



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/nutrition-flair-dramatic-ethiopia>

Nutrition with a Flair for the Dramatic in Ethiopia



Sean Sheridan, Mercy Corps

Marketing materials, like these posters, are tailored to each of the three different Ethiopian regions where a radio soap opera is airing.

You probably don't tune in to *Days of Our Lives* for health advice, but a Feed the Future project in Ethiopia is taking an out-of-the-box approach to improving nutrition through a new radio soap opera campaign that is capturing the attention of traditional pastoral families.

More than 83 percent of Ethiopia's population lives in rural areas, many as pastoralists, who depend almost exclusively on the land and their livestock for food and livelihoods. For these communities, securing enough of the right foods every day is a struggle; inadequate livestock care, poor maternal health and insufficient child nutrition compound the challenges they face.

Last month, in partnership with entertainment powerhouse Warner Brothers, a [U.S. Agency for International Development project](#) implemented by Mercy Corps as part of the Feed the Future initiative launched an original soap opera program – broadcast via radio – that uses drama, love and conflict to educate pastoral communities and encourage behavior changes that can improve their long-term food security, health and well-being.

"This initiative taps into the strong Ethiopian tradition of oral storytelling and harnesses the power of stories to entertain and educate," says Dominic Graham, Ethiopia country director for Mercy Corps. "Our goal is to help people facing repeated drought, hunger and poverty improve their long-term health through better decision making."

The soap opera campaign is supported by the creative expertise of four Warner Brothers volunteers who worked closely with Mercy Corps staff on character development, compelling storylines and promotional strategies. They shared best practices for writing and marketing with Ethiopian staff to help ensure the program's longevity, and spent time in Ethiopia in order to shape stories that would be both interesting and authentic.

The result is a radio drama that is on air with dialect and characters tailored to three regions where Feed the Future is working, Afar, Oromia and Somali. The weekly broadcast engages listeners with stories that stress the importance of diversifying diets (particularly among mothers and their young children), increasing awareness of the critical 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday, equitable decision-making for improved household nutrition, and other behaviors. Details unique to each region, such as names and common greetings, help make the stories feel familiar and relatable for local audiences.

Early feedback on the 20-episode first season indicates the program is helping generate community and family discussions about marriage, career, natural resources, nutrition and other critical topics. As part of this dialogue, the Feed the Future

project has also established listener groups that coordinate direct and facilitated listening of the soap opera and assist with effective monitoring and evaluation. The group will use an innovative qualitative data capturing tool called [Sensemaker](#) to evaluate whether and how these discussions will lead to better decision making and impact nutritional status.

***[USAID's Pastoralist Areas Improvement through Market Expansion \(PRIME\)](#)** activity is a five-year, \$57 million effort under the Feed the Future initiative designed to increase household incomes and enhance resilience to climate change through market linkages in Ethiopia's dryland areas. PRIME is helping improve the nutritional status of women and children, mainly through improving productivity of livestock and livestock products.*