

AGRA impact series



Kaduna Women Farmers Improve Lives through Use of Improved Seeds

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The Kaduna Consortium has been working with AGRA support to support smallholder farmers in the State to overcome a host of challenges, including limited access to extension services and high-quality inputs, inadequate storage and weak market linkages.

The program that has been running since December 2017 seeks to uplift smallholder farmers' livelihoods through market driven upscaling of the maize, rice and soybean value chains. The Consortium is working through women farmer organizations to build the capacity of women to act as producers, trainers, agro-dealers, service providers, processors and aggregators.

Consortium partner Value Seeds, an indigenous crop seed production solution and development company, says early success has been the distribution of maize value kits to women farmer organizations. The value kits apply technology rooted in conservation agriculture, which reduces input costs and guarantees a dramatic increase in yield. They include all the inputs a farmer requires, including seeds, fertilizer and crop protection products.

With these kits, farmers can harvest 1.4 tons of maize on 1/4 hectare. Since 2018, Value Seed has distributed 116 value kits to members of two women's farmer organizations. In addition, Value Seed trains the women on good agricultural practices (GAPs), monitors their seeds, and either acts as an off taker or links them to other farm gate buyers in urban centers, such as Grand Cereals in Jos.

One of the women's farmer organizations that has benefited from this intervention is Makarfi Women's Group. Formed 50 years ago as a prayer group, the 30 members

support one another in farming a variety of crops for household consumption and income generation. In early 2019, Value Seeds registered 25 of the members as beneficiaries of the Value Kit program.

The members highlight a number of benefits from this support. Thanks to the GAP training, yields have doubled compared to previous years. One member says "the numbers of bags in my room now can never be compared with the previous years." Because of the crop protection products, the women no longer need to weed, which alleviates both physical and mental stress and frees time up for other productive activities. They are grateful for the linkages to premium markets and the opportunity to sell all their stock at a fair price.

The women now have money in their pockets and can pay for school fees and buy clothes for themselves and their children and also meet other unexpected needs. They can use their money for petty trading outside the farming season, ensuring income generation throughout the year. The women say their social status has changed as a result of AGRA support. They are considered very advanced and are admired by other women that are not in the group.

Initially, interest was low as the commitment fee of N1000 (approximately US\$3) was a challenge for some women, as was the cost of acquiring land (the women use their own small plots for food crops and hire the land for maize production) and the required in-kind repayment of 300KG post-harvest. However, having seen the positive impact of the project, other women are now interested in participating.

Value Seed would be happy to expand the value kit distribution intervention as they have found that women are committed and trustworthy, and that their payback rates are high compared to men's. Although in the part of Nigeria where they work there are cultural norms that undermine women's full participation in commercial farming, Value Seed Program Officer Idoko Gabriel says: "I believe that the continuous sensitization we have been doing has made more women come out. Their husbands allow them to join as this is an opportunity for the women to be productive and help at the household level." The women confirm that their husbands are happy because they are bringing in money and even ask them for occasional financial help.