



Highlights from the Extension on Seed and Cultivation Practices (ESCP) multistakeholder workshop

Zaria, Kaduna state, Nigeria.

December 2024

Summary

As part of the Extension on Seed and Cultivation Practices (ESCP) initiative under the Collaborative Seed Programme (CSP), the team organized a one-day multi-stakeholder workshop on November 7, 2024, in Tanimu Balarabe Hall, Institute for Agriculture Research (IAR), Zaria Kaduna, Nigeria.

The workshop aimed to share knowledge on key achievements in promoting quality seeds and improved cultivation practices. A primary focus was linking small-scale producers with appropriate off-takers to increase awareness and adoption of high-quality seeds of improved varieties.

The event brought together representatives from key stakeholders, including the Institute for Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University (IAR-ABU), National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL Plc), National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC), farmer groups and cooperatives, public extension agents, traditional rulers, tomato off-takers, and Sahel Consulting.

The workshop commenced with opening remarks from IAR's Assistant Director of Research, representing Prof. Ado Yusuf, who emphasized the critical role of quality seeds in enhancing agricultural yields and farmer income. While noting the generally low adoption rate of quality seeds nationwide, he highlighted the program's success in increasing usage among local farmers, evidenced by growing workshop attendance.

The Dean of Agriculture (ABU, Zaria) and NAERLS Executive Director followed with addresses highlighting the strong female representation at the workshop. They encouraged participants, particularly women, to explore opportunities in vegetable cultivation, noting that successful farming doesn't necessarily require large land holdings.

The speakers concluded by urging participants to disseminate their acquired knowledge within their communities, emphasizing how individual efforts contribute to broader goals of improved seed access and national food security.

The workshop's technical sessions encompassed several key components, centered around agricultural development. The agenda included presentations on the Collaborative Seed Programme overview and the achievements of the ESCP topic.

Key discussion panels focused on:

- Gender inclusivity in agriculture
- Impact of quality seeds and extension services on smallholder productivity
- Financial models for agricultural entrepreneurs
- NIRSAL's initiatives in agricultural financing
- Business models for agricultural product marketing

The interactive format fostered engaged participation and meaningful dialogue among the participants, facilitating knowledge exchange and practical insights.

Key reflections from the Extension on Seed and Cultivation Practices (ESCP) multistakeholder workshop



Key takeaways from the presentations

The workshop featured presentations from Mr. Ilesanmi Pupa, Sahel Consulting, who gave the audience a background to the initiative in "A Brief Overview of the Collaborative Seed Programme." Also, from Prof Aisha Abdulkadir, the ESCP Nigerian Topic Lead on "the achievements of the ESCP topic so far."

highlights of Mr. Ilesanmi Pupa's presentation

Title: A Brief Overview of the Collaborative Seed Programme

The Collaborative Seed Programme (CSP) is a four-year initiative funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Abuja, Nigeria. It operates under the Nigeria-Netherlands Seed Partnership (NNSP) and aims to enhance the performance of the Nigerian seed sector. The programme focuses on key topics, including Decentralization of Seed Quality Assurance, Extension of Seed and Cultivation Practices, Seed Company Marketing and Promotion, Institutional Markets, Sector Governance and Coordination, Plant Variety Protection, and Variety Release. These topics were extracted from the 22 Strategic Innovative Pathways (SIP) of the National Seed Roadmap (NSRM), and the CSP focuses on eight topics from the twenty-two Strategic Innovative Pathways (SIPs).

CSP collaborates with various partners, including Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS), the National Agricultural Seeds Council (NASC), the Seed Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria (SEEDAN), National Variety Release Committee (NVRC), Sahel Consulting, Plantum, and Naktuinbouw. The primary goal of the programme is to improve farmers' access to quality seeds, and building a strong, robust, resilient and reliable seed system in Nigeria.

For more information, visit the official website of the [Collaborative Seed Programme](#).

Highlights from Prof. Abdulkadir's presentation

Title: ESCP achievements so far..

Significant milestones were achieved through the implementation of these strategies, which contributed to improving farmers' knowledge and adoption of improved seed varieties:

- **Adoption survey:** A structured adoption survey was conducted across five Local Government Areas (LGAs), engaging lead and neighboring farmers. This resulted in some findings into farmers' adoption rates and the challenges farmers face in accessing and utilizing quality seeds.
- **Knowledge testing:** Farmers' knowledge of properly planting and managing vegetable seeds was assessed. This helped to identify gaps in understanding and areas requiring further training.
- **Seedling training through demonstration plots:** Practical training on seedling raising was conducted using demonstration plots across the five LGAs. These hands-on sessions allowed farmers to observe and practice the correct techniques for raising seedlings using quality seeds of improved varieties.
- **Community awareness** campaigns were conducted to promote improved seed varieties and their benefits. These campaigns utilized innovative approaches such as:
 - Magic shows on market days to draw crowds and engagingly communicate key messages.
 - Radio programs to reach a wider audience, including farmers in remote areas.
 - Distribution of production guides to provide farmers with step-by-step instructions on planting and caring for improved seeds.

Challenges encountered so far

Despite these achievements, several challenges hindered the topic efforts, including:

- **Pest and disease management:** The inability to effectively manage pests and diseases posed a significant barrier to adopting improved seed varieties. Farmers were often discouraged by the risks to their crops.
- **Negative perceptions about seed packaging:** Farmers expressed skepticism about the quality of seeds based on their packaging. This perception led many to purchase large quantities of lower-quality seeds instead of investing in smaller amounts of high-quality seeds.
- **Limited availability of quality seeds:** Access to quality seeds remained challenging due to the limited supply in local markets, which restricted farmers' ability to adopt improved varieties.
- **Affordability Issues:** The high cost of quality seeds made them inaccessible to many farmers. As a result, farmers frequently opted for cheaper, lower-quality seeds, prioritizing quantity over quality.

Key highlights from the panel discussions

The workshop featured three panel sessions. Here are the key takeaways from each of the sessions:

Gender inclusion in agriculture



Women, who make up 43% of the global agricultural workforce, reinvest about 90% of their income into their households. This places them as top contributors to poverty reduction, economic progress, improved food security, and better nutrition. Despite their contributions, women face systemic barriers such as limited access to land, finances, education, and training. These challenges are rooted mainly in cultural norms, lack of land ownership rights, and insufficient access to gender-sensitive financial products and training opportunities.

Discussions highlighted that restrictive cultural norms and gender-based discrimination limit women's participation in agriculture. Women also face challenges in accessing financial services and land resources, which are critical for productivity. Training programs often fail to address women's specific needs, while the absence of flexible systems prevents them from balancing farming responsibilities with household duties. These barriers collectively hinder women's ability to engage in crop cultivation fully.

Recognizing the importance of gender inclusion in the sustainable development of agriculture, strategies have been proposed to address these challenges:

- Land reform is needed to secure women's land rights, ensuring equitable ownership and control. Financial inclusion initiatives, such as gender-sensitive financial products and microfinance, can provide women with the necessary resources.
- Tailored training programs with flexible schedules that can accommodate women's farming and household roles.
- Digital upskilling efforts, empowering women through tools and platforms to enhance their competitiveness.
- Market access initiatives, including linking women farmers to premium markets, are vital for economic empowerment.

- Additionally, providing certified seeds and addressing logistical issues in rural areas can support women farmers equitably.

These efforts aim to create a more inclusive seed system, creating an enabling environment for women's involvement in agriculture,

Role of quality seeds and extension services in transforming smallholder farmers' productivity and income.



Quality seeds are essential for achieving higher yields and improving profitability. However, several challenges limit farmers' access to certified seeds and effective extension services, which are fundamental for modern farming practices.

The availability of extension agents remains insufficient compared to the large farming population, leaving many farmers without adequate support. High transportation costs and security concerns further restrict the mobility of extension agents, reducing their ability to reach remote areas. Additionally, many farmers rely on uncertified seeds, leading to declining yields and limited profitability.

To address these issues, certified seeds must be promoted. Training programs and community outreach initiatives can raise awareness of the benefits of using certified seeds. Digital tools like Seed Tracker and Seed Codex can enhance traceability and ensure quality assurance in seed distribution. Financial support mechanisms, including seed input loans and contract farming models, were proposed to help farmers manage the rising costs of certified seeds.

Participants emphasized the need for innovative financing solutions to improve the affordability of certified seeds, ensuring that farmers at all levels have access to certified seed in the quantity they want, with their desired traits, and within their purchasing power.

Access to finance for agripreneurs

Access to finance is a critical enabler for agricultural development, particularly for women farmers and small-scale agripreneurs. Despite its importance, significant barriers limit farmers' ability to secure funding. The session explored innovative financing models, partnerships, and fintech solutions to address these challenges and promote financial inclusion in the agricultural sector.

Traditional financial institutions often impose high requirements, making it difficult for small-scale farmers and women to access loans. Many farmers lack awareness of available funding opportunities, preventing them from leveraging existing resources. Gender bias further compounds the issue, with loan approval processes frequently favoring male applicants over women despite the latter's role in the system.



Financing models for agripreneurs

To overcome these barriers, several innovative financing approaches were discussed:

- **Community-Based Seed Production (CBSP):** CBSP involves cooperatives that produce and certify quality seeds, supported by funding and technical assistance. This model provides both men and women with financial resources and strengthens local seed systems.
- **Seed input loans:** Farmers receive certified seeds on loan, with repayment structured around a portion of their harvest. This system alleviates upfront financial burdens while ensuring access to quality input.
- **Microfinance partnerships:** Collaborations with microfinance institutions offering flexible eligibility criteria can link farmers to much-needed capital without the rigid requirements of traditional banks.
- **Self-reliance groups:** Women-led self-help groups drive financial inclusion by pooling resources, offering peer-based lending, and empowering members to invest in agricultural activities.

These financing models aim to address farmers' unique challenges, particularly women's, by reducing barriers. By promoting an inclusive financial system, these initiatives can improve the engagement of small-scale farmers and agripreneurs in the seed sector,

The role of NIRSAL in improving farmers' access to finance

NIRSAL (Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending) plays a pivotal role in addressing the financial challenges faced by farmers by implementing innovative solutions to enhance their access to loans and other economic resources. Through strategic initiatives and partnerships, NIRSAL is creating pathways for small-scale farmers and cooperatives to overcome traditional barriers to financing.

Key initiatives by NIRSAL

- **Facilitating farmer-bank partnerships:** NIRSAL bridges farmers and financial institutions, ensuring farmers can access loans tailored to their needs. By de-risking agricultural lending, NIRSAL encourages banks to provide more financing to the sector.
- **Agro-geo cooperatives:** Farmers are supported through agro-geo cooperatives, which allow members to access loans without needing collateral or guarantors. This model pools resources and creates collective bargaining power, making it easier for small-scale farmers to secure funding. To further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Agro-Geo Cooperatives, participants proposed limiting cooperative membership to a maximum of 40 members and not more than 10 for smaller groups. This structure promotes better management, accountability, and equitable loan access, ensuring cooperatives remain focused and impactful.
- **Farm insurance partnerships:** NIRSAL collaborates with insurance companies to develop farm-specific insurance products. These policies protect farmers against risks such as crop failure, pests, diseases, and adverse weather conditions, reducing the financial vulnerabilities associated with agriculture.

- **Promoting certified seeds:** NIRSAL advocates for adopting certified seeds by partnering with research institutions, ensuring farmers access high-quality inputs that enhance productivity and profitability.

Through these initiatives, NIRSAL is actively improving the agri-finance landscape, empowering farmers to access the necessary resources while mitigating risks for financial institutions and farmers alike.

Business models for marketing agricultural produce

Effective marketing strategies are essential for ensuring farmers' profitability and competitiveness. This session explored innovative business models and practices to improve market access and enhance farmers' ability to meet market demands and market their produce.

Community-Based Models

Several community-based approaches were highlighted as tools for connecting farmers to high-value markets:

- **Community-based aggregator model:** Local agents play a role in aggregating produce from smallholder farmers and facilitating its sale to high-value markets. This ensures farmers can access better prices and reduces individual marketing challenges.
- **Contract farming:** Agreements between farmers and buyers provide guaranteed market access and fair pricing. This model reduces the uncertainty of market demand and stabilizes farmers' incomes.
- **Community enterprise development:** Local entrepreneurs, especially women, are supported in engaging in vegetable seed production and marketing. This diversifies income streams and strengthens the local agricultural value chain.

Participants stressed the importance of market readiness to improve farmers' competitiveness. Key recommendations included maintaining consistent quality, adhering to packaging standards, and aligning production with market demands. Farmers can achieve higher incomes and establish long-term relationships with buyers by meeting these requirements.

To overcome barriers to effective marketing, several solutions were discussed:

- **Access to quality inputs:** Farmers were advised to source seeds from certified companies to ensure the quality and reliability of their produce.
- **Innovative growing techniques:** To address land availability challenges, participants suggested alternative growing methods, such as sacks, plastic containers, and coco pits.
- **Market linkages:** Cooperative societies, radio programs, and training initiatives were identified as key tools for connecting farmers with buyers. Providing real-time market price information was also emphasized to help farmers make informed decisions and negotiate better deals.

By adopting these business models and strategies, farmers can strengthen their market presence, enhance their profitability, and contribute more effectively to sustainable agricultural value chains.