

# Exploring Strategies for Increasing Uptake of Improved Seed in Uganda

## PRESS RELEASE

### BACKGROUND

Most smallholder farmers throughout Africa lack access to the improved technologies needed to increase yields on their farms. Lack of availability/low adoption of improved seed varieties are still some of the greatest barriers to achieving the food security and poverty reduction in most sub-Saharan African countries.

So even as policy makers increase investments in technology generation, it is also worrying that uptake of already available technologies (such as seed varieties) is still low, particularly among smallholder farmers. This has mainly been blamed on low investments in the seed business. Even as the industry tackles the long enduring challenge of how to increase farmer's use of improved varieties, there is another challenge of how to speed up adoption of new varieties among the smallholder farmers, so that benefits are felt immediately an improved technology becomes available for use.

**The lack of information is one of the key barriers to agricultural technology adoption, including adoption of new technologies.** Creating awareness amongst farmers and promoting the new seed varieties is part and parcel of development agencies (like AGRA) efforts to get smallholder farmers adopt and benefit from the new varieties.

### PROBLEM

Over the next couple of years, national/local seed companies with grants from various development agencies will promote new seed varieties in their respective regions/countries. Most seed companies will use a combination of methods/modalities to create awareness and promote new seed varieties, including demonstration plots, field days, training, radio programs, and brochures/leaflets. **The efficacy of these promotion methods is not known/or documented making it difficult to identify methods or combinations of methods that are most cost-effective. It is also not clear which methods/approaches are best for reaching different categories of farmers such as women.**

### EVALUATIVE STUDY

Tegemeo Institute, a policy research Institute under the Division of Research and Extension of Egerton University in Kenya, and Pearl Seeds (U) Ltd in conjunction with the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES) in Makerere University have organized a consultative meeting where, early findings from an evaluative study on seed promotion strategies will be shared with stakeholders. The three institutions have set out to undertake an evaluative experiment aimed at providing evidence on the effectiveness of promotion strategies. This study, and the planned meeting are motivated by renewed efforts to up-scale the use of improved seed in the region and the increased number of new varieties which need to be passed on to farmers for their benefit.

The primary evaluation question is: *'How cost-effective are modalities used in promoting new seed varieties to smallholders'*? Specifically, the study team uses mixed methods constructed around a randomized control

trial (RCT) to gauge changes occurring as a result of specific seed promotion efforts. The study will note changes in:

- i. Use of new varieties (proportion of farmers, acreage under new variety, proportion of acreage under new seed, changes in yield/productivity)
- ii. Farmers' behaviour, attitude and perceptions with regard to the new seed varieties

The key assumption in this study is that awareness creation and promotion of new seed varieties among a random set of farmer, **will induce a significant change in their adoption behaviour**, compared to another random set of farmers who have not been exposed to the awareness and promotion modalities.

## EARLY RESULTS

During the last two quarters (Nov/Dec 2014 & Jan/Feb 2015), the study team concluded a baseline study which gives the starting point in study areas i.e. both the treatment and control population. While the study confirms what is already known by players in the seed industry such as the low levels of adoption of improved seed and of new varieties, it also revealed useful insights into the attitude and perceptions about improved seed, the sources of information on improved seed for both male and female farmers, and the adoption behavior of households in general. The baseline results provide useful information for firms and development agencies that are designing seed promotion strategies, or are promoting other technologies.

The preliminary baseline findings show that:

- Most farmers in the study area are aware about improved maize seed (85% and 75% of males and females respectively). But majority are unaware of improved bean varieties (54% and 60% of male and females respectively). An interesting result was that 58% of farmers would plant a variety after learning about it! In spite of this high level of awareness, most farmers plant local varieties.
- Majority of farmers indicated that they get information about improved seed from other farmers; radio; and family/friends (in that order), and the information is obtained through mainly personal communication and radio. Only a few obtain this information through trainings, demonstration plots/seminar/meetings.
- Men and women differed significantly on: whom they ask information about improved farming methods. Nearly all the men (90%) ask other men, whilst women ask both men and women – but majority ask men (40% ask other women).
- Men and women are similar in more ways than one: More than half are optimistic about the economic situation while 25% are pessimistic. They have a positive attitude towards improved varieties, and an overwhelming majority believe their households would benefit from planting new varieties. In spite of their positive attitude, their perception on the new varieties (being promoted) is undecided to negative. Their risk preference is risk averse.
- They have similar investment preferences, preferring to put the greatest proportion of their higher incomes into children's education, home improvements, and a small proportion in purchase of improved seed or fertiliser.

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