



Fieldday demonstrating improved onion farming in an entrepreneurial hub to farmers in Ogun State

Scaling Innovations through Entrepreneurial Hubs

HortiNigeria has designed an inclusive business model through hubs for scaling out innovations to young entrepreneurial farmers within the program's intervention areas in Ogun and Oyo states. The hubs serve as a platform to improve young entrepreneurial farmers' access to knowledge, mentorship, quality inputs and innovations, finance, and markets. The hubs serve 50–500 young farmers linked to various Business Champions, the project's business partners who are promoting innovations, within their farming zones.

Recently, HortiNigeria partnered with three Business Champions to introduce and train over 650 farmers (over 90% youths) on eco-efficient solutions. Within the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) hub, training on good agronomic practices, crop protection, and food safety was provided to young students who have ventured into farming and are interested in growing their farming business by adopting innovations. Similarly, the Eupepsia hub trained over 500 young entrepreneurial farmers on onion production, introducing them to post-harvest handling and recordkeeping. In June, entrepreneurial farmers trained under the Eupepsia hub were linked to the Integrated Aerial Precision (IAP) hub, where they received training on drone farming. Crop analysis for pest infestation was also discussed. According to Emanuel Atilola, "I was delighted to participate in the training provided by IAP, as it exposed me to how a drone can be used in application of fertilizer and herbicides and as an irrigation tool. During the on-farm training, I saw the drone irrigate 0.08 hectares in less than two minutes. It is simply a smart and precise technology." ■

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INCREASING AWARENESS, A SOLUTION FOR DEALING WITH TUTA ABSOLUTA



Cross section of some speakers at the press conference held in Abuja

In collaboration with the Nigeria Agribusiness Group (NABG), HortiNigeria facilitated a press conference in April as one of its solutions for addressing the invasion of Tuta absoluta.

Speakers at the press conference included Dr. Deola Lordbanjou, Director of Horticulture of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD); Emmanuel Ijewere, President of the Nigeria Agribusiness Group (NABG); Alhaji Sani Danladi, National Secretary of National Tomato Growers, Processors and Marketers Association of Nigeria (NAPTAN); Dr. Abiola Oladigbolu, representing Dr. Mohammed Attanda, Executive Director of the National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT); Dr. Manzo Maigari, NABG Director General and Mohammed Salasi Idris, HortiNigeria Program Director.

Danladi has already been appraising the losses caused by Tuta absoluta on more than 300 hectares of land. Lordbanjou further estimated the cost of the Tuta Absoluta in Kano to be about 1.3 billion naira. These losses will lead to an astronomical increase in food prices, reducing accessibility of and availability to nutritious foods.

Ijewere said that to avoid a repeat of the devastation caused by the pest in 2016, actors in the sector must collaborate to harness the resources needed to address the issue early and reduce the negative consequences that will be felt across the value chain – from farmer to

consumer. Dr.Maigari, added that farmers in affected states will have the benefit of observing demonstrations of strategies for containment and prevention by technical officers in the field.

NIHORT has developed sustainable, environmentally friendly Integrated Management Packages that include the biopesticides Lyptol and Raktin, which effectively kill the egg and the damaging larvae of the pest, and a trap tray, which eliminates the adults. The institute has successfully demonstrated these technologies and trained farmers on their use in Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, and Plateau states. NIHORT has also aired radio spots on controlling Tuta absoluta on Arewa FM Kano, FRCN, and Freedom Radio Kano. The institute distributed 2,000 liters of Lyptol to farmers across the northern states in 2020 and recently produced 4,000 liters of biopesticides and 500 trap trays for farmers’ use.

Idris stated that one of the reasons why this pest ravaged farms so severely in the past was because most farmers lacked awareness of how to treat it. This time, HortiNigeria hopes to help farmers understand what they are dealing with and how to address it. He also explained that the program’s demonstration fields were not affected, despite the pest attacking neighboring farms. “We will work with farmers and agro-input dealers, showing them the techniques and technologies needed to combat this small but disastrous pest.” ■

Strengthening Smallholder Farmer Capacity to Boost Productivity and Income



Group picture of farmers who received training in Kaduna State event, Lagos State

HortiNigeria conducted its first set of group dynamics training to strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers in Kaduna and Kano states. The training intends to help the actors effectively manage their activities and businesses, thereby improving food and nutrition security.

Almost 800 farmers – women, men, and youth – participated in the three-day training conducted in Ikara, Kubau, Kudan, Makarfi, Sabongari, Zaria, Dawakin, kudu, Dawakin tofa, Kumbotso, Rimin Gado, Minjibir, Garko, and Bichi local

government areas (LGAs). The key objectives of the training were to equip the farmers from different agricultural value chains on the importance of group dynamics and to help them identify and develop strategies for decision-making as a group and understand group formation processes. Key topics of discussion included the group vision and mission, challenges in managing groups, group decision-making and implementation, effective communication in working as a group, and the importance of inclusion to transform the sector.

In delivering the training, the facilitators adopted practical training methods, such as team exercises, and facilitated discussions to ensure all participants were engaged, irrespective of their literacy level. Participants were very excited about the group dynamics training because, for many, it was the first time they participated in such training. According to Abubakar Sadiq Siniya from Dawakin Tofa LGA in Kano State, “The group dynamics training exposed me to the meaning of the concept and has helped members to understand how and why we need to work together.” ■

CLEAN TECH EVENT: FACILITATING COLLABORATION AS A SOLUTION TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Reducing the carbon footprint and identifying the opportunities that emerge in doing so were the highlights of discussions held during the Netherlands Nigeria Clean Tech event, organized by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in partnership with the Federal Government of Nigeria, in June at the Transcorp Hilton.

The dignitaries present included Hanneke Schuling, Vice-Minister for Foreign Economic Relations of the Kingdom of the Netherlands; Dr. Eniola Ajayi, Nigerian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands; Samuel Isopi, Ambassador of the European Union to Nigeria; Wouter Plomp, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Nigeria; and Michel Deelen, Consul General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

At the event, HortiNigeria collaborated with Sosai Renewable Energies Company, a provider of renewable energy products and technology, engineering, and advisory services intended to preserve the environment for sustainable development, to showcase and promote climate-smart solutions. One such solution is a solar-powered irrigation pump, suitable



Michel Deelen Consular-General visiting HortiNigeria booth at the clean tech event, at Transcorp, Abuja

for smallholder farmers who have just been introduced to the technology in Ikara and Makarfi LGAs in Kaduna State.

The event provided an opportunity for knowledge exchange and discussions to facilitate climate solution-driven partnerships and collaborations. ■

NETHERLANDS AMBASSADOR FOR YOUTH, EDUCATION AND WORK VISITS NIGERIA



Cross section of participants at a meeting with the Netherlands Ambassador of Youth, Education and work's visit to the HortiNigeria office in Abuja

Middlehoff's visit allowed him to gain an understanding of how HortiNigeria and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture Youth in Agribusiness (YAS) are tackling challenges in the horticulture and agriculture sectors.

During the meeting, a young entrepreneurial farmer who has been supported by IITA shared his challenges and successes since venturing into agriculture. He said that access to capital that would enable him to scale his business was a key issue. While markets are available, he had limited capacity to meet their needs. Middlehoff agreed, explaining that access to capital from financial institutions, such as banks, poses a major challenge to youths, particularly startups.

HortiNigeria hosted the Netherlands Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work, Jurriaan Middlehoff, on June 16. Other delegates from the Netherlands Embassy attending the event included Mariska Lammers, First Secretary of Food Security and Climate, and Foluso Adejoro, Policy Advisor, Food Security and Climate.

In closing the meeting, HortiNigeria Program Director, Mohammed Salasi Idris, explained the program's plan to work with the Nigerian government to design innovative policies to promote financial inclusion, targeting youths in agriculture. He stated that a policy will serve as a de-risking mechanism for financial institutions, which often do not want to invest in agriculture. ■

Partnering with Dangote Farms to Boost Seedling Production



NATPAN, Dangote Farms, TomatoJos and HortiNigeria representatives at Dangote Tomato Processing plant in Kano State

Recently, the HortiNigeria team initiated discussions with Dangote Farms to facilitate the production of the tomato seedlings needed to boost tomato production. The availability of quality seedlings has long been a constraint in bridging the existing supply gap. To this end, HortiNigeria will work with Dangote Farms to design an outgrower model to boost seedling production. According to Abdullahi Umar, HortiNigeria Enhancing Sector and Business-to-Business Lead, "Tomato is a key vegetable for Nigerian households, so there is high demand, but the production capacity of farmers is low. That is why we are stepping in as a program to build the capacities of farmers and design a business model that will boost production." The seedlings produced will be sold to tomato processing plants, such as Tomato Jos, Aldusar, and Simkay Limited. ■

Agro-Dealership: A Source of Income Diversification



Success Story

Grace Williams a trained Agro-Input Dealer in Kaduna State

Forty-five-year-old Grace Ojochide Williams is a wife and mother of three children. Williams was a teacher before she married in 2007. With a growing family and a tough economy, she and her husband decided to diversify their household income by venturing into agro-dealership, a business she saw her father build to provide for her and her 12 siblings.

Williams thought her experience working in her father's agro-input shop would make it easy to start and scale her own business. However, she encountered challenges that almost made her give up. In 2022, Williams heard about HortiNigeria from an input distributor and was linked to the program. Since then, she has participated in the program's agro-dealer training, which has increased her knowledge and capacity to better serve her customers.

Williams intends to combine her knowledge of agro-dealership and her teaching skills to train farmers and

other agro-input dealers on how to grow their businesses. "The moment people realize you have the knowledge they need, they want to engage with you," she said. These training services will benefit her family by providing another source of income.

Williams' business has now grown to serve an average of 80 customers a month. She explained that she has built the trust of her clients, who now prefer her services. According to Williams, "If I don't have the inputs they request, they still want me to be the one who supplies it to them because of the knowledge I share when they buy from me."

With more sources of income, Williams and her husband are sending their children to school comfortably. Her next priority is to rent a shop in an appealing location that will help her attract more clients in Zaria. Today, she is proud to be a certified female agro-input dealer supported by the HortiNigeria program. ■

MULCHING A ‘WIN-WIN’ FOR THE EARTH, THE FARMER AND A FOOD CONSUMER



A mulched field at the East-West Seed Knowledge Transfer learning site at Saa'datu Rimi College of Education, Kano State

The HortiNigeria program promotes mulching as an eco-efficient technology for supporting soil fertility and water management. A good alternative for weed control, this inexpensive farming technique has been embraced by farmers. Since mulching reduces the use of chemicals for weed management, it promotes the production of safe and nutritious food.

Since inception of HortiNigeria, the program has trained over 17,000 smallholder farmers, in Kaduna and Kano states, Northern farmers introducing them to mulching and other eco-efficient practices.

As such, HortiNigeria promotes mulching as a core technology within the program. Through program training sessions, farmers learn about the types of mulching practices and their benefits. According to Abdullahi Babayaro, a HortiNigeria Technical Field Officer in Kano state, “Mulching involves the use of available local materials, preferably dried, to cover the soil surface after planting.” This technique minimizes moisture loss and enhances weed management, thereby increasing crop yields. In 2022, mulching was one of the most replicated

techniques by farmers, and other farmers have reported that they will be adopting it because of the many benefits they have observed.

According to 40-year-old Jamila Abubakar, a farmer in Rimin Gado, Kano state, who has started applying mulching to her okra field, “I like the options I have with mulching, as I can use organic materials that are cheaper, such as grass, corn chaff, or rice straw. These are easily accessible and available to many smallholder farmers for free. Also, because the materials are organic, I learned that they decompose in the soil, increasing the fertility of the soil.”

In addition to the increased soil fertility, mulching increases soil moisture, because it protects the soil surface from heat, keeping the soil from drying easily.

According to HortiNigeria Program Director Mohammed Salasi Idris mulching is a win-win for all, because as the soil benefits from increased fertility, the farmer enjoys lower production costs and increased productivity, and the consumer enjoys nutritious foods that are safe to eat. ■