

# Realising farmers' dreams

## hybrid seeds and higher yields in Nigeria



Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is importing tomatoes at a rate of **360 million US dollars per year**. But local tomato growers advocate for more production in Nigeria. A group of farmers started a cooperation with five Dutch seed companies and a biological crop protection company, resulting in an impressive hike in local production.

**When Tosin Oyewande** first heard about the Seeds for Change programme, the farmer from the Nigerian capital city of Abuja was immediately enthusiastic. "For many years, we have been growing tomatoes at my company Blaid Farms," said Mr. Oyewande. "We have two hectares of greenhouses and we grow another two hectares in the open field. But production was always very low. We harvested only two tonnes of tomatoes per hectare." Realising that his production could be improved, he gladly participated in the Seeds for Change (S4C) programme, which brings together Dutch seed companies Bakker Brothers, East-West Seed, Enza Zaden, Rijk Zwaan, Syngenta and a biological crop protection company, Koppert Biological Systems.

Soon after, Mr. Oyewande invested in hybrid seeds by purchasing high-quality seeds from the participating Dutch companies in the programme. "We are in the middle of the harvest season, so I cannot yet give the exact results. But it is already very clear that our yield will be much higher than last year," he stated.

In Kano, in the north of Nigeria where the climate is much dryer and warmer than in the south of the country, large groups of farmers are experimenting with hybrid seeds. This is where S4C, funded by the Dutch government, started operations in the beginning of 2019. S4C aims to promote improved inputs by way of demonstrations and knowledge transfer to farmers. So far, over 600 farmers and 30 field extension agents have been trained.

22-Year-old farmer, Yusuf Unuwa is managing a family business that grows several different crops, including cucumber, garden egg, watermelon, pepper, and tomato. "I am really impressed by the outcomes of the hybrid seeds," Mr. Unawa said. "Before, we used to have issues with pests, because tomatoes are prone to being attacked by diseases. But now I use an integrated



pest management approach, which has helped me to overcome these challenges.”

Especially the Tuta Absoluta, a tiny but aggressive moth species that eats away both the leaves and the actual tomato, has been a real plague in recent years. In 2016, they caused a loss of up to 80 percent of Nigeria’s tomato harvest. ‘Tuta Aboluta traps’, supplied by specialist Koppert, can catch the insects before they have the chance to spread.

### Working hand in hand with farmers

“S4C creates a win-win situation. Knowledge transfer to farmers and on-farm demonstrations enable farmersto increase their yields. They generate more income, that can also be spent on purchasing inputs. Next to seeing the performance of hybrid seeds, farmers receive the know-how and capacity building on how to utilise these improved varieties. And the Dutch companies see an entirely new market develop,” Mr. Kabir Ademoh, Coordinator of S4C, explained.

“The percentage of companies that used hybrid seeds before S4C was launched, did not exceed 2 percent,” explained Saifullahi Yusuf Indabawa, the Kano Sales

## Seeing is believing Saifullahi Yusuf Indabawa, Rijk Zwaan

Representative of Rijk Zwaan. “Since S4C started, we have seen an increase in popularity.” However, a change in farming practices does not happen overnight. “It is important to give good guidance to the farmers. We make sure we are close to the farmers, sow with them and show them how it is done. Farmers will only believe us when they see the results with their own eyes,” Mr. Saifullahi explained. Saifullahi explained the business case behind it: “By setting up the demonstrations on existing farms, everybody can come and see with their own eyes that these hybrid seeds give better yields. It took time to convince the farmers, because they have been deceived in the past by NGO’s and other people promising them all kinds of things. I am certain we will see the use of hybrid seeds and good farming practices increase in Kano.”

When Seeds for Change started, none of the six participating Dutch companies had a local representative in the North of Nigeria. Now almost all of them work with a Nigerian employee who represents them in the Northern horticultural production region of Africa’s most populous nation. The results halfway the 3-year S4C’s programme have been satisfactory, according to Mr. Ademoh: “This strengthens our belief that cooperation between several companies is a good approach: pre-competitive cooperation to support local sector development.” Presently in Kano, young farmers are looking at the future with confidence. “It really is a farmers’ dream to see my crops doing well, and getting more than expected in terms of profit,” Yusuf Onuwa concluded. ☺