



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative

RURAL RESILIENCE ACTIVITY

February 2023

IMPROVING GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

HOW WE IMPROVE ACCESS TO CLIMATE-ADAPTED SEEDS AND HIGH QUALITY AGROCHEMICALS



Display of seeds at the Agricultural Input Fair in Gombe

Background

Limited access to quality agricultural inputs, such as seeds, agrochemicals (e.g., fertilizer), mechanization and extension services focusing on good agricultural practices (GAPs) contribute significantly to lower yields and reduced productivity of smallholder farmers. The market constraints associated with the limited access to agri-inputs include gaps in supply chain, where agricultural input manufacturers and large producers of fertilizers, seeds, and crop protection products are not incentivized to sell directly to farmers. Smallholder farmers depend on the informal seed system (exchange of seeds among farmers and through barter, use of reserved seeds from the previous harvest, and purchase of seeds in the open markets) to meet their seed needs. The informal seed system is filling underperformance gaps of the formal seed system (mainly seed companies) which are characterized by a low supply of seeds and a weak distribution network.

In Northeast Nigeria (NEN), seed companies are predominantly found in urban areas, which are far from the last-mile farmers seeking seeds of improved and climate-adapted varieties. Farmers also mistrust certified seeds due to the proliferation of counterfeit seeds in the markets.

The dearth of extension and advisory services and workers makes it difficult for farmers to adopt climate-smart varieties that would thrive better in their ecological context, and adapt to the effects of climate change such as drought,

and late/early cessation of rainfall. The obvious absence of trained community-based seed producers to fill the gaps created by ineffective formal seed systems also poses a significant challenge to smallholder farmers who are seeking quality seeds of improved varieties within their localities. The absence of community seed producers encourages the recycling of saved seeds (grains) year in and year out, and the presence of counterfeit and adulterated seeds; hence, farmers achieve low yields and weak income and nutrition.

To address the market constraints in NEN, the Feed the Future Nigeria Rural Resilience Activity facilitates farmers' access to agricultural inputs ranging from high-quality certified seeds, Crop Protection Products (CPP), organic and inorganic fertilizers, and simplified, innovative farm mechanization through seed companies, fertilizer companies, CPP companies, and agro-dealers. Through the Seed and Input Supply Intervention, the Activity promotes the introduction of short-duration, drought-resistant varieties as a climate-smart practice for optimizing crop production and increasing yield potentials of smallholder farmers in its target locations.

INFOGRAPHICS

 **215**
Seed Entrepreneurs 

 **3290.73MT**
seeds offtaken
by 9 companies  **₦150,000**
Profit made
per person

 **11** Input
Fairs 

97,150 
participants
adopted GAPs  **₦46.7m**
Sales in
6 months



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RRA's Market-led Approach for Improving Access to Agro-inputs

The Rural Resilience Activity adopts a facilitation approach based on our Market Systems Development principles to bridge the information and connectivity gaps among market actors. We identify and incentivize key market players, including agro-inputs companies, community-based seed producers, and input suppliers, and link them to prospective buyers (farmers) whose capacities are built through private sector-led interventions.

Facilitation of Market Linkages

RRA leverages every opportunity including agro dealers' meetings, extension services and training sessions, input fairs, and demonstration plots to establish market linkages between agro-input companies and farmers and among the companies (B2B) to mobilize investments in NEN. Input fairs are facilitated to support farming communities, in remote and isolated areas with limited access to markets, to have access to a wide range of quality inputs and services, and to information regarding the performance of different crop varieties .

Demonstration Plots

Demonstration (demo) farms are the most effective extension education tool, as they can demonstrate to farmers the performance of new agricultural input and farming technologies in a low-risk manner. In partnership with seed, crop protection products (CPP) and fertilizer companies, the Activity establishes demonstration plots in Northeast states to trigger demand for the high quality seeds of improved varieties, fertilizer blends and CPP being

demonstrated. Demonstration plots also serve as a market linkage tool between farmers and input companies. The market linkages mostly take place during green and brown field days¹.

Technology to Drive Sales

RRA leverages digital technologies and non-traditional sales channels to expand and extend the distribution of agro-inputs to last-mile communities. For instance, the Activity partnered with Interra Networks, a technology firm, to develop the Nigeria Seed Information Management System (NIGSIMS), an e-marketing portal / online marketplace for high-quality, certified seeds. NIGSIMS bridges the information gap between farmers and input companies selling through the platform. NIGSIMS is also helping seed companies in NEN to record sales transactions and manage the inventory of their stocks.

Facilitation of Pro-poor Packaging of Products

Because farmers' purchasing power differs, the Activity encourages seed companies like GreenPal Ventures in Gombe State to create smaller packages (2kg) of seeds that are more affordable to smallholder farmers and can increase access to improved seeds for producers who are cultivating smaller pieces of land.



Rural Resilience Activity's private sector partner showcasing products at the SeedConnect event



Dr. Yusuf Yakubu Yerima Ballah – Executive Director Albit & Agro Consult Limited at the Input Fair in Mubi

“My company, Albit, was invited by Mercy Corps to the input fair, and we came in with our team.

We promote implements such as weeders, planters and we have our Albit organic fertilizer which is used for seed immunization before planting, and with this fertilizer, you won't need NPK in the farm. And I would say that the turnout of the farmers is encouraging, and we were able to make very good sales.”

Our Activities

The Rural Resilience Activity facilitates access to quality agro-inputs, promotes access to information and advisory services on improved, climate-adapted varieties and builds the capacity of participants on GAPs through the activities highlighted in this section.

Input Fairs

During the 2022 wet season (between May and July 2022), the Rural Resilience Activity facilitated agricultural input fairs² in 11 locations across Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, and Gombe states, reaching over 6,331 participants and other partners, including farmers and agro-dealers. Seeds and other inputs worth NGN18 million (US\$43,395³) were sold to farmers and agro-dealers during the agricultural input fairs. Many farmers and agro-dealers continued to access input from the input companies after the fairs had ended, generating additional sales of over NGN28 million (US\$67,504) within the next three months.

¹ Field days are educational events held on-farm. They are organized and hosted by the producer, oftentimes in collaboration with agricultural educators and private sector input suppliers. Green field day is held during the vegetative stage of the crop while a brown day is held at harvest.

² Vox pop on the input fair held in Mubi Adamawa State

³ Exchange rate = NGN414.79/US\$1 - <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/rates/ExchRateByCurrency.asp>

Demo Plots

The Rural Resilience Activity in 2022 engaged 125 states' Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) officers, seven seed companies, and M & A Greenery to establish over 220 demo farms, through which 14,500 farmers in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, and Gombe states were reached with information and advisory on GAPs. The engagement with farmers on the demonstration plots, at the input fairs, and in other capacity building activities, has led to the adoption of certified seed of improved varieties. A total of 97,150 participants in the Activity have adopted GAPs, according to the Annual Surveys conducted by the Activity in year 2021 and 2022.

Smart Seed Subsidy

The smart seed subsidy is aimed at promoting access to seeds of improved varieties through a subsidy program. The Activity worked with the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC) and two seed companies to subsidize the price of seeds by 50% for selected vulnerable farmers, including Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and selected host community members in BAYG states, to improve crop productivity and nutrition of the target communities. The participants were provided with extra early maturing and nutrient-dense varieties of maize, groundnut and cowpea to help them adapt to the unpredictable weather pattern that affected production in the year 2021 wet season. The Activity reached 333 participants, including 230 women farmers, with smart seed subsidy sales worth NGN1,693,300 in Borno and Yobe states between July and August 2022.

Capacity Building for Seed Entrepreneurs and Farmers

In response to the gaps in the supply of quality seed of climate-adapted varieties within the agro communities in the intervention states, the Rural Resilience Activity trained 215 seed entrepreneurs, including women and youth, on community seed production. The participants were trained by the NASC using its tailor-made training materials. Asma'u Farms, Green Pal Global Ventures and other seed companies supported by integrating the seed entrepreneurs into their supply chain and providing them with farmlands and agricultural inputs in the form of loans for seed production.

Development and Adoption of Nigerian Seed Information Management System

The Rural Resilience Activity through, Interra Networks, developed the Nigerian Seed Information Management System (NIGSIMS) which provides a distribution channel for quality certified seeds for farmers and is expected to liberalize the seed marketplace, leading to increased participation at all levels in the target areas where the Activity works. The NIGSIMS is accessible to all seed actors and is being promoted among farmers and seed companies for improved patronage. To date, NIGSIMS has generated NGN50,777,066 in sales of rice, maize, cowpea and groundnut, as reported by five seed companies on the platform.

SeedConnect

In November 2022, the Activity supported five seed companies from the Northeast to exhibit and showcase their seed varieties at the 2022 Annual Seed Connect conference, organized by the NASC. The conference created opportunities for collaboration with other agricultural input actors, and expanded their distribution networks. The SeedConnect is an annual event organized by the NASC, in collaboration with the private seed actors, to create a forum for major stakeholders within the industry to discuss various issues impacting the players within the seed industry and design pathways for more resilient food systems. Over 100 seed actors participated in the conference, tagged "Innovations and Strategies for Sustainability in Achieving Seed Security in Nigeria and Africa".



Smallholder farmer in Mubi

"I bought a bag of maize seeds and herbicides, and I would love that the input fair would be organized every month because the prices of what I paid here are less than what I would usually get in the market."



Smart seed subsidy recipients

Lessons Learned

- The production of high quality seeds by seed entrepreneurs and seed companies is greatly impacted by the high costs of fertilizers in the Northeast region. For example, a bag of 50kg Urea is sold at N40,000 as against N6,000 in the previous years. The high cost of foundation seeds is another factor affecting seed production.
- Poor marketing strategies by seed companies contribute to the lack of information for smallholder farmers. The Activity is working with the seed companies to increase their visibility and information-sharing capacity.
- More farmers accessed seeds of improved varieties through the input fairs during the wet season. Organic fertilizers are getting attention as well as handheld planting tools.

Key Achievements



215 New Community Seed Entrepreneurs in the Northeast

The Activity has onboarded 215 new community seed entrepreneurs in the Northeast. 151 community seed entrepreneurs have been trained and linked with seed companies. 60 participants have been supported to establish 30 hectares of wheat seed farms in collaboration with M & A Greenery. Asma'u Farms is working with IDPs and seed entrepreneurs to multiply seed of different varieties such as maize, rice, groundnut, cowpea and millet. Other private sector partners such as Albit and Agro Consult, Girmal Seeds, Green Pal Global Ventures, Sa'a Seeds, Sadiq and Nana Seeds, Jirkur Seeds, Viable Seeds, LACRI Seeds, Meleri Seeds, and Nagarta Seeds supported the seed entrepreneurs with farm lands and inputs to establish seed farms. The participants have harvested the seeds grown in 2022 wet season, and they have sold the seeds to seed companies for processing and NASC certification. An estimated 3290.73MT of seeds were offtaken from the seed entrepreneurs by nine companies. Most participants reported a profit between NGN150,000 and NGN200,000 after harvest. Strengthening the seed entrepreneurs is expected to improve the availability of seeds to and adoption of climate-smart varieties by the smallholder farmers. This will foster the replacement of saved seeds and build confidence in the formal seed system.



Improved Access to Agro-Inputs through Various Distribution Channels

The Activity's market linkage events and agricultural input fairs in 11 locations increased access to quality agricultural inputs, generating sales of NGN46,756,600 in six months. The input companies have continued to partner with the Activity on other interventions such as the community seed multiplication and smart seed subsidy.



Working Partnerships with Private Sector

The "Access to Agro-inputs" intervention in the Rural Resilience Activity is implemented in collaboration with private sector partners. The Activity has formed good working relationships and partnerships with 14 private sector partners, who are supporting participants - smallholder farmers - to improve information and knowledge around GAPs. For instance, through the partnership with Interra Networks, the NIGSIMS platform onboarded a total of 20 seed companies, 100 seed traders, and 7,130 farmers. Through the partnership with Golden Agric Input Limited, a total of NGN42,000,000 sales of hybrid pioneer maize seeds were sold. The Activity is in partnership with M and A Greenery, Golden Agric Input Limited, Notore Chemical Industries, Asma'u Seeds, Albit and Agro Consult, Alkay Seeds, Jirkur Seeds, Viable Seeds, Lake Chad Research Institute Seed Company, Meleri Seeds, Nagarta Seeds, Green Pal Global Ventures Seeds, Sa'a Seeds, Sadiq and Nana Seeds, and Interra Networks to improve access to agricultural inputs in the Northeast.



Seed varieties grown by seed entrepreneurs at Asmau Farms in Yola, Adamawa State

About the Feed the Future Nigeria Rural Resilience Activity

The Feed the Future Nigeria Rural Resilience Activity is a five-year, US\$45 million program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to facilitate economic recovery and growth in vulnerable, conflict-affected areas by promoting systemic change in market systems. The Activity is part of the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative. It is aimed at empowering vulnerable households, communities and systems to cope with current shocks and stresses, and to be prepared to withstand future ones.

The Activity is implemented by Mercy Corps, in partnership with the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) and Save the Children (SCI), primarily in the Northeast states of Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe. Through the COVID-19 Mitigation Response Program, the Activity's operational areas also included Benue, Kebbi, Niger and Ebonyi states, as well as the Federal Capital Territory. Using market-led approaches, the Activity will move over 600,000 individuals out of chronic vulnerability and poverty.

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