



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Breaking Gender Stereotypes to Build a Business



CNFA

Adanech Zewdie and her husband's passion to help farming families led them to start an agribusiness. Today, she's breaking gender stereotypes and helping smallholders in Ethiopia by running the business herself.

Twenty-two years ago my husband and I, driven by a mutual passion to serve farmers and their families, started our agricultural input trading business in Ethiopia. For more than a decade, we worked side by side to fulfill this dream, providing farmers with tools and products to meet their needs.

My husband and I also provided training for local farmers, introducing them to new agricultural products and technologies. We loved our work and were happy to make a difference in our community. Twelve years into this venture, I unexpectedly lost my husband. I've worked on my own since then to meet the goals we set together.

Being a one-woman team has been tough, but nothing has made as big of a difference as when I applied to the Commercial Farm Service Program, part of Feed the Future. The USAID-funded program selected me as one of six grantees—the first and only female. My years of experience in the retail business and passion to serve smallholder farmers and be a role model for other women entrepreneurs set me apart. Through the program, we received support from Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA) to set up farm service centers in Ethiopia – I established mine in Shashemane.

The farm service center network, the first of its kind in Ethiopia, provides smallholder farmers with quality agricultural tools and services. This expanded my business beyond what I or my husband could have ever envisioned. In addition to matching my grant for financial support, USAID and CNFA provided me with agricultural training that has been critical in ensuring my store's sustainability.

Becoming the first female farm service center owner brought a new set of challenges. Unfortunately, many of these hurdles stem from a lingering perception in Ethiopia that women are not as capable as men at running a big business. These stereotypes are shifting, and I'm grateful that USAID gave me the chance to prove my skills as a woman entrepreneur.

Through my business, I've met people that share my passion for improving our country's food security. I've also connected

with other female entrepreneurs who are looking to increase their families' incomes. These women inspire me every day and demonstrate just how important gender equity is to our nation's economic security.

I also serve as one of the shareholders of an agricultural input supplier that provides the farm service centers with year-round supplies for farmers, such as seeds, fertilizer and tools. As one of this cooperative's four founders, I'm proud to work alongside my partners to pool our inventory needs, access discounts, and deal directly with top-tier suppliers to keep our centers well stocked with what Ethiopian farmers want and need.

My center not only provides farmers with affordable, quality agricultural products, but we also train and consult with farmers on how to properly use these tools. For example, we offer personal protective equipment so farmers can safely administer crop protection products, like herbicides, on their crops. For those farmers who can't afford to buy this equipment, we send service providers to their farms to spray their plants for them.

Recently, a new customer came in looking to buy herbicides for his crop. We discussed at length how to properly use crop protection products like herbicides and the dangers of using them without personal protection equipment. As a first-time customer, he was surprised to learn about the potential hazards of herbicides and even admitted to using the empty containers for other household purposes. He said that we might have saved his life, and promised to share the safety information he'd just learned with his family and neighbors.

Experiences like this one prove to me that my store and this agricultural network are making a difference, and I know my husband would be extremely proud of me for taking on this new responsibility to better the lives of Ethiopian farmers and their families.

Today, Ethiopian entrepreneurs like me have more opportunities to improve our livelihoods while contributing to our country's prosperity.

Today, Ethiopian entrepreneurs like me have more opportunities to improve our livelihoods while contributing to our country's prosperity. In the years to come, I hope to reach many more farmers by expanding my business and sharing best practices with other small agricultural business owners.

Over the past several years, I've witnessed many positive changes in our agricultural sector and I encourage every Ethiopian to take responsibility in developing this sector, which is the heartbeat of Ethiopia.

With new opportunities, we have a responsibility to ensure that agricultural progress will continue for generations to come. We must all work together to create a more prosperous Ethiopia.

Additional Reading

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