

SAIRLA Story of Change

Ethiopia: bringing SAI and private sector perspectives into the drafting process for the Government of Ethiopia's Livestock Feed Strategy

1. Introduction

The National Learning Alliance (NLA) of the SAIRLA programme in Ethiopia aims to engage different stakeholders with evidence to help them address challenges concerning sustainable agriculture intensification in Ethiopia.

Both quantity and quality of livestock feed supply represent significant bottlenecks to the expansion of livestock production in Ethiopia. The Government has therefore identified the need for a comprehensive Livestock Feed Strategy to address the issues of production, handling and enhanced utilisation of various feed resources.

Through membership of the Ethiopia NLA, a Ministry of Agriculture expert involved in coordinating the Strategy development, was exposed to concepts relating to sustainable agricultural intensification (SAI) including the issue of trade-offs in existing policy frameworks. As a result of this exposure, the expert raised the possibility of including issues relating to sustainable agriculture in the Strategy document. The Ministry of Agriculture then approached the NLA to provide technical, financial and facilitation support to the process.

This story of change describes the NLA's contribution in 2018 and 2019 to an improved policy making process for finalising the Strategy

2. The challenge

It has long been acknowledged that both quantity and quality of feed supply represent significant bottlenecks to the expansion of livestock production in Ethiopia. Various efforts by governmental and non-governmental organisations to support farmers and agro-pastoralists to address these issues had have been too diffuse to adequately address the problem. The Government of Ethiopia therefore identified the need for a comprehensive strategy for the production, handling and enhanced utilisation of the various feed resources in the mixed crop livestock system on the one hand and of rangeland rehabilitation and management in the pastoral/agro-pastoral system on the other. The aim is to develop a clear strategy that will make livestock feed a marketable commodity and have a positive impact on livestock production in Ethiopia. The strategy is being developed by the Ministry of Agriculture as part of its Agriculture's Agricultural Transformation Agenda¹.

The strategy as originally conceived, however, did not take into account the issue of trade-offs in existing policy frameworks, such as between the national livestock master plan which sets ambitious targets of increasing meat and milk production and the national climate resilience and green economy document which aims at reducing the carbon foot print of the livestock sector.

A further issue with the strategy development process was the question of who was going to be involved in its formulation. Typically, the private sector is only invited into the policy formulation process after significant progress is made on the draft policy document. As a result, government policies often lack an actionable private sector component.

¹ The Ethiopian Government's Agricultural Transformation Agenda was formally introduced in 2006 E.C. during the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) in order to provide a platform to address the most critical systemic bottlenecks constraining fulfilment of agriculture sector goals and targets identified by the government.

Finally, although a Livestock Feed Strategy has been a key priority for the Ministry, it was unable to access adequate funding to hold a retreat necessary to enable senior experts to set aside the time and attention required to discuss and draft the strategy itself.

3. The intervention

The Ethiopia NLA chose learning themes that align with the SAIRLA research projects working in Ethiopia, one of which relates to livestock – environment trade-offs. In order to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were represented in the social learning process around this theme, the NLA facilitation team established contact with various experts at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA). This led to the Advisor to the State Minister of Livestock Development - who is deployed by the ATA to steer the transformation agenda within the ministry - becoming an NLA member, attending NLA workshops as well as NLA livestock-environment thematic learning group meetings.

The NLA facilitation team developed a sound understanding of the livestock-environment trade-offs issues through reviewing the national livestock master plan and the climate resilient and green economy documents. They realised the clear policy gap that existed in reconciling ambitious production targets set by the master plan whilst at the same time meeting the government commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the livestock sector.

Their understanding deepened further through the social learning process undertaken around the trade-offs learning theme. Firstly, during a meeting organised by the NLA facilitation team to connect the SAIRLA livestock-environment trade-offs assessment project with national decision makers, they became aware of the strong focus placed by the Government on meeting production targets. In a separate meeting with research boundary partners, one of the NLA members, who is from an environment and climate change background, was shocked to realise that the meat target set by the national livestock master plan was not in line with the government commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It was at this stage that the facilitation team, decided to connect with the ATA, Livestock Development team to see if there were ways of engaging them on their policy formulation initiatives. From the outset, the ATA team showed interest in their concerns on the need to consider trade-offs and became involved with the NLA as a result.

The request from the Ministry of Agriculture and the ATA for the NLA to bring an SAI perspective to the strategy development process therefore came as a result of a series of engagements with the NLA over a number of months. In agreeing to provide technical, financial and facilitation support to the process, the NLA also insisted on the inclusion of a private sector actor in the strategy development. As a result, the president of the Ethiopian Association of Feed Producers was invited to join the strategy development team, despite some initial resistance from the lead expert who felt that it was not necessary to include the private sector at this early stage of drafting.

In December 2018 the NLA supported a week-long meeting of ten experts whose objective was to develop a draft strategy. The group was chaired by Alemu Wolde (Director of the Feed Resource Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture) and comprised experts from the ATA, the Ethiopia Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), SAIRLA and the President of the Feed Producers Association.

The strategy was drafted during this meeting and was subsequently circulated for comment. Although there was some resistance to the explicit use of the word sustainability in crucial components of the strategy, the NLA facilitator was able to ensure its inclusion by addressing the narrow interpretation of the concept being used by the expert group. He instead encouraged a focus on the broader concepts of SAI and gained support from others through emphasising how the dual concepts of sustainability and intensification, which consider production, environment, economy, social and human aspects, could make the strategy more attractive to and fundable by development partners.

4. The change (result)

SAIRLA was able to respond to the Ministry's request for assistance flexibly and at short notice, recognising the opportunity to inform the policy process with SAI and private sector perspectives. As a result of SAIRLA's involvement, relevant sustainability considerations are reflected in the draft strategy. The concept is included in the vision, mission and goals of the strategy, the strategic issues and strategic interventions identified, and cross cutting issues, which include gender and environment (conservation and biodiversity). Additionally, tools and evidence from the SAIRLA research projects were brought into the monitoring and evaluation section including use of digital technologies such as the ICRAF dashboard.

The private sector's involvement at this early stage of drafting was significant. As a result, the strategy includes private sector relevant actionable issues, such as the reconsideration of heavy taxes imposed on imported livestock feed additives. This is a major problem for the feed sector and one that the private sector has long been trying to persuade the Government to address – so far without success. The strategy as currently drafted commits the Government to review the feed additive taxation issue. As the strategy will serve as the reference document upon which feed strategies prepared by regional governments or private actors in the livestock sector will be based, ensuring the inclusion of the private sector perspective was crucial.

5. SAIRLA's contribution to the change

The NLA contributed to the change in three ways:

Firstly, although, it had long been a government priority to develop a Livestock Feed Strategy, the process had stalled due to challenges in finding adequate funds to host a group of lead experts on a retreat for the time necessary to do so. SAIRLA's ability to respond flexibly and at short notice to the request allowed the process to be initiated sooner than it otherwise would have been and ensured the attendance of the lead experts.

Secondly, the concept of 'sustainability' is mainstreamed throughout the document directly as a result of the NLA's involvement in the drafting process. However, it should be noted that the NLA was only approached as a result of the involvement in the NLA of ministry expert coordinating the Strategy development, and his consequent introduction to the issue of trade-offs in existing policy frameworks. It was as a result of this exposure that the expert raised the possibility of including the issue of sustainability in the Strategy document. SAIRLA's contribution to the change therefore started through the engagement of the expert in the social learning process around trade-offs and livestock.

Thirdly, the draft Livestock Feed Strategy includes a commitment from the Government to review the taxation regime for imported feed additives. This is a major problem for the private sector. Although the problem was known to government experts, the presence of a private sector actor at the drafting retreat firmed up that concern and gave it a sense of urgency.

6. Conclusions

The key to the success of the NLA's intervention was:

- i) Ensuring that the relevant stakeholders were members of the NLA and participated in the social learning process around this theme. Had the expert involved in coordinating the strategy development not been a member of the trade-offs thematic learning group, the opportunity for the NLA to become involved in the development of the Strategy would not have arisen. Furthermore, lead experts from the Ministry participated in at least three NLA events / meetings prior to the Strategy drafting workshop demonstrating the clear benefits to longer term engagement around issues such as this.
- ii) The NLA was able to respond rapidly to the request from the Ministry of Agriculture for financial support ensuring that the process was initiated without further delay after long having been on the government's agenda and also that it included lead experts who would not have been involved otherwise.

- iii) The insistence of the NLA in ensuring private sector participation at the drafting stage resulted in the inclusion of an actionable private sector component in the draft Strategy. This is not often the case as the private sector is only habitually consulted at a later stage in the process.

Whilst there were clear successes in the intervention, there were also lessons to be learned. It is important to note that this was a government led process. The Ministry of Agriculture/ATA experts were focused exclusively on the production aspect of feed and fodder development. There was no one included in the drafting group with expertise in the social and environmental aspects of sustainable intensification. As a result, SAI issues were relegated mainly to 'cross cutting' issues.

7. Looking forward

The final draft document will be validated at national level by invited relevant stakeholders. The committee of experts will incorporate stakeholders' comments and the final strategy document will be submitted to the livestock sector State Minister for final approval and printing. The NLA continues to track the process and expects to be invited to the validation meeting.

The CLEANED tool that has been developed by SAIRLA's SEI-led research project, RESLESS, is now available. The tool aims to help decision makers to better understand and manage the trade-offs between increasing livestock productivity and environmental impacts. The target audience for training on the tool is the relevant NLA thematic working group and senior experts from the Ministry of Agriculture. The NLA's support to and participation in the Livestock Feed Strategy drafting process has strengthened relationships between the SAIRLA programme and technical experts in the Ministry. The result is that the experts are more likely to participate in the CLEANED tool training. This will maximise SAIRLA's ability to inform Ministry policy and processes at the right level for take up of the tool and the concepts that underlie it.

8. Sources of Evidence

- Letter of invitation from the Ministry to the NLA inviting their participation and support
- ToR for development of the Strategy
- Draft strategy (currently internal to the Ministry of Agriculture and confidential)