremental number of targets reached, and diversity of the regional/geographic coverage, evolving range of activities implemented, crafting more suitable strategies, empowering and amplifying unheard voices of women food producers, nurturing their leadership, and spearheading their productivity for sustainable food security. The key achievements are further detailed and substantiated as follows.

3.3.1 Enhanced awareness, self-confidence, and empowerment among FFH alumni

Ethiopian rural women shoulder multiple responsibilities, including productive and reproductive roles. For FFH alumni, this often means managing domestic tasks, farming, business operations, and community engagements. Many of these women worked tirelessly, balancing multiple demands without prioritizing personal safety, care, and well-being (KIIs conducted in 2024). The business skills training and award by the FFH Program brought about transformative changes in their self-awareness and self-care practices. Alumni reported a shift in behaviour, highlighting how the training encouraged them to reflect on their lives and prioritize their health and safety. Many alumni also developed better confidence in public interactions as expressed below.

> *Before the training, I never took time to rest or reflect on my business journey. I now prioritize self-care: I rest, eat properly, and make time for family and social life. My home is now a more comfortable space for my family.*
> (KI-Info-001)

> *I was once afraid to leave my house, let alone speak in public. Now, I can knock on any government office door and talk to anyone without fear.*
> (KI-Info-007)

> *I feel like I've graduated with a diploma. The training inspired me to think big, work hard in my village, which is now admired by the community, knock on all possible doors of the local government and demand for farm services. Overall, I have a better life and more opportunities than ever before.*
> (KI-Info-006)

> *I stood before the judge with confidence, holding up my FFH Award medallion and certificate to demonstrate my recognition and reputation. I presented my case without fear, using the skills I gained from the training. I won the case, and the charges were reversed.*

However, the local administration delayed enforcing the decision. And I continued advocating for my rights and finally re-granted permission to continue my farming activities. Had it not been for the FFH Award and training that boosted my skill and confidence, it wouldn't be easy.

(KI-Info-002)

In addition to the alumni, key informants from partners reported significant improvement in self-awareness, confidence, and self-care of the FFH alumni after the training. They said, "The three-day training changed the life of many alumni. It taught them to balance their work and life, look after themselves, adopt new business practices, and interact more effectively with their family and community" (KI-Info-013 and KI-Info-014).

In summary, the FFH training helped alumni build confidence, improve self-awareness, and open doors to new opportunities. The training enabled participants to think beyond their immediate challenges, dream big, and act differently. It encouraged them to stay focused and bold, and advocate for policies and services they require for their productivity improvements.

3.3.2 Boosted managerial and leadership capacities of FFH alumni

The other achievement of the FFH business skills training was the managerial and leadership capacities of the alumni. Most of the alumni lacked basic literacy, skills, and leadership experience beyond their routines. The business skills training and experience-sharing facilitated by Oxfam and partners in the FFH Program changed the landscape. Hence, FFH alumni reported significant improvements in farm and non-farm businesses, family roles, and community leadership. Many reported better engagements in farming activities, strategic task planning, and improved management of both family and hired labor. Financial record-keeping became more meticulous, and alumni began long-term planning, diversifying businesses and launching new ventures. Several also stepped into leadership roles in their communities, participating in local councils, thanks to the leadership skills they developed. A few alumni reflected in the improvement in their own words in the following way.

The training helped me identify local business opportunities. For example, I noticed the growing rice production but saw that farmers struggled with processing. I responded by installing a rice-cleaning machine in my millhouse, making it available to the community at an affordable rate. This reduced the burden on women hauling the grain and promoted the use of high-yield rice, which had been underutilized.

(KI-Info-007)

Thanks to the training, I organized our dairy farm more efficiently. Every family member now has defined roles and a fixed monthly salary (5,000 Ethiopian birr for each of them), including my disabled

son and college-attending daughter. I manage finances, covering feed, medication, and salaries. We've saved enough to build a spacious home and provide high-quality dairy products to the community.

(KI-Info-001)

After the business skills training, I successfully organized and led over 20 women village saving and loan groups (each with 20 to 30 women members). Under my leadership, several members succeeded in their business by using the loan services from their groups and became millionaires. Furthermore, I have been elected by my community and joined the Woreda Council, where I am defending the rights of women and present the demands of my constituency. All are results of the FFH in one way or another.

(KI-Info-004)

In addition to the alumni themselves, the key informants from partners (MoA regional coordinators (RCs), and experts from MoA and SEDA) confirmed the improved managerial and leadership skills of the alumni and increased public role, including as heads of women groups, council members, and representatives of women following their recognition by the FFH (KI-Info-011 and 012).

In summary, the FFH business skills training, experience-sharing events, and the overall Award and recognition significantly enhanced technical, business management, communication, and leadership skills, empowering alumni to transform their personal and community lives and play a significant role in public governance, and social and economic affairs.

3.3.3 Improved income and livelihoods of FFH alumni

The training enhanced participants' business skills, helping them adopt a more entrepreneurial and profit-driven mindset. Many diversified and sustained their income sources by planning and aligning their products with local market demands. They improved living standards, built better homes, adopted advanced farm technologies and inputs, and provided better education and food security for their families. Moreover, they expanded their farm business and operations, invested in modernizing their farms, and engaged in new ventures through strategic planning and investment for long-term sustainability and optimized production. The alumni expressed their improvements as follows:

The training helped me establish a year-round milk production schedule. By organizing insemination and calving times, I now supply 100 liters of milk daily.

(KI-Info-001)

I diversified my livelihood and income sources: expanded farming activities by renting additional farmland, kept dairy cows with better management, started poultry and fattening of small ruminants. I started irrigation by purchasing a pump. Beyond farming, I opened a

consumer retail shop attached to my house. I also constructed a house in the nearby town and started collecting rent. I increased my income in many folds and built a modern house admired by the community. All my children now attend school. We have enough food, a well-furnished house, and regular income.

(KI-Info-006)

3.3.4 FFH alumni platforms created and used for policy engagements

Oxfam supported and guided the FFH alumni to form platforms (national and regional) to better organize and present their policy requests. Accordingly, the platforms were established nationally and in most of the regions. These platforms enabled FFH alumni to thoroughly discuss, sort out, and present their issues directly as the policymakers and implementors (public and private institution officials like banks) attend the forum (desk review; KI-Info-022).

The formation and utilization of national and regional platforms have yielded mixed results. Since 2016, the FFH Award has been provided at the regional level, successfully bringing the Initiative closer to communities where alumni can significantly impact and serve as role models for other women farmers and pastoralists. Given that regional governments are autonomous and responsible for their socioeconomic development, including gender justice and agricultural progress, it makes sense for FFH alumni to present their policy requests directly to regional authorities. Evidence shows that various requests made to regional agricultural bureaus during FFH Regional Platform and Award events were positively received and acted upon by regional officials and policymakers. In contrast, issues raised at the national level often face delays and may be forgotten.

For instance, during the Gambella Regional FFH Award in 2017/18, senior regional government officials attended the event and made a policy speech promising to support FFH awardees with additional financial prizes, access to mechanization, and extension services. And the regional government did as promised, according to the following key informant's own words.

Following my recognition as an FFH, I have received better and closer support from the regional government and Woreda Agriculture Office experts. In 2023, I requested mechanization service support, and the government agreed to provide it for free, something that was not available even for payment before my recognition through the FFH Award. The Award elevated my profile and made my voice heard. Interestingly, due to my increased exposure and courage, the regional government extended free mechanization services to at least 20 other strong women farmers in my woreda. We, as women farmers, are extremely happy and thankful for this support. We hope all women elsewhere receive similar attention and support, and we want this to continue without waiting for individual requests like mine.

(KI-Info-007)

While regional platforms have been formed in most areas, they have remained less effective, despite occasional meetings aimed at setting action points. The most recent regional platforms were held in 2021 and 2024. For instance, in 2021, Oxfam in Ethiopia and SEDA organized a national platform for FFH alumni, where important issues were discussed and directions set, as summarized below.

> *The National-Level Female Food Heroes Platform brought together members from all regions and city administrations. During this platform, Female Food Heroes shared their practical experiences and consolidated 10 key issues (two related to gender and eight related to food security) to present to policymakers. During an interface meeting with relevant government officials, policymakers, and financial institutions, FFH alumni raised various food security and gender-related issues, marking a promising start.*
>
> (Oxfam, 2023)

Two years later, in July 2024, the next FFH alumni regional platform was conducted alongside the 11th round FFH Award event attended by FFH alumni and government officials of three regions (Somali, Hareri, and Dire Dawa) and convened in Dire Dawa City. The desk review of project documents states that the platform enabled alumni to share experiences, discuss challenges, and identify issues for further action, including gender equality, income generation, and women's political involvement.

Based on information from reviewed documents and interviews, the study team explored the progress of issues tabled by FFH alumni at the national and regional government levels in 2021. Similar issues were presented again in 2024. While regional contexts may differ, all issues are linked to the national platform, and there should be a review of previous achievements before presenting new or similar issues. During the analysis, partners and FFH alumni were asked about the progress of previously tabled issues, but no concrete progress was reported, either orally or in writing. This indicates that the national and regional platforms are weak, poorly planned, and remain ad hoc. The platforms also lack the necessary institutional framework, defined terms of reference, agreed action plans, monitoring tools, and resources for effective operation.

3.3.5 Research and documentation for evidence-based policy engagement

Oxfam realized the importance of supporting FFH awardees in sharpening their policy asks before tabling to the concerned government for consideration. Thus, the policy asks were planned and supported by concrete evidence generated through participatory action research. The findings from these studies not only help frame specific policy issues but also highlight the need for an enabling environment tailored to smallholder women food producers in Ethiopian agriculture. Furthermore, gathering success stories and producing documentary films on the experiences of FFH winners serve to inspire other small-scale farmers. These stories are shared on both national and international platforms as

evidence to support the policy issues raised by FFH alumni and fellow farmers, demonstrating the need for policy action (KI-Info-009).

According to our findings, between 2015 and 2024, Oxfam in Ethiopia conducted more than 10 evidence-generating research/studies (including evaluations) that informed the FFH Award and other country programs. These studies explored key issues, such as small-scale Female Food Heroes' awareness and resilience to climate change impacts (Allan et al., 2021) bottlenecks faced by FFH alumni in agricultural production (Tolera, 2019), and scoping studies on policies, institutions, and structures related to gender-disaggregated and responsive budgeting in agriculture. Additionally, studies on the adoption of conservation agriculture, climate financing, and budget tracking were conducted by the project utilized both desk research and firsthand qualitative field data, providing background information, analyzing current conditions, highlighting achievements and challenges, and offering robust solutions and recommendations for improving FFH engagement, ensuring gender justice, enhancing climate resilience for smallholder farmers, and improving agricultural budgeting practices.

Furthermore, documentation of FFH awardees' success stories, both in written and audiovisual formats, has been produced by Oxfam in Ethiopia and its partners, and attempts were made to let them reach the target audience. These include short case studies of individual awardees, television documentaries, regional TV coverage of award events,[7] short video footage documentaries, news coverage of award events, social media posts, and blogs. The transmission channels include social media platforms (Oxfam's website,[8] FFH Award Facebook page,[9] SEDA's Facebook page,[10] and MoA's Facebook page). Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC)[11] national and regional government channels, and private TV stations (Fana broadcasting and Kana) also transmitted FFH short profiles and nomination calls for several years. FFH Women Alumni documentaries were also used at international events[12] and during the award event as a showcase. Soft copies of documentary video and printouts of magazine were also produced and disseminated in limited reach (SEDA, 2019).

7 https://youtu.be/yx_ifyReHG0;

8 https://cng-cdn.oxfam.org/heca.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Celebrating%20Female%20Food%20Heroes%20in%20Ethiopia.pdf.

9 This is the official FFH Facebook account administered by Oxfam in Ethiopia and has more than 19.1K followers and likes on August 30, 2024. It has been in use since 2014 for posting stories and updates of the award. The link: https://www.facebook.com/femalefoodheroes.

10 This is SEDA's organizational Facebook account with 4.8K followers. It posts FFH events. Here is the link: https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19LiTeSWB6/.

11 Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) produced and broadcasted 44 TV and 38 radio documentaries on the success as well as the challenges of FFH small-scale farmers. It transmitted three award events live, which were watched by over 30 million people (Oxfam Report, 2017).

12 Includes World Food Prize in 2013 in Washington, D.C., World Food Day event at the Milano Expo (2015), Annual UN Commission for the Status of Women.

While these efforts have contributed to raising public awareness, recognizing the awardees, and communicating key messages to policymakers at various levels, there has been no systematic tracking of the outreach and impact of these documentaries. Specifically, it remains unclear to what extent these efforts have addressed biases against women farmers, challenged deep-rooted gender stereotypes, or influenced the policy environment towards achieving gender justice in agriculture and broader economic development.

Moreover, many of the research findings produced by Oxfam have not been fully utilized. Although these studies contain valuable insights, they remain largely within Oxfam's internal archives, with only a few recommendations being acted upon. Major recommendations from more recent evaluations, such as the need for stronger media engagement at the local level and a shift towards group-based action (rather than individual approaches) for women alumni in their policy advocacy efforts, have not yet been implemented. These gaps need to be addressed by Oxfam and its partners moving forward.

In conclusion, while several research studies and recommendations have been produced, many have not yet been translated into action. There is a need to synthesize and share these findings with the public and policymakers in more formal and accessible formats, such as policy briefs and targeted messages. This will help ensure that the research results are effectively utilized for policy advocacy and programmatic improvements.

3.4 Challenges of FFH Initiative in Ethiopia

The implementation of the FFH Initiative faced the following key challenges that provide valuable lessons for future programs.

Understanding and commitment to partnership frameworks: Despite the signing of a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) between MoA, Oxfam, and SEDA, institutional collaboration lacked consistency. Partnerships often relied on individual efforts rather than institutional adherence to agreed responsibilities. For example, MoA depended on SEDA/Oxfam to organize technical and senior-level meetings, contrary to its mandated role. In the same way, Oxfam failed to implement a comprehensive capacity-building plan for SEDA, leaving identified gaps unaddressed.

Funding and management gaps: Oxfam US raised annual funds for the FFH Initiative, yet several funding-related issues persisted: short-term grants (one year) created planning difficulties, despite multiyear back-donor commitments. Inconsistent and declining funding levels demotivated participants, especially regarding the monetary awards. Moreover, stringent budget compliance limited the purchase of useful agricultural tools like small water pumps for women farmers.

Weak monitoring and evaluation systems: While Oxfam developed a MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) plan for FFH, its implementation was weak. Data collection remained minimal, focusing on basic details like names and phone numbers without tracking socioeconomic or agricultural progress. There was no consistent follow-up with awardees post-award, making it challenging to assess long-term impacts.

Inactive alumni platforms: FFH alumni platforms, meant for experience-sharing and advocacy, were largely inactive due to lack of structured terms of reference, meeting schedules, and documented action plans. There were rare and irregular meetings, with some regions failing to convene for over two years. Moreover, poor follow-up on issues discussed in prior meetings was common.

Limited alumni group actions: Although the platforms aimed to amplify group advocacy, most alumni acted individually. This lack of collective action undermined the program's goal of fostering group representation to influence policies.

Over-reliance on government structures: Relying on government staff for implementing advocacy efforts could create conflicts of interest. Advocacy aimed at policy change was compromised by dependence on government structures for awardee selection and program execution.

Insufficient focus on gender justice: The Initiative advanced gender justice through recognition and representation but fell short in redistribution. The limited provision of agricultural inputs and tools left grassroots-level needs unmet, reducing the program's impact.

Insufficient outreach: The FFH Award reached fewer than 200 women over a decade, insufficient for nationwide policy advocacy. Furthermore, awardees were concentrated in easily accessible regions, limiting their influence as role models in underserved areas.

Lack of continuous capacity building: Business skills training provided to awardees was a one-time event, with no follow-up. Topics such as male engagement, advocacy, and gender issues were not included in the training. Furthermore, the absence of refresher courses limited the sustainability of skill development.

3.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of FFH engagement strategy

Based on the analysis from the desk review and field data, the research plotted the following key points as SWOT that can inform the current and future engagement of Oxfam in Ethiopia and partners. As such, the tools pinpoints what to build on (strengths), what to revise/reconsider

(weaknesses), what to make use of (opportunities) and what to be alert to and do to adjust (threats), consolidating the points discussed under various topics in the report and considering possible scenarios. See Table 5.

Table 5: SWOT analysis of Oxfam and partners in FFH engagement and management

Strengths	Weaknesses
Close collaboration with governments and engaging other stakeholders (CSOs, private, research…) in the FFH implementation FFH success and challenges documentation and research for generating evidence FFH meeting and addressing international events (food and climate related), global, national and regional policymakers, senior government officials and parliamentarians Use of media (mass, social media/Facebook) and communication (through art/music, Goodwill Ambassadors–influential personalities promoting and addressing the alumni, standing by them, and conveying messages to policymakers) Trainings for FFH winners, which include financial management, leadership, marketing, and self-awareness skills Engaging public through social media is a useful new tool given size of country. Vibrant and strong women alumni using their recognition and challenging the duty bearers and the system: rights claims, requests for improved services Supporting national and regional platforms of the awardees for discussion, issue identification, and tabling to policymakers; efforts in policy engagement Continuous efforts of learning from experience and improving approaches, and tailoring actions and strategies	Relying on government as key partners for implementing the program at grassroots level Fund related: minimal budget allocation, restricted allocation, annual and short-duration project approach in funding for local NGOs Limited number of staff both in Oxfam and partners; lack of communication, advocacy, gender, policy persons in the team Weak monitoring, inconsistent documentation and tracking of the FFH alumni works and their platforms, after the award Limited support for capacitating and institutional engagement of regional platforms and government staff engaged in the implementation Inadequate outreach, geographic coverage, less diversified, less representative of alumni in big regions Lack of business skills refresher, basic communication, gender-transformative leadership, and advocacy skills trainings for alumni Lack of timely action of research findings for policy brief, public awareness, other program planning, policy issue identification, and messaging by the FFH alumni Limited follow-up of issues tabled by FFH, policy monitoring, and customization of message with professional guidance: limited technical support to platform
Opportunities	**Threats**
Encouraging progress and energies of recognition results of FFH Number of awardees in each region and ample convincing cases Policy and strategy commitments and institutional framework/structures in Federal Ministry and Regional Agriculture Bureaus to grassroot levels, addressing gender issues Presence of revised gender mainstreaming, agricultural extension strategy in agriculture sector, and flagship programs in the MoA, Oxfam, and partner to align, investing in women in agriculture Experience accumulated so far and partnership established by Oxfam, SEDA, and government Revitalization of indigenous institutions and values	Still-dominant traditional norms and value systems suppressing women and girls; presence of resistant traditional leaders in some emerging regions Decline of donor funding and interest Dominant individual actions and mindset among FFH during policy and enabling environment asks Long-term and time taking of results in policy change Recurrent security problems and disaster risk barring outreach and diverting attention Too much agenda and difficulty in priority setting is not practical. Genuine commitment of government at all

promoting gender equality and justice based on local contexts	levels Raised expectations of FFH in getting their policy and enabling environment asks answered Loss of interest and hope among FFH to push agenda when feedback and actions from the government take longer

Source: Based on field survey and desk review, 2024

3.6 Lessons learnt from Oxfam's FFH engagement in Ethiopia

Multistakeholder and sector engagement: Involving multiple stakeholders and sectors, including financial institutions and the private sector, has proven crucial for scaling up the FFH Initiative. Expanding the program beyond government offices has allowed for a broader understanding of the program's goals and areas where different stakeholders can contribute. Engaging financial institutions, for example, has facilitated smoother implementation and enhanced the program's reach, recognizing and supporting more food producers.

Engagement of policymakers and technical experts: The involvement of senior government officials, policymakers, and technical experts has been a key lesson in driving the success of the FFH Initiative. Their participation ensures that small-scale female food producers' issues, including food security and gender equity, become part of the broader development agenda. Strengthening partnerships at these levels increases the likelihood that policy asks and support for women farmers will be prioritized.

National and regional platforms for FFH awardees: The Initiative's creation of platforms for small-scale female food producers to voice their concerns has been central to the FFH Program's success. These platforms provide an opportunity for women to share their stories, inspire other rural women, and serve as role models. Moving forward, there is a need to strengthen these platforms at the regional level to ensure that gender and food security issues are regularly presented to local policymakers.

Evidence for policy advocacy: Research outputs, policy briefs, and documentary films have played a significant role in influencing policy and raising awareness about the challenges faced by small-scale female food producers. These tools have been instrumental in putting critical issues such as conservation agriculture, climate change, and gender-responsive budgeting on the agenda. The use of evidence-based advocacy has proven effective in mobilizing action and providing practical solutions.

Focusing on the implementation of existing policies: While advocating for new policies is a long-term process, the FFH Initiative has highlighted

the importance of focusing on the full implementation of existing policies. This approach helps build the confidence of FFH alumni, who can leverage current laws and regulations to demand better services and support from local authorities.

Empowering FFH alumni through capacity building: The Initiative's emphasis on leadership and capacity building has enabled FFH alumni to speak out on behalf of small-scale food producers at various levels. Despite challenges, alumni have become increasingly bold in requesting better extension services, mechanization, inputs, and information from local authorities. Their participation in international and regional platforms has also brought attention to their challenges, leading to improvements in agricultural extension and other services.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

The Oxfam-initiated and -managed FFH Award project in Ethiopia has been instrumental in promoting a meaningful coalition towards a food-secure Ethiopia, under the theme “Together for a Food-Secure Ethiopia.” The FFH has been funded under the “Together Against Poverty Program” in its multiple phases (TAP and TAP2). The Female Food Heroes (FFH) Initiative in Ethiopia is implemented by Oxfam and its local CSO partners (Sustainable Environment and Development Action (SEDA)), Ministry of Agriculture and its structure, Women in Self Employment (WISE), and others.

Between 2012 and 2017, The FFH Award project succeeded in building a strong relationship with relevant ministries at a time when relationships between the government and civil society organizations were not good and inconvenient for policy advocacy in its proper sense. Furthermore, the Initiative remarkably contributed in terms of influencing the attitudes and beliefs of men and local officials to have greater recognition of female small-scale food producers, especially at the regional and local level. The project has documented positive feedback and expressions of political commitment from the policymakers (Ministry of Agriculture, regional government) during their address at our annual award ceremonies. Moreover, local officials in some regions have recognized the misconceptions they had about female small-scale food producers and their skills, efforts, and commercial orientation. This has completely changed for the better.

The strategies used by the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia to promote the cause of female smallholder farmers included: use of Goodwill Ambassadors (influential women figures, alumni speakers, artists); using media (mainstream and social) to promote the FFH Award Program through live streaming of the event and a documentary on the stories of alumni; FFH Initiative-organized town hall events (regional launching, award ceremonies); alumni sharing their stories and addressing international, national, and regional platforms; mobilization using the government structure (agriculture, women and social affairs at the federal and regional (to kebele) levels); and panel discussions and alumni in-person meetings (with policymakers and parliamentarians). The partnership has been successful in empowering smallholder women food producers and promoting their recognition as key contributors to food security and agricultural transformation.

The FFH Award Project achievements include: its continuous operation, with increasing reach and coverage (10 years of operation, covering 11 regions and two city administrations and has awarded over 193 Female Food Heroes), enhancing the self-assertiveness, self-esteem, confidence, income, livelihoods, and holistic leadership capacities of women alumni, increasing recognition and space for female food producers, and

enabling them to present their policy asks through various platforms. In addition, the program generated evidence through research and documentation for policy engagement. Thus, it has made significant contributions in improving the lives of awardees. All the awardees consulted are financially independent and are major contributors to the household, with some awardees transitioning from food insecurity to prosperity. The defining characteristics of these FFH awardees are dedication in their farming and enterprise, capacity to apply learning and innovation, ability to take risks, and confidence to fight injustices and demand access to services. These characteristics have contributed to their success and are the reason for their award. In Ethiopia, FFH is a great achievement whereby Oxfam is honored to acknowledge the bravery, strength, and perseverance of these and many other courageous women who work hard for the betterment of their families, society, region, and country at large.

However, the Initiative also faced challenges, such as weak regional platforms, limited group action in voice, monitoring, and tracking, limited capacity-building themes and no refresher, the need for more sustainable funding, the complexity of working with diverse stakeholders, and the persistence of cultural norms that limit women's participation in agriculture.

4.2 Recommendations

The study recommends the following for the future of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia.

Strengthen partnerships and collaboration: Oxfam and its partners should continue to foster strong partnerships with the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector to ensure the sustainability and scalability of the FFH Initiative.

Improve the capacity-building training: Enhance capacity building by investing more resources in capacity building for women food producers. Focus on technical skills, business management, gender-transformative approach, male engagement and advocacy, and refresher and additional trainings for all female food farmers to further their skills and knowledge.

Capacitate regional platforms and advocate for policy changes: Use the evidence generated through the FFH Initiative to advocate for policy changes that support women's access to land, inputs, credit, and markets. It is important to develop and support an alumni network for past awardees to foster ongoing connections and development opportunities. Building the capacity of farmer groups, rather than just individuals, and facilitating them to form strong regional platforms and coalitions with group action can have long-term benefits. The skills imparted to the farmer groups can be used to also advocate for other services from government that are relevant to enhancing their resilience, such as health facilities and job opportunities.

Synthesize, disseminate, and use the findings of the research: The research reports done so far by Oxfam need to be synthesized, shared with the relevant audience, crafted into policy asks and advocacy messages, and used for policy influencing. Moreover, the studies need to developed into Oxfam’s and partners’ programs with policy-influencing component issues.

Engage women organizations and promote gender-transformative approaches: Incorporate gender-transformative approaches in the FFH Initiative to challenge and change the underlying social norms and power dynamics that limit women's participation and leadership in agriculture.

Diversify funding sources and improve project resource and management: Explore diverse funding sources, including government, private sector, and international donors, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the FFH Initiative.

Increase number and diversity of awardees: Consider increasing the number of female farmers recognized each year, aiming to honor at least 50 participants annually.

Revisit the strategy to enhance communication and media engagement: Invest more in media engagement to raise awareness about the program across Ethiopia. This could involve both traditional media and in-person outreach efforts to maximize visibility and impact.

Develop FFH Award Program to a full-fledged multisectoral program approach: Develop a multiyear program that meets the Fraser's Gender Justice Framework (Recognition, Redistribution) with development and activities to be implemented at grassroots level that help to develop success stories and good practices and generate evidence as a showcase. Policy-influencing actions that include the Award need to be designed. It can be a flagship program funded by multiple donors and done in partnership.

Enhance tracking, documentation, monitoring, and evaluation: A database of FFH needs to be created. A monitoring tool, data collection and repository mechanism, and proper monitoring and evaluation need to be developed. The required human and financial resources need to be planned and allocated.

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Annex I Forms

Form A: Participant Information Sheet

Study Title	**Analysis of the Female Food Hero (FFH) Engagement Strategy**
Client	**Oxfam International in Ethiopia**
Researcher	**Dr. Tolera Abriham, Managing Director, TAN Consultancy**

You are invited to take part in a study on analysis of the challenges and opportunities involved in engaging the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia.

This Participant Information Sheet helps you decide if you would like to take part. It states about the overall study, scope of your participation, benefits and risks of the study to you, and end use of the study. You are encouraged to go through this information to decide about your participation in this study. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign the Informed Consent Form. You will be given a copy of both the Participant Information Sheet and the Informed Consent Form to keep. Please make sure you have read and understood all the pages of the Participant Information Sheet.

1. **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study aims to understand the challenges and opportunities in engaging the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia as well as identifying, reviewing, analyzing, and documenting strategies, systems, and practices that have either supported or undermined Oxfam's engagement with the implementation of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia.

2. **What will my participation in the study involve?**

As a stakeholder of the FFH Initiative, your participation would involve being interviewed in line with the purpose of the study mentioned above. Due to constraints, the interview would be conducted electronically via audiovisual internet-enabled (voice-over internet protocol) platforms such as skype, Zoom meetings, Google Meet, or WhatsApp video call. If you agree to partake in this study, we can use any of the above-mentioned software that you are most comfortable and familiar with for your interview. With your permission, the interview will be recorded. In order not to take up too much of your time, the maximum duration of the interview would be 60 minutes (1 hour) and any follow-up interview (where

necessary to clarify ambiguous issues) would be for a maximum of 30 minutes.

3. **What are the possible benefits and risks of this study?**

The main benefit of the study is that it would help provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia. This study poses no risks, as the researcher would ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' personal data.

4. **Do I receive payment for my involvement with the study?**

There will be no payment for participation in this study as the study is purely explorational to develop engagement strategies that would be beneficial to the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia, thereby improving participants' livelihoods and well-being.

5. **What if I feel uncomfortable with an aspect of the study?**

If you feel uncomfortable at any point in the interview, you are free to withdraw your participation, and data provided will be deleted and will not be used in the study.

6. **What if I do not want to answer a question being asked of me?**

You are always welcome to decline any questions you are not comfortable with.

7. **What if I do not want to participate in some parts/elements/tests of the study?**

There is only one part in which you are required to participate in, the interview. If you do not wish to participate, you can freely decline.

8. **What are my rights?**

You have the right to freely participate or not to participate in the study.

9. **What happens if I change my mind?**

If you change your mind after the interview, you have a period of five (5) days to withdraw your participation, and your data will not be used in the study. After five days post-interview, the researcher would commence the data analysis process, and code names will be assigned to every participant and interview session to avoid using personal information in the research. At this point of data analysis, it may be difficult to know who is withdrawing their participation and the exact data to expunge.

10. **What happens after the study?**

Once the research is completed, all data collected will be transferred to Oxfam in Ethiopia and deleted from the researcher's personal password-encrypted computer and external hard drive.

11. **Who do I contact for more information about this study?**

The Managing Director of TAN Consultancy.

12. **Whom do I contact if I have concerns about the ethics of this research?**

First the Managing Director of TAN Consultancy, Dr. Tolera Abriham (abineg@ymail.com) and then Oxfam's GROW Coordinator, Kinde Teshome (KTeshome@oxfam.org.uk) when and if the research lead does not address the concerns.

13. **How will my data be stored and for how long?**

Data collected will be only stored on the personal computer of the researcher, backed up on the researcher's encrypted hard drive, and accessed by the researcher and Oxfam (where necessary), up until the completion of the study, after which the raw data will be deleted.

Form B: Informed Consent Form

Study Title	**Analysis of the Female Food Hero (FFH) Engagement Strategy**
Research Organization	**Oxfam International in Ethiopia**
Research Lead	**Dr. Tolera Abriham, TAN Consultancy**

Kindly tick the boxes provided by each issue to show that you have read, understood, and agreed.

I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet dated _____ explaining the above research project, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw in accordance with the explanation offered in the Participant Information Sheet, without giving any reason and without there being any consequences.	☐
I agree to participate in the study via phone and other audio-visual means.	☐
I give my consent for the interview sessions to be recorded for the purpose of the study.	☐
I understand that my data/responses will be anonymized and any personal or identifying information removed from published materials.	☐
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymized data/responses as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.	☐
I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	☐
I understand that the data I provide will be used for the purposes of the research study outlined. I also understand how long my data will be stored for.	☐

I agree to take part in the above research project by way of interview for up to one hour and be available for follow-up interviews of up to 30 minutes, to answer questions in line with my experience as an FFH stakeholder.	☐

Pre-Interview Questions (Respondents' Sociodemographic Details)

- **Gender**

Male [ ] Female [ ]

- **Age Group**

18-25 [ ] 26-35 [ ] 36-45 [ ] 46-55 [ ]

56 years and above [ ]Rather not say [ ]

- **Highest Educational Qualification**

Primary [ ]Secondary [ ]Graduate [ ] Master [ ] Doctorate [ ]
Other:_____ Rather not say [ ]

- **Role in the FFH Ethiopia Initiative**

Participant/Beneficiary [ ] Oxfam Staff [ ] SEDA Staff [ ] MoA Staff [ ] Regional Ag Bureau Staff [ ] Media Staff [ ]

Donor [ ]

Other (Please specify):_____

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant **Date** **Signature**

(Or Legal Representative)

_____ _____ _____

Lead Researcher **Date** **Signature**

(Or Legal Representative)

Form C: Interview Guide

Study Title	**Analysis of the Female Food Hero (FFH) Engagement Strategy**
Research Organization	**Oxfam International in Ethiopia**
Research Lead	**Dr. Tolera Abriham, TAN Consultancy, Managing Director**

Greetings and Introduction

My name is Dr. Tolera Abriham, and I am currently the Research Consultant and Lead Researcher on the FFH Ethiopia Study by Oxfam titled above. This research aims to understand the challenges and opportunities in engaging the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia as well as identifying, reviewing, analyzing, and documenting strategies, systems, and practices that have either supported or undermined Oxfam's engagement with the FFH women in the implementation of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia.

Aim of the Interview

As outlined in the Participant Information Sheet, the reason behind my interest in interviewing you is related to Oxfam's research on understanding the challenges and opportunities involved in engaging in the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia. The research involves getting insights on the situation and prospects of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia from experienced individuals like yourself. Since you are a stakeholder of the FFH Initiative in Ethiopia, your perspectives on the field would be very contributory to this research.

Interview Ethics

1. Due to time and accessibility constraints, this interview will be conducted electronically via phone call or WhatsApp video call. If you agree to partake in this study, we can use any of the above-mentioned modalities that you are most comfortable and familiar with for your interview.

2. Before we begin, I would like to ask for your permission to record the interview. If you agree, I would then like to ask you to sign the Informed Consent Form, to approve your willingness for participating in this study and for being recorded.

3. I would like to reassure you that all the experiences, perspectives, and information given during this interview will remain confidential and anonymous. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions to be asked, please feel free to inform me and then we can skip it.

4. I would like also to notify you that if you wanted to add any answers after the interview, please feel free to contact me (via email or phone, depending on the initial way of communication).

5. Generally, a transcript will not be provided as it is a confidential interview. Any transcript would be anonymized after the point of interview but you may request a copy before this point within five days of the interview.

6. Would you like to ask me any questions before we start the interview?

Annex II Key Informant Interview Semi-structured Checklists

Checklist 1: For Sampled FFH Awardees/Women Alumni

Part I. Specific

Targeting and Enrollment History

- Would you tell us when, how, and why you joined FFH and how you were selected and rewarded as a FFH?

Approaches and Strategies

- Would you tell us the specific strategies or activities employed by Oxfam/SEDA to involve women farmers in the FFH Initiative?
- What were the steps, transparency, and objectivity of the selection process?
- Which of these strategies were most effective in empowering (boosted your skill, voice, income, and attention) you?

Impacts (Oxfam's Impact)

- How have Oxfam's/SEDA's approach and processes (such as training methods, capacity-building approaches) influenced the success of the FFH Initiative from your perspective?
- What are the reasons/your success factors? How do you manage to achieve the status of food-secure female smallholder food producer?

Intervention and Impact of FFH on You

- What did you get from FFH: training, linkage, capacity, incentive, awareness, network, exposure?
- How has participation in the FFH Initiative impacted your farming practices, livelihood, and community standing? Can you share any specific examples? How do you differentiate or compare "before" and "after" the alumni/FFH Award in terms of:
    - Recognition/self-esteem/confidence
    - Livelihoods and income
    - Capacity skills: leadership, business, planning, management
    - Influencing: voice, attention by government
    - Local community attitude/norms
    - Role model and local impact

- Attention and support from the local government, community, public and private actors

Status and Challenges for Effective Engagement

- How active and how often do you engage in various platforms (Oxfam, MoA, FFHP, regional platforms, local platforms, local women group, farmers…) ?
- What challenges have you faced in maintaining your engagement with Oxfam over time? Have there been specific issues or obstacles that affected your participation?
- What are the bottlenecks/or constraints you observed for FFH that should be improved for the future for effective engagement of women food producers to speak for themselves and influence policy?

Comparison with Other Organizations

- Have you engaged with other organizations besides Oxfam? If so, what do these organizations do differently that you prefer or find more effective? For instance, the previous government award procedure, women empowerment projects by other NGOs…

Communication and Collaboration

- How would you describe the communication and collaboration between Oxfam and women farmers? Are there ways this can be enhanced or streamlined?

Future Aspirations

- What are your hopes and expectations for future partnerships with Oxfam or similar organizations to advance the interests and rights of women farmers?
- Based on your experiences, what areas do you think Oxfam can improve upon to better support and engage with women farmers like yourself?

Suggestions for Improvement (Your Recommendations)

- What should be done to better empower women food producers? Enable them attain optimum productivity, benefit from the agriculture, contribute their fair share to the country's economy?

Part II. General

- What value do you think initiatives like FFH bring to the broader community, beyond direct beneficiaries?
- How does the engagement of women farmers through initiatives like FFH contribute to broader community development and food security?
- What are the most effective methods for building the capacity of women farmers to advocate for their rights and influence policy in our country context and your experience?

- What are some best practices you have observed in Oxfam's and partners' engagement with women farmers that should be preserved or scaled up?
- What are the main barriers hindering sustained engagement between organizations like Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers?
- From what you know about Oxfam's internal processes, how do they impact the effectiveness and sustainability of its engagement with female farmers?
- From your perspective, what are the key factors that contribute to successful collaboration between Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers, and how can these be improved?
- What can Oxfam learn from other organizations that seem to excel in engaging with women farmers or advancing gender equality in agriculture?
- Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you provide to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Oxfam's engagement with female farmers?
- Looking ahead, what transformative changes or innovations would you like to see in Oxfam's approach to engaging with women farmers in Ethiopia?
- Would you like to add any further points before we conclude the interview?

Checklist 2: For Ministry of Agriculture/Regional Agriculture Bureau and RCs

Part I. Specific

- Tell us about FFHP. What is the FFH project goal, focus, and key actions? Whose project is FFH? Who funds, implements, manages, and how and when did FFH come into being?
- Is FFH's goal and action areas really a priority and focus of your Ministry? If yes, how?
- What strategies have been used to implement FFHP by Oxfam and local partners?
- How do the MoA and regional counterparts collaborate and work together with Oxfam and local partner SEDA in terms of:
    - Joint planning, joint implementation, joint monitoring, scaling up and out
    - What actual impacts/sustainable benefits do you think FFH alumni got by being involved with the program in terms of:
    - Improving the livelihood/income/poverty/food security
    - Recognition and power/voice, (getting attention for their demands)

        - Policy-enabling environment (improvement/change, implementation: ag extension, improved input, market, land access, credit, mechanization)
        - Institutional and technical capacity and systems for pursuing their agriculture business in a productive and profitable way
        - Do you think that FFH contributed towards improving the focus on women in the enabling environment (policy, strategy, proclamation, directives, guidelines, tools, institutional arrangements, implementation capacity)? Was there improvement over the last one decade or couple of years for female small-scale food producers: GTP I, GTPII, HGER-10YIP? If yes, mention examples and share documents.
    - How is FFH positioned in terms of other policy-focused programs and projects of the Ministry/Bureau (if any), mainly in terms of its goal/focus, implementation, and results. Examples: AGPs, LMPs, Irrigation, RLLPs, PSNPS? (Explore current and recent flagship programs.)
        - Has it helped in the design and implementation lessons?
        - Any lesson of alignment of FFH with other big agricultural programs?
        - Experience adopted at planning and implementation, good practices of FFH to other flagship programs/projects in the Ministry
        - What new experience and lessons were gained by MoA/Bureau of Agriculture (BoA) as government by being involved in the program in your opinion?
        - Has the attention to women farmers' recognition and value of their contribution in agriculture in general and food production in particular in the MoA and Regions improved in the last 10 years? If yes, how? What is the evidence you avail? If not, why?
        - Is there effort and willingness in resource allocation, leadership commitment, budget, etc. in the MoA/BoA for changing/revising policies and practices that address challenges faced by women female small-scale food producers, such as access to natural resources (e.g., land, water, forests, seeds), information (e.g., weather patterns), and extension services in recent years? If yes, what contributed to that? Any contribution of FFH in this regard?
        - Any lesson and experience for the MoA for serving women farmers better and closely through the institutional systems and policies and programs and activities in land, extension, credit, input, marketing...?
- In your opinion, has FFHAP implementation been successful and the results achieved? If yes, how? If not, why? ask for evidence and reason for success.

- Does the Ministry appreciate and/or consider the project as worthwhile? If yes, how? If not, why?
- Do you think FFHP results will be sustainable beyond the project period? What institutional arrangement, capacity, and systems are in place in MoA for sustaining the result?

Part II. General

- What value do you think initiatives like FFH bring to the broader community, beyond direct beneficiaries?
- How does the engagement of women farmers through initiatives like FFH contribute to broader community development and food security?
- What are the most effective methods for building the capacity of women farmers to advocate for their rights and influence policy in our country context and your experience?
- What are some best practices you have observed in Oxfam's and partners' engagement with women farmers that should be preserved or scaled up?
- What are the main barriers hindering sustained engagement between organizations like Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers?
- From what you know about Oxfam's internal processes, how do they impact the effectiveness and sustainability of its engagement with female farmers?
- From your perspective, what are the key factors that contribute to successful collaboration between Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers, and how can these be improved?
- What can Oxfam learn from other organizations that seem to excel in engaging with women farmers or advancing gender equality in agriculture?
- Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you provide to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Oxfam's engagement with female farmers?
- Looking ahead, what transformative changes or innovations would you like to see in Oxfam's approach to engaging with women farmers in Ethiopia?
- Would you like to add any further points before we conclude the interview?

Checklist 3: Checklist for Oxfam in Ethiopia/GROW Coordination Unit

Part I. Specific

FFHP Start, Evolution, and Partners Selection

- Would you tell us the background why and how Oxfam initiated FFHP and involved FFH women?
- Who are key partners, and how are they selected?

Partnership and Program Management

- What is the partnership principle of Oxfam in terms of FFHP with CSOs, FFH alumni, government, others?
    - How was the co-planning, co-implementation, joint monitoring, shared responsibilities, etc. in FFHP?
- What does the FFH implementation modality (as opposed to the usual grant management) look like from your perspective? How do beneficiaries (FFH alumni) and partners (government and CSOs, media, etc.) engage?
    - Specifically, what strategies did Oxfam and its partner employ to engage the FFH awardees?
    - Which tactics or approaches were in use in engaging FFH awardees? How effective is that? Why?
- What are the existing policy, systems, and processes available internally in Oxfam that support initiatives like FFHP partnership work with informal women groups? What are the challenges and benefits existing within these systems?
- How do you monitor the Female Food Heroes Initiative (FFHI)? Have the monitoring system, data, report…been regular, rigorous, effective in tracking FFHI engagement, performance of FFH partners? How does that inform decision making, implementation, partnership…?
- Would you tell us the achieved result/impacts/sustainable benefits gained by FFH alumni by being involved in the program: in terms of capacitating them to build their livelihood/income/poverty/food security, power/voice, policy-enabling environment, institutional and technical capacity and systems?
- To what extent have strategies been effective in ensuring the engagement with FFHP women is sustained beyond the project period?
    - How did Oxfam's and partner's internal systems and processes support sustainable engagements with FFH women?
    - Do you think FFHP implementation was inclusive and optimum in terms of engaging partners? What can be done differently?
    - What are the missed opportunities?

- **Internal Program Management, Review, Reflection, and Feedback**
    - How is the resource, documentation, and implementation capacity over the years?
    - How have Oxfam's internal processes and capacity (e.g., staffing, leadership, coordination, decision-making structures, resource allocation) affected the effectiveness of engagement with female farmers?
    - What practices or approaches from other organizations/other programs of organizations working in similar sectors have

you observed that Oxfam could adopt or adapt to enhance its engagement with women farmers?

    - In what specific ways does Oxfam seek feedback from women farmers to continuously improve its engagement strategies?

- **Challenges, Learnings, and Recommendations**
    - What have been the key challenges encountered in sustaining partnerships with women farmers, and what lessons have been learned from these experiences?
    - What is the learning for Oxfam over the years in the process, partnership, and engagement modality with government, local partner, and alumni?
        - In women engagement, evidence-based policy advocacy, bottom-up approach, gender-transformative approaches
        - Has the learning been institutionalized or improved over the years?
        - What should be done in the future to leverage FFHP as a tool for advocacy?
    - How can the FFH Initiative contribute to sustainably building women's economic leadership capacities?
    - What processes and systems would internally need to change to promote long-term engagement of women organizations?
    - How does Oxfam collaborate with partner organizations, and what lessons have been learned from these partnerships that could inform future strategies?
    - What strategies or improvements do you envision to revitalize and strengthen Oxfam's partnerships with female farmers, considering recent trends and challenges?

Part II. General

- What value do you think initiatives like FFH bring to the broader community, beyond direct beneficiaries?
- How does the engagement of women farmers through initiatives like FFH contribute to broader community development and food security?
- What are the most effective methods for building the capacity of women farmers to advocate for their rights and influence policy in our country context and your experience?
- What are some best practices you have observed in Oxfam's and partners' engagement with women farmers that should be preserved or scaled up?
- What are the main barriers hindering sustained engagement between organizations like Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers?

- From what you know about Oxfam's internal processes, how do they impact the effectiveness and sustainability of its engagement with female farmers?
- From your perspective, what are the key factors that contribute to successful collaboration between Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers, and how can these be improved?
- What can Oxfam learn from other organizations that seem to excel in engaging with women farmers or advancing gender equality in agriculture?
- Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you provide to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Oxfam's engagement with female farmers?
- Looking ahead, what transformative changes or innovations would you like to see in Oxfam's approach to engaging with women farmers in Ethiopia?
- Would you like to add any further points before we conclude the interview?

Checklist 4: For Local CSO Implementing Partner (SEDA)

Part I. Specific

FHI Initiation, Evolution, and SEDA's Engagement

- Would you give us briefly when, why, and how FFH initiated?
- What are the key purpose, goal, activities, target, results/accomplishments to date...?
- How did SEDA becoming the preferred partner for the FFHP evolve?
- How is the FFHP partnership with government and Oxfam over the years, in your opinion?

Program Management, Attained Results, Benefits, and Potential Impact

- How adequate are the HR, technical skills capacities, resources, communication, management FFH requires and availed by Oxfam/donor? How effective and sufficient has it been? What should be considered for the future?
- How are you involved in the planning, implementation, M&E, reporting?
- What does the FFH implementation look like from the perspective of MoA, Oxfam, and FFH alumni?
- In your opinion, what are the actual impacts/sustainable benefits gained:

by FFH alumni:

    - Livelihood/income/poverty/food security, power/voice, policy-enabling environment, institutional and technical capacity and systems

by SEDA/Oxfam/MoA (your own version):

- Gained from FFHP by being involved in the program: its experience, program portfolio, informing policies, and program design…
- What added value did FFHP bring to SEDA's programming and women empowerment and policy engagement?
- How did its internal systems and processes support sustainable engagements with FFH women?

SEDA's FFHI and Oxfam Partnership and Engagement Strategy

- What strategies did you employ to engage the FFH awardees? How do you relate it to your other engagements, policy process of the nation? Oxfam's policy approach?
- Which tactics or approaches have been most effective in engaging the women FFH, Oxfam, MoA, other partners? Why?
- What are the existing systems and processes available in SEDA that support partnership work with informal women groups like FFH awardees/platforms?
- What strategies/informed action has been in place so far? How effective are they in ensuring the engagement with FFHP women is sustained beyond the project period?

Challenges, Gaps, Lessons, and Opportunities

- What were the key gaps, weakness, challenges, actions taken in SEDA's engagement and management of FFHI?
- In your opinion, what could be done differently: aha moment? What are the missed opportunities?
- What lessons have been learned from the Oxfam's partnerships regarding FFHI that could inform future strategies?

Suggested Actions and Future Direction

- What processes and systems would internally need to change to promote long-term engagement of women organizations? (in SEDA, in Oxfam and MoA)
- What strategies or improvements do you envision to revitalize and strengthen SEDA's partnerships with female farmers, Oxfam, MoA…etc. considering recent trends and challenges?
- What do you suggest to enhance the effectiveness of SEDA's FFH engagement strategy?

Part II. General

- What value do you think initiatives like FFH bring to the broader community, beyond direct beneficiaries?
- How does the engagement of women farmers through initiatives like FFH contribute to broader community development and food security?
- What are the most effective methods for building the capacity of women farmers to advocate for their rights and influence policy in our country context and your experience?

- What are some best practices you have observed in Oxfam's and partners' engagement with women farmers that should be preserved or scaled up?
- What are the main barriers hindering sustained engagement between organizations like Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers?
- From what you know about Oxfam's internal processes, how do they impact the effectiveness and sustainability of its engagement with female farmers?
- From your perspective, what are the key factors that contribute to successful collaboration between Oxfam, SEDA, MoA, and women farmers, and how can these be improved?
- What can Oxfam learn from other organizations that seem to excel in engaging with women farmers or advancing gender equality in agriculture?
- Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you provide to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Oxfam's engagement with female farmers?
- Looking ahead, what transformative changes or innovations would you like to see in Oxfam's approach to engaging with women farmers in Ethiopia?
- Would you like to add any further points before we conclude the interview?

Annex III Additional Tables

Table 2 Consolidated detailed profile of KII Respondents

S.N	Personal Code	Region and Role	Year Awarded/ Involved in FFH
1	FFH_KInfo-001	Addis Ababa City, Women Farmer	2023
2	FFH_KInfo-002	Addis Ababa City, Women Farmer	2018
3	FFH_KInfo-003	Addis Ababa City, Women Farmer	2016
4	FFH_KInfo-004	Harari Region, Women Farmer	2020
5	FFH_KInfo-005	SNNP/Sidama, Women Farmer	2017
6	FFH_KInfo-006	Oromia Region, Women Farmer	2018
7	FFH_KInfo-007	Gambella Region, Women Farmer	2021
8	FFH_KInfo-008	Hareri Region, Women Farmer	2015
9	FFH_KInfo-009	Oromia Region, Women Farmer	2016
10	FFH_KInfo-010	Amhara Region, Women Farmer	2012
11	FFH_KInfo-011	Oromia Region, Women Farmer	2019
12	FFH_KInfo-012	Dire Dawa City, Women Farmer	2018
13	FFH_KInfo-013	FDRE MoA-GD-Team Leader	2020-2024
14	FFH_KInfo-014	Harari Region BoA, FFH RC	2022-2024
15	FFH_KInfo-015	Afar PDB, FFH RC	2016-2024
16	FFH_KInfo-016	Oromia BoA, FFH RC	2017-2024
17	FFH_KInfo-017	Afar WSAB, Regional Jury	2018-2023
18	FFH_KInfo-018	WISE-CSO-FFH Trainer	2016-2024
19	FFH_KInfo-019	Pellum Ethiopia, CSO-FFH Jury	2022
20	FFH_KInfo-020	SEDA-Former FFH Coordinator	2015-2022
21	FFH_KInfo-021	SEDA-Current FFH Coordinator	2023-2024
22	FFH_KInfo-022	Oxfam Ethiopia-GROW/FFH Coordinator	2016-2024
23	FFH_KInfo-023	SEDA-Former FFH Accountant	2014-2023
24	FFH_KInfo-024	SEDA Director	2014-2024

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 3 Oxfam's FFH engagement strategies, accomplishments and remarks

Implementation Strategy	Summary of Key Actions and Achievements	Reflections
Media engagement (use of TV, radio, Facebook) and using Goodwill Ambassadors as jury	Public awareness about the FFH Award, airing the nomination call, live streaming of award events and panel discussions, FFH alumni success story documentary production and	Limited efforts in continuity and localized messaging beyond occasional events (nomination call and award event news coverage), limited use of social media (only Facebook and in English language only),

and promoting FFH	transmission. National and regional public TV (EBC) and private TV (Fana, Kana). Over 40 documentaries done, 10 million audience members reached, six celebrities identified, and engaged Goodwill Ambassadors to promote on media, speak to and motivate women farmers (using music,[13] video footage farming with women), address FFH winners, policymakers, and public on behalf of SH female food producers	most of the Goodwill Ambassadors were not committed, were busy, and did not support as intended
Capacity building and empowering FFH alumni	Business skills training, experience-sharing on improved agriculture, recognizing through Award and encourage FFH alumni interaction with different institutions and women leaders	Lack of refresher and continuing of training, limited themes/topics covered as no significant need assessment before tailoring done, lack of post-training follow-up, ongoing mentoring
Partnering and collaborating with local CSOs (SEDA and WISE) for implementation of activities	Collection of nominations, selection of awardees, organizing and attending platforms for policy asks and enabling environment support, organizing training and experience-sharing, doing the monitoring and evaluation of the jury's and awardees before final vote	Lack of capacity-building support for partners, lack of adequate resources for implementation and follow-up, less dynamic and limited activities over the years. Oxfam and local partners engage in implementation routine jointly, including monitoring and evaluation and award at grassroot levels; yet the learning and value addition is limited; rather OiE could engage more with policy at national and international level as partners handle the other.
Working through government structure and staff (Ministry of Agriculture, federal to the local level), Gender Directorate/Unit as focal point/ coordinators	Dissemination of calls and formats, collection of nominations, short-listing at woreda and zonal level, forming jury and selection of finalists/awardees, site visit and monitoring of FFH winners, support convening of platforms for policy asks and enabling environmental support	It was a useful strategy in earlier years during the restrictive CSO law in Ethiopia. After 2018, the proclamation 1113/2019 allowed advocacy for international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) like Oxfam but FFH strategy remained as it is. Relying too much on government for implementation and at the same time advocating changes might backfire or be less likely to succeed. It would be easy to badly reflect on government while depending too much on the same government structure in supporting the routine implementation. It is noted that SEDA engaged federal and regional government experts in Ministry of Agriculture for nomination and selection of awardees and organizing events.
Platforms networking FFH alumni for collective voicing	Establishing women alumni platforms (national and regional) level and support regular meeting and discussions on their status, gaps, and demands (leading to specific demands for improved services	They remained ad hoc, done only once annually or after two years in some regions despite the bi-annual plan; alumni lack capacity to exhaustively identify, rectify, and table agenda and urge government. No capacity and logistic support availed from

13 Artist Hamemal Abate (Afrima All African Music 2017 Award Winner), FFH Award Goodwill Ambassador of 2014 issued a single music clip about the women farmers, portraying their unrecognized effort.

		Oxfam as intended.
Evidence generation and documentation for policy influencing	More than eight reports done on themes: FFH evaluation, agricultural budget tracking, climate finance, capacities, and issues of smallholder food producers[14] for specific message of policy asks; informing policy makers and future planning	Yet most of the research reports were not synthesized as policy brief; results not shared widely and not used for messaging.
Organize in person meetings with policymakers at national and regional level and travels of FFH alumni to attend international events and platform to share their experience and address their issues	Using previous alumni of each region to speak at launching of new rounds, supporting in crafting and presentation of messages on behalf of female food producers. Organize meeting with policymakers (parliamentarians, Ministers[15] of Agriculture, regional officials); facilitating travels and attendance of international, national, and regional events, covering cost	Follow-up of policy demands, and limited action on promises made immediately during meetings, individual

Source: Consolidation based on desk review and field survey. 2024

14 The link is here: https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/small-scale-female-food producers-and-climate-change/.

15 FFH Alumni Met and presented their issues with Ministers of Agriculture at different times (for instance: 2013. 2016, 2018, 2019).

Table 4. Comparison of the nomination criteria: previous (2015) vs revised (2018)

Nomination Criteria 2012–2015	Nomination Criteria 2018 Onwards
A women farmer or a pastoralist Ones who have overcome challenges and made significant gains in their farming and in their communities Can show the production from her farmland and use environmentally friendly technology to increase production Demonstrate innovation strategies/technology (traditional or modern) to increase production in addressing several challenges, e.g., drought, pests, insects, storing techniques, market linkages, etc. Can show the amount of production that can assure food security of a family or a community Demonstrate the extent to which she has been an agent of change (a role model) in her family or community Has participated in activities apart from agriculture as a source of income Has not been recognized and given an award before	A female farmer or pastoralist or agro-pastoralist At her production age and be economically active Overcome challenges and made continuous progresses in their farming and in their communities Fulfilled their household-level food security, household basic requirements, and gains the living out of her backyard garden/small plot of land Use environmentally friendly technologies to increase production Demonstrate innovative strategies/technologies (traditional or modern) to increase production in addressing several challenges, e.g., drought, pests, insects, post-harvest technologies, market linkages, cluster farming… Show the amount of production that can assure food and nutrition security of a family or a community Demonstrate the extent to which she has been an agent of change (a role model) in her family or community; and maintains family relationship, improves gender norms, and shows improvement in leadership at all levels Participate in nonfarm additional source of income, and diversification (on-farm, nonfarm, and off-farm activities), access to and utilize credits and do the saving regularly Perused adult education program and also inclusiveness for all types of impairment (physical and physiological and also PLWHIV, PLWD…) Created job opportunities for others and cascades what she has acquired to other fellow female food producers Has not been recognized and given an award before

Source: Summarized from desk review, 2024 of Nomination Call Form 2015 and 2018

Annex IV Case Stories of FFH Alumni

Case study #1: W/ro Asegedech Asegedech Takele

W/ro Asegedech, is a 58-year-old woman who is a mother of three (one female and two male) living with her stepson and husband, making a total of six family members. Her first son is a disabled person while the second girl and third boy are university graduates in architecture and auto mechanics, respectively. She is one of the female food heroines awarded in 2022 for her exemplary efforts in doing urban farming and improving her family's food security and living conditions.

W/ro Asegedech's educational level is 12 plus 2, and she is working in dairy farming in her living compound in Addis Ababa, Nifas silk sub-city. Before the dairy business, she and her husband used to work in government offices, and their monthly salary was their sole family income. The woreda agriculture office asked how she started the dairy farming and what contribution it has made to the surrounding community. That was how she competed and won the FFH award two years back.

Her life-changing story begins when her husband's family gave them a cow for family consumption 10 years ago. After that cow gave birth to a heifer, she became more motivated, and the moment unexpectedly changed her livelihood. She stopped working as a government employee and began giving her full time and energy to follow-up and take care of the milking cow. In addition to the money the family is making from dairy products, using manure for biogas as a source of cooking energy has added to her encouragements.

W/ro Asegedech has made urban dairy farming a family business by teaching her children the practices of milking, feeding animals, and watering. Her disabled son also engages in what he can, like carrying animal feed. She also pays her children an equal amount of salary, 5,000 Ethiopian birr monthly, including to her disabled son. She has shown that "disability is not inability." Her husband, who was hesitant at the beginning about how they could manage the gifted cow, is now supporting the family, as he has retired from his job too. She has constructed a modern house inside her compound equipped with improved household items in addition to expanding her business by adding more interbred cows. She has also constructed cattle trough separate for small calves and heifers, with proper management of the sanitation.

1. The singular recognition and significant award have inspired and strengthened her capacity to further grow her activities. The training she attended has changed her attitude on self-awareness and self-care, and her feeding habits and added happiness to her family's life. She added how much running the dairy business around the household has helped her be closer to her children, which enabled her to properly care for and support them in their needs and

education as well. She has also trained her children on milk processing involving churning milk to make butter and *ayib*.

Currently, she supplies from 100 to 130 liters of milk to the surrounding people, who come and collect it in person. After she got recognition and the great reward, she has also traveled abroad (to the Netherlands) where she learned many things related to her dairy farming. W/ro Asegedech has made a recommendation about the training, saying it will be good if refreshing trainings could be offered with additional skills development schemes. She also raised the demand for support from the government for access to credit services, facilitation on construction permission, as well as access to improved local animal breeds like Borena breed cows, which she could not manage without support.

Case Story #2: W/ro Senait Gezahegn: "From a kitchen to demanding mechanization service"

This is the story of W/ro Senait Gezahegn from Mengesh Woreda of Gambella Region, FFH Award recipient. It's a story of a hardworking single mother: from her individual family farm to multiple community service; from shying away from public meetings to convincing local government to support fellow women farmers through provision of modern inputs and mechanization.

W/ro Senait, a mother of nine children (six daughters and three sons), has been recognized and crowned as an FFH alumni for her outstanding achievements in agricultural production, which have significantly supported her family. One of her daughters works in a hospital, while her eldest son, who assists her actively on the farm, has completed high school. The remaining children are also attending school. As a single mother, W/ro Senait primarily runs a family-operated farm in Mengeshi Woreda, Komi Kebele, Gambella Regional State, where each child contributes after school hours.

In 2020/21, she became the only woman in Mengeshi Woreda to receive the prestigious "Oxfam's Female Food Hero" Award for her exceptional work as a farmer. When initially approached about the competition by the regional coordinator, she questioned how someone could reward her for merely supporting her family. However, after attending Oxfam's FFH business management training provided as part of the recognition process, she gained a deeper understanding of the mission and began to appreciate her achievements. This training was a pivotal moment for W/ro Senait, inspiring her to devote more energy to the agricultural sector. One important skill she acquired was saving practices, which proved especially valuable since, living in a rural area with limited access to banking services, she previously stored money in unsafe places and spent it without proper planning. After the training, she began saving money in a more secure manner.

Motivated by the recognition, W/ro Senait expanded and diversified her farming activities, with strong support from her son. On her farms, she grows maize, rice, and sesame, and she also runs a dairy farm, producing milk from her cows, and raises goats for fattening. Additionally, she engages in honey production using both traditional and modern beehives, and she has ventured into poultry farming with improved breeds of

chickens. To manage her transportation needs, she owns a Bajaj, which she uses to travel between her residence and the farms, located in rural areas.

Following her winning the Oxfam's Female Food Hero Award, the woreda's agricultural officers began visiting her farms. W/ro Senait was pleased to receive their assistance, including the use of tractors for plowing her fields. This support extended beyond her own farm; through her advocacy, 20 single mothers in similar situations received tractor tilling assistance for their farms two years ago.

W/ro Senait's agricultural business has thrived since the award. She has increased the number of improved poultry breeds, now owning between 300 and 400 chickens, producing approximately 100 eggs daily. Her goat herd has grown to 69, excluding the kids, used for breeding and fattening. After her training, she also began purchasing calves (heifers and bulls) for fattening and expanded her dairy business, using her Bajaj to transport milk from her distant farm.

Her entrepreneurial spirit didn't stop there. Encouraged by her success, W/ro Senait started a grinding mill and a restaurant business. She also purchased two rice threshing machines, which have proven to be profitable, as many local farmers in the rice-producing area use her machines for hauling and cleaning their crops. Furthermore, she has recently started building houses, expanding her ventures beyond agriculture. To facilitate her movements between her home and farms, she now owns a motorbike. She also possesses two pairs of oxen for plowing her land. Reflecting on her experiences, W/ro Senait said that visiting Addis Ababa for the FFH Award and attending the training was a transformative experience, given that she had previously never traveled beyond her rural community.

Despite her busy schedule, W/ro Senait feels a desire to share her experiences with other women, though she notes the lack of opportunities to meet with them as a group. She suggests the formation of an association where women can share their experiences and benefit from collective empowerment. In addition to her agricultural work, she provides support to women in need by offering oxen to plow their land when they are unable to do so due to religious reasons. She also allows neighboring farmers to use her grain storage, which is safer and helps prevent post-harvest losses due to pests.

W/ro Senait further extends her generosity by supporting three elderly individuals (two women and a man) in her community and acting as a role model for other women. She facilitates credit services for women involved in petty trading, allowing them to obtain grains on credit from wholesalers. Her dedication to both her family and her community has made her an influential figure and a role model in her region.

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Cover photo: At the Regional Female Food Heroes Award Ceremony, women farmers were celebrated for their resilience, innovation, and impact in feeding nations. Their leadership lights the way to food justice Credit: Kinde Teshome/Oxfam

About Oxfam

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