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



RRA supported seed companies in an exhibition in Abuja, Nigeria (Mercy Corps Nigeria/ Raphael Ehiabhi, 2023)

BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA THROUGH THE ADOPTION OF CLIMATE ADAPTED SEEDS

Using a market systems approach to build climate resilience in
a conflict-affected area

AUGUST 2024



Introduction

The climate shocks occurring in Nigeria's northeastern region, including persistent droughts, floods, erratic rainfall and soaring temperatures, are wreaking havoc on local agricultural production and threatening the population's primary livelihood source. Active conflict in the region is further exacerbating food insecurity, poverty, unemployment, and displacement and contributing to escalating conflicts over scarce natural resources. Systemic, resilience-building interventions are needed to support local communities and address the complex interplay of climate change, conflict, and poverty over the short, medium, and long-term. Through the USAID-funded Feed the Future Rural Resilience Activity (RRA), Mercy Corps has implemented several climate-aware and conflict-sensitive interventions in Northeast Nigeria to strengthen local agricultural systems at scale and enable farming communities to protect and improve their income and assets.

Climate change and conflict in Northeast Nigeria

Climate change has led to an overall decrease in rainfall over the past sixty years, which has escalated conflict over water resources. The region has also been hit by several catastrophic climate events in recent history. In 2022, floods across Nigeria completely destroyed 339,065 hectares of farmland and partially

“During the last flood, I lost count of the number of deaths. It's a heart-wrenching toll on our community.”

Mustapha, a resident of Borno State

destroyed 110,052 hectares; in the Northeast, 38,483 hectares of farmland were destroyed during these flooding events. In August 2023, farmers in Borno and Yobe were affected by a severe drought that reduced that year's harvest and, in October, floods in Adamawa State

impacted around 8,500 households (51,063 individuals) and led to mass displacements of individuals and entire communities.

While these adverse weather events take an obvious toll on agricultural productivity and food security, climate change also impacts yields through more insidious means, such as increased evaporation rates due to rising temperatures and more favourable environments for pests and diseases. These worsening climatic conditions, alongside ongoing conflict, have heightened the risks, costs, and logistical difficulties of agricultural production in the region. A market assessment conducted in 2021 by Mercy Corps revealed that yields in the Northeast averaged 1.47MT and 1.22MT per hectare for maize and rice, respectively. These yields are far below average expected yields of 6.0MT per hectare seen elsewhere in the country. Stakeholders in the Northeast identified climatic trends as a major risk to agriculture and an emerging driver of conflict and displacement. “During the last flood, I lost count of the number of deaths. It’s a heart-wrenching toll on our community.”

Mustapha, a resident of Borno State

RRA's approach

The Feed the Future Nigeria Rural Resilience Activity (RRA) is a five-year program operating from 2019 to 2025 and 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. RRA used a market systems development (MSD) approach that integrated resilience and conflict sensitivity programming to support more sustainable and inclusive agriculture markets in Northeast Nigeria. This learning brief describes RRA's efforts to strengthen the seed sector and introduce new climate adapted varieties to the region. It highlights the key design and implementation features, the results and impact to date, and how service provision and use are expected to continue to grow. In addition, it discusses how the MSD approach taken by RRA facilitated adoption of climate adapted seed varieties, even in thin markets and fragile contexts, and provides recommendations for future interventions.

¹ Oyewo, H.T. (2023). Climate Change and Conflict in Northeast Nigeria. Art and Social Science Research, Vol 13 No 3.

² ReliefWeb. (November 2022) Nigeria floods response: flash update-2

³ ReliefWeb. (October 2023) North-East Nigeria: Flood Incidents Report - October 2023 - Nigeria

⁴ Rural Resilience Activity 2021. Market System Assessment

⁵ Ahmed Alibe, R. (2024 June 18) Living On The Edge: Stories From A Flood Prone Area In Northeast Nigeria. HumAngle

Crop-based agriculture and the associated seed systems in NE Nigeria

Crop-based agriculture

Key crops in northeastern Nigeria include rice, maize, cowpea, millet, sorghum, and groundnut. Average farm size in the Northeast is 0.82 hectares. These farms rely heavily on hand tool technology, with draught animal traction used on 10-25% of cultivated land. Mechanical traction is used on only 5-15% of cultivated land. Northeast Nigeria has two cropping seasons: the rain-fed season from late May to late September and the dry season from late October to late March. The majority of farms are dependent on rainfall.

The primary crops planted in each state varies depending on ecological conditions. Maize is a crucial crop in Borno and Adamawa states, where it serves as a staple food supporting food security for over 90% of households. Maize is also used for animal feed production and is a major source of income for farmers. Maize farms are frequently intercropped with legumes and bordered with vegetable crops, fruit trees, and other field crops like sesame, sorghum and millet. Groundnut producers are located predominantly in Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe. Rice is prominent throughout the agricultural landscape of northeastern Nigeria.

Seed systems

In 2021, RRA conducted a market system assessment that embedded elements of a seed system security assessment (SSSA) within it. The RRA team collected information from farmers; local, regional, and national seed companies; and the public sector, including the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC), the government body responsible for certifying seed produced in Nigeria, extension agents, and Area Agriculture Officers. The assessment sought to understand the constraints and barriers farmers face in accessing climate adapted seeds and identify any incentives and opportunities available to address these barriers. This information was used to inform a set of facilitation-based interventions aimed at transforming local seed systems.

Farmer demand for climate adapted seeds

The assessment found that smallholder farmers predominantly rely on the informal seed system to source their seeds. Farmers reported sourcing seed through farmer exchanges, saved seed from previous harvests, and, to a small extent, open markets. Farmers typically were unaware of the variety they were planting, saying that they planted local landraces circulated throughout the community via farmer exchanges and grain markets.

Several recent climate events, including the floods in 2022 and 2023 and major drought in 2023, had raised farmers' awareness of the dangers and risks associated with climate change. However, farmers had limited awareness of the climate-resilient, early maturing and biotic stress-resistant seed varieties developed by national research institutions. In addition, they were distrustful of the seed found in retail marketplaces due to previous experiences purchasing poor quality seed and the prevalence of adulterated seeds in the markets. Table 1 below describes some of the certified seeds available in Nigeria. Improved seed has been available as early as 2009 and offers farmers options for a range of different climatic shocks and stresses yet was essentially unused by farmers in the Northeast prior to RRA.

Table 1: Climate Adapted Seed Varieties Available in Nigeria

Variety	Characteristics	Release Date
Maize		
Sammaz 27	Drought tolerant and striga resistant	2009
Sammaz 51	Drought tolerant and striga resistant	2016
Sammaz 53	Early maturing, drought tolerant	2017
Sammaz 54	Early maturing, drought tolerant	2017
Oba Super 11	Striga and drought tolerance and high yield	2016
Oba-Super 13	Striga and drought tolerance and high yield	2016
Rice		
Faro 67	Submergence tolerant	2017
Faro 66	Submergence tolerant	2017
Groundnut		
Samnut 24	Extra early maturing and rosette resistant, high oil content	2011
Samnut 25	High rosette resistance, high yield and early maturity	2013
Samnut 29	Early maturing and high pod yield	2018

⁶ RRA 2023 Annual Survey

⁷ Maboyeje, L. (2017). Mechanization in Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and the Future. Institute of Agricultural Research & Training, Obafemi Awolowo University

Seed supply chain

RRA's market system assessment also identified a weak seed distribution network and inability to meet farmer demand for quality seeds. Local seed companies reported several factors that contributed to their low production capacity and lack of investment in distribution and sales.

The market assessment found that most seed companies are micro and small enterprises, often comprised of fewer than five employees. Seed companies frequently buy seed on contract from farmers, then clean, package, and distribute it to either their agents operating out of a sales outlet or to secondary businesses. On occasion, seed companies will also lease their own land to farmers to produce seed for their company's supply; however, the majority of the seed used in the region is multiplied by independently operating farmers. Both seed producers and seed companies were found to lack knowledge on modern seed



A key finding from the assessment was that seed companies in Northeast Nigeria are predominantly located in urban and semi-urban areas and have no functional outlets. Some closed their outlets when agricultural activities were halted due to the conflict in farming communities. For example, national seed companies, such as Premier Seed, closed their remote sales office during the height of the conflict in 2010. This prompted other national seed companies to stop supplying to the region. As a result, farmers now must travel long distances of 20 to 50km to obtain the seeds they need. Overall sentiment among seed producers and distributors was that certain regions within the Northeast continue to be both high cost and high risk to access due to the ongoing conflict, disrupted services, degree of displaced population, and eroded transportation infrastructure. These challenges have resulted in very little private sector investment in seed production and distribution in the region, leading to a lack of access to the quality and affordable seed varieties needed by farmers in these communities to increase yield, productivity and income.

processing techniques and hybrid seed production. Seed companies often sold just one type of seed; those who sold multiple crops did not focus on varietal diversity and were typically selling only 1-2 different varieties per crop type. In both urban and rural seed outlets, the assessment found that seeds were only packaged in quantities of 5kg, 10kg, and 20kg, making it challenging for low-income smallholder farmers — especially women and internally displaced persons (IDPs) — to afford and access them. Smaller package sizes, which could be more affordable to smallholder farmers, are scarce and seed

companies were reported to be out of stock; some companies reported sitting on seed stock for up to two years, after which they were compelled to sell the seed as grain. Seed companies pointed to limited facilities and equipment as the primary barriers to scaling their seed production, cleaning, packaging, and storage capacities. They had difficulty accessing seed distribution markets and often had surplus seed inventory after planting season. Low sales discouraged them from expanding their seed inventory further.

These inefficiencies among seed companies operating in the rural Northeast resulted in insufficient seed stocks, inadequate quality control, limited customer and market share, and poor information sharing on new varieties. These factors further perpetuated low demand from smallholder farmers.

RRA'S SEED MARKET INTERVENTION

RRA's market analysis of the seed system in Northeast Nigeria pointed to a weak seed market that was unable to provide farmers with the climate-resilient solutions they desired. RRA designed a set of interventions that would generate systemic change by improving all levels of the seed supply chain within the Northeast region. This approach aimed to combat poor availability and quality of climate-resilient seed varieties by raising farmer awareness of these varieties and facilitating the establishment of new outlets at which to purchase them.

1. Creating awareness among seed companies of farmer demand for climate-resilient solutions

The market assessment found that seed companies could not accurately assess farmer demand for climate adapted varieties. To build seed companies' awareness of farmers' need for climate adaptation strategies, RRA facilitated a roundtable meeting for seed companies to share information on the growing climate shocks and stresses affecting the region. Results from the market assessment that demonstrated farmers' demand for climate resilient crops were also shared, along with a presentation by the NASC on the climate adapted varieties with potential for the region. Following the event, RRA conducted face-to-face visits to seed companies to further discuss strategies the seed

companies could adopt to take advantage of farmer demand for climate-resilient solutions. Among the ideas suggested at this time were adoption of the out-grower model to increase production, engagement of sales agents to reach last mile farmers, and resizing of seed packages into smaller, more affordable packages. These initial conversations successfully spurred individual companies to expand their out-grower model to include the planting of more climate adapted seeds.

RRA also engaged the NASC to provide trainings to seed producers and seed



***“ I wish I had this experience
before starting my seed company,
I have seen and learnt how hybrid
seeds are produced ”***

- Managing Director/CEO of Wonotanzokan Farms Limited, a seed company in Northeast, after an exposure visit to Premier Seed Limited.

companies in seed production techniques with an emphasis on newer climate adapted varieties. In addition, RRA organized an exposure visit for several micro seed companies and seed producers to Premier Seed Limited, a leading seed company in the country. During this visit, seed companies were able to hear about modern seed production and processing techniques, hybrid seed production, seed marketing practices, and overall seed business strategies. The interactive visit energized and motivated many seed companies to enhance their market competitiveness.

2. Creating awareness among farmers of climate adapted seed varieties

To increase awareness among smallholder farmers of drought-, flood- and disease-tolerant crop varieties, RRA partnered and collaborated with seed companies and public extension agents within Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, and

Gombe States to establish approximately 1,300 community-based crop demonstration plots between 2021 and 2023. Each demonstration plot showcased the performance of multiple varieties of improved seeds and was managed by twenty-five smallholder farmers. Company representatives and extension agents worked with farmers to sow and maintain the plots. Additional climate-resilient management techniques were demonstrated along with the new seed varieties. Field days were held prior to harvest where the managing farmers could demonstrate their results to larger audiences of farmers. Farmers were able to see that many of the crop varieties demonstrated were early maturing and drought tolerant, which greatly increased their demand. On average, field days hosted approximately 100 additional farmers, extension agents, and seed company representatives.



The number of seed companies using the platform increased from 12 in 2022 to 22 in 2024, an 83% increase, and is currently being used by 50% of seed companies operating in the Northeast. The number of digital transactions on the platform and number of farmers onboarded also increased by 1,787.5% and 54% respectively from 2022 to 2024. Given the great interest in this technology from farmers and seed companies, the firm hosting the NIGSIMS electronic platform is looking to expand their business to include other types of agricultural inputs and cover additional regions of Nigeria, which will allow it to operate independently from RRA.

RRA also used mass media to raise awareness among farmers and collaborated with several private service providers, including Intertra Networks, Extension Africa, Center for Microenterprise Development (CMD), Environment and Economic Resource Center (EERC), and media houses, to promote both digital and non-digital climate adaptive farming messages. RRA also partnered with local and regional radio stations to provide access to early warning information on floods and drought through periodic and daily jingles played on the stations. These messages were complemented with fliers, SMS, cropping calendars, seed fairs, field days, and community meetings to reinforce preparedness and awareness among farmers.

3. Building market systems resilience from top to bottom

Once an invested network of seed companies coalesced, RRA used a multi-

pronged approach to lower the cost of logistics and de-risk business operations for these companies to operate in the rural Northeast. RRA sought to strengthen each market actor by improving both their internal operations and their connections with upstream and downstream actors.

First, RRA facilitated a series of **dialogue sessions** that were attended by large and small national, regional and local seed companies coming from different regions with different risk profiles, agro-dealers from different regions, government extension agents, research institutes, and farmer cooperative

“There are some certain varieties I don't have which are being demanded. Through the Northeast seed working group I was able to get those varieties to supply my customers. This year alone I have sold seed worth of 20 million naira [12,200 USD] to other seed companies in the region, while I equally bought seed of 7 million naira [4,270 USD] from other seed companies”

- Managing Director, Jirkur Seed Company

representatives. The attendees strategized how to improve last-mile farmer access to improved seeds with the goal of expanding the number of existing market channels available to farmers. The market actors were able to discuss the mechanics behind increasing investment in the Northeast and ultimately initiated a seed working group to foster ongoing information sharing, data-driven decision making, and collaboration. After several in-person meetings, the group settled into maintaining electronic communication through Whatsapp and now primarily use the platform to buy and sell seed among themselves. Seed working group members have noted that the group has lowered the cost of maintaining their seed stocks, diversified their product base, and increased their sales. It remains an important source of up-to-date information on all aspects of the industry for members.

RRA fostered a relationship between seed companies and agro-dealers in the Northeast who could act as sale venues through **business to business (B2B) meetings**. In particular, RRA sought out agro-dealers who were not selling seed to attend these meetings with the goal of creating new venues for farmers to access seeds and an attractive “one-stop shop” in their community. Through these new relationships with seed companies, agro-dealers were now able to stock high quality and diverse seed offerings and also be trained on proper seed usage and storage, which improved their attractiveness to clients. RRA helped these agro-dealers expand their client base by hosting **input fairs** at the beginning of each season. The fairs brought together agro-dealers, extension service providers, and farmers so farmers could be exposed to new products and buy inputs directly from the dealers.

To further support seed sales in remote areas, RRA helped seed companies initiate use of the Commercial Agent Model (CAM), an arrangement where seed companies contracted “seed agents” to act as intermediaries between them and buyers. The CAM arrangement was supported by the launch of the Nigerian Seed Information Management System (NIGSIMS), a comprehensive database detailing the seed varieties available for purchase from all seed companies registered on the platform. Farmers are able to request seed through their phones and then pay upon seed delivery. The system prompts a designated seed agent at the community level, who then retrieves the requested seeds from the appropriate seed company and delivers the seed to the farmer, eliminating the need for the farmer to travel. The approach also brings the agent directly to the farmer and allows the agent to pass along technical advice while seed is being delivered. Beyond expanding sales, NIGSIMS benefits seed companies and research institutions by serving as an effective inventory management tool. Having aggregated information on farmer demand for particular varieties allows research institutions, like the Lake Chad Research Institute (LACRI), to plan their production of foundation seed for multiplication by seed companies and their out-grower network.

Results and Impact

RRA collected data through a structured market systems resilience assessment, routine monitoring and evaluation surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a full range of market actors, key informant interviews (KIs), and periodic outcome harvesting exercises. Following annual data analysis, post-assessment workshops were conducted to share and discuss findings with market actors who validated results.

There is evidence of seed companies scaling their operations and distribution networks across the Northeast region far beyond RRA-supported activities. Seed companies are hiring sales agents and investing in new sales outlets and branches in areas outside of the project area. In one instance, a partner invested in a new sales outlet after participating in an RRA-sponsored input fair in that community. With these efforts, supply of seed has increased in a tangible way.

Systemic supply chain improvements

There is evidence of seed companies scaling their operations and distribution networks across the Northeast region far beyond RRA-supported activities. Seed companies are hiring sales agents and investing in new sales outlets and branches in areas outside of the project area. In one instance, a partner invested in a new sales outlet after participating in an RRA-sponsored input fair in that community. With these efforts, supply of seed has increased in a tangible way. Over the course of the project, RRA mobilized 20 national, regional, and local

seed companies. These seed companies created new partnerships with 1,300 community-based seed producers, who were able to produce 7,130 metric tons of climate adapted varieties during the 2022 and 2023 cropping seasons. Seed companies hosted 1,320 community-based seed demonstration plots to demonstrate the performance of improved seeds to at least 66,000 smallholder farmers. These plots demonstrated climate adapted seed varieties of maize, rice, cowpea, groundnut, sorghum, and millet. Seed companies in the Northeast region now sell a diverse selection of improved seeds, including over ten maize varieties, four types of rice, six sorghum varieties, three millet varieties, four

groundnut varieties, three types of soybeans, and three cowpea varieties, providing farmers with an array of options to help them navigate climate shocks and stressors. Independent of RRA, these companies are reaching out to research institutes for foundation seeds to maintain their supply of climate adapted varieties.

The NASC has been an engaged partner throughout RRA. After observing the continued demand from farmers for certified seeds, they began offering additional trainings and technical support to seed companies, out-growers, and community-based seed producers on good seed production practices from pre-planting and crop management through to harvest, post-harvest, and seed handling. Seed companies who are expanding their out-grower network have begun to invite NASC to train their new out-growers, sometimes co-financing these training sessions with other seed companies who are also expanding their networks. NASC has responded to these requests and recruited additional field monitoring and technical staff to enable the certification of more community-based seed producers.

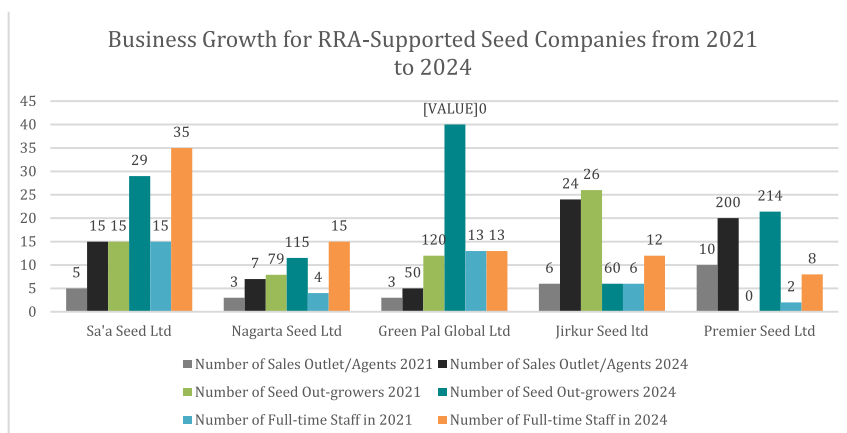
The EIF worked with six companies to expand their outlets and network in the Northeast. One seed company, Seed Co., expanded their distribution network to Borno state and is now participating in agricultural input fairs facilitated by RRA. The largest company, Premier Seed Limited, reopened two seed distribution offices in Borno and Yobe states and expanded their offices in Adamawa and Gombe States. After participating in a Partnership Day organized by RRA, Premier Seed Limited made a major investment to collaborate with the Gombe State Investment Committee to lease the Gombe State Industrial Park with the purpose of establishing a large multi-million-naira seed processing facility to serve the northeast region. In August 2024, the company is advancing NGN750 million (455,250 USD) as an initial capital investment to establish the seed processing plant. This investment will benefit smaller seed companies who can sell direct to the processing facility. Table 2 describes some of the changes taking place within select national, regional and local seed companies who

worked with RRA

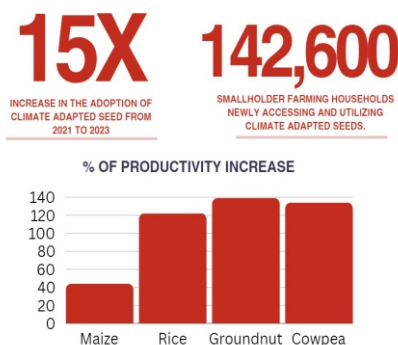
Table 2: Change in Seed Offering from RRA-supported Seed Companies from 2021 to 2024

Company	Volume of Seed Produced (MT)		Volume of Seed Sold (MT)		Value of Seed Sales (US\$)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Sa'a Seed Ltd	12	70	12	120	4,856	58,272
Nagarta Seed Ltd	90	158	73.5	158	12,140	76,482
Green Pal Global Ltd	232	159	15.2	160	13,354	77,696
Jirkur Seed Ltd	70	120	56.7	118.24	16,996	51,595
Premier Seed Ltd	Was not producing in NE	817.63	75.57	376.83	11,897	159,641

All RRA supported seed companies showed business growth by opening sales outlets, engaging sales agents, increasing their seed out-growers and adding full-time staff. For example, Sa'a Seed Ltd who had just 5 sales outlet/agents in 2021 now have 15 sales outlets/agents in 2024. The number of seed out-growers also increased as a response to increased seed demand by farmers. Green Pal Global Ltd who had 120 seed out-growers in 2021 now has 400 seed out-growers in 2024. The increase is also seen in the number of full-time staff engaged by the seed companies as shown in the Chart below.



Impact on Farmers



According to data from the 2023 annual survey conducted by RRA, the adoption of climate adapted seeds among smallholder farmers in northeast Nigeria increased by 15 times from 2021 to 2023, with at least 142,600 smallholder farming households newly accessing and utilizing climate adapted seeds.

Additionally, the data shows that farmers' productivity increased by 44% for maize, 122% for rice, 139% for groundnuts, and 134% for cowpeas during the same period because of the adoption of the new seed varieties and other climate-smart practices.

Lessons Learned

The market systems approach deployed by RRA was essential for introducing and promoting the adoption of new climate-adapted varieties into a conflict-affected area. Market actors are continuing to diffuse high-quality, certified seed to last-mile farmers without the assistance of project staff. Farmers now have access not only to seed, but also to technical support via a strengthened agro-dealer network. Market actors are contributing to local employment and have new mechanisms for assessing farmer demand for seed. Several lessons were learned along the way:

Building the business case for climate adapted seeds early was key to capturing the interest of seed companies. RRA assessments showed farmers' strong desire for solutions to climate shocks and stresses driven by recent catastrophic weather events. This information was presented during sensitization meetings with seed companies and other stakeholders. At the same time, RRA was able to show that farmers were currently not planting suitable climate adapted varieties developed by National Research Institutes.

Taken together, this information highlighted farmers' unmet demand for climate adapted seeds and kickstarted their engagement in the process. Involving seed companies in the demonstration plots and field days also brought farmers and suppliers together during critical learning moments and had the effect of reinforcing farmers' preferences to company representatives.

Market system resilience was built and strengthened by partnering with relevant market actors of all sizes and types and from different regions with different risk profiles. RRA worked with national, regional, and local seed companies, in addition to other actors, and partnered with them on multiple different fronts to improve the efficiency of their businesses. This spread the risk across partners and enabled the inclusion of even marginalized farmers as customers. RRA also built resiliency into the system by working both upstream and downstream of partners to strengthen their supporting services and the overall business environment they operated in.

Seed suppliers and farmers both required multiple types of interventions, sometimes serving overlapping purposes, to break down the barriers limiting climate adapted seed from reaching smallholder farmers. Seed companies received support from RRA on all levels, including business training, market linkages, and certified seed production. Likewise, farmers were engaged on multiple levels to strengthen their farm management and access to services beyond seed acquisition. Farmers received information about new climate-resilient production techniques in addition to information about new varieties. They were linked to seed companies and government extension agents via the demonstration plots and field days. The NIGSIMS platform provided farmers with a user-friendly method to purchase a variety of seeds in small quantities, with the bonus of receiving tailored user information upon seed delivery. This approach recognized that a healthy seed system is not possible without each market actor performing optimally. It also recognized that a market systems approach that encompassed a variety of different crops and cropping systems would serve farmers and the private sector better than a value chain approach focused on a single crop. Farmers and seed companies were both able to benefit

by diversifying the number of crops, and varieties within those crops, with high-quality seeds available to purchase. Many seed companies improved their profitability and customer base by expanding their seed offerings.

When done in conjunction with on-the-ground network building, digital tools can accelerate access to and adoption of new seeds by last mile farmers. Even with the use of remote seed agents, the digital platform NIGSIMS greatly enhanced companies' capabilities to sell to remote farmers residing in conflict-affected areas. It allowed for easier and more accurate record keeping and professionalized their business operations. Creating a digital record of seed sales and projected seed sales also provided much needed data for seed value chain actors, who must gauge far in advance which varieties to multiply and stock. The company operating NIGSIMS is currently investigating the feasibility of expanding its functionality to include other agricultural inputs.

Albit and Agro Consult, a small seed company, received a de-risking and co-investment grant from EIF of 25,000 USD in 2020. When Albit and Agro Consult applied for the grant, they had one field office and five staff in the Northeast and worked with only two seed out-growers who each produced only one variety of either maize or rice. RRA worked with Albit and Agro Consult staff to provide technical support and training to their seed out-growers and enroll additional out-growers. RRA facilitated access to foundation seeds for the out-growers and encouraged Albit and Agro Consult to work with NASC to comply with certified seed production requirements.



The Managing Director of Albit & Agro Consult examining rice seedlings from an out-grower farm in Yola, Nigeria (Mercy Corps/Ezra Millstein, 2024)

Albit and Agro Consult were able to participate in trade fairs, linkage events, and exposure visits to grow their customer base. They established 30 demonstration sites and trained 3,000 farmers. As of 2024, Albit and Agro Consult operates six field offices and has increased staffing to 49 in the Northeast. They work with 150 seed out-growers to produce four crops (maize, rice, sorghum and soyabeans) and a total of six varieties. They were able to increase their volume of seed produced and sold from 9.8 MT in 2020 to 204.8 MT in 2023. With their large out-grower network, they are frequently able to supply other companies with seed. They have initiated many business growth activities inspired by RRA, including organizing an input fair with other private sector actors in Adamawa State, linking members of a farmers' cooperative they work with to a formal financial service provider, and working with NASC to continue to provide technical training to their out-grower network. They are now an established partner to several government agencies and a key player among private sector actors operating in the Northeast.

About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

About RRA

The Feed the Future Nigeria Rural Resilience Activity (RRA) is a five-year, US\$49 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. Using market-led approaches, the Activity is moving over 800,000 individuals out of chronic vulnerability and poverty.

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