

## AGRA Impact Series



# Nigeria's rural farmers return to farms, markets after receiving free PPE

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**The Covid-19 pandemic introduced additional expenses to the already strained budgets of citizens of Farin-Shinge a remote farming community in Nigeria's Niger State.**

Most notably was the need for personal protective gear, including facemasks and hand sanitizers, items that proved expensive especially after the initial lockdown led farmers to lose their livelihoods.

Relief for Farin-Shinge farmers came after the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) teamed up with the Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa (PIATA) to supply personal protective equipment (PPE) to the underprivileged families of the community.

The AGRA-PIATA support followed the relaxation of limitation of movement orders allowing farmers to tend to their fields. However, facemasks and hand sanitizers were required for public activities like market visits and communal land tilling.

“For most families, the new mandatory requirements competed for finances with daily sustenance needs, especially food and farm inputs,” said Alhassan Umar, the Director of Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture.

Curiously, a Reuters report showed that although demand for agricultural produce was high across the country, crops were rotting in farms due

to logistical challenges. A separate study by PwC confirmed that the COVID-19 measures impacted the logistics and supply chains for food and agricultural inputs and outputs, as well as stopped food production and agricultural activities.

As such, in the initial days post-lockdown, it was not uncommon to find cash-poor farmers disregarding the world health organization recommendations for personal protection, and take their chances with the disease as they returned to their farms and markets unprotected.

Recognizing the farmers' quagmire, AGRA and PIATA set out to alleviate their worries by supplying protective kits that included protective face masks, hand sanitizers and hand washing stations for farms. The handwashing kits included a bucket with a tap, a collection bowl, and soap. Point of use water treatment hardware including chlorine dispensers were also provided. The equipment was distributed through Community Based Advisors, who had earlier received training on how to it.

This availability of the protective equipment



helped smallholder farmers regain the confidence to venture outside their homes, and, for example, visit markets to buy the agro-inputs needed to save their crops.

“I am thankful to AGRA and PIATA for their intervention, which came just in time to enable me revive my farm. I would have run into huge losses during harvest had the PPE not been distributed in my community. Things like hand sanitizer are costly and without their availability it would have been difficult to get people back on the farm and in markets, where we sell most of our produce and buy inputs,” said Mohammed Sanni, one of the beneficiary farmers of the AGRA-PIATA initiative.

Meanwhile, to find long-lasting solutions for Nigeria’s food challenges amidst the pandemic, AGRA and PIATA organized a webinar that brought together government officials, scientists, private sector members and farmers in discussions.

Under the theme Securing the 2020 Cropping Season in the face of Covid-19 Pandemic, the panelists resolved to develop a pathway for building a resilient agricultural sector during and post covid-19.

On the path to recovery, it was recommended that stimulus packages be introduced for

farming households and farmers be permitted to continue farm operations at the local government level. Other recommendations included the establishment of technology-based communication networks to link stakeholders together for the continuation of planned projects and the delivery of extension services.

In closing the session, the importance of women in agriculture was emphasized. The panelists agreed that no meaningful resolutions could be made around the state of agriculture without their involvement. This is especially because women make up to 80 percent of the agricultural labour force in Nigeria, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“If you ignore your other half, you are already half way to your failure; women should be empowered and put in the front lines to ensure food security in this period,” said Halima Lawal, the Commissioner for Agriculture of Kaduna State.

The forum was timely given that the World Bank projects Nigeria’s population to double in the next 30 years to 402 million people. This increase in population will add more pressure to existing food resources, which are now constrained by unexpected challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic, floods and locust attacks.

