

2SCALE

Women inclusion in a male dominated onion value chain

Gender Cases

2SCALE Consortium



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1. The onion sector

The onion sector

Onion is a vegetable used in sauces and is widely used as a food ingredient in the West African region. Official statistics rank Nigeria among the largest producers of this crop in West Africa, with Sokoto State as the main production area¹. From Sokoto, fresh onion is mainly supplied to the Southern, Eastern and Western parts of the country but also, onion is traded regionally across the Sahelian countries like Niger Republic and Chad during period of gluts. There is also a cross-border trade of onion from surrounding countries into Nigeria in times of shortages.

Onion sector in Nigeria is a dynamic one, as different onion varieties are usually demanded for across different locations in the country. While food processors demand for white onion in powdered form, high end market demands for quality fresh onion in terms of varieties, sizes, and weights. Local consumers demand for onion in terms of its colour, sharp smell and flavour. Onion production is mostly dominated by men, but recent development has seen that women have started making appreciable inroads.

Drawbacks in Onion farming

In spite of these demands, onion farmers are faced with huge losses arising from employing poor agricultural practices such as low-quality seeds, poor planting methods, poor storage practices and facilities. These losses are commonly experienced from the harvest point to consumers table which can be accrued up to 35%² of total production per annum.

Background on 2SCALE

The 2SCALE program 2019-23 aims to be a flagship program for the Netherlands' food security policy and

¹ AllAfrica, Nigeria: Sokoto's booming onion market; by Rakiya.a.muhammed, 7 October, 2008.

² Officialgazette, Minimizing postharvest losses in Onion through effective handling techniques; from the bureau of agricultural research, the department of agriculture, 4 February, 2014

one of the leading catalysts of inclusive agribusiness in sub-Saharan Africa. 2SCALE is designed to incubate and accelerate inclusive agribusiness development in target countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are the core implementation modality to achieve the objectives of the program.

An insight on the Wamakko's women Onion farmers

Wamakko is a Local Government Area in Sokoto Nigeria where about 45 women are now actively involved in onion farming. They find motivation from the lucrative benefit of this venture. Women onion producers' economic wellbeing have been further enhanced through their foray into the production of this all-important vegetable. Through this venture, onion producers can afford to cater for their personal needs, take care of their children and also support their husbands when the need arises. No doubt, this is a new dawn for most of the women producers involved, as they have migrated from relative obscurity to an all-encompassing brighter and prosperous reality.

It is safe to say that the Wamakko women onion farmers now produce about 10% of the vegetable in Sokoto state production quota. With a production rate of about a 100 bags per farmer gotten from an average of an acre of land.

Access to input credit

Onion is a high input demanding crop and requires \$500 - \$3000 as cost of production per acre with



Sokoto, Nigeria - Female onion farmer



Sokoto, Nigeria - Women planting - Onion farmer

2. Gender based constraints

about 20% of the cost of production used to purchase inputs only and other labour services. The obvious lack of funds from banks and other friendly sources affects women onion producer's capacity for enhanced cultivation of onion. They face challenges acquiring quality seeds to grow their nursery before transplanting it their farm land and when they manage to acquire these seedlings, they lack funds to purchase herbicides and pesticides to maintain these crops, thereby leading to low productivity.

Women's limited access to market

Cultural and religious barriers also present a challenge, limiting direct access market for sales of their produce. In Northern Nigeria, the men dominate the market place and have more access to produce markets as sellers, aggregators and transporters. Women are expected to produce till harvest and their husbands sell the harvested produce on their behalf with implications. In some cases, their husbands don't remit all the proceeds to their wives and others don't get the proceeds completely. As more women are empowered to go into on-farm activities, they need access to market to sell their produce directly, thus generating commensurate income. This will give them more ownership and voice in the value chain.

Poor agronomic practices

Limited access to improved production practices affects productivity. Generally, women in this area have low access to capacity building opportunities and information needed to improve their production practices. These gaps include their inability to identify the right seeds and herbicide for usage; when to apply these herbicides; recognizing the right time to start irrigation, best planting methods and knowing the right time in the season to begin planting.

Lack of good storage facility

Storage of produce is almost as important as growing the crops because when these crops are harvested and not stored properly, they are prone losses. These losses are occasioned due to the attack of storage by pest and diseases and some cases, temperature variation which reduces the quantity and quality of the onion produced. This has a direct impact on women's income which is significantly reduced, because the ability to store optimally determines the final income. This presents a major challenge for the Wamakko women as it affects the material benefit derivable from growth and sales of onions.



Nigeria - Storage facility used by Wamakko women

3. Strategies and recommendations

Access to input credit

In order to ensure that women onion farmers get full reward for their labour and become independent, 2SCALE facilitated a connection between a group of 45 Marhaba women onion farmers as out growers, which consist of 16 young women (YW) and 39 senior women (SW) with Tays Food limited, a private company active in trading, handling and storage of onions in Sokoto, Nigeria. Thus, giving them an alternative remunerative market directly. Furthermore, Marhaba cluster was strengthened to become capable of organizing and selling their produce as group directly to off-takers in the region.

Trainings on good agronomic practices

To bridge the knowledge gap of female onion farmers, 2SCALE and Tays Foods implemented good agronomic practice pre-season, in-season and post-harvest trainings using learning plots including use of high yielding improved seeds, fertilizer application, planting methods and plot management practices. Access to information and good seeds was also facilitated including access to weather information service in collaboration with IGNITIA and improved seeds leveraging on Tays Food connection with Bejo seeds.

Improved storage facility

Through the intervention of 2SCALE, trainings on construction of good storage facility was carried out to teach and practicalize to these women farmers on proper storage techniques using frugal innovations to reduce post-harvest losses. Implementation of post-harvest management trainings is being carried out, and improved versions of locally made storages for onion preservation were introduced, which has led to an increase in productivity of about 100 bags per hectare and has reduced postharvest losses to about 10% for them.

Financial and resource management

2SCALE provided financial literacy and resource management training for the Marhaba women onion farmers to ameliorate the obvious bottleneck of managing their own income and promote reinvestment like daily contributions made in their cooperatives tailored towards improving the level of production for its members. The training was aimed at helping the women plan their activities before and after production. This is also expected to increase their bankability/ credit worthiness and capacity to access credit for inputs



Nigeria - Sokoto onion harvest



Results from 2SCALE interventions



Benefits for companies

Quality products

As a result of 2SCALE's interventions, the quality of onion produced by Wamakko women group has greatly improved; the onion is firmer with shiny, tissue-thin skins, the water content is lower (which increases its shelf life), and they look more appealing. Onion producers can transport or store them for a longer period, and sell them at a premium price while off-takers pay for quality.

Good buyer-seller relationship

The basic foundation in a business relationship is the trust and commitment between the buyer and the supplier. The major objective is to maintain a long term mutually benefitting relationship. Tays Food limited has attested to the credibility of these onion women farmers. They see women onion producers as reliable, trustworthy business partners.

Benefits for women

More income due to improved storage facilities

The Wamakko women have confirmed that the improved storage facility has enhanced their income level directly by limiting the losses of their vegetables to 30% - 40% loss compared to the 40% - 50% losses they incurred in 2019.

Better access to market

Good access to lucrative markets is vital for farmers to be profitable and productive. As a result of 2SCALE's intervention Wamakko women group have gained better access to markets, improved negotiation skills and are capable of accessing and using market information to their advantage to sell their produce at better/premium prices, thereby improving their income level and position in the value chain.

Perspectives

As the partnership goes on, 2SCALE will continue to support these women as out growers, more trainings will be initiated to improve their productivity and steps taken to increase the number of women involved in the on-farm activities in Wamakko from 45 to at least 100 women in the coming year. Tays Food will continue to provide variety seeds for production for the Marhaba cluster women and also work with 2SCALE to implement the women to women trainings to overcome the cultural barriers so as to be more women inclusive.



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