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Bimonthly Updates

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium Bimonthly Newsletter

Rooted in Resilience, Moving Toward Sustainability

Contents

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC)

Editorial Message

Welcome to the April 2026 edition newsletter of the **Ethiopian Sustainable Food System and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC).**

In this issue, we share some of the important moments and lessons from our recent work and more.

We are proud to highlight the celebration of International Women's Day, during we recognized women whose leadership, knowledge, strength, perseverance and daily efforts continue to shape the future of our food systems.

This edition also marks an important milestone with the launch of Ethiopia's National Agroecology Strategy, an important step toward more sustainable and resilient food systems.

At the same time, we reflect on emerging challenges, including the rise of ultra-processed foods and its implications on public health and nutrition. Lessons from Brazil showcase how school feeding programs can support local farmers and promote healthier diets.

You will find inspiring stories from the Dasenech pastoral community in South Omo. Their traditional knowledge reminds us that local solutions are vital, especially in times of climate change.

As ESFSAC, we remain committed to working together with our partners, communities, and stakeholders. We believe that by sharing knowledge, and supporting local best practices, we can build a better food system for everyone.

Warm regards,
ESFSAC Team

Celebrating International Women's Day

On 7 March 2026, the **Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC)** hosted a celebratory program in Addis Ababa to commemorate International Women's Day. The event, titled ***"Celebrating Women Leading Change in Agroecology and Food Systems"***, served as a powerful platform to recognize, amplify and strengthen the role of women in society.

The session was anchored in the global IWD 2026 theme: **"Give to Gain"**. The discussions moved beyond advocacy, focusing on a pragmatic truth that when society invests resources and opportunities in women, the entire community progresses.

Dr. Bayush Tsegaye, Executive Director of ESFSAC, in her opening remarks said: **"ሴቶች እድልን እንጂ ችሎታ አላጡም"** meaning **"Women have the ability**; **they lack opportunity".** She stressed that while Ethiopian women possess the indigenous knowledge and skill to drive agroecology, structural gaps in terms of access to resources and capacity-building remain the primary barriers.

Hirut Kassa from Action Aid Ethiopia gave a powerful keynote speech. While acknowledging the government efforts and legal frameworks for gender equality, she noted the gap between policy and practice. Her call to action resonated with recent regional dialogues, including the IGAD Women Forum on Agri-Food Systems held just days earlier in Addis Ababa, which highlighted that women produce 40 to 60 percent of agricultural output yet remain largely excluded from land ownership and financial decision-making.

Mignot Getachew of Kotebe University of Education inspired the next generation of leaders with her motivation, **"Be the First You"**. She urged women to see themselves as pioneers, noting that investing in female-led innovation is the shortest path to social transformation.

One of the profound moments came from personal testimonies. Dr. Eskedar Gizat, former Vice President of Dire Dawa University, encouraged women to confront their weaknesses as a pathway for self-growth, emphasizing continuous learning and work-life navigation.

Dr. Alganesh Tola, a senior researcher, shared her moving journey, from walking hours to attend primary school to facing workplace discrimination where she was denied an office but did not relent. By converting a library into her workspace she persevered even when the odds were stacked up against her and went on to achieve remarkable success in her life.

Women's role in in restoring ecosystem balance, preserving biodiversity and ensuring food security is strongly emphasized in the recently launched National Agroecology Strategy of Ethiopia.

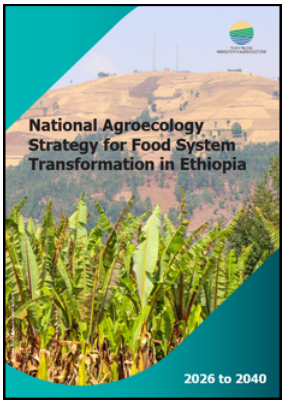
The event concluded with a powerful message that celebrating women is not merely a ceremonial gesture; it is imperative that women should be acknowledged, honored and celebrated for inspiring change, leading transformation, and shaping inclusive and sustainable food systems..

" Honoring her hands, nurturing the land, feeding the nation "

Participants of the International Women's Day event

Launch of the National Agroecology Strategy of Ethiopia

On 14 March 2026, Ethiopia officially launched **National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation (2026–2040)**. Led by the Ministry of Agriculture, the strategy aims to transform Ethiopia's food systems through agroecology, i.e. by fostering sustainable farming, building towards resilient ecosystems, empowering communities and inclusive access to resources; thereby securing nutrition, food sovereignty and prosperity for all. The driving factor behind the need for developing a **National Agroecology Strategy (NAES)** in Ethiopia stems from the urgent need to transform a vulnerable, external input-dependent agricultural sector into a more resilient, sustainable and equitable food system.



Read more:

The strategy moves beyond theory into operational reality through a detailed implementation matrix containing over 110 actionable activities. Key pillars include investing in rural market infrastructure, supporting marginalized group led enterprises and protecting traditional food cultures. The strategy envisions that: **"by 2040, Ethiopia will have a transformative agroecological system that promotes sustainable farming, empowers communities, restores ecosystems, strengthens climate resilience, and ensures equitable access to food, nutrition and resources for all"**.

The strategy has 6 major strategic objectives and 26 focus areas with a directive to foster a resilient, sustainable and productive agricultural systems that will benefit all communities while protecting the environment and preserving natural resources. It also focuses on strengthening the roles of women, youth and marginalized groups in sustainable agriculture.

Strategic Objectives

1. Promote sustainable and resilient agricultural practices and technologies.
2. Enhance knowledge, research and capacity for agroecological innovation and extension services.
3. Support market system development.
4. Create an enabling environment for policy and governance.
5. Strengthen social inclusion and empowerment.
6. Promote sustainable consumption and healthy diets.

As Ethiopia takes a monumental step in advancing sustainable agriculture and food systems, the launch of the National Agroecology Strategy marks a decisive shift from isolated interventions to a unified, systemic transformation. By producing a strategy that is inclusive of all communities, with a reach of the wider society and placing smallholders, pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and ecosystem balance at the heart of national policy, the NAES offers a replicable blueprint for balancing productivity with environmental health.

High level dignitaries and officials launching the NAES

Health Impacts of Ultra Processed Foods

Landmark Review Finds Ultra-Processed Foods Pose a "Seismic Threat" to Human Health

The world's largest comprehensive scientific review published as a series in The Lancet, has delivered an (alarming) warning about Ultra-Processed Foods and their immense harm to human health in its entirety. A review of this kind positions the rapid rise of UPFs not just as a dietary concern but as "seismic threat" to global health and wellbeing.

The three-paper series, authored by 43 of the world's leading experts, systematically reviewed 104 long-term studies and found that 92 reported significant associations between high UPF consumption and an increased risk of chronic diseases (Journal of *Clin Nutr* 47(6) : 1386 - 1394). These include obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and depression, with the evidence pointing to damage across the entire human biological system.

Prof. Carlos Monteiro, a series author and professor of public health nutrition at the University of São Paulo stated that, "The first paper in this Lancet series indicates that ultra-processed foods harm every major organ system in the human body. The evidence strongly suggests that humans are not biologically adapted to consume them."

The second paper in the series proposes policies to regulate and reduce UPF production, marketing and consumption. The progress in the fight to alleviate current UPF crisis is similar to the early days of tobacco control, which shows the global policy response remains dangerously underdeveloped.

The third paper argues that this dietary shift is not a failure of personal choice but a manufactured outcome. The series points to aggressive tactics by global food corporations extensive marketing, political lobbying and efforts to shape scientific debate that blocks regulations. These **industrial formulations prioritize profit over human wellbeing and health**, they are made out of convenience and not out of dietary benefits.

As the global diet shifts increasingly toward the manufactured and the convenient, this landmark review serves as an undeniable wake-up call. Ultra-processed foods are not merely a dietary trend to be managed but **a public health emergency to be controlled**. The evidence assembled by these researchers transforms what might seem like a personal choice into a collective action problem—one where the health of populations hangs in the balance. The remaining question is clear what is to be done to counter and alleviate this seismic threat before it reaches a magnitude that is impossible to come back from.

What are UPFs?

These are industrial formulations of processed food substances (eg. oils, solid fats, sugars, starch, protein isolates) that can contain little or no whole foods and typically include flavorings, artificial colorings, sweeteners, emulsifiers and other additives and preservatives.

FROM FARM TO CLASSROOM: HOW BRAZIL FEEDS A NATION'S FUTURE

Every morning across Brazil, millions of children walk into school knowing that a healthy meal awaits them. For many, it is more than just lunch; it is nourishment, dignity, and a promise of a better future.

Since 1955, Brazil's National School Feeding Program (PNAE) has quietly become one of the largest and most inspiring school meal programs in the world. Today, it reaches more than 40 million students in about 150,000 schools, serving nearly 50 million meals every day. But what makes this program truly remarkable is not just its scale—it is the vision behind it.

PNAE was created to fight hunger, but over the decades it has grown into something much bigger. The program ensures that school meals contribute to children's health, learning, and overall physical and mental development, providing a significant share of their daily nutritional needs. At the same time, schools teach students about healthy and culturally appropriate diets, helping young people develop lifelong healthy food habits.

One of the most innovative features of the program lies in how food is sourced. By law, at least 30% of the food used in school meals must come directly from family farmers. This simple but powerful rule connects classrooms to local farms. Fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and traditional foods move from nearby fields to school kitchens supporting rural livelihoods while ensuring students eat nutritious, locally produced food. The impact reaches far beyond the school gates. Thousands of family farmers gain a stable market for their produce, local economies grow stronger, and communities preserve traditional food cultures.

At the same time, nutritionists design balanced menus that prioritize fresh foods and limit ultra-processed products, ensuring that children receive healthy meals every day.

Core Objectives and Principles

- **Student Development**: To contribute to the biopsychosocial development, learning, and academic performance of students.
- **Nutrition and Health**: To ensure meals meet a significant portion of students' daily nutritional needs and to promote the formation of healthy eating habits.
- **Food and Nutritional Education**: To integrate food education into the school curriculum.
- **Support for Family Farming**: To act as a guaranteed market for local, small-scale farmers, thereby strengthening rural economies and local food systems.

Brazil's school feeding program shows that a meal can be much more than food on a plate. It can be a bridge between education, agriculture, nutrition, and community wellbeing. In every lunch served, there is a **story of connection -** from farmers who grow the food, to schools that nurture young minds, to a nation investing in the health of its next generation.

The Lesson: investing in school children is about building a healthy generation, supporting local economies, promoting agroecology and food sovereignty.

Resilience case from South Omo: The Story of the Dasenech Community

Along the lower Omo River in southern Ethiopia, the Dasenech community lives in a harsh, unpredictable environment (arid and semi-arid climate) characterized by intense heat, erratic rainfall, frequent droughts and floods. Despite these challenges, the community has sustained its livelihood for generations through a resilient pastoral system built on deep ecological knowledge and strong social institutions.

Traditionally, the Dasenech rely on rearing livestock cattle, goats, sheep, and camels - combined with seasonal fishing and small-scale farming of drought-tolerant crops such as sorghum and maize. Mobility is central to their pastoral way of life, allowing herders to move livestock seasonally in search of pasture and water. This movement is carefully guided by community elders who have deep knowledge about rainfall patterns, vegetation cycles, and the dynamics of the rangeland ecosystem. Herd splitting is another strategy adopted to reduce pressure on available feed and water resources.

In recent years, the community has strengthened its resilience through an agroecological initiative focused on fodder production. With active participation of women and youth, households have begun cultivating improved fodder species such as Desho grass, Sudan grass, and Elephant grass, often intercropped with legumes like Lablab that enrich the soil and increase the nutritional value of livestock feed.

Using seasonal flooding from the Omo River and simple irrigation methods such as hand pumps, community members grow and harvest fodder even in dry conditions. The grasses are carefully harvested, sun-dried, and stored to ensure feed availability during the dry season when natural grazing becomes scarce.

The impact has been significant. Livestock health and productivity have improved, milk production has increased, and some households now generate additional income by selling surplus fodder to neighbours in need during periods of feed shortage.

As one fodder production project participant household shared his experience:

> “We used to watch our animals weaken and even die when the dry season becomes so harsh through time. Now, we grow and store enough feed to support our animals, and sometimes we even sell the extra feed to neighbours. This practice has made our community resilient and thriving.”

The Lesson: experience of the Dasenech community demonstrates how **pastoral knowledge, community cooperation, and agroecological innovation** can strengthen resilience in fragile ecosystems. It is a powerful example of how indigenous practices and locally adapted solutions can contribute to sustainable food systems and livelihoods in Ethiopia.

FOOD CULTURES: TRADITIONAL DISH FROM MALI

A taste of Mali
Tigadeguena

Tigadeguena is a West African peanut stew which is said to have originated in Mali among the Mandinka and Bambara people. In the local Mandinka language, the name translates literally to “peanut paste sauce”. It is so delicious, simple, and well-loved that it quickly spread to plenty of neighboring countries.

Key Ingredients

- **Garlic Cloves**: Fresh (not jarred) for the best flavor.
- **Onions**: Use both the green and red onion.
- **Tomatoes**: Whole, peeled tomatoes as well as tomato paste.
- **Pepper:** You can use Habanero Pepper or Scotch Bonnet. The more pepper you use, the spicier the dish would be.
- **Oil:** Vegetable oil or any natural oil.
- **Meat:** You can use almost any kind of meat in this recipe.
- **Broth**: Beef or chicken broth. Change this to vegetable broth if you are making a vegetarian version.
- **Peanut Butte**r: Preferably creamy.
- **Vegetables**: Carrots, russet potatoes, sweet potato, and red bell pepper. This portion of the recipe is very customizable to what you have on hand and what you like to eat.

Instructions

Step 1: Make the tomato sauce by blending garlic, green onions, tomatoes, and a scotch bonnet pepper until smooth.

Step 2: Heat the oil in a large pot and sear the meat until it is browned on both sides. Set aside.

Step 3: Saute the red onion, then add the tomato blend and tomato paste back into the pot.

Step 4: Add the broth, reserved beef, and peanut butter into the pot. Simmer.

Step 5: Add the carrots, russet potatoes, sweet potato, bell pepper, and scotch bonnets back into the pot.

Serve: It is typically served with a side of rice or fonio in Mali.

Fonio is a delicious, gluten-free ancient grain from West Africa that cooks in 3 mins and is a great alternative to rice.

UPCOMING EVENT

Get ready for a series of exciting upcoming events that will bring together experts, policy makers, and stakeholders to advance sustainable food systems.

- **Event Title:** Commemorating and Celebrating Former Ethiopian Patriots.
  Date & Place of Event: 5th of May 2026. National Archives and Library Agency (NALA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Title:** Bridging Research and Policy: Assessment of Population and Development Activities of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences.
  Content: Released in December 2025, this volume serves as a critical retrospective and analytical roadmap, documenting the milestones and outputs of the "Bridge Project" implemented by the Academy from 2016 to 2024. The book provides a rigorous assessment of how scientific evidence generated through population and development initiatives has been utilized to catalyze policy dialogue and enhance decision-making frameworks within Ethiopia.
  The document is available online. Read more...

- **Title:** Ethiopian National Agroforestry Development Strategy (2026-2035).
  Content: Launched in March 2026, the strategy is developed by the Ministry of agriculture and serves as comprehensive framework for all respective actors, including implementing partners. It highlights the state of agroforestry development policies and strategies for the Ethiopian contexts. The proposed implementing strategic interventions focus on how agroforestry systems could sustain and continue the supply of goods and services by building on and strengthening existing traditional practices while significantly minimizing potential threats to agroforestry development.
  The document is available online. Read more...

We are excited to invite you to be featured in our upcoming June edition of ESFSAC's newsletter. If you have any projects, achievements or announcements you'd like to share, please send us your content by mid-June. This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase your work. For submissions or inquiries, feel free to contact us or email your content to: contact.esfsac@gmail.com / newsletter@esfsac-ethiopia.org. We look forward to featuring your highlights.

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC)

Consortium Members

- MELCA Ethiopia
- Land for Life Ethiopia
- PELUM Ethiopia
- Enhanced Rural Self-Help Association
- Pesticide Action Nexus Ethiopia
- Agri Service Ethiopia
- CST Ethiopia
- Home Grown vision
- PHE Ethiopia
- Ethio-Organic Seed Action
- Action Aid Ethiopia
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