

Transforming Nigeria's vegetable markets

Impacting smallholder farmers through added value and increased productivity



Case owner: East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer Foundation

Speakers: Joan Boer, Hadiza Yaro, Stuart Morris

Date: Friday 31 August from 14:00-15:30

Venue: Orion building Wageningen Campus, room to be decided



Background

Nigeria is one of the fastest growing countries in the world. With the population estimated to grow from 200 to an estimated 400 million by 2050 there are clear issues to address with urbanization, food security and migration. If not enough is done soon, this combination of demography combined with climate change is likely to push Nigeria to irreversible extremes. Limited opportunities for rural economic development are affecting (particularly) the youth; and if unchecked the increasing unemployment and the false hopes of migration are likely to contribute towards further instability and conflict.

What needs to be done? Catalysing innovation at farm level is needed to transform and position farming as an *attractive business opportunity*. Simple technologies can drive an increase in productivity which benefits all stakeholders; from input suppliers to farmers and from traders to consumers. As well as increasing the income of smallholders, higher qualities, diversity and consistency of supply will widen the availability of healthy food and raise broad based purchasing power in rural areas.

Despite its huge potential for agriculture, Nigeria remains a food importing nation. Currently only half the cultivable land is used for agriculture, and yields remain disappointingly low. Supplying 95% of all food in Nigeria, smallholder farmers are the backbone of production; however only few smallholders see the opportunity of transforming their hard work into a thriving business and grow

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into commercial farmers. The majority crops they produce such as yam, rice and cassava, have low nutritional value and generate very limited income.

With its focus on smallholder production and potential for value added and nutritional security, horticultural crops make an enormous impact on rural livelihoods. Vegetable cultivation provides highest employment (labour requirement) per ha of all sectors of agriculture and the increased availability of affordable vegetables will allow for balanced diets that provide sufficient macro- and micronutrients essential for young children and pregnant women. Vegetable production, which makes use of affordable and innovative technologies, can also be an attractive and realistic business opportunity for new generations of young farmers in Nigeria to develop into rural entrepreneurs. Improved practices which bring significant transformation range from simple changes such as optimised field layout to more advanced technologies such as protected cultivation. In areas where little change has occurred in the last 30 years, even simple innovation will step-by-step catalyse the much needed transformation we need to support.

With a population of 200 million there are good opportunities for Dutch stakeholders to be part of Nigeria's developing agri sector; bringing in technologies and innovation needed to drive positive growth in the sector. However there are still significant barriers towards successful development of the vegetable sector in Nigeria:

- Poor cultivation techniques, limited access to advisory services and lack of awareness in the benefits of using improved seed varieties / agri-inputs
- Weak market linkages and poor infrastructure
- Uncertain regulatory environment
- Some production blockages require research; especially to identify solutions for issues such as Tuta absoluta

East-West Seed has 35 years experience in market-oriented plant breeding for vegetable seeds in emerging economies in Asia and Africa. With its unique focus on smallholder farmers, the company is steadily growing its presence in Sub Saharan Africa; including Nigeria, Cameroon , Gabon, Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso.

Until recently EWS' main presence in Nigeria focused on variety testing to ensure that farmers have access to seeds suitable for local agronomic conditions and that they are better able to align their production towards the rapidly changing demands of their markets. To create a conducive environment for developing a vibrant and competitive vegetable- and seed market, EWS has recently started building a team (of 25-30 extension officers), dedicated to pre-commercial knowledge transfer. EWS expects to initially focus its pre-commercial knowledge transfer activities in Northern Nigeria (especially Kaduna and Kano which have more than 400,000 ha of vegetable production). However with increased time, resources and partnerships it is expected to extend these activities to other states where there is a need to develop the skills of Nigeria's smallholder farmer community.

Recognizing that farmers need access to quality seeds and knowledge on how to grow, East-West Seed has supported intensive farmer training programs since 2000 as an essential fifth pillar of its core business model - next to breeding, seed production, seed processing and sales & marketing.

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To ensure that pre-commercial activities are most effectively geared towards benefiting smallholder farmers the company created an independent non-profit foundation dedicated to facilitating knowledge transfer and improving on-farm skills and innovation. 'East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer' works hand-in-hand with farming communities to showcase profitable and sustainable farm practices in areas where the company seeks to grow new markets.

Although this model has proven successful in many other countries, the return on investment from pre-commercial knowledge transfer is slow - particularly at the initial stages of market development. Knowledge transfer stimulates demand and therefore drives the development of agro-input markets. By 'growing the pie', gains from pre-competitive knowledge transfer are attenuated and dispersed across a range of companies supplying both complementary products (such as mulch, trellis net, seed trays, better fertilizers and pesticides), as well as competitive products from other seed companies.

Better production knowledge enables farmers to take advantage of improved seed varieties adapted to local agronomic conditions, with increased vigor and yields as well as tolerance to disease and stress. In addition, the marketable characteristics and post-harvest qualities enable farmers to better align their production towards the rapidly changing demands of their markets.

However, despite significant impact to local farming communities there are no quick wins or direct wins for companies investing into pre-commercial activities. As such there is a clear need for multi stakeholder partnerships and public investment to scale-up the outreach of pre-commercial knowledge transfer to a level needed to catalyse the development of Nigeria's vegetable market. But to enable sustainable development driven by the private sector, Nigeria's regulatory environment also needs some smart reshaping to make it attractive for investment.

This session aims to identify the main bottlenecks in the Nigerian vegetable sector as well as how to address them, and discuss solutions towards upscaling knowledge transfer activities and developing sustainable input markets for the future.

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Programme (85 mins)

Moderator: Joan Boer

Time	Subject	Responsible
10 min	<p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of Nigeria's vegetable sector • The opportunities of Nigeria • What are the main constraints to farm and market development 	Stuart Morris
10 min	<p>The context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it look like to be a vegetable farmer in Nigeria • The experience of a typical farmer producing vegetables in Kaduna; where a lack of innovation has stagnated progress for 30 years 	Hadiza Yaro
60 min	<p>Debate: How do we make it work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the real bottlenecks towards driving innovation on the farm level and how to address them? • What and who are the movers and shakers? • What should we jointly do better and different? • What programs do the Dutch govt have on the horizon? • What are the priorities we should bring and discuss with governments/ seed industry/ donors over the coming 5 years? 	Joan Boer
5 min	<p>Takeaways</p>	Stuart Morris

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